

# Edith Hartwell Woodward

by *Lynne Belluscio*

Edith Hartwell was born in Pavilion on August 24, 1878 and graduated from LeRoy High School in 1896. She graduated from Geneseo Normal School and was a teacher in LeRoy. In 1903, she married the eldest son of Orator Woodward. Their wedding took place in the spacious home on West Main Street, which was a present from Ernest's father. Today the house is the home of the American Legion. Their only son, Talmadge, was born in 1905. In 1906, Orator Woodward died and left the Jell-O fortunes to his family. Eventually Ernest would become the CEO of Jell-O and would manage the selling of the company in 1925 to the Post Company - - the beginning of General Foods. Ernest and Edith lived in the house on West Main until their new home on East Main, known as Poplar Lane, was completed in 1921.

Mrs. Woodward was a member of the LeRoy Women's Club, the LeRoy History of Art Club, the Historical Society, the Genesee Valley and the Country Club of Rochester and St. Mark's Church. She and her husband gave generously to the Genesee Memorial Hospital and St. Jerome's Hospital in Batavia, as well as the Woodward Memorial Library. They donated the property north of the post office to be used as a park and gave their first home on West Main Street to the American Legion. Edith also acquired the old Kellogg House on the corner of Church Street and East Main and planned to create a recreation center for the community. The building was damaged by a fire and the house was razed and the property became a parking lot for St. Mark's Church. The Woodward's donated money to have the parish rooms at St. Mark's Church remodeled. They also donated funds for an athletic field for the Batavia School District. In 1948, Ernest purchased his brother Donald's house on West Main and gave the property to the University

of Rochester to be converted into a residential medical center for epileptic children. The gift also included funds to furnish and equip the center. It was named the Edith Hartwell Clinic. Ernest died the same year, but Edith continued the family's philanthropic endeavors and donated the 42 acre athletic field for the LeRoy Central School, known as Hartwood Park. Edith was upset that the students at Notre Dame in Batavia were not allowed to use the athletic field that she and her husband had donated, so she donated funds for the athletic field for Notre Dame. Edith encouraged the adoption of a zoning ordinance in LeRoy and encouraged the community of Lime Rock to spruce up its homes and roads.

Ernest died in 1948 and Edith died seven years later on October 8, 1955. All the businesses in LeRoy were closed during her funeral in respect for a woman who had contributed so much to this community. Her ashes were placed next to her husband in the Woodward Mausoleum. Her estate was estimated at \$12 million

Poplar Lane on East Main Street was given to the University of Rochester with the provision that it would be used and maintained. It became a retreat house for several years, but the U of R decided that they no longer wanted it, and according to Edith's will, the gracious mansion was torn down. The Episcopal Diocese was given all of her pearl jewelry with the provision that they be sold and the proceeds be used for the church. A \$2 million trust was established with a variety of organizations to receive the proceeds, including the Woodward Library and the Batavia Children's Home. The University of Rochester received \$5,600,000 and R.I.T received \$1,200,000. The Salvation Army \$400,000; the Rochester Humane Society \$400,000; the Seeing Eye Inc. of Morristown, New Jersey, \$400,000 to train seeing eye dogs. A trust fund of \$1 million was left to her only son, Tal-



madge, but he challenged the will. He died five weeks after his mother and the litigation was never pursued.

When Edith was 28 – the year after her son Talmadge was born, noted artist Irving Wiles – and son of Ingham University's professor Lemuel Wiles, painted Edith's portrait. Eventually it hung in the Edith Hartwell Clinic until it closed in 1958. At some time, the portrait was transferred to the University of Rochester and it hung in what was known as the "Jell-O Room" at Strong Memorial Library. In 2004, the portrait was discovered in a closet of the Development Department at the U of R. It was offered to the Historical Society, if we could raise sufficient funds. David Walsh, noted artist and former professor at the U of R, donated several pencil sketches, to raise money and generous donations from Robert Fussell and Lorelie Ketter, made it possible to acquire the portrait. It now hangs in the back hall of LeRoy House, a tribute to a woman from Pavilion, who never forgot her roots, and like others in the family, made the word philanthropy synonymous with the

name Woodward.



*Edith sitting on the front porch of Poplar Lane in 1940*

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