# Helen Hoyt reports on life for Williamsport Women at the beginning of the 20th century

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Williamsport Women

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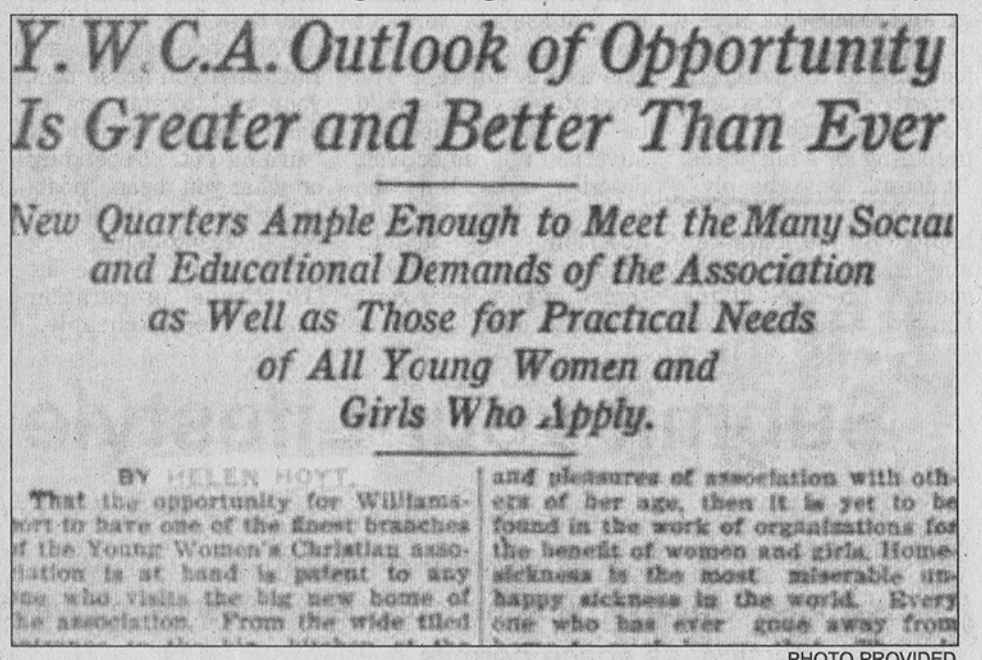
Beginning in 1910, a "Helen Hoyt" began writing articles in Williamsport's Gazette and Bulletin. These articles focused on topics related to the lives and interests of women and girls living in the city. Ads for the newspaper in 1912 declared to the male customer, "Just after breakfast when you have left the house for your place of work or business, is just the time when your wife will thoroughly enjoy reading Helen Hoyt's daily talk with women readers ... " The columns are important to us today because they depict the activities and concerns of the average housewife in that era.

Who was "Helen Hoyt?" Research has shown that she wasn't the daughter of Governor Henry Hoyt, who headed the state from 1879 to 1883. Nor was she the poet Helen Hoyt, who wanted her poetry to be a space for women's voices. The answer comes from a newspaper article of June 21, 1913, in which Charlotte Burch (1893–1951) was identified as the paper's "former Helen Hoyt." Burch was leaving for the University of Michigan to attend a summer course in short story writing at the University of Michigan.

## Charlotte Burch

Burch grew up in Williamsport, at 864 Rural Ave., and graduated from Williamsport High School. During her early years, she was occasionally mentioned in the local affairs section of the paper as attending a dance in Hughesville, going to a house party in Salladsburg, entertaining the members of the



Y. W. C. A. Outlook of Opportunity Is Greater and Better Than Ever

New Quarters Ample Enough to Meet the Many Social and Educational Demands of the Association as Well as Those for Practical Needs of All Young Women and Girls Who Apply.

BY HELEN HOYT.

That the opportunity for Williamsport to have one of the finest branches of the Young Women's Christian association is at hand is patent to any one who visits the big new home of the association. From the wide tiled ... and pleasures of association with others of her age, then it is yet to be found in the work of organizations for the benefit of women and girls. Homesickness is the most miserable unhappy sickness in the world. Every one who has ever gone away from

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**This clipping of an article by Helen Hoyt is from the May 22, 1913 edition of the Sun-Gazette.**

Vallamont Tennis Club at a rustic party, having her appendix out in 1912 and traveling to a fraternity party at Lehigh University — with a chaperone, of course.

(See HELEN, Page E-3)

# Helen Hoyt reports on life for Williamsport Women at the beginning of the 20th century

(From Page E-1)

After the writing course, Burch returned to Williamsport, and occasionally her social calendar was shared in the newspaper. In 1918, she married John B. Rishel, a very popular science teacher at the high school. The family moved to Denver in 1924.

## Looking for news

The column continued until 1917, perhaps with several different authors. We find some of "Helen's" articles clipped for the YWCA scrapbooks, including one chronicling activities and praising the local chapter as one of the best branches of the organization. An article from Nov. 14, 1914, is included in the Home for the Friendless scrapbook; it is titled "Home for the Friendless Annual Dinner, Supper and Donation Day: Freshly Killed Turkeys for Dinner and the Well-Known Chicken Salad and Fried Oyster Supper Will Be Served. Home Shelters Many Old Ladies and Children."

"Helen's" columns were chatty and often written in the third person. She would sometimes venture out of her office at the Gazette and Bulletin, walking about town in search of news. Her columns focused on a wide range of topics: the meaning of being a Campfire Girl, her views on modern fashions or the boys' domestic science class at the high school.

