

Former Walworth Woman Honored

By Mary Jane Devlin

Cortland County recently inducted Bessie Mabel Seely into their Hall of Fame. The Cincinnatus Area Heritage Society nominated her.



Bessie Seely circa 1930



Bessie Seely circa 1970

Bessie was born in 1881 to Jay and Sarah Seely. Her father had a tinsmithing shop at 2256 Walworth-Marion Road where Roxy's Salon is now located. She was the first woman to graduate from Syracuse University, School of Law, and the first woman accepted to the New York State Bar.

Bessie's career began as a law clerk in a Syracuse law firm; she soon became a partner. She then joined the banking industry with positions in Syracuse and Detroit. While in Detroit she wrote columns for the "The Detroit Banker" and the magazine of the American Institute of Banking. She also lectured and did public speaking.

In the 1930's she moved back to the Rochester area to help with her aging parents. Following her father's death, Bessie resided in the living quarters of his building. She settled her father's estate in 1958 by giving his tinsmith shop to the Walworth Chamber of Commerce with the stipulation that it be used for educational and cultural benefits of area residents. On August 19, 1962 it became the town library. The library is now located at the town hall complex and is named after the Seely family.

Bessie later moved to Cincinnatus when she inherited a home from her brother-in-law. While living there she became a member of the Cortland County Historical Society and joined the Board of the Kellogg Free Library. In her retirement, she corresponded with several servicemen, pursued her interest in textile arts and continued to be an avid reader.

Bessie passed away in 1981 at the age of 100. She willed her historic home to the Kellogg Free Library and the balance of her estate in trust to two educational institutions.

Congratulations to Bessie Mabel Seely on all her achievements.