Albany Guardian Society

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Improving the Lives of Seniors Since 1852

by Paul Grondahl & Judith Fetterley

Albany Guardian Society: Improving the Lives of Seniors Since 1852

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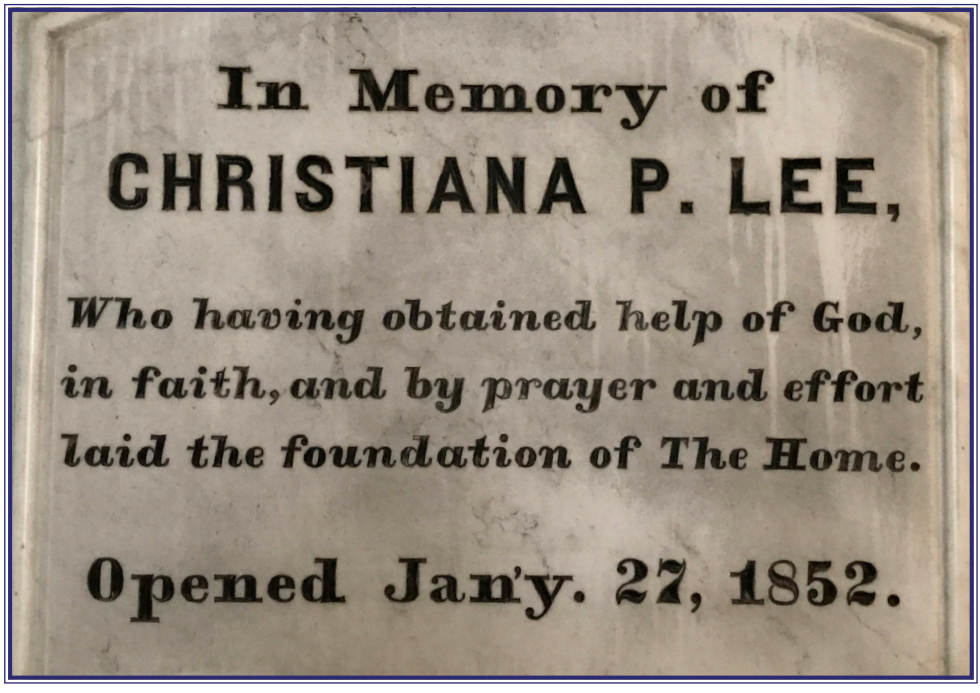
CONTENTS


In Memory of
CHRISTIANA P. LEE,
Who having obtained help of God,
in faith, and by prayer and effort
laid the foundation of The Home.
Opened Jan'y. 27, 1852.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THE LOBBY

INTRODUCTION

Historic photographs, antique furniture, and a commemorative white marble plaque transport the visitor entering the lobby of the office suite of Albany Guardian Society at Building No. 14 in the Corporate Woods Office Park in Albany, New York back in time to the 19th century. The plaque reads: "In Memory of Christiana P. Lee, Who having obtained help of God, in faith, and by prayer and effort laid the foundation of The Home. Opened Jan'y. 27, 1852." Sepia-toned sketches of founders Christina P. Lee and Eliza McIntyre greet the visitor, as do photographs of the original officers of the Society and members of the first Board of Managers. The display testifies to the organization's rich history, its proud legacy, and its remarkable longevity. It also testifies to Albany Guardian Society's reverence for its founders and its abiding respect for its past while it works in the present to create a vibrant, sustainable future.

There is good reason for the Society to revere its founders and its history. One of the oldest, continuously operating charitable organizations in New York State's Capital District region,

Albany Guardian Society confirms the wisdom of Margaret Mead's perception:

> **"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed, citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has."**

The foundation for the Society was laid by a small group of dedicated and persistent women who perceived a need and responded to it. Moved by the sight of poor, destitute women and children begging on the streets of downtown Albany during the mid-19th century, and aware that few, if any, resources existed at the time to assist such women, they decided to do something about the situation. Their philanthropy grew in part out of the women's suffrage and temperance movements, in part out of their religious and class backgrounds, but it led them to create Albany Guardian Society. Albany Guardian Society provided a welcoming home for poor women, often without family members to help them or any means of financial support.

The fiscal prudence and business acumen that characterized the founders has persisted throughout the history of Albany Guardian Society and is a legacy of which the Society can be justly proud as funding for its programs is secured by its endowment. The Society can also be proud of its history of flexibility since this flexibility has enabled it to change and adapt as the landscape of elder care has changed. Albany Guardian Society has changed to keep pace with the changing needs of seniors and the evolving technology that can be used to meet those needs.

Initially, the Society provided a Home for older women and children and, in its final years, for some older men. For almost

150 years, this Home provided quality care in a family-style environment for its residents. Beset in the 1980's by problems of urban blight in the West Hill neighborhood surrounding the Society's facility of Clinton Avenue, and faced with the high cost of bringing the facility up to code in a rapidly shifting landscape for senior care facilities, the Society's directors, in 2000, made a difficult decision to close The Home. There was a shift in the focus in the new century from housing seniors in an adult home to the broader mission of education and service provision. The directors realized that, while indispensable as a service for its time, the impact of The Home on the well-being of Capital Region seniors was limited at any one time to the 50 residents and their families. By comparison, through its wide-ranging programs, the Society today can touch the lives of more people in a single day than it did in an entire year when The Home was its only offering.

AN ORIGINAL DRAWING OF THE HOME

MISSION

"To improve the quality of life for seniors" – this is and has been the mission of Albany Guardian Society since its founding. It currently pursues this mission through education, information sharing, financial support for research, and community engagement.

Through its Institute, the Society offers over 115 classes a year in a small classroom setting. These classes cover a broad range of topics from "Communication by Email, Texting and Video" to "Downsizing and Organizing for Seniors" to "Gizmos and Gadgets." These programs, which each year reach thousands of area seniors and those who provide services to seniors, fill an important niche in the region's educational offerings and provide an intimate and personalized learning experience.

In its role as convener of public programs on issues relevant to the lives of seniors and to those who provide services to seniors, the Society has partnered with several area organizations to present large forums in which world-class presenters provide in-depth investigation of these issues. These forums have addressed such topics as "Aging in Place: The Village Movement", "Innovative Approaches to Senior Care Management", and "Positive Approaches to Dementia Care."

In collaboration with WMHT, a local public television station, the Society has produced a series of programs that explore various issues facing seniors. In the 14-part series, *Age Wise,* experts in the field of aging, as well as older adults, examine what can and should be done to help older adults age better. The series has been picked up by nearly 100 public television stations across the United States.

Albany Guardian Society serves as an indispensable resource in the field of aging services for the Capital District region. In addition to the Institute, the forums, and the public television programming, the Society has developed and distributes several publications, including "Housing Options for Senior Adults in the Capital Region," "Adult Day Services in the Capital Region," and "Transportation Options for Senior Adults in the Capital Region" directories. These popular publications bring together a comprehensive listing of services available to seniors. They are widely used by older adults and their families, aging services providers, hospital discharge planners, and county offices for the aging.

The Society continues to look for opportunities to expand its offerings and to make significant contributions to the field of aging services. To that end, it has sought partnerships with cutting-edge researchers at local colleges and universities. An affiliation, begun in 2004, with Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute's Multidisciplinary Design Laboratory allows students and faculty to explore how the application of technology can benefit seniors. Projects have focused on mobility enhancement, lighting and environmental design, an Apple and Android Balance App, and a medication administration project.

The longevity of Albany Guardian Society is remarkable. Many other charitable organizations founded in the mid-19th century have not survived. The Albany House of Shelter (1868), Children's Friends Society (1875), the Home for Aged Men (1876), the Albany Woman's Exchange (1881), the Open Door Mission (1882) — all have come and gone, but more than a century and a half after its founding, Albany Guardian Society continues to operate. Grounded in the original intent of its founders, its mission remains the same. The Mission Statement of Albany Guardian Society recalls the vision of the founders and provides the foundation for its continuing operation. As a document that looks both backward and forward and that conveys the conviction that older adults deserve respect, assistance, and support, Albany Guardian Society's Mission Statement is a strong testament to the continuing importance of this historic organization.

MISSION STATEMENT

The mission of Albany Guardian Society is to engage in a wide range of activities that will improve the quality of life for seniors. The Society fulfills this mission through:

- providing public educational programs that enable consumers and providers to improve the quality of life for seniors;
- funding the exchange of information that will enable interested parties to create a better standard of living for seniors;
- funding the development of services for seniors and supporting those that already exist;
- creating an environment that will maintain the growth of creative and innovative ideas;

  and

- attracting additional resources to increase our impact.

EARLY HISTORY AND CONTEXT

ALMS AND ALMSHOUSES

In Beverwijck's (as Albany was called at the time) earliest years, assisting the poor and destitute, often the elderly, was seen as essential to the well-being of the community. On April 10, 1652, as one of his first official declarations, Peter Stuyvesant, the Dutch West India Company's Director-General, granted land to the First Church in Albany, a Dutch Reformed Church, so that congregants could build a house to shelter the community's poor. He understood that seeing friends and neighbors living in poverty in a fledgling city on the edge of the frontier in the New World was bad for both civic morale and for the prosperity of merchants and local businesses. He also understood that those merchants and businessmen and their wives would respond to a request to assist.

The First Church in Albany functioned as a sort of social services agency in 17th century Beverwijck. The money or food (also known as "alms") collected for poor people on Sundays was used to fund its civic agenda and to build a poorhouse. The deacon's role included that of social worker, but the church's largesse came with ground rules. The deacon's rules explicitly stated that he would

only assist the "honest poor," those who faltered through no fault of their own, such as widows with young children to raise and no work experience, and those who were physically disabled. The "dishonest poor," including able-bodied men who were not gainfully employed because of alcoholism or other problems, were, according to the deacon, failures of self-discipline and willpower and not deserving of help.

The poorhouse of the 17th century First Church in Albany was a small and limited option meant as a temporary relief in a situation where a gift of money, food, clothing, and an ecclesiastical pep talk might make a difference to those the Church felt deserved it. Occasionally, since land on downtown's outskirts was undeveloped and of little value, the deacon would donate a small plot of land with encouragement for the poor person to build a shelter and plant a garden to grow their own food, and so to become relatively self-sufficient.

As the city's population continued to soar, however, and the number of widows and orphans in Beverwijck continued to climb, the church alms model was stretched beyond its ability to meet the growing need. By the latter part of the 18th century the resources of the modest poorhouse proved inadequate and by the early 19th century it could not handle the influx of needy people. New approaches and new resources were needed to address the growing problem.

