

Mattie E. Clark:

'A philanthropic legacy'

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Women

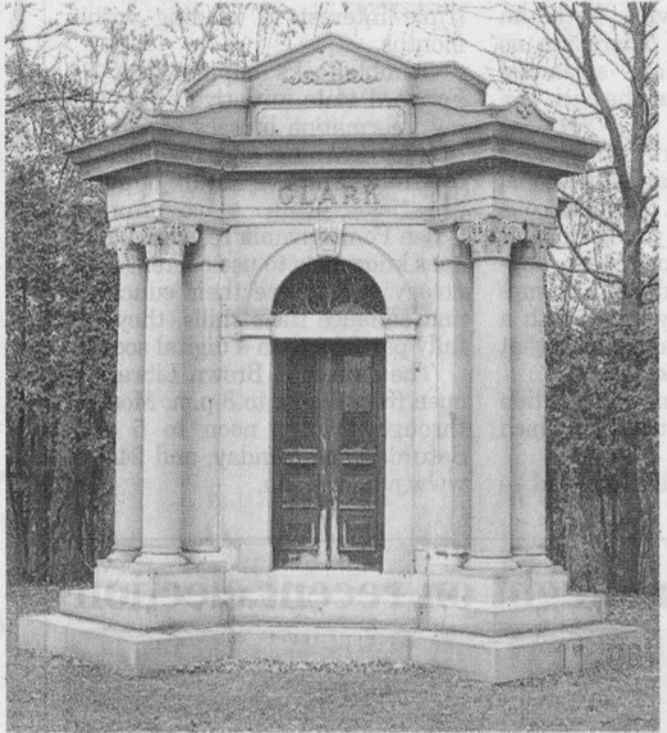
by MARY SIEMINSKI

The "Williamsport Women" series, which appears the second Sunday of each month, is entering its fourth year. Columnist Janet Hurlbert and I are often asked how we find women and women's organizations to write about and whether we will run out of subjects. Our answer is "no," we won't run out. Each time we research the extensive online resources in the Lycoming County Women's History Collection (www.lycoming.edu/orgs/lcwhc), we come across more women who pique our curiosity. Who was Mrs. So and So? What did she do? What motivated her? What can we discover and share about her? The histories become interwoven and create a rich tapestry of life in Williamsport in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

Such was the case with Martha Almina Smith, who became Mrs. Timothy S. Clark but preferred to be called Mattie. Her name first came to my attention when I was reading about the capital campaign to fund a new building for Williamsport's Young Women's Christian Association. The campaign was ultimately successful, thanks to the widow Mrs. T. S. Clark, who made a gift of \$50,000 in May 1927. Looking back further in the YWCA archives, we noticed that Mattie Clark had been a charter member in 1893 and served on the board for many years. The residences were named Clark Hall in her honor.

Once a name comes to my attention, I see it more and more places. The scrapbooks of The

