

Last of the pioneers

Community's grand dame dies at 101 years

Helen Mary Wattles, one of Troy's remaining pioneers, died Tuesday at William Beaumont Hospital in Royal Oak. She was 101.

Born on the family homestead, 3864 Fernside, she lived there all her life. Wattles was the oldest descendant of one of Troy's original six families. She is survived by her brother, Morris, and 14 nephews and nieces.

Funeral services will be held at 1 p.m. tomorrow (Friday) at the First Presbyterian Church of Troy, 4328 Fernside. She will be buried in White Chapel Memorial Cemetery.

Ms. Wattles was honored on her 100th birthday by the Troy City Council as the "Grand Lady of Troy." She remained active in the Troy Historical

Society and First Presbyterian Church into her late 90's.

Her great-grandfather, Alexander Wattles, moved his family from New York in 1835 to settle on a 300-acre farm in Troy. Wattles Road and Wattles Elementary School in Troy are named after him.

Ms. Wattles grew up on the family dairy farm. Walsh College and Wattles school now stand on part of the old farm. She fondly remembered the barn dances and square dancing that were popular in the young agricultural community. Troy's suburban development in recent years was never expected by early settlers, she said.

When she was 14, Ms. Wattles drove a horse and buggy to Birmingham High

School. Graduating in 1896, she wished to study Latin and Greek for another year. So she boarded a streetcar to Pontiac, the only place the courses were offered.

She was the oldest alumna of Ann Arbor University. She graduated from the school, now the University of Michigan, in 1901. She taught mathematics for 47 years at Central High School in Detroit.

During the Depression, she grew flowers in the yard and her brother raised vegetables. They sold them at a roadside stand.

Retirement in 1948 gave her more time to devote to the local organizations she loved. Helen Wattles was never one to let the parade pass her by.

"If you don't keep up with the procession, you get run over," she commented four years ago.

She was a member of Circle Dramatique, Pi Beta Phi sorority, the Oakland County YWCA, Oakland county pioneer and historical societies. In 1972, she and her brother were named Troy Distinguished Citizens of the Year. She was also named outstanding citizen by the Clawson-Troy Elks Club in 1971.

Her greatest efforts were in service to local groups. "She was very supportive of the library," said Joseph Howe, director of Troy Public Library and Troy Historical Museum.

But the museum was closest to her heart, he added. She and her brother donated many of the artifacts in the museum's collection, he said. Ms. Wattles was a member of the Troy Historical Society and Troy Museum Guild.

She worked as a tour guide at the museum.

Libby Ford, a longtime friend, remembers her as "A good Christian, a good Republican, a good neighbor and a very dear friend."

Ms. Ford and Ms. Wattles were both members of First Presbyterian Church. Ms. Wattles also served as deacon and as secretary of the women's association for many years.

"She contributed to every phase of the church-monasterially and with herself," Ms. Ford said. That attitude extended to everything in which Ms. Wattles was involved, her friend of 40 years said.

"She was such a vital person. She was very interested in everything — everyday living and international affairs. She lived a full life," Ms. Ford said.

"She was just a delight to everyone that knew her."

A life-long Republican, Ms. Wattles had voted ever since women gained suffrage in 1920. She was honored at age 95 by the Oakland County Council of Republican Women.

"She always came out. It was a pleasure to have her at meetings," said Skeets Davy, of the former Birmingham-Troy Republican Women's Council to which Ms. Wattles belonged.

"She was a joy to have around," Ms. Davy said.

Ms. Wattles turned in her buggy for a car in 1927. She was still driving at 95. By then, she had a Corvair.

"I suppose if Ralph Nader knew I'm still driving a Corvair, he'd have some

things to say. But until they sell brains along with the cars, they're all dangerous," she said in an interview several years ago.

Until recently she cleaned, shopped and cooked for her brother and herself in the 10-bedroom farmhouse. She never married.

Poor health kept her housebound for the last two years, forcing her to curtail her community involvement. She

had several times expressed loneliness because all her high school and teacher friends had died. She had even survived most of her first students, her brother said.

Ms. Wattles said she missed those with whom she shared old memories. In 1976, she commented, "When we go out, I don't see anyone I know anymore."



HELEN MARY WATTLES

Fine arts camp begins

Several Farmington area students are attending Blue Lake Fine Arts Camp this summer.

They are: Stella Miller, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Charles Miller of 2823 Balmoral Way, Farmington Hills; Karen Oswald, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Robert S. Oswald, of 28745 Village Lane, Farmington Hills; Susa Reesker, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. H. Dale Reesker, of 28491 Wellington, Farmington Hills; Laurie Roshak, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Anthony Roshak of 29947 Fernhill Drive; James Kordel, son of Mr. and Mrs. Chester Kordel of 36170 Congress, Farmington Hills. All of these students are band members.

Choir members include: David Fernquist, son of Mr. and Mrs. James Fernquist of 33105 Cloverdale, Farmington; Wendy Westenberg, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Robert J. Westenberg, of 30231 Wicklow Court of Farmington Hills.

Orchestra members are: Grace Hill, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Walter Hill, of 31192 Bycroft, Farmington Hills; and George Pekaris, son of Mr. and Mrs. Steve G. Pekaris, of 29578 Mul-lane, Farmington Hills.

A new director for LIT alumni

Roger Avie of Farmington Hills has been elected president of the Lawrence Institute of Technology Alumni Association.

A 1968 graduate of LIT where he earned a B.S. degree in industrial management, Avie is director of marketing and sales for H.W. Kaufman Financial Group.

As president of the alumni association, he will direct activities and programs of LIT's nearly 10,000 alumni.

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