Established in 1826, and built along New Scotland Avenue adjacent to what is now Albany Law School, the Albany Almshouse consisted of four two-story red brick buildings with large basement areas used for domestic purposes. As many as 40 people were crammed together in a dormitory room with only one or two win-

dows to let in light. These gloomy spaces were dark, cramped, fetid, and poorly ventilated. The air was often thick with smoke and soot from furnaces and stoves that heated the rooms in the winter. The complex included a hospital, a so-called "pest house" to quarantine people with contagious diseases, an industrial school to train those of sound mind and body in a trade that would lead to employment, and a building used to confine the insane. It also included a 216-acre farm where "inmates," as they were called, were expected to work caring for the animals, planting, and harvesting vegetables to produce enough food to feed the men, women, and children who lived at the Almshouse. For the most part, the "inmates" only crime was being poor. They died with little dignity and were buried in a potter's field behind the Almshouse off New Scotland Avenue. Burial space was limited and coffins were stacked four and five deep in unmarked mass graves.

The intake ledgers, old, battered leather binders preserved at the Albany County Hall of Records, provide a glimpse into the wide range of human misery warehoused in the Albany Almshouse in the mid-19th century:

> *Mary Barker,* age 45, born in Ireland, "became too sick to support herself, was brought here and died 10 months later of consumption."
>
> *Ida Bartholomew,* age 17, born in Albany. "This child has been an epileptic for the last 10 years. Her father resides in this county in moderate circumstances, but has a helpless family. The mother died a few months previous to her entrance here."
>
> *William Lawlor,* age 8, born in Cohoes, "homeless by death of parents."

John Hutchinson, age 21, born in Watervliet, "a laborer of temperate habits, can read. This young man was first admitted to the Insane Asylum in May and under treatment about 6 months, where he was discharged to his father. He was arrested for an attempt to rape and again pronounced insane & committed to the Insane Asylum, where he will probably remain during his life."

Annie Maxwell, age 65, born in Ireland. "A widow and housewife of temperate habits, unable to read or write. Admitted for old age and destitution."

THE ORPHANAGE

In the 1820's, Orissa Healy lived in an affluent section of State Street but daily she walked past poor, haggard beggars on downtown streets: destitute women, the elderly, orphaned children. Healy was particularly moved by the plight of orphaned children, who were regularly rounded up from downtown streets by authorities and placed in the dangerous Almshouse. While Healy was convalescing after the birth of her second child, she was visited by her friend, Eliza Wilcox, at that time head teacher at a private school in downtown Albany. Healy brought up the deplorable situation facing orphaned children in Albany and together the two women developed a proposal to start an orphanage. They presented their plan to First Church in Albany Deacon John G. Wasson, who was also Mrs. Healy's stepfather. Deacon Wasson, who had been orphaned himself as a child, understood firsthand the hardships that orphans faced and he joined them in their plan to open the first orphanage in New York's capital city.

A small notice in the Albany newspapers on November 23, 1829 called people to a meeting at the First Church in Albany "to concert a plan and adopt measures relative to the establishing

in this city an Asylum for Helpless Orphan Children and other infant children who may be destitute of the ordinary means to receive regular instruction and parental care." The newspaper notice called for participation among "the benevolent of all classes, especially ladies." Deacon John Wasson rented a small cottage for the orphanage on the upper end of Washington Avenue in the fall of 1829 and paid the expenses for Eliza Wilcox to travel to New York City to observe orphan asylums there and to learn best practices from those already established organizations.

Orissa Healy considered the orphanage, officially established in 1829 and one of the earliest in America, her calling. She was haunted by the images of unwanted and neglected children in Albany. "I hear the Macedonian cry from every little ragged, wicked child in the streets," she wrote to Wilcox in October 1829. "Something must be done for the orphan and the outcast child. They are hungry and naked, and more than all that, they are deprived of the means of religious instruction because there is none to wash them, and feed them and tell them that these things are necessary for them."

MID-CENTURY MALAISE AND MOVEMENTS

While the orphanage relieved some of the overcrowding at the Almshouse and provided a safer space for children, the number of poor and destitute people continued to grow as the population of the Capital District climbed. In 1850, the population of Albany was 50,763, making it the 10th largest city in the United States. In that same year, 1,373 people entered the Albany Almshouse. By these figures, at least one out of every 37 Albany residents was unable to provide for themselves. As the city's wealthy bankers, prominent merchants, powerful industrialists, and influential legislators walked through the city's commercial heart at the corner of State and Pearl streets, they were confronted with the destitute. More than a century before the term "homeless" was coined, or the federal government established a safety net for those facing poverty, Albany's downtown streets were littered with men, women, and children who could not make it on their own. Orphaned children begged for spare change along the commercial district near the Hudson River. Itinerant dock workers slept off drunken binges on the wharves. Uneducated and unskilled women left

widowed after an industrial accident killed their husbands were unable to find work. Elderly women who could no longer earn a living as housekeepers or seamstresses and had no relatives to take them in were left adrift.

Though the destitute underclass congregated in the shadow of the New York State Capitol, those who pulled the levers of power were by and large immune to their plight. The power brokers and policy makers looked the other way as they gave wide berth to this ragtag multitude of the dispossessed on downtown streets. After all, those in need could always go to the Almshouse, the court of last resort for the city's indigent.

The final sentence of the 1857 report of the New York State Commission of Public Charities provides a crucial context for the burgeoning problem: "One half, at least, of the paupers are reduced to their present position by reason of intemperate habits." Between 1840 and 1860 Albany had an astonishing 15 to 20 breweries in operation and its famous "Albany Ale," a potent brew, was consumed in great quantities locally and exported widely. In 1850, London was the only city in the world that brewed more beer than Albany. The city's largest brewer, John Taylor and Sons, located along the Hudson River near the Port of Albany, produced 200,000 barrels of beer a year in that era and employed hundreds of people at the block-long, red-brick brewery. As the leader of one of the city's biggest and most important industries, Taylor rose to prominence in Albany. He was among the city's wealthiest residents, was elected mayor of Albany, and served on the city's first water commission – a steady supply of clean water being a key ingredient in beer brewing. The city's ruling elite paid homage to Taylor and hailed his product as an economic engine

that helped Albany prosper. To others, however, particularly supporters of a national temperance movement, Taylor and his ilk were producing a dangerous intoxicant that created scores of alcoholics and fueled a grave social ill.

The temperance movement was a broad social crusade critical of excessive alcohol consumption that began in the 1820's in the United States and rapidly grew in numbers and stature. It tapped into a deep strain of Puritanism that ran through the American character. The American Temperance Society was formed in 1826 and by 1838 its membership had swelled to more than 1.5 million members who belonged to 8,000 local temperance societies around the country. The emergence of mass communication, including temperance newsletters, the distribution of booklets, pamphlets, and political cartoons with compelling caricatures of drunken citizens aided the growth of the temperance movement.

Many of the organizations that made up the temperance movement, however, banned women from membership. Women's dissatisfaction at being excluded from temperance societies in part fueled the emergence of the 19th century women's movement and its demands for equal rights and equal opportunity, as well as for the right to vote. In 1848, Lucretia Mott and Elizabeth Cady Stanton organized the nation's first-ever women's rights convention in Seneca Falls, New York. Stanton also organized the conference in Rochester, New York in 1852 which led to the establishment of the Woman's New York State Temperance Society. Five hundred women attended to protest the fact that existing temperance groups did not accept women as members.

Their message was strong, direct, and even militant. The Woman's New York State Temperance Society urged women who

were married to "confirmed drunkards" to divorce them. Amelia Bloomer, a leader of the movement, urged passage of a law that would require women to divorce drunkard husbands. In one of her speeches, she asked in these blunt terms: "Can it be possible that the moral sense of a people is more shocked at the idea of a pure-minded, gentle woman sundering the ties which bind her to a loathsome mass of corruption, than it is to see her dragging out her days in misery, tied to his besotted and filthy carcass?"

One of the numerous temperance societies established in Albany during this period was the Albany Dorcas Temperance Society. Founded in 1845, it was a hybrid group that adopted both the methods of local temperance societies – large public meetings in Washington Park and downtown lecture halls – and of a Dorcas society. Dorcas societies traced their roots to 1834 and the Isle of Man in the Irish Sea, when a group of women provided clothing to the poor of the island as a way of giving thanks to God for sparing their community from an outbreak of cholera. These groups of philanthropic women took their name from the woman named Dorcas (also called Tabitha), whose selfless acts were chronicled by Luke in the Acts of the Apostles. Dorcas sewed garments that she gave to the poor and widows, and she also provided money for their well-being. The Scriptures praised and commemorated the practical, unselfish service of this Christian philanthropist and she served as a lesson of selfless service for others. A small group of church women took this Biblical lesson to heart and formed the Albany Dorcas Temperance Society.

ALBANY GUARDIAN SOCIETY AND HOME FOR THE FRIENDLESS

Christina P. Lee, wife of Thomas Lee, a prominent Albany businessman whose philanthropy included serving on the New York State Senate's Committee on Public Charities, was a member of the Dorcas Society. She was a woman of conscience and compassion. Like Orissa Healy in the 1820's walking along State Street, Lee in the 1840's, walking the same streets, became increasingly concerned as she encountered a growing number of destitute residents. Almost daily she was confronted by children begging for coins in the streets or haggard women in tattered clothing lolling on the sidewalks, some visibly inebriated and others not in their right minds. She felt pity for the feeble-minded, as well as flashes of anger toward what she considered the evils of alcohol. Like Orissa Healy, Lee struggled to formulate a useful response to such misery. She could simply ignore the destitute, leaving them to be eventually rounded up and transported to the Albany Almshouse. She could hand out assistance in the form of money or bits of food that would provide a temporary relief but do nothing to solve the fundamental problem. Her efforts in this direction

MRS. CHRISTINA P. LEE

proved understandably inadequate, and, as word quickly spread, she tended to draw a crowd of the needy. And so, like Orissa Healy, Lee decided to enlist the help of other women to seek some kind of solution to the misery she witnessed.

As a member of the Albany Dorcas Temperance Society, Lee raised her concerns at a meeting of the group, and discov-

ered that other women had also witnessed this rising tide of the destitute in Albany and that they, too, wanted to do something to help the situation. Their hearts in particular went out to the women they observed and they decided they would try to provide a home for destitute women. Food and shelter would help these women to get off the streets, where they often fell victim to violence of all types, until a more permanent solution to their situation could be found.

Initially, Lee and her associates spread the word among their women friends, announcing that they were taking up a special collection to establish a home for poor, needy women. When they were only able to raise $56 (equivalent to $1,807 in 2019) in a single year, 1850, they decided that they needed to establish an organization that could more fully realize their project. In 1851, Lee and a small group of women formed an organization they called Albany Guardian Society and Home for the Friendless. The women were longtime friends and some of them had grown up together along fashionable Elk Street, a row of luxury townhouses a block north of the New York State Capitol. Moreover, many of them were married to wealthy men with a history of philanthropy.