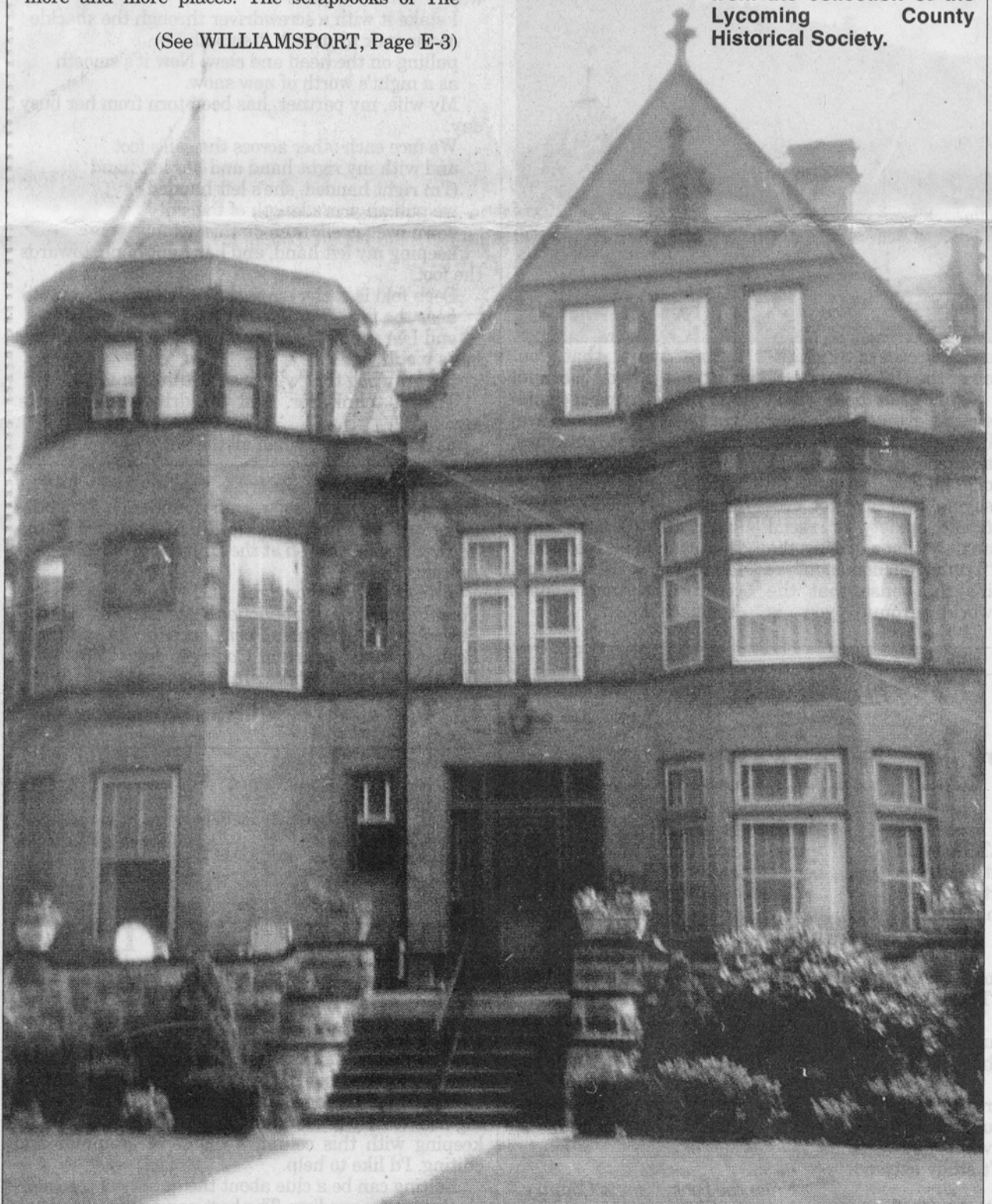
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MRS. TIMOTHY S. CLARK

PHOTOS PROVIDED

Pictured from top to bottom, the Clark Mausoleum at Wildwood Cemetery from the collection of the Lycoming County Genealogical Society; a 1927 photograph of Mattie Clark from the Lycoming County Women's History Collection; and the Clark home, 907 W. Fourth St., from the collection of the Lycoming County Historical Society.



Williamsport Women

Mattie E. Clark: 'A philanthropic legacy'

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Home for the Friendless are replete with references to Mrs. T. S. (or Mattie) Clark. She became a vice president of the Home in 1905 and continued in that role until at least 1928. She funded a construction project at the Home that added a new apartment for the matron, increased living space for the staff, and enlarged the kitchen and dining room.

Another piece of information caught my eye in the early annual reports of the James V. Brown Library, found in the History Room of the library: Mattie Smith had supported the efforts of the newly established library to create a branch near the Stearns Silk Mill (now the site of Memorial Homes). There were 500 to 1000 workers employed in the area, mostly women, who needed reading material. When the library had difficulty funding the branch, she donated money. When the library was forced to abandon the branch in 1911, she personally took over its operation. Working in cooperation with the YWCA, she donated a 20-room building at 1622 Erie Avenue, which served as the West Branch of the YWCA and had reading rooms, a lunchroom and other resources for the mill workers.

