

Levancia H. Plumb, National Bank President

By Karl Sanford Kabelac

LEVANCIA AND SAMUEL PLUMB WERE EARLY SETTLERS IN Streator, Illinois, a city some 90 miles southwest of Chicago that has a current population of about 14,000 residents. The community was named for Worthy L. Streator, a Cleveland physician and investor, who began to develop the coal resources in the area in the mid-1860s. His local agent was Ralph Plumb, the younger brother of Samuel Plumb.

When the couple arrived in 1870, the community had a population of 1,500, which was to grow nearly ten-fold by the turn of the century. By then, in addition to coal mining, two new industries, glass making and brick and tile making had also developed, prompted by the natural resources in the area.

Levancia Holcomb had been born in upstate New York on June 23, 1841. When a child her family had moved from New York to Ohio and then on to Illinois before returning to Ohio. She attended Oberlin College, in Oberlin, Ohio, one of the first coeducational colleges in the United States, entering in 1857 and graduating in 1861.

In Oberlin, she met Samuel Plumb, a widower almost thirty years older than she. He was the founding president of the Oberlin National Bank in 1863. They married in 1868. Upon moving to Streator, Samuel Plumb had founded the Bank of Streator, which in 1874 became the Union National Bank of Streator (charter #2176). He was its president and continued in that office until his death in 1882.

Levancia then became a vice president of the bank, and in 1899 its president. At that time, her only son, S. Walter Plumb, then 24 years old, succeeded her as the vice president of the bank. She served as president for 24 years, until her death at the family home in Streator on April 10, 1923. In ill health for a number of years, an obituary noted that "although unable for some years to work actively in this capacity [as president], she retained a keen interest in the affairs of the Union National Bank, talking over matters of finance almost daily with her son, S. W. Plumb, vice president, upon whom the duties of president developed."

One of her great personal interests was that of temperance. She was a close friend of Frances Willard, the founder of the Women's Christian Temperance Union, and took an active role in various related organizations. And even as an invalid, she

not only kept up with the bank's affairs, but also national affairs. At the very end of her life, she had a new invention, a radio, in her room.

Her family was also one of her great interests. She had four children and eleven grandchildren. One of her grandchildren, Captain Harold Harris, a military pilot, had flown to Streator on the occasion of her 80th birthday in 1921 to be with her at the family celebration. Another grandchild, Edward Holcomb Plumb (1907-1958), became an important film composer with the Walt Disney Studios.

In succeeding decades, the bank continued to grow in that area of Illinois, with 15 offices by 2006. That year it merged with Centru Bank another regional bank. The combined bank, keeping the name Centru Bank, now has 28 offices in Illinois and Missouri. It proudly traces its history back to the founding of the Union National Bank of Streator.

Sources and Acknowledgements

An obituary for Samuel Plumb is found in the *Chicago Daily Tribune* for June 26, 1882. Lengthy obituaries of Levancia H. Plumb appeared in both Streator newspapers (*The Daily Free Press* and *The Daily Independent-Times*) on the day of her death, April 10, 1923. Two books helpful in giving an overview of the history of Streator are J. E. Williams, *The Story of Streator* (1912), and Paula Angle Franklin, *Biography in Black, a History of Streator, Illinois* (1962). The Oberlin College Archives also provided helpful information.



MRS. L. H. PLUMB.

Levancia H. Plumb's entry in *A Woman of the Century, Fourteen Hundred-Seventy Biographical Sketches ... of Leading American Women...*, 1893.

PLUMB, Mrs. L. H., financier, born in Sand Lake, N. Y., 23rd June, 1841. She has lived in Illinois since 1870. Her husband died in 1882, and after his death she took charge of his estate. She was elected vice-president of the Union National Bank of Streator, Ill., of which her husband had been president for years. She is a woman of liberal education, sound business judgment, great tact and wide experience in practical affairs. She is interested in temperance work. Her work in that reform began in 1877. She was one of the charter members of the Woman's Temperance Publishing Association. She was one of the charter members and originators of the temperance hospital in Chicago, Ill. Since 1890, while retaining her business interests in Streator, she has made her home in Wheaton, Ill., in order to superintend the education of her four children, who are attending school there. Mrs. Plumb is as successful a home-maker as she is a business woman and financier.