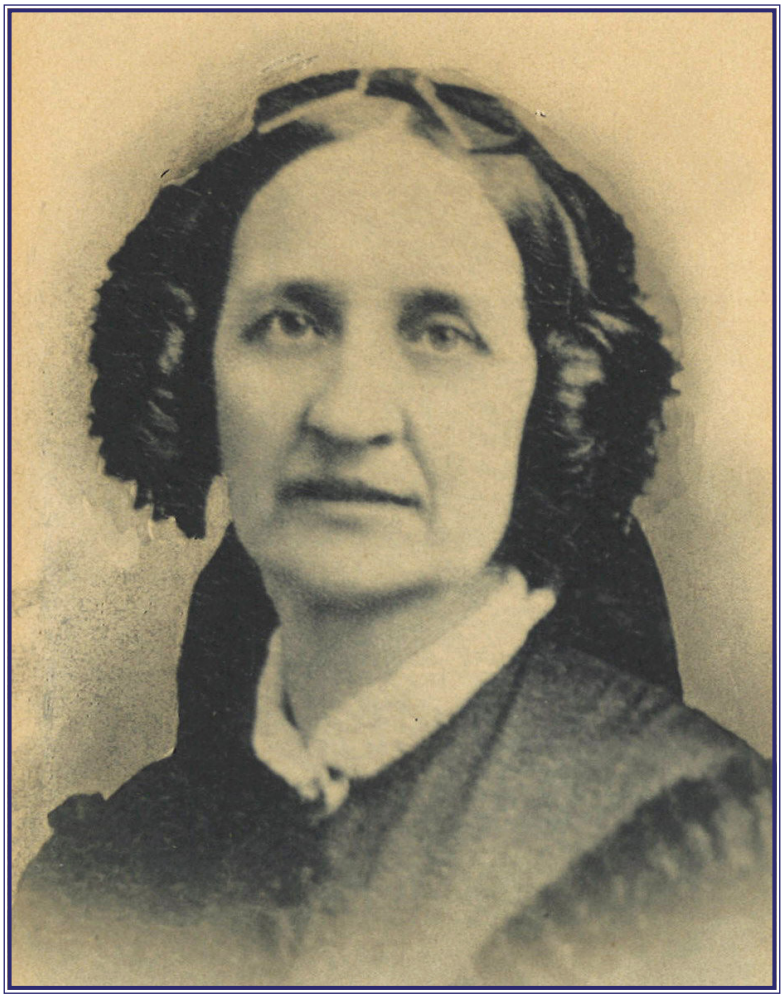
Eliza McIntyre, elected First Directress of the fledgling Society, was married to Archibald McIntyre, a Scottish immigrant whose hard work, talent, and ambition had taken him to the highest levels of politics and business. He was a state legislator, state comptroller and the creator of the state's first lotteries, games of chance that brought in revenue to state coffers. As a businessman, he amassed a fortune by operating large and prosperous iron ore mines in the Adirondacks. He was also a philanthropist, helping to found the St. An-

MRS. ARCHIBALD McINTYRE

drew's Society in Albany in 1803 to assist needy Scottish immigrants and to organize charitable activities throughout the city.

Harriet Van Rensselaer, another key organizer holding the position of Second Directress, was a descendant of the first Dutch patroon, Kiliaen Van Rensselaer and was married to Stephen Van Rensselaer IV. Stephen Van Rensselaer IV was the son of Stephen

Van Rensselaer III, a patroon who had used the wealth he inherited to develop great and lasting cultural institutions in the region, including Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute in Troy and the Albany Institute of History & Art in Albany and who had also served as Lieutenant Governor of New York and as a Congressman. Stephen and Harriet's daughter, Catherine Van Rensselaer, was chosen to be Corresponding Secretary.



MRS. JAMES B. SANDERS

MRS. FREDERICK TOWNSEND

Maria Vielie, selected to serve as Treasurer, was the wife of a successful Albany importer and exporter who owned the largest hardware store in the region, located at the foot of the State Street hill near Broadway. The founding mothers also established a Board of Managers which extended the network of organizing women and affluent men upon whom they could draw for support.

This broad network of influential contacts cemented the future of the nascent organization. The founders could draw upon the long history of philanthropy among the class they represented as most of them had been raised with a sense of obligation to those less fortunate than themselves. As they solicited gifts from others, the founders set an example by making substantial donations themselves. Two years after Christina Lee and members of the Dorcas Temperance Society met to discuss ways of helping indigent women, they had raised enough money to rent a house at 23 Montgomery Street, located downtown near Quackenbush Square in the shadow of today's Interstate 787 overpass. With the building in place, they were ready for legal incorporation. With the assistance of lawyers who were the husbands of the women who served on the Board of Managers, the founders filed incorporation papers and on January 6, 1852, the city granted Albany Guardian Society and Home for the Friendless status as an incorporated organization. The now legally recognized Society held a tea party to celebrate their incorporation and they served birthday cake. This quickly became an annual tradition, one that is still observed by Albany Guardian Society today.

The incorporation document, or charter, of Albany Guardian Society provided for a Board of Managers to oversee operation of the Society and The Home, and included what amounts to an original mission statement: "The particular business and objects of such society is to be an establishment of a temporary home for the friendless, destitute families of Albany, without employment or house and friendless destitute children of both sexes until they can be committed to the guardianship of foster parents or worthy families who will train them to respectability and usefulness. Such institution is to be called the Albany Industrial Home for the Friendless." On January 27, 1852, Albany Guardian Society's Home for the Friendless admitted its first resident.

The goal of the founders was to address the situation of destitute women, the impoverished single mothers or widows, and

their children left to beg on the streets that they encountered on a regular basis in downtown Albany. They intended to find them food and shelter, but they wanted Albany Guardian Society to be a referral agency and not a permanent residence. However, with few options available for long term care, the founders soon came to realize that providing permanent housing was essential to the health and well-being of the women and children in their care. They had underestimated the extent of the problem and the entrenched nature of destitute families on the street. By necessity, then, the mission shifted and The Home became a permanent residence.

It proved difficult for The Home to house orphans and the challenge of dealing with mothers with young children was more than the Society had staff or expertise or resources to address. As a consequence, the focus of the Society became primarily destitute and elderly women and women with no relatives or family members willing to take them in and suffering from financial hardship that made living in their own apartment untenable. These women, more and more, lived out the final years of their lives at The Home because they had nowhere else to go. The Society's early bylaws for their Home for the Friendless laid out who was eligible for inclusion: "Any Protestant woman, resident of Albany City, of good moral character, and in destitute circumstances, who has no one upon whom she can depend for support, is eligible to a home in the institution, cared for by Albany Guardian Society…"

In 1854, after two years at the rented house on Montgomery Street, the Society was forced to move. Construction of the rail yards for the New York Central Railroad and for Union

Station, a sign of Albany's mid-century growth and importance, required its demolition. The Society quickly moved to rent another house at the corner of Dove Street and Lydius Street (now Madison Avenue). A block east of Lark Street in the city's Center Square Neighborhood, the building still stands today and has been turned into apartments. This site filled up quickly, and needy women were turned away due to lack of capacity. In response to this situation, the Society solicited more donations and in March 1855 rented two additional houses at No. 15 and No. 17 Park Street, located just off State Street across from the New York State Capitol along what is today's Empire State Plaza. The Society soon relinquished the rental house on Dove Street and put their resources into the Park Street buildings. These two houses, situated side-by-side, could accommodate up to two dozen women at a time. The rooms were almost always filled.

Although the Society's founding bylaws indicated that The Home was intended for "Protestant women of outstanding moral character" and so, by implication, excluded women of Catholic or Jewish faith, the color barrier was broken soon after incorporation. In October 1854, the Society received a gift of $1,000 (the equivalent of $28,220 in 2019) – the largest bequest they had seen up to that point – from a donor who preferred to remain anonymous. The bequest, however, came with the stipulation that "colored women should be received" at The Home if they applied. The Board of Managers unanimously approved the conditions of the donor's $1,000 gift, but they put a racial quota in place by limiting the number of African-American women to four residents at any one time. Although New York's gradual

emancipation process freed the last slaves in the state by 1827, racial discrimination and institutional racism remained stubbornly in place for decades in the northern states. The fact that Albany Guardian Society welcomed African-American women into The Home in the mid-1850's, despite the quota, was a progressive policy for its time.

ALBANY GUARDIAN SOCIETY SEAL

553 CLINTON AVE

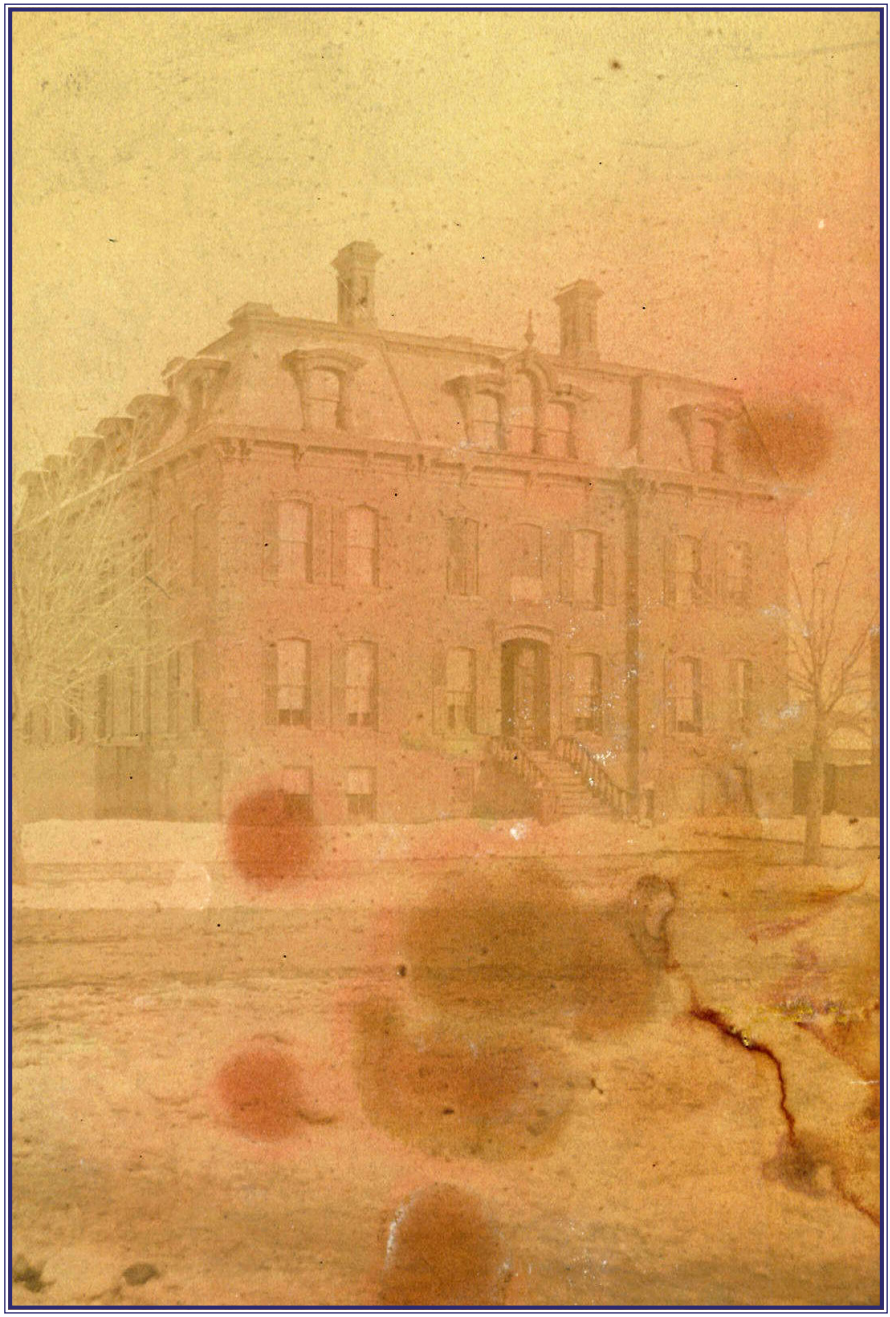
BEGINNINGS

The population of the city of Albany continued to grow at an explosive rate, rising from 50,763 in 1850 to 95,000 in 1890. As the city grew, so also did the numbers of impoverished women with no family or financial resources, straining the resources of The Home with its buildings on Park Street that could house only a few of those in need. In the 1860's, as space constraints created long waiting lists, the Board of Managers began the next major phase of Albany Guardian Society – a long-range plan for a permanent site for a larger Home.

