

Historic Childs: Nellie Vagg, wife of blacksmith, was active leader in temperance movement

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Editor's Note: This is the fourth article in a series about historic Childs in the Town of Gaines. The hamlet of Childs lies just north of Albion at the intersection of Routes 104 and 98. In 2019, Childs was selected to be on the Landmark Society of Western New York's "Five to Revive" list. In 1993, the federal U.S. Department of the Interior declared the Cobblestone Museum in Childs a National Historic Landmark, the first site in Orleans County with that distinction. The NYS Barge Canal was later declared a National Historic Landmark in 2017.)

By Erin Anheier, President, Cobblestone Society



Nellie Vagg

GAINES – In our last installment we learned about Joseph Vagg, the last practicing blacksmith on the Ridge. This time let's focus on his wife, Nellie.

You already know that Nellie was civic minded as she donated Joseph's blacksmith shop to the Cobblestone Museum after his death. She wanted to assure that his legacy was preserved and that future generations learned about the importance of the village blacksmith.

Today we might call Nellie a citizen activist, as she tirelessly worked to improve the lives of her neighbors.

Nellie not only maintained the home, raised two children and frequently assisted Joseph in the blacksmith shop, she was active in the church and community. She was a member of the Home Bureau and Extension Service since its inception.



Nellie Vagg taught many classes for the Home Bureau.

Similar to the Farm Bureau, the Home Bureau sought to bring scientific information to the rural communities in curriculum formulated by Cornell University. Classes for local women which she hosted at her home included Elementary Meal Planning, The Study of Meat, A Place for Everything, General Mending, Nutrition, The Amount of Food Required, Salad Making and Whole Wheat.

She herself conducted classes at other locations including What Makes A Good Day for the Homemaker, Family Fun and Morale in War Time, and Hazards to Our Youth in Our Present World.

Nellie was a long-term member of the Orleans County Women's Christian Temperance Union rising to the position of delegate to area and state conventions. Her commitment to the Temperance Movement was strong; a local resident recalls that when the corner store across the intersection from her home began to sell beer, she told the proprietor that she would "no longer be able to trade with him."



The white ribbon of the Women's Christian Temperance Union

Local residents recall she wore the white ribbon of the WCTU, a symbol of purity, until her death in 1975.

Ironically, she maintained this stance from her home located directly across the road from the tavern that is now Tillman's Village Inn.

As the Cobblestone Museum uses the story of Joseph and his blacksmith shop to educate visitors about the past, next year they plan to include Nellie's story.

The Vagg home is being purchased by the museum and will become a new exhibit. The interior of the home maintains the decorative style of the 1920-30's and will help illustrate rural life in the early 20th century as well as Nellie's role in the community.



The Cobblestone Museum is acquiring the Vagg home at the southwest intersection of routes 104 and 98.