

# **Worcester Reed and** **Cornelia Blakemore Warner**

Worcester and Cornelia Warner moved to Tarrytown from Ohio in 1911. Together they gave generously to various charities and paid for many new structures in the town. Although all their contributions were endless, the library was one that they are most remembered for.

**Commemorative Essay by Madeline McGovern, Tarrytown**

**Sleepy Hollow High School, May 25, 2011**

## **Worcester Reed and Cornelia Blakemore Warner**

For as long as I can remember my grandmother has had her name engraved on a bench outside the Warner Library. It has always been something that I am proud to share with others, but never really understood the reasons why. The relationship between my grandma and the library was a mystery to me, and when the opportunity came to research more about it, I decided to educate myself on the history and significance of the library and the family whose namesake it is. Researching the history of the library led me to Cornelia Blakemore Warner (1859-1947) and her husband Worcester Reed Warner (1846-1929), the couple who financed the creation of the library and dedicated it to the community. For this dynamic duo who lived a long life of philanthropy the library was just one of their many charitable acts. Worcester Reed Warner was a scientist, manufacturer, engineer, and philanthropist. Cornelia Blakemore Warner, his wife, was a patron of the arts and a huge benefactor to many aspects of the Tarrytown community. Tarrytown and Sleepy Hollow have benefitted from this generous family in many ways and they are deserving of a place in the Hall of Fame.

Worcester Reed Warner was born on May 16, 1846 in Cummington, Massachusetts. Worcester attended the public schools in Cummington and left home at the age of 19 to begin working in a drafting room of a Boston machine shop. He later moved to a position in Exeter, New Hampshire, where he met Ambrose Swasey. Worcester and Ambrose both left New Hampshire to work for Pratt & Whitney in Hartford, Connecticut. From 1870-1880 Worcester worked for Pratt & Whitney as a tool-maker while also continuing his studies in astronomy and science. In 1881, Ambrose and Worcester established the Warner & Swasey Company. Their company is well known for constructing a 36-inch Lick Observatory telescope, 40-inch Yerkes telescope, and the 72-inch telescope for Canada. Worcester was a well respected and renowned engineer and was a member of the national engineering society which included President Herbert Hoover.

Worcester married Cornelia on June 26, 1890. Cornelia Blakemore Warner was born on July 27, 1859 in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Cornelia attended Ogontz School in Philadelphia then later at the age of twenty received a teaching position at Mittleberg School in Cleveland, Ohio. Cornelia was very active in the community. She became an organizer of the Charities Clearing House, she was the founder of the Fortnightly Musical Club of Cleveland (which later became the Cleveland Symphony Orchestra), she was the founder of the Cleveland Institute of music, she was a chairman of the Free Kindergarten Association, and she regularly donated to the Cleveland Museum of art. Cleveland was very fortunate to have the Warners as benefactors for nearly twenty years.

To the good fortune of the Village of Tarrytown, the Warners decided to leave Ohio and moved to Tarrytown. In 1911, Worcester built a new mansion for himself, Cornelia, and his daughter Helen on Wilson Park Drive which he named "Wilholm". The Warners brought their charitable spirits along with them to their new town. The Warners, through Cornelia's guidance, made countless donations to Tarrytown including: a large donation of money to the Obstetrical Department of Phelps hospital, they contributed around 25,000 dollars to the creation of Patriots Park (the Park was originally going to be named after her because of her large donation), she gave the Old Mill to the Philipse Castle Restoration, paid off the mortgage of the church she attended-the First Reform Dutch Church, she also donated to the YMCA and the Neighborhood House which is the headquarters of the Red Cross, County Health Department, Community Chest, and many other organizations.

The Warners' biggest donation to the community was the library, where they designed and willingly paid for construction, books, and future repairs