Members of the Board had been seeking a suitable location for a permanent facility for quite some time when fortune smiled upon them in the form of a lawyer named James Kidd. Familiar with and impressed by the work of Albany Guardian Society and aware of the Board's search for land, in the spring of 1869 he donated a lot he owned at 553 Clinton Avenue, at the corner of Clinton Avenue and Perry Street (now Lake Avenue). Located in the Arbor Hill neighborhood, so named because of its lovely trees, the site was perfect, with lots of open space and mature shade trees that made it quiet and attractive. Shortly af-

ter receiving Kidd's gift, the Board purchased two small adjacent lots. With the site now an appropriate size for the contemplated new Home, the Board approved construction of a new building.

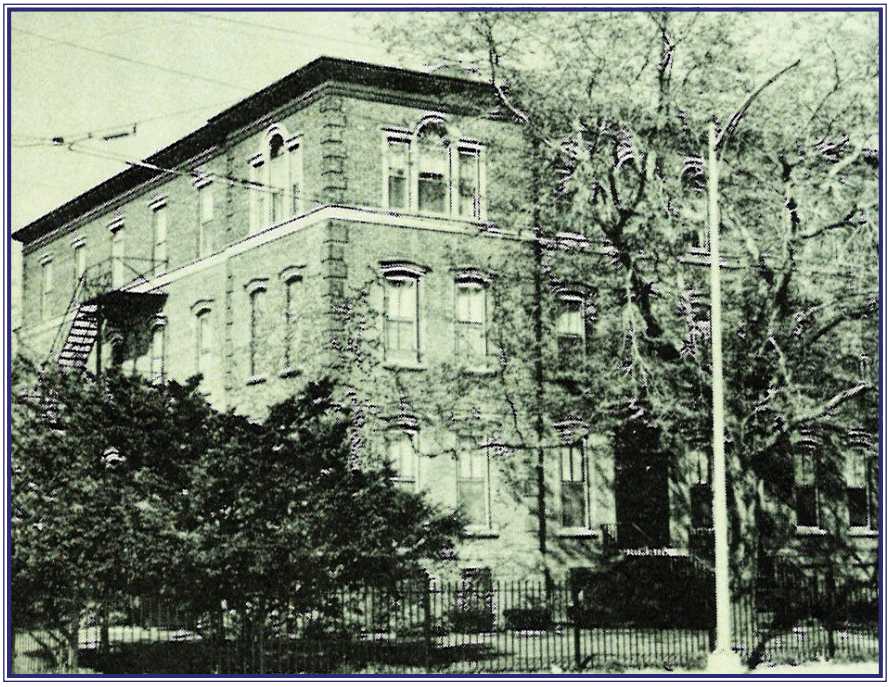
Work on the building began in July 1869 and ultimately cost $32,500 (about $601,517 in 2019 dollars). According to contemporary newspaper accounts, the women who comprised the Board of Managers at the time went together to the State Capitol to pressure their local legislators to help them get state funding for their project. Apparently, they were sufficiently persuasive. In its legislative session of 1869, the New York State Legislature praised the work of Albany Guardian Society and appropriated $7,250 for the construction of its new building. The rest of the money needed was raised through bequests and donations. The Reverend Dr. William Sprague, pastor of the Second Presbyterian Church in Albany and a noted writer, orator, and editor, led the fund-raising effort. His broad contacts with a range of congregations and their pastors helped Board members solicit donations for construction of The Home from many churches across the region. Equally important, Sprague's support was crucial in keeping the contractors and work crews paid on time and thus keeping the project moving forward. By the spring of 1870, the project was completed.



FIRST KNOWN PHOTOGRAPH

EARLY PAINTING

EARLY PHOTOGRAPH



Current Location: 14 CORPORATE WOODS BLVD., ALBANY, N.Y.

Since the new Home provided considerably more space than the two rental houses the Society had previously used in downtown Albany on Park Street, Board members reached out to the Roman Catholic Diocese of Albany to see if they were interested in joining forces with Albany Guardian Society in utilizing this new space. However, diocesan officials felt they already had sufficient funds and facilities to care for elderly Catholic widows who were in need and so decided not to collaborate. With the offer of collaboration turned down, The Home stayed a place designated for Protestant women and would remain so for much of its history.

The new Home was glowingly described in an article in the local newspaper, the *Morning Times*, a forerunner of today's *Times Union*: "The Home is situated on the North side of Clinton Avenue opposite Perry Street. The building is fifty-six feet by seventy-five feet in depth, and is finished off with a mansard roof, which gives it an attractive appearance. It is beautifully located, and from its windows the inmates command a splendid view of the surrounding country – the noble Hudson on the East and Helderberg Mountains on the South being plainly visible. Everything is so admirably arranged that The Home is well adapted in all respects to the uses for which its projectors designed it, reflecting, as it does, great credit on the Christian ladies who have devoted their whole time and energies to the glorious cause."

These Christian "ladies," it should be noted, were also shrewd businesswomen and experts at managing finances. On May 5, 1870, shortly after construction on the new Home at 553 Clinton Avenue was completed, the Board paid off the building's

mortgage in full, making Albany Guardian Society debt free. This extraordinary accomplishment testifies to the business acumen and fiscal restraint of the women on the Board of Managers. It also lifted a huge weight off the Society and allowed it to focus on its mission of providing excellent care to the residents of its Home.

Records suggest that, from its earliest days, women did indeed receive excellent care from the Society and felt welcome and comfortable in The Home. The longevity of their residencies and their advanced ages, which frequently exceeded the life expectancy for women of that era, support this inference. The Board's report of 1902, celebrating 50 years of operation, testifies to the satisfaction of the residents as "only a few cases of dismissal are recorded, and very few have left because of dissatisfaction."

CONTINUING CARE FOR THE ELDERLY

Although an exact date is not available, by the 1870s the Society required that women be 65 years or older to be admitted. As no upper age limit was set, eventually women in their 70's and 80's became residents and often lived into their 90's. Consequently, death became a common and ordinary fact of life at The Home. Residents often did not have family members in the Albany area and usually lacked financial resources to cover burial expenses. In the earliest years, when the numbers were small, end-of-life issues were handled on a case-by-case basis. As the operation of the Society grew, however, it became imperative to have a burial plot that could be used for residents who had no next of kin or the funds to purchase their own cemetery lot.

Thomas Olcott, President of the Mechanics and Farmers Bank in Albany and a prominent figure in state politics and finance, stepped in to fill this gap in end-of-life services for The Home. A

noted philanthropist and an early supporter of Albany Guardian Society, he owned a large estate in the city's Arbor Hill neighborhood known as the Ten Broeck Mansion, today a historic home and museum and headquarters of the Albany County Historical Society. In 1869, Olcott purchased a large burial plot for Albany Guardian Society at the Albany Rural Cemetery in Menands on the northern border of the city. Albany Guardian Society still owns and maintains two sections in the Albany Rural Cemetery where previous residents of The Home are buried today.

The number of women the Society assisted grew rapidly with each year of operation. In 1873, the annual census for residents of the Society's Home was 139 women, who ranged from short-term residents of a week or two to those who lived there for several years. Also, that year, an additional 946 people received food and a night or two of lodging until they could find more permanent housing. By this time the term "Friendless," part of the original title of The Home, had been dropped. As the organization's reach expanded, the term was jettisoned because it carried an unwanted stigma. Officially, Albany Guardian Society's residence was known as The Home but the unofficial title soon became "The Old Ladies' Home." Even Board members referred to their facility by this name and this was the name given the facility when mentioned in local newspapers. Receipts from a local dairy, grocery store, and butcher who supplied fresh food to the Clinton Avenue residence each week always noted that delivery had been made to The Old Ladies' Home.

Fundraising to pay for the costs of running the new residence became primarily the province of the women on the Board of Managers, who used their connections in the community to solicit donations. A Continental Tea Party in October 1875 raised $7,642; fun-

draisers in December 1886 and April 1890 earmarked for special projects at The Home each raised $5,000. The women made special appeals to the public for capital improvements such as the installation of a steam heating plant in 1880. Almost half of the $2,153 cost of the steam plant was met by monies that came in as a result of the public appeal. Continuing the record of fiscal care, Albany Guardian Society's Board of Managers shepherded the donations they received into an endowment that by 1890 had reached $83,575. With an eye always to the future, the Board insured that the Society spent only the interest earned and did not invade the principal.

In 1910, the Society authorized the construction of a major new addition to The Home. A new section built at the rear of the building, and connected to it, added 22 rooms to relieve overcrowding. The extra rooms also made it possible for those who had languished on a waiting list to be admitted. The new addition, called the Hascy Memorial and built by Oscar Hascy in memory of his wife, Cornelia Hubbard Hascy, was completed in the winter of 1910 and turned over to Albany Guardian Society on February 14, 1911. For the first time, all 50 women who lived at The Home had their own bedroom. As was typical of the Society since its inception, the women who composed the Board ran a tight ship. In 1919, just one year after the end of the Great War, receipts broke exactly even with disbursements, each being $16,788. That same year, the conservative and low-risk investment portfolio, with most of its holdings in municipal bonds and railroad stocks, helped the endowment to rise to $201,000.

In 1924, beset by a need for major repairs to The Home, including a new roof, plumbing, and exterior and interior painting, the Board made another financially prudent and future-oriented

decision. Rather than taking the needed funds from the endowment or cashing out some of the Society's stocks and bonds, the Board applied for a loan from the Mechanics and Farmers Bank, securing favorable terms and an extremely low interest rate from Thomas Olcott, the bank president and a longtime supporter of The Home. Nineteen hundred twenty-four also witnessed an exciting new addition – an elevator. Widely used in tall buildings across the United States since the late-1800's and obviously an addition that would benefit residents of The Home, an elevator had been deemed an expense the financially conservative Board decided it could not fund. This changed when Pauline Wilson, a new Board member, donated an elevator and had it installed at The Home in memory of her parents, Mr. and Mrs. George P. Wilson.