"Helen" loved the theater and interviewed actors whenever she could. She wouldn't miss a performance of the Repasz Band. She toured the new country club, which proved to exhibit "good taste, much comfort and an all pervasive and seductive air of social fellowship." She was in attendance at the first "real" performance of the high school orchestra, as well as the monthly meeting of the local Temperance Society at which the attendees also discussed the addictiveness of tobacco.

No topic was too small to comment upon. One time she observed passengers in the station of the Pennsylvania railroad at the Park Hotel, sure that she had spotted newlyweds because of their "brand new clothes" and "smart traveling bags." Another time she happened upon a piano tuner; the column reiterates their extensive conversation.

In an article on the advantages of swimming for women, "Helen" brought up the inconvenience of conventional clothing for women when they are swimming. Perhaps sarcastically, she said that she was not suggesting total freedom for women as a general rule: "Women would very likely not know what to do with a freedom of this kind if it were suddenly thrust upon them, just as some of the freed slaves begged to remain slaves."

Helen Hoyt Has Comments on Common Errors of Speech and Spelling

Says Greater Care Is Necessary In Schools and Colleges To Improve English and Common Spelling of Boys and Girls Who Cannot Spell.

Considers Poor English Clue of Most Palpable Signs of Careless Breeding, and Offers Some Examples of Common Errors Made By People Supposed to Be Educated.

BY HELEN HOYT.

Mothers are just now very busy with the last details of the outfit for their daughters who are leaving for boarding schools. They are giving advice as to health, morals and behavior. They are wondering if the lovely girl who is now going away from home for the first time will come back changed as to her attitude toward the dear ones who stay behind; if she will ever be quite the same again; if she will make the right sort of friends; if she will make the kind of an impression that her charms should carry.

There is one thing that it may be wagered not a solitary mother has in mind with regard to her beloved daughter. She has thought of everything else, but it may safely be asserted that not once has it occurred to her that the fair daughter is likely to come way from the school with many new accomplishments and graces, with much solid learning and not a few sensible, rational ideas, but she will probably make no improvement in her spelling. The letters home will not be spelled any better than they were before she went away when she was in the public or private school. ... school. I suppose the poor child is distracted with homesickness and the new scenes, but she certainly spells atrociously. She can't spell 'receive or believe' to save her life. She can't spell 'too' when she means that word. At least, she doesn't. She can't spell 'appointment' and she spells 'arrange' with an 'I.' In this letter I received today she writes enthusiastically of the 'maraculously fascinating French teacher.' It seems that 'miraculously' is the new word that is now being overworked to express something not at all out of the ordinary, but the girls who use it constantly apparently can't spell it."

"I said to her father," continued the lady, who has a sense of humor, "that I didn't see what we are spending all this money for if our daughter isn't even learning to spell, and he replied indignantly that he doesn't see that Alice needs to spell, a girl who is as pretty as she is; besides he was never strong on spelling himself, so I suppose I may as well give up the subject. At least she spells no worse than the girls who write to her, but I must say that I do wish there was more attention paid to spelling in our grade ... it a sign of refined speaking whe they say "He gave it to she and I' and "She went along with we girls Or even "Her and I went to the sho one day."

And what a time we have wi "whom!" There are people who fe self-conscious when using this wo correctly. For instance they thi it far easier to say "Who are y going with? than to say the thi correctly. "With whom are you g ing?" or "Whom are you going with Rather would they say, "Who is th for?" than "for whom do you inte that" or "whom is that for." Rath say "Who did you give it to than whom did you give it," etc.

In a certain novel by a woman w is said to pride herself greatly on h English there is this sentence. "Ea one sees it as they will." We are to in old grammars that a sentence that sort is permissable but should avoided. Why it is permissable a yet should be avoided is difficult tell. At all events it has been rul out entirely in later English. It no longer permissable, yet mode writers either cling to it out of for ness for it or because they don't kn

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**This clipping of an article by Helen Hoyt is from the Sept. 15, 1911 edition of the Sun-Gazette.**

## Societal concerns

"Helen" also wrote about serious topics, as is illustrated by the title of her Sept. 27, 1910, column: "Cites Horrifying Instances of Children being reared in the most filthy surroundings imaginable and surrounded with vice." She stated, "In our own Williamsport there are cited daily tragedies of such pathetic and heartrending nature as to ... throw one into disbelief of their existence."

"Helen" chronicled events connected with women's suffrage. In 1915, the suffrage bell traveled through Williamsport to a "splendid" reception by the community. The bell was patterned after the Liberty Bell but without the crack. The inscription read, "Proclaim liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants." She also reported on the Pennsylvania Association Opposed to Woman's Suffrage, with headquarters at 139 W. Fourth St. "Helen" did seem to make a point of staying away from any discussion of the War, though she admitted, "it was hard yesterday to think or hear of anything else."

## Nothing to talk about sometimes

"Helen" would run out of things to talk about — so she would write about that. August was an especially hard month because everyone she knew was away on vacation. She did welcome letters from her readers. When she launched an attack on the male population that sported mustaches, she received quite a few irate letters to discuss in the column. Or, she might resort to the weather: "The only thing is the weather and we are all tired of that — no one seems to realize that we need news every day. In a city like ours, where there is a population of how many thousand is it, one would suppose there should be enough to supply a poor struggling soul with material for a daily column."

## Gossip of the photoplays and photoplay people

The "Helen Hoyt" column changed format in 1917. It was no longer on the women's page, and was titled "Gossip of the Photoplays and Photoplay People." In it readers learned what silent motion pictures were playing at the Grand, Lyric, Lyceum, City, Hippodrome and Orpheus theaters in town. By the end of the year, the byline "Helen Hoyt" had disappeared.

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