

# Famous Women of Erie

## **Sarah A. Reed**

Sarah A. Reed was born in 1838, the granddaughter of Erie's first female settler, Hannah Reed. As an educated woman, Ms. Reed spent most of her life improving the lives of others in the Erie community. In 1871, she helped to form the first welfare agency in Erie. She served as president of "The Erie Association for Improving the Conditions of the Poor and a Home for the Friendless" for 44 years. During that time, she also conducted Sunday school classes for the children in the Home. Throughout her life, Ms. Reed was involved in over 25 different societies, including the Needlework Guild, the League of Women Voters, and the Young Women's Christian Association. Years later, she would go on to write children's books, and dedicate them to her "little flock". After her death in 1934, the Home for the Friendless became the Sarah A. Reed Home.

## **Elizabeth Burleigh**

Elizabeth Burleigh was the daughter of Hamilton Waters, a slave who bought his freedom. With the dream of becoming a teacher, Elizabeth attended Avery College near Pittsburgh. Even after completing the requirements for her teacher training, she met local prejudice that would not permit the hiring of a black woman. Undaunted, she became a janitress at North Public School where she had hoped to be a teacher. While at North Public School, Elizabeth married Henry B. Burleigh and had 4 children. When Henry died in 1873, Elizabeth was left to take care of their children. Working as a janitress and taking a part time job as a maid, Elizabeth did everything she could to provide for her children. Elizabeth did make use of her talent by teaching at the at a local mission school, a black church and cultural center. She remarried in 1875 to John Elmendorf and the couple had 2 daughters. Her daughters, Eva Burleigh and Bessie Elmendorf attained the goal denied to Elizabeth, becoming teachers in the Erie Public Schools.

## **Annie Strong**

Annie Strong came from a family of wealth and prestige. Her father, William L. Scott, was a railroad tycoon and powerful Congressman. Annie married Charles Strong and the couple lived in a magnificent 46-room home at 6th and Peach. The couple played host to many famous guests, including President Grover Cleveland and President William Howard Taft, who got stuck in a bathtub while visiting. With so much wealth, Annie felt that it was very important to give back to the community, donating to St. Vincent Hospital and to the building of the St. Peter Cathedral. Mrs. Strong played an important part in the creation of the Training School for Nurses, which trained nurses for Hamot Hospital. When she died in 1928, her personal estate was valued at \$4,230,972. In 1940, her home became Gannon University's first building and now bears the name Old Main.

## **Laura Sanford**

Laura Sanford was Erie's first historian. In 1861, using her own recollections, those of her father (Giles Sanford, a prominent Erie businessman), and her friends, Laura put together the

first history of Erie County. It was based on original document and first hand observations of people who lived through it. Besides being an avid historian, she also was one of the charter members who started the Home for the Friendless and was the first president of the Women's Christian Temperance Union. From her education at Erie Academy, Laura developed a strong love for books and learning. This was shown through her donations for the building and upkeep of the public libraries. Laura and her mother donated land behind their potato patch to a site for the building of a public library. In 1894, she updated her history of Erie County. Laura Sanford passed away on August 16, 1907 after giving back to the community for 88 years.

## **Ida Tarbell**

Ida Tarbell was born in 1857 in a small, secluded town 10 miles outside of Corry. Unlike many women, Ida decided that she would not get married, because it could rob her of her goals of having the right to an education and the right to economic independence. Choosing a career in biology, Ida was one of the first dozen women to attend Allegheny College. After graduating, she became a teacher, but quit and returned home to her family in Titusville to pursue her goals. At the urging of a friend, she wrote "The Chautauquan", a publication about the Titusville settlement. Wanting to become more independent and a more successful writer, Ida moved to Paris, where she made a living by writing articles about historical and living personalities and selling them to American magazines. She eventually returned to America to work for McClure's Magazine, where her first assignment was on the life of President Lincoln. Her largest and most important assignment was "The History of the Standard Oil Company", a company which was headed by John D. Rockefeller. Published in 1902, the article led to an investigation of the company, which led to federal laws regulating monopolies and big business. Besides writing, Ida worked with many groups, including the Women's Committee of Council of National Defense, Pen and Brush, and the Red Cross. Ida died in 1944 at the age of 86.

## **Charlotte Elizabeth Battles**

Charlotte Elizabeth Battles was born October 11, 1864. She married Charles E. Barber, an attorney, in October 1886, but the marriage was annulled in July 1887. In 1890, Charlotte started the Psi Gamma club and became its first president. She also was a member of the Traveler's Club and the North Western PA Human Society. In 1907, she became the acting president of R.S. Battles Bank. Charlotte and her mother donated money to build the Battles Memorial school in memory of her late father. Charlotte was a founding member of the Erie Chapter of Lake Erie College Alumni Association. Also an avid gardener, she won 2nd place in the Yard and Garden Contest of America in 1935. At the time of her death in 1952, her estate was valued at \$950,072.75.

## **Joyce Savocchio**

As the first female mayor of Erie, Mayor Joyce Savocchio was in office from 1990-2000. On July 25, 1997, President Clinton named her Vice-Chair and member of the Christopher Columbus Fellowship Foundation. Also in 1997, she helped to create two Erie land recycling projects that created up to 500 new jobs. As the co-chairwoman of the Community United for a Cancer Cure, Mayor Savocchio led the fundraising efforts in Erie. Under her leadership,

Erie has developed an environmentally sound system for dealing with its wastes. Through her efforts, the payoff in Erie for the environment has been cleaner water in Presque Isle Bay, fewer sewage backups, and an end to overflows at the sewage treatment plant.

## **Gertrude Barber**

Gertrude Barber was born September 16, 1911. After attending Villa Maria Academy, she received a B.S. in elementary and special education, an M.A. in psychology, and an Ed.D. in Educational Administration from Penn State. She began her career as a teacher and then an administrator in the Erie public school system. After leaving the Erie School District in the 1960's, Dr. Barber developed the Barber Center, a school and group of homes in the Erie community that are used to help special education children and adults. Visitors from all over the United States and many foreign countries have come to Erie to both study and observe the methods, care, and affection that produced such excellent results with exceptional children. With the success of the Barber Center, new centers have been opened in Corry, Girard, Philadelphia, and Pittsburgh. Dr. Barber died on April 29, 2000 at the age of 88. Bishop Murphy, in his eulogy for Dr. Barber, called her "Erie's Mother Theresa with a degree in political science."