Despite the fiscal prudence and acumen of the Society's Board of Managers, it eventually became necessary to require an admission fee for those seeking residence in The Home. In 1884, the rising costs of caring for more elderly women with longer life spans brought about the first admission fee of $100 (equivalent to $2,568 in 2019 dollars), a fee that increased gradually over the years. For this one-time fee, residents received food, lodging and care for the rest of their lives, including a burial plot if the family did not have one. In addition, each resident received individual attention from a Board member who visited them regularly, each week if possible, and took them on outings such as a trip to a museum or dinner out at a restaurant. Board members also assisted residents with banking, tax forms, and other paperwork. It was an extraordinary bargain, and the beginning of a major movement in elder care that we now call "continuing care retirement communities" and "life plan communities."

LIFE AT THE HOME

In the archives of Albany Guardian Society, one can find yearbooks for many of the years since its founding in 1852. The yearbooks are thin pamphlets of perhaps a dozen pages that include a Board report, a tally of deaths and admissions, a review of key events, and a full financial disclosure statement, including a detailed listing of receipts and disbursements and a thorough accounting of the performance of the stocks, bonds, and other investments in the portfolio. Yearbooks for some years are missing. Either they were not saved or in difficult periods such as World War I, the stock market crash, The Great Depression, and World War II, they were never printed.

Some of the yearbooks include a list of donors who brought to The Home gifts of cash, clothing, furniture, flowers, plants, fruit, jellies, jams, ice cream, and greeting cards. These lists of donations, ranging from practical household items to foodstuffs to unusual items, provide a unique window into life at The Home. An early donor, for instance, delivered half a barrel of mackerel and a half-dozen brooms. Another person donated a 248-pound pig. The Shakers, a religious community that operated a large farm

near today's Albany International Airport in Colonie, sent over a bushel of apples, a load of wood, a barrel of carrots, a barrel of potatoes, a barrel of beets, a bushel of onions, two brooms, a pail of applesauce, and four pies. More common was the gift of "factory scraps" — cloth and material from textile mills that could be used by women seamstresses at The Home to make clothing, draperies, and bed linens. A large box containing 45 pounds of goose feathers and down arrived from another donor and the industrious residents, able to make something useful out of the most unusual gifts, used the down to fill pillows.

Sporadic donations of food and household goods were obviously neither frequent enough nor plentiful enough to cover the entire cost of operating The Home. Although it began as a totally free residence and though small entrance fees were introduced in the late 1800s, the first big fee hike for admission to The Home came in 1943 during the difficult years of rationing and domestic shortages due to the need for goods to supply American and Allied troops during World War II. This decision did not come easily to the Board of Managers. They had to balance the added strain that doubling the current entrance fee of $500 to $1,000 (about $14,500 in 2019 dollars) would place on already cash-strapped women and their families against the fact that running a budget deficit would eat into the endowment and jeopardize the long-term sustainability of The Home. In 1943, the Board also replaced the rather lax and unspecified payment structure with a clearly defined one, as the amount to be paid was now significant and required clarification.

Most of the women admitted to The Home had few financial assets and hard-luck stories abounded, but the Board of Managers, consistent with their history of financial prudence and future-oriented vision, attempted to hold the line when it came to requiring the $1,000 up-front entrance fee. Applicants had to be approved by a two-thirds majority vote of those Board members present at the meeting when new applicants were vetted. The 1943 yearbook made clear that "Only in exceptional, and under peculiar circumstances, shall the Board of Managers have power to admit any person without this payment."

With 50 women living together in one building, cared for by a small staff, rules that maintained decorum and a sense of order were critical. Although the records show little evidence of long-running disputes or major clashes between residents or between residents and staff, a resident was occasionally dismissed. Residents could be dismissed for continuously disrupting the other residents, refusing to turn down their music, or acting in a loud and obnoxious manner. According to the rules, after a six month probation period a resident who "persists in being disagreeable and fault finding or who fails to comply with the Rules or By-Laws, shall be dismissed from The Home by order of the Board of Managers." Moreover, "No resident leaving The Home shall be received again." In the case of dismissal, the 1943 rules stated that the resident's $1,000 entrance fee would be returned, minus $5 a week for room and board for the time spent at The Home. By 1945, reflecting the fast-rising costs of supplies due to wartime shortages, the cost per week for residents who were dismissed doubled to $10.

Rules for the residents or "inmates" at The Home shifted over time based on cultural and societal norms and the sensibilities of each successive era. The list of regulations from 1911, for example, seem particularly harsh.

1. *Inmates will rise at first bell and go down to breakfast at second bell.*
2. *Inmates must attend mandatory family worship each morning and evening.*
3. *Inmates are expected to clean their own rooms and help the Matron with washing and ironing.*
4. *Inmates must not leave the house without consent of the Matron.*
5. *Inmates are expected to be neat and tidy.*
6. *Inmates are not permitted to have any food, drink or medicine without the approval of the Matron.*
7. *Inmates will allow all baggage and personal items to be inspected by the Matron.*
8. *After the death of an inmate, all personal effects go to The Home.*
9. *No visitors are allowed to be shown through The Home on Sunday.*

A later version from the 1930's seems a bit less restrictive. These rules, entitled "Rules for Residents of The Home" and published by Albany Guardian Society, remained largely unchanged

through the 1990's and also provide a window into the experience of life at Clinton Avenue.

1. *Due respect to the Superintendent and implicit obedience to the Rules of the Home are required of every resident. Disregard of either of the requirements shall be reported to the Board by the Superintendent if persisted in after admonition.*

2. *Residents, not confined to their rooms by illness, shall be expected to go to the dining room for breakfast.*

3. *Residents, not confined to their rooms by illness, shall be expected to attend family worship every morning.*

4. *Residents shall, under the direction of the Superintendent, at such times as she sees fit, clean and put in order their own rooms.*

5. *Residents are not allowed in the kitchen, except for necessary work, or by permission of the Superintendent.*

6. *Residents shall be in the Home every night at 10 p.m. unless they have special permission from the Superintendent or a nurse to remain out after this hour.*

7. *No medicine shall be brought into the Home by residents or anyone without the knowledge and consent of the Superintendent.*

8. *No stimulant or anodyne is to be used except by order of a physician and then administered by the nurses.*

9. *No trunks or boxes shall be allowed in the bedrooms but must be placed in a room appropriated for them.*

10. *Radios and televisions may be permitted in resident's rooms, provided they are turned low and room doors are closed.*

11. *No light bulb over 100 watts is to be used in any light socket.*

12. *Residents must not throw food out of windows to feed birds, squirrels or any animal.*

13. *The doors of a resident's room must never be locked when the resident is in the room.*

Many of these directives were in response to the dangers present in any senior adult home. Fire constituted a major risk, hence the restrictions regarding light bulbs that could become hot enough to ignite paper or fabric. Similarly, throwing food out the window for animals would encourage rodents to take up residence. Locked room doors could delay first responders in the case of an unexpected health emergency. Also, doors needed to be unlocked and rooms relatively uncluttered in case a fire, natural disaster or other emergency required quick evacuation of 50 elderly women, many of whom were infirm and had mobility issues.

Many of the rules were also meant to protect the residents from issues that can affect the elderly, including potential lapses in judgment stemming from memory loss or dementia. Rules that prohibited residents from remaining in their room for long periods of time guarded against isolation and depression. Requiring all medications to be administered by a nurse or physician who

made regular visits to The Home or by a staff member with special medical training prevented overdoses or dangerous drug interactions. Not allowing residents to use the kitchen on their own protected against potential injury from a hot stove, a sharp knife, or food poisoning from improperly prepared meals.

Several of the rules also related to keeping vigilant about sanitary concerns at The Home. Since more than four dozen women lived in close proximity to each other in congregate care, infectious diseases, respiratory illnesses, or other communicable diseases could spread rapidly if proper sanitary precautions were not taken.

Despite strict rules and tight control by the staff, and despite the general good behavior and contentment of the residents, there were occasional instances of problems. Ida Marian Williams, a 76-year-old widow from South Hawk Street in Albany, applied on August 1, 1923 to live at The Home. She was an Episcopalian, unemployed, with no means of support as her husband had died a few years earlier. She had a cousin in Hollywood, California and a niece in Hartford, Connecticut, but they provided no financial assistance to her. Aside from bouts of rheumatoid arthritis in cold weather, she was in reasonably good health. She was also strong-willed and ornery. Runaways among the elderly residents were a constant concern, particularly for those who suffered from dementia or Alzheimer's and who were quite vulnerable once they got outside the comfort zone of their daily routine and residence. The above resident, however, slipped past the staff that was always on the alert for runaways, and bolted. She was absent for several hours before she was spotted by a team of searchers, caught without trouble and returned to The Home. "I am sorry she has caused the people of the Guardian Society so much trouble, though there

is nothing I am able to do to aid," wrote her niece, who had lost touch with her aunt. "I seem to have incurred my Aunt's disfavor, as she has not written to me since last January. I told her that her ideas were hallucinations, for if you people were putting poison in her food, she would have died long ago."

SNAPSHOTS OF RESIDENTS

Application forms for entrance to The Home over the years offer insights into who the residents were, where they came from, and how long they lived at 553 Clinton Avenue. The archives do not contain extensive narratives or comprehensive reports; rather they provide a snapshot of the personal difficulties, lack of family support, and economic stresses that led women to apply for residency at The Home. They are biographies in brief, but they document the harsh reality faced by indigent women in the Capital Region and they testify once again to the long history of service that is the legacy of Albany Guardian Society. Here are some of their "stories."

Mrs. Marian Sherman was admitted to The Home as a 67-year-old widow in 1894. A former dressmaker and seamstress, she had suffered a stroke and could no longer earn a living. She was not a member of any particular church, but a brother paid all her expenses at The Home. She was recommended by a member of the Board of Managers, who wrote an unusually detailed note about Sherman: "Mrs. Sherman appears to be particularly friendless, her brother being the only person who seems to have any

interest in her welfare and he cannot have her at his home, as his wife is an invalid, and he depends upon his daily work to support his family. If her brother's help should fail her, as it might at any time, she would probably find herself without a home. A neighbor had always known her as an upright, hard-working woman."

Miss Lydia Brown lived at The Home from October 1, 1911 until her death on January 7, 1935. A former housekeeper and nurse's assistant, she faced financial difficulties when she could no longer work. She had two sisters, both poor and widowed, each of whom lived with another relative. Neither of her sisters was in a position to care for Brown. Brown lived at The Home for nearly 24 years, apparently pleasantly and uneventfully because nothing was recorded of her life there.

Mrs. Sarah Bracey lived at The Home for nearly 25 years, from November 4, 1911 until her death on June 9, 1936. Her records indicate that she was 50 years old when she entered The Home, estranged from her husband, and in poor health. She suffered a bad fall at The Home in autumn of 1935, was hospitalized for two months at Albany Memorial Hospital, returned to The Home and died the following spring at age 74. Her death freed up a room for Mrs. Eva May Ward, an 81-year-old widow and former hairdresser who lived on Lark Street. No longer able to cut and style hair, Ward had no income or means of financial support. She had a brother and nephew living in Albany, but she was estranged from them. She was a member of St. Peter's Episcopal church on State Street, one of the city's oldest and wealthiest parishes, but she apparently received no help from the church. In her application she requested that her ring and watch be given after her

death to her sister-in-law. She entered The Home on December 1, 1936 and died just 16 days later on December 17, 1936.