Who was she?

Genealogical records indicate that Martha Almira Smith was born in Driftwood, in 1851. Her parents, Isaac and Elizabeth Dent Smith, were farmers and long-time residents of Cameron County. Although today Driftwood has fewer than 100 inhabitants, at the time of Mattie's childhood it was a thriving lumber town. J. Henry and Avis Cochran had a home there, and the Philadelphia and Erie Railroad ran through the town. The town had hotels, banks, churches, a newspaper and many businesses.

It must have been in Driftwood that Mattie met her future husband, Timothy Smith Clark. Although I was not able to confirm it, knowledgeable local history buffs

repeat the story that Mattie was a cook in a lumber camp where Clark was working. Timothy Clark of Williamsport and Mattie Smith of Cameron County were married at the Pine Street United Methodist Church in Williamsport on April 15, 1873 (*Gazette & Bulletin* April 17, 1873, p. 3).

Clark was born in 1849 in the central Maine town of Bingham. His father, Hanson Clark Jr., was a farmer. Some time before 1870, he came "west," presumably in search of work. At the time of the census of 1870, 21-year-old Clark was living with 14 other men and women in a boarding house in Williamsport; his occupation was listed as "works in a saw mill." He eventually became a foreman and then a lumber manufacturer. In partnership with Stephen Brown and David A. Howe, he formed Brown, Smith, and Howe. Their large and prosperous sawmill and lumber business was located at the foot of Park Street.

As the family's resources increased, Mattie began to make monetary donations to help low-income workers and the disadvantaged in the community. She and her husband contributed not only to the YWCA and the Home for the Friendless, but also to the Girls Training School, the Home for Aged Colored Women, the Clio Club Day Nursery, and Central Presbyterian Church. They were major contributors to the construction of Covenant Central Presbyterian Church. Clark was an active Mason and was a major donor to the Acacia Club building fund and other Masonic causes.

Her homes

After living in several homes on West Third Street, in 1897 the Clarks built a home at 907 Fourth St., which stands today. The three-story home, designed by Wagner & Reitmeyer, was described in the *Daily Gazette & Bulletin* (April 10, 1897) as "gothic and built of Pompeian brick and brownstone. The inside will be of hardwood finish." In 1900, according to census

records, the Clarks had three servants: two young Irish women and a 35-year-old black coachman.

About 1910, they built a cottage called Chestnut Glen on Warrensville Road. Loyalsock Township supervisors expressed their appreciation when, in 1914, "Mrs. Timothy S. Smith macadamized, at her own expense, about 2300 feet of public road leading south from her cottage along the west bank of Loyalsock Creek (*Sun-Gazette* Sept. 17, 1914.)

The Clarks did not have children and were apparently private people. I did not find newspaper stories about big parties or dances at their home, although there were mentions that Mattie "entertained" at her home and at her summer cottage, Chestnut Glen.

Death

Timothy Smith Clark died at their home on West Fourth Street in 1911. He was 61. Mattie continued to live at their home until her death in 1930 at the age of 79. Her funeral was held at Covenant Central Presbyterian Church, and she was buried alongside her husband in a large mausoleum at Wildwood Cemetery.

Mattie Clark was one of the most active and generous of the women who lived on Williamsport's Millionaires' Row. During her lifetime, she donated her leadership skills and financial resources to multiple charitable and educational organizations. At her death, she left several large bequests, including one to the Williamsport Foundation (now the First Community Foundation Partnership of Pennsylvania). Her generosity lives on in the form of the Mattie E. Clark Trust Fund.

Sieminski is a retired librarian and manager of the Lycoming County Women's History Collection. Her column is published the second Sunday of each month and she can be reached at lcwhcmanager@gmail.com.