Elizabeth Reid Selkirk, a single woman lived alone in her modest apartment on Clinton Avenue, just a few blocks from The Home, until poverty and declining health led her in 1946 at age 80 to apply to Albany Guardian Society for a room. She had no formal education and no means of support because she could no longer do housework as a domestic, her livelihood in the past. Her only living relative was a niece. Selkirk made a few special requests on her intake form. Although furniture was generally not allowed into the facility as all the rooms were already furnished, Selkirk was given special permission to bring with her a prized dresser and card table, which she stipulated should be given to her niece after she died. She wanted her niece to have a watercolor painting, "The Homestead," that her grandfather had painted. She signed over her five shares of Niagara Hudson Power Corp. to Albany Guardian Society as the rules for admission dictated and requested that she be buried with her mother and father in the Selkirk family plot at Albany Rural Cemetery.

Some residents seemed to be afflicted by a string of rotten luck and unexpected misfortune that made their already trying circumstances even sadder. Consider the story of Miss Carrie Neal, a 70-year-old hunchback woman who never married and who lived just two blocks away at 374 Clinton Avenue. Despite her disability, Neal worked in the bindery at Williams Press in Albany and had a small pension as a result. She was a member of First Church of Albany. Her only known relative was a nephew who lived in Los Angeles. She moved into The Home on November 7, 1941 and died on April 18, 1948 after being critically

injured when she was struck by a car as she walked across Clinton Avenue. She was taken to Albany Memorial Hospital, but never recovered from her injuries. She was buried in a single plot she purchased herself at Albany Rural Cemetery.

Sometimes the trials that lay ahead for the staff were flagged in the application forms. Mrs. Althea Austin, a 56-year-old widow who lived on lower Clinton Avenue, a few blocks from The Home, could no longer work as a housekeeper because of declining health and she had no other means of support. She had a sister in Hudson and a cousin in Troy but her 1936 application form contained the note: "Applicant has relatives who are well-to-do people, but who have become estranged on account of the manner she chooses to support herself." No explanation or further information was provided, but it was a heads-up to the staff about potential challenges that awaited them with the new arrival.

Obviously, The Home became the last resort for many who applied for admission, especially those whose difficult personalities and anti-social behavior had damaged relationships, estranged them from family members, and burned bridges among their social network. Such women may well have been suffering from dementia before it was recognized as a disease. Receiving these women put an added strain on the staff at The Home, who had to care for the difficult newcomers while keeping the peace with the long-term residents.

The narratives in this small sampling gleaned from the application forms only hint at the hard lives the women faced before they became residents of The Home. Since nearly all of them lacked financial means of support or relatives willing or able to take them in, the brief biographical snapshots read very much like

the entries in the earlier admittance ledger of the Albany Almshouse. In that era, these women most likely would have been evicted from their homes and would have ended up destitute on the streets of Albany or rounded up and sent to the Almshouse to be warehoused with the mentally ill, the criminally insane, and men suffering from alcohol addiction. Thanks to the vision of its founders, Albany Guardian Society offered an alternative. Before this social safety net existed, the lives of these women would have been dreadful indeed. Of course, it was not always easy for these women to leave their home or apartment, however modest, and move into The Home. But the benefits of three meals each day, a comfortable bedroom in a well-appointed mansion on well-maintained grounds with large, shaded yards and gardens, and the possibility of community from other residents and the Board of Managers, no doubt outweighed the losses. For most of the women, there was a striking contrast between the marginal quality of life they had on their own, often marked by isolation and loneliness, and the community of women, nice surroundings and amenities they enjoyed at The Home.

"I'm Happy Here"

Those who lived at The Home in recent decades spoke with great warmth and affection about the wonderful care they received, as well as the sense of family the staff and Board members engendered. "I'm sure no one in the wide world, not even Happy Rockefeller, would get better care," 89-year-old Lucky Milligan told Times Union reporter Pamela Sawchuk in 1977 as she rocked contentedly in a Victorian chair and showed her guest a gathering of family mementoes she had brought with her. In preparation for a feature story to mark the 125th anniversary of Albany Guardian Society's founding in 1852, Sawchuk got a tour of the Clinton Avenue facility and heard candid assessments from the residents. "Now, I'm not going to say this place is perfect, but then again, is any home?" asked Barbara Wilcoxon, 97, the eldest resident, who was affectionately nicknamed "Grandma." The other women always let Wilcoxon sit in her favorite chair in the living room, a gold brocade recliner that offered plush comfort.

Sawchuk described the women as "high-spirited oldsters" in a story that emphasized the rich history of Albany Guardian Society in providing a comfortable residence for women over the age

of 65 of modest means and in moderately good health. Miss Milligan, a spry 89-year-old and longtime resident, piped up to the reporter: "We are not a nursing home. Don't make that mistake. But if we get sick, believe me, we are taken care of very well."

Residents testified to the peace of mind that came with the provision of complete lifetime care. "Once a woman is accepted for residency, we take care of everything she may need for the rest of her life, including any medical needs which may arise," Board member Mrs. C. Frank Suderley II, told the Times Union. "We also pay each woman the income from any funds transferred as well as half the net income from any Social Security payments, pension, and annuities." The agreement also included end-of-life arrangements. "Each lady gets a very decent funeral and a well-maintained plot in Albany Rural Cemetery," Board member Mrs. B. Jermain Savage told the reporter. "Of course, if the family has made other burial arrangements we would comply with those."

"There is something about the spirit here. It is very difficult to capture in words," said Savage, who served on the Board for 44 years. She noted the Victorian-era furnishings and well-maintained antiques, as well as a piano where residents occasionally gathered for singalongs while a resident played tunes. The social schedule included formal teas, holiday and birthday parties, and festivities sponsored by community groups, including the Salvation Army. There were regularly scheduled day trips, luncheons, musical programs, and communal sharing. The women were proud of their beauty salon and of the home-style meals in the dining room. Many were eager to tell the newspaper reporter how happy and content they felt living out their final years at The Home. The goal of The Home was for residents to maintain as much as possi-

ble the routines they had established when they lived in their own places. "We recommend they attend meetings, go to church, do just about anything they wish, within reason," said Board member Suderley. Residents were free to come and go as they pleased and some of the women spent winters in Florida with friends.

At the time of the Times Union feature story, which appeared in the fall of 1977, there were 38 residents and six empty bedrooms at The Home. An administrator, Thomas Martin, the first man to hold the post in its 125 years, supervised the full-time staff required to run the facility and an additional workforce of part-time cooks, maids, maintenance men, night watchmen, and aides. Medical and nursing attention was available on a 24-hour basis. The 27-member Board of Managers reviewed applications of women who were required to be between the ages of 65 and 80 and able to care for their own daily needs without an aide's assistance. A physical examination by a physician affiliated with The Home insured reasonable good health upon admission. Applicants who were admitted paid a $3,000 entrance fee and agreed to transfer any remaining assets or property to Albany Guardian Society.

Six years later, in 1984, women at The Home welcomed another Times Union reporter, Grace O'Connor. As she interviewed residents, staff, and Board members she concluded that the $3,000 entrance fee represented a remarkable bargain for room and board and care for the final years of an elderly woman's life. O'Connor spoke to Prudence Ciaccio, chairman of the Board, who, in choosing to serve on the Board, followed in the footsteps of her mother and grandmother, both of whom were also on the Board. "I've known about Albany Guardian Society all my life," she said.

O'Connor observed residents reading books, working on crossword puzzles, playing the piano, attending exercise classes, and watching television in a community parlor. "I'm happy here," said Florence Jennings, 91, who had lived at The Home for 12 years. She was among 33 women who were residents at the time. Jennings said she liked the security of knowing she would have good care, meals, and a comfortable home for the remaining years of her life. The reporter also met 68 year old Arletta Agans who had lived at The Home for the past two years after the death of her husband. "I worried what I was going to do after he died," Agans said. "I knew a few women who lived at The Home and they told me how much they liked living there. I feel very secure here, although my sons worried at first that I was in a downtown area. It's been wonderful and I'm happy I could bring all my own furniture and collections here. I like to say, 'It's just like home, without the cooking and cleaning.'"

THE CHANGING LANDSCAPE OF ELDER CARE

THE REGULATORY ENVIRONMENT

Beginning in the early 1970's, the landscape of elder care began to change, particularly for the low-income target population of Albany Guardian Society. With reimbursement available from Medicare and Medicaid, construction of modern nursing homes increased. In these facilities, low-income people (and private pay individuals who expended their resources) found that Medicaid could pay for their care.

In the mid-1970's the federal government enacted and New York State enhanced the Supplemental Security Income (SSI) program to bring the income of aged, blind, and disabled individuals up to a minimum standard. These payments became available to people living at home, or in a congregate care setting such as an adult home in which the funds could be used towards the cost of services provided.

New York State also developed several Medicaid programs that enabled people to receive needed services including people living at The Home. These included the Personal Care Program designed to provide assistance with activities of daily living and the Long Term Home Health Care Program designed to provide broader home care to people who were nursing home eligible.

Additionally, in 1991, New York State established its Assisted Living Program (ALP) which allows Medicaid to pay for additional services to Adult Care Facility residents through an arrangement with a home care agency. ALPs serve people who are medically eligible for nursing home placement but can be served as effectively in a less medically intensive, less expensive setting, one that also promotes resident independence. New York State encouraged limited development of ALP beds as a direct substitute for building new nursing home beds.

The 19th century building that housed Albany Guardian Society's Home could not be easily transitioned to meet the new standards required for the ALP. Moreover, The Home was never intended to offer the skilled care that the new nursing home regulatory environment of the late 1980's required. ALP facilities provide a range of home health services including therapies, and the case management services of a registered professional nurse. The Home was not designed to provide those additional services. Besides, the charitable mission of Albany Guardian Society did not focus on the provision of medical or health care services; its mission focused on serving older adults in a social environment that would enhance their end of life experience. Without an additional income stream (such as Medicaid) and with declining occupancy due to lower-income seniors having more housing options, operation of The Home became financially unsustainable. By 1990, the deficit was in the high six-figures and it was eating into the principal of an endowment that had been built and maintained for more than 125 years. Moreover, the building needed expensive renovations if it was to continue to operate, with or without federal funding. Something had to be done.

In 2000, the Board of Albany Guardian Society hired Rick Iannello to serve as its Executive Director. Iannello had previously overseen the transition of The Eddy, begun in Troy in 1928 as a 19-bed nursing home, to a large multi-campus provider of residential and home-based services to seniors. With a background in senior services but without the emotional connection to The Home felt by those who had been involved with it for so many years as either staff or Board members or residents, Iannello was able to assess the situation clearly. "From a distance," he said, "it might have looked like it had Victorian grandeur, but it was a very old building that had a lot of problems that would be very expensive to fix. What immediately struck me was that all the employees referred to the 1911 wing as 'the new wing.' That summed up the challenge."

In the year 2001, Albany Guardian Society sold The Home to Dr. Bob Paeglow who currently operates Koinonia Primary Care at 553 Clinton Ave. The clinic provides care coordination and management to all in need of health care, with a focus on low-income residents and the underserved in the community.

SAME MISSION, NEW APPROACH

Initially, the Board sought to partner with the Eddy to build a modern senior care facility that would replace The Home. However, as negotiations for the construction of what has since become The Beverwyck (an independent senior living community in Slingerlands, New York) proceeded, it became clear that this project would not meet the Society's historic mission of serving low income and destitute seniors. Finally, the Board made the difficult decision to close The Home and to end the Guardian Society's long and distinguished history as a provider of housing to seniors.

After closing The Home in 2000, the Board moved quickly to begin the Society's transition from a provider of direct care to a provider of services and to begin achieving the objectives of this transition. Settled in its office suite in Corporate Woods, in Albany, New York, The Society embraced its new role as a clearinghouse able to provide an overview of senior services in the Capital Region and as a catalyst that organized conferences with leading experts in the field of aging. The Society soon established a working relationship with professors and researchers at the School of Social Welfare at the University at Albany, in particular with the University at

Albany's Center for Excellence in Aging Services. This collaboration, begun in 2002, involved jointly producing a series of community forums on topics concerning aging. The initial success of these forums underscored the need for such programs and encouraged Albany Guardian Society to develop its role as a prime convener of large public forums. In the years since that first effort in 2002, Albany Guardian Society has partnered with dozens of organizations in community forums related to senior services.

In 2003, Albany Guardian Society began another collaboration, this time with WMHT, the local public television station. The result was a 13-part TV series titled "It's an Age Thing!" Hosted by award-winning NPR journalist Susan Stamberg, the program included interviews with seniors from Buffalo to Manhattan who had successfully addressed issues common to older adults. The series' compelling narration underscored both humorous and dramatic approaches to aging issues, such as working past the age of 65 and dealing with the loss of a spouse. In 2007, Albany Guardian Society again collaborated with WMHT to expand the series "It's an Age Thing." Now titled "It's an Age Thing: Our Communities," it was narrated by Mary Beth Wenger.

In 2014, Albany Guardian Society continued the collaboration with WMHT to produce a 14-part TV series entitled "Age Wise." The episodes examined what can and should be done to help older adults age better and they presented best practices from various regions across New York State. This series carried the name of Albany Guardian Society far beyond its previous lo-

cal reach as "Age Wise" programs were broadcast over nearly 100 public TV affiliate stations across the United States.

Another major initiative for Albany Guardian Society began in 2005 with the publication of its first housing directory, "Housing Options for Senior Adults in the Capital Region." The directory includes detailed information about the full range of housing options for seniors in Albany, Schenectady, Rensselaer, and Saratoga counties. A photograph of each facility, along with an overview of what it offers, helps families begin a conversation about the types of housing an older adult might wish to consider. Albany Guardian Society publishes the "Adult Day Services in the Capital Region" directory and continues to provide valuable information to seniors by introducing and publishing, in 2020, an additional directory, "Transportation Options for Senior Adults in the Capital Region."

In 2011, Albany Guardian Society moved to a larger office space in Corporate Woods that included a multi-purpose meeting room with a full range of audio-visual features. With a "learning center" now available, the Board in 2013 launched Albany Guardian Society Institute. The Institute offers lectures, classes, and workshops on a variety of topics, ranging from caregiving to housing to aging in place for audiences of up to 35 people. The small, intimate meeting room is ideal for group discussions and the space has the technology to support multi-media presentations. The Institute has welcomed thousands of people to its programs over the years and greatly expanded the reach and public profile of Albany Guardian Society.

In 2015, Rick Iannello retired as Executive Director of Albany Guardian Society and Ken Harris was hired to replace him. In

his previous work with statewide and national advocacy organizations, Harris had witnessed the shift in funding and regulations that conspired to bring about the closure of The Home and other facilities like it that served a low-income clientele in buildings that could not be brought up to code. Thus, Harris began his tenure as Executive Director with a keen awareness that to fulfill its mission in the 21st century, Albany Guardian Society would need to continue transforming itself from a provider of direct care to an organization that facilitates the exchange of information about best practices in the field of aging.

ALBANY GUARDIAN SOCIETY COMMUNITY PROGRAMS

ALBANY GUARDIAN SOCIETY INSTITUTE

RESEARCH AND COMMUNITY EVENTS

CONCLUSION

Throughout its long history, Albany Guardian Society has responded to the changing landscape of elder care while always seeking to fulfill its mission of improving the lives of seniors. Its Board of Directors remain committed to maintaining a business model that will preserve the Society's endowment and thus enable it to fulfill its mission.

Recent surveys of seniors across New York State and the nation have confirmed that people are staying in their homes longer. Albany Guardian Society is actively engaged in providing support for this change in the pattern of aging. Institute classes address this issue through programs such as "Aging in Place: Your Home for Your Lifetime." The recent directory of "Transportation Options" helps seniors age in place by enabling them to access information about how to get where they need to go.

Albany Guardian Society is also actively involved in supporting the Village Movement, which began in 2001 by a few individuals in the Beacon Hill neighborhood of Boston, Massachusetts. Now a nation-wide phenomenon, Villages are membership-based, grassroots, nonprofit organizations run by volunteers and/or paid staff

that coordinate access to a variety of services that support the goal of enabling seniors to remain in their homes for as long as possible. In 2017, the Society organized the Capital Region Villages Collaborative and in 2019, in collaboration with the New York State Office for the Aging (NYSOFA), the Society established the Villages Technical Assistance Center. Promoting the emergence of grassroots Villages in the Capital District will allow seniors to age in place successfully as the Villages will provide needed services, educational programming, and social events.

The current collaboration between Albany Guardian Society and the Design Lab at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute (RPI) also reflects the Society's recognition of significant changes in the landscape of senior care, particularly in the area of technology. Engineering students at RPI have developed the Timed Up and Go test (TUG), a commonly used screening tool to assist physical and occupational therapists to identify seniors at risk of falling. They have also developed a smartphone app that utilizes accelerometers in mobile phones to detect the orientation of the phone (and the senior holding it) and the phone's gyroscope, thus providing a 3-D view of a person's balance that assists in developing a therapy plan. Another Albany Guardian Society and RPI collaboration project involved developing a senior medication dispenser connected to the internet that can use voice activation technology to assist in proper medication management. Most recently students have worked to develop applications that will assist seniors to remain independent in their homes.

Albany Guardian Society began with the compassion and determination of a few women who saw a need for quality care for older female citizens in the Capital District and who responded to that need. It has evolved into a staffed organization that offers over 115 classes a year to meet the needs of seniors from all walks of life; funds large-scale forums on issues relating to aging that draw hundreds of attendees; publishes key directories to assist seniors in making major life decisions; supports cutting-edge technology and television programs that have the potential to improve the life of seniors; and provides crucial support for major new developments in elder care such as the Village Movement.

From 1852 until the present, Albany Guardian Society continues to evolve, seeking always to fulfill its mission – to improve the quality of life for seniors – through education, information, funding the development of services, and creating an environment favorable to the growth of innovative ideas for improving elder care. It is a history and a legacy to be proud of.

REMEMBRANCES AND REFLECTIONS

During the Hungarian Revolution of 1956, John Bagyi, an 18-year-old worker in an aluminum factory in Budapest that was taken over and occupied by Soviet troops, tore off a Soviet insignia that had been placed on the wall of the factory. The Soviet secret police launched a manhunt for him so he knew he had to flee. With a little cash from his mother, he fled to the Austrian border. He spent a few weeks in an Austrian refugee camp but his hope was to reach the United States. An aunt who lived in Albany, New York, had offered to sponsor his emigration to America. Bagyi managed to secure a refugee visa and to book an airline flight to the United States, arriving at a refugee processing center at Camp Kilmer, New Jersey on New Year's Eve, 1956. He took a train to Albany where he met his aunt and benefactor for the first time.

"I couldn't speak a word of English when I arrived," Bagyi recalled, but his aunt gave him support and assistance. She also introduced him to other Hungarian émigrés in Albany, one of whom, in turn, introduced Bagyi to a Board member of Albany

Guardian Society, which regularly needed to fill entry-level positions at The Home. Bagyi got an interview and was hired at The Home in March 1957 to wash dishes. While he washed dishes for the meals served in the cafeteria for some 50 residents and 40 employees, he learned his English language skills talking to residents and staff.

Bagyi worked six days a week, 12 hours a day. "It was hard work and long hours, but I was young and grateful for the opportunity," he said. His English language skills steadily improved and when he felt homesick, he caught a bus to Schenectady, where he socialized with other countrymen. Wanting to become even more proficient at reading, writing, and speaking English, he enrolled in night classes at Albany High School in English as a Second Language. There he met a charming young woman, an Irish immigrant named Barbara, who had come to Albany from Galway in the mid-1950's. Although she spoke English in Ireland, Gaelic was Barbara's first language. She, too, sought to improve her English language proficiency in the night classes at Albany High.

John and Barbara dated briefly before he was drafted in September, 1959, into the U.S. Army. While he was away in the service, John put in a good word for Barbara with his boss and in 1961 she was hired to join the kitchen staff at The Home. After he completed his military service and was discharged from the Army, John moved back to The Home, he and Barbara resumed dating, and in 1964 the couple married.

In the early 1960's there were 12 tables with four residents apiece in the long dining room at The Home. Additional tables could be set up to accommodate family members, who were welcome at both lunch and dinner, or other visitors or guests. When

Barbara started as a kitchen worker in 1961, part of her job was to bring out a dozen plates and bowls, which were passed around and served family-style by the four women at each table. The ritual of sharing a meal, Barbara recalled, provided a significant focus for the residents' days.

"The women always liked to knit and crochet," John recalled. "The house manager hired an activity director and there were a lot of day trips and outings planned. The women liked to play cards and bingo and to plant flowers in the gardens. Some of them were frail and elderly, but most of the women could get around pretty well and they liked to stay active."

In the early years, there was a single small black-and-white television set, located in the Board room, that served all the residents. The women would agree on which show to watch and there were rarely arguments or disputes, according to Barbara. Though each resident had her own bedroom, they shared bathrooms. The women worked out their own arrangements over when and how long each would use the bathroom and the bathrooms did not become a source of strife or contention, either. In later decades, more bathrooms were added. In the 1990's, five deluxe bedrooms with a private bathroom were created by knocking down walls and turning two bedrooms into one. Residents paid a premium for these enhanced accommodations that were in high demand. Barbara also noted that when, in the early 1990's, The Home accepted men for the first time because they had openings to fill, no problems resulted. This historic change passed without fanfare, according to Barbara.

"I enjoyed working there because I loved the people," Barbara recalled. "We really got close to them after so many years togeth-

er. We were like a family. I know some don't like working with the elderly, but I remind them we'll all be old one day. It was very sad and hard when one of the residents passed away. We would say special prayers at morning prayer and many of us would go to the funeral service. It was like losing a family member."

Since Barbara and John were dedicated longtime staff members, the Board gave the couple permission to bring their young children to The Home as preschoolers. That welcoming attitude and flexibility on the part of the Board was critical in keeping the dedicated couple working there so happily for so many years. "I loved working there because they let us bring our kids to The Home and it worked out very well. Our kids practically grew up there and the old ladies enjoyed having them around. It was like my kids had lots of grandmothers," Barbara said. As they got older, the children came to The Home after school. Moreover, if either John or Barbara, as supervisors, had to stay late due to an emergency, they did not have to worry about the children being left alone.

During their long tenure at The Home, the Bagyis witnessed the changing nature of Clinton Avenue and the neighborhood which in the mid-1900's came to be known as West Hill to differentiate it from adjacent Arbor Hill to the east. In the 1950's, when the couple started their employment, West Hill was an enclave of German and Irish immigrants, many of whom worked at the nearby West Albany repair shops of the New York Central Railroad. Just across Clinton Avenue there was a German butcher and bakery, where, as John recalled, he bought food for the residents, including fresh whole chickens at 14 cents a pound and a dessert favorite, apple kugel. Beginning in the1990's, West Hill's landscape changed making it more difficult to sustain The Home.

Increasingly stringent state regulations on senior adult homes forced The Home to undertake expensive safety renovations, including the installation of an elevator, fire doors around stairwells, and other measures. "The Home was a 19th century building and it was a challenge and very expensive to upgrade it to meet all the new codes," Bagyi said. "It was well maintained and we did the best we could. But everything was old, from the heating system to the plumbing. We had one large furnace and switched it over from coal to oil to natural gas during my time. It had a large boiler with hot water and there were radiators throughout the house. It was fairly reliable, but we had occasional problems."

The Home never had central air-conditioning, but John and his assistant distributed fans in the summer and they helped with the installation of small window-mounted airconditioners for residents who had enough money to purchase these units for their bedrooms. "The building could get quite warm in the summer," John said. "Luckily, it was a solid brick building with thick walls that helped keep the interior warm in winter and cool in summer. It was a challenge to keep everyone comfortable."

Facility upgrades and renovations, however, could not address the underlying financial pressures brought about by the changing landscape of senior care. "People wanted to live in the brand-new nursing homes being built," John said. "And the state started adding more regulations. That cost more and we started losing money and tried raising prices. The state was putting its nose more and more into our operation. We could see the writing on the wall."

When The Home finally closed in 2000, the Bagyis helped the residents pack their belongings to move to other accommoda-

tions. "It was very hard for us and for the residents who had lived there for many years," John said. "There were a lot of tears and sharing favorite old stories," Barbara said.

Prudence "Prudie" Ciaccio, a third-generation Board member, recalls visiting The Home with her mother as a young girl when they lived nearby in Albany. Her grandmother, Grace Blessing, joined the Board in the early 1900's, and her mother, Helen Clemishire, joined around 1935. Prudie served on the Board from the 1960's through the 1990's. Her term overlapped with that of her mother's for some time and together they attended monthly Board meetings and took assignments on various committees. They also organized fundraising events for The Home at St. Paul's Episcopal Church where they were members. "I loved the staff and residents and visited The Home regularly," she said. Her volunteer work included baking a cake or other dessert for holiday parties and driving residents on errands. "I understood the decision to close The Home because of the finances. I was sad to see it shut down, but times change. As far as I know, we were the only family with three generations on the Board. I'm proud of that."

The Pooles are another family with a three-generation connection to Albany Guardian Society. Sally Poole, her mother-in-law, and her mother-in-law's mother-in-law were all members of the

Board of Albany Guardian Society. Sally Poole joined the Board in the 1960's and in her capacity as a Board member she handled financial matters and other details of daily life, including shopping, for some of the residents. "Many of the women were single and had no family, so we served as family members to them," Poole said. "Things were a lot more relaxed back then and you could help people without a lot of state regulations. It was a simpler time and we were there to help the ladies without a lot of rules."

"We knew everyone at The Home and they all knew us and it was a family kind of place," Poole recalled. "Our main goal was to make The Home as comfortable as possible for the ladies. A lot of the people couldn't afford to live there and they had no money. We never put them out. We kept a secret fund to assist ladies who ran out of money. We didn't advertise it, but there was always money to help those in need. The Board over the generations had been very frugal with the finances and the endowment grew. We used the interest for the daily operations and to keep The Home going. We only withdrew from the principal if the roof leaked or the building was in need of critical repairs."

Poole was on the Board when more stringent fire codes and more increased state regulation of adult homes required costly renovations at The Home, including an elevator, fireproof doors, and reconfigured stairways. "We really struggled whether we should spend that kind of money and I remember at one point in the interim we put portable roll-up ladders outside the bedroom windows because we were worried the ladies could not evacuate down the stairs if we had a fire because they were elderly and infirm," Poole said. "But expecting feeble old ladies to climb out their bedroom windows and down ladders was also a ridiculous

idea. In the end, we all came to the conclusion that it was an elegant old building, but it had outlived its usefulness."

Wendy Brandow's service to Albany Guardian Society began in 1988. Her mother, Polly Woodward, was a longtime Board member before Wendy joined and it is possible that her grandmother may also have served on the Board. In the company of her mother, Brandow began visiting The Home as a teenager. "I remember we would visit the residents and we always participated in the formal teas, one in the spring and one in January to celebrate the anniversary of The Home's founding," she said. She has fond memories of helping her mother clean the Board room, set up the silver service, and prepare the tea. "Tea was a very important and formal ritual in those days. The women wore fancy hats and white gloves and tea was served from a beautiful silver tea service. It was very special for them. One afternoon a month, we also took part in a social hour where they got a piano player and everyone sang old-time songs," she recalled.

Brandow and her mother occasionally invited two or three of the residents on special outings. "We'd take a drive in the country and stop for ice cream or we'd pack a picnic lunch and stop along the Hudson River," she said. "I remember we took them to lunch once at a country club. They really looked forward to getting out because they didn't seem to have anyone else, other than the staff, who treated them like family."

In the end, following extended discussions, Brandow made peace with the decision to close The Home. She remained on the Board until 2018 and is pleased with the direction Albany Guardian Soci-

ety has taken since closing The Home. The emphasis on education, presenting useful workshops, and programs related to aging services, fulfills the mission of the organization. "We're working," she noted, "to change the low profile the Guardian Society has had since the beginning. It's always been something of a secret. I'm not sure why. The Board, as a whole and individually, are not people who go out and blow their own horn. We've been successful without fanfare. There was agreement, however, that [in moving forward] we wanted to preserve the best qualities of The Home, including humility."

In his 40-year banking career, Robert Leslie oversaw the investment portfolio for dozens of churches, hospitals, and nursing homes. "I knew which ones were being properly run and Albany Guardian Society was well-run," said Leslie who served on the Board from 2000 to 2012. "I monitored its portfolio of investments and it had a very good track record on building its endowment and being very careful with its money." According to Leslie, Albany Guardian Society was a well-kept secret throughout most of its history because its business model did not require a high public profile. "It was largely unknown because it never had to go out and raise money," Leslie said. "I called it the best bargain in Albany, you learned about it word-of-mouth."

Leslie suggested that the long history and rich legacy of the Guardian Society was due to its having gained the backing of prominent families in the Capital District who have supported it financially for generations. He also credited its durability and stability to the number of two- and three-generation Board member families whose deep commitment meant steady resources.

Leslie was involved in the decision to close The Home. His review of the organization's financial portfolio and the projections as to how much it would cost to renovate The Home in order to meet new codes and regulations left no doubt in his mind that closure was the only prudent course of action. "It was sad to see The Home close because it was a feel-good philanthropy with exceptional commitment and support," he said. "The Board members visited regularly, attended teas and holiday parties, took the residents out on special day trips, and had a very deep and personal relationship with the residents. That was hard to give up. The other reality was that by the end, it got to the point where we had a lot of empty rooms we couldn't fill because of the location and the building's age and the people we were getting were not even from Albany anymore. They only chose The Home because it was such a great bargain and we finally got honest with ourselves and asked tough questions about what we were really doing there. That made the decision to close an obvious one."

Attorney Margaret "Meg" Reed was elected President of the Board of Directors of Albany Guardian Society in 2014 after serving on the Board for 10 years. "Our role now has evolved into being a knowledgeable and reliable resource about senior services in the Capital Region," Reed said. "There are restrictions on what we can do as an operating foundation, which precludes us from lobbying and other activities. We want to be able to suggest the best practices for elder care. We also collaborate with other organizations that assist seniors. For instance, Colonie Senior Services and

an organization called Umbrella which helps keep seniors in their homes by offering affordable home repair. Our philosophy is, we'll help you if you help us with services that assist seniors with aging in place. We also have transformed the Board from philanthropic women to people who have specific expertise in aging services."

Reed acknowledged the importance of producing a history of Albany Guardian Society out of gratitude for the pioneering women who founded it and the remarkably dedicated individuals who have sustained the organization for 168 years. "There are so many women we need to thank and to memorialize for their years of service to Albany Guardian Society," Reed said. "I am thinking in particular of Gertrude Olcott. She and her late husband Bob Olcott and the entire Olcott family had an extraordinary commitment to The Home for generations. Gertrude was on the Board for many years, always made time to help the residents and to take them on outings. She died in 2002 while on her way to a Guardian Society meeting. She represented that kind of remarkable dedication that has sustained this organization since 1852. As the President of the Board of Directors, I am grateful for their outstanding efforts and the Board joins me in thanking them for their service."

ALBANY GUARDIAN SOCIETY

Albany Guardian Society offers over 115 educational programs a year in a small classroom setting on aging-related topics. Topics include aging in community, caregiving, healthy aging, housing options, legal issues, and technology.

Also offered by Albany Guardian Society are community forums with national speakers on topics of interest to seniors, their families and caregivers. Some past forums have included "Positive Approaches to Dementia Care," "Understanding Medicare," and "Innovative Approaches to Senior Care Management."

Albany Guardian Society publishes a "Housing Options for Senior Adults" directory which provides detailed information on different types of housing that are available for seniors looking to downsize or to move within New York State's Capital Region. Also available are the "Adult Day Services in the Capital Region" and "Transportation Options for Seniors in the Capital Region" directories.

Albany Guardian Society has been supporting the "Village" movement since 2012, most recently by convening the Capital Region Villages Collaborative (www.crvillages.org) and developing the Villages Technical Assistance Center (VTAC) in partner-

ship with the New York State Office for the Aging. Villages are "neighbors helping neighbors" membership-driven, grassroots, not-for-profit organizations run by senior volunteers and/or paid staff that assist seniors in remaining independent in their home. Villages provide a variety of services including home services, transportation, educational programs, and social events.

For more information about Albany Guardian Society, or to be placed on their mailing list, call 518-434-2140, or visit www.albanyguardiansociety.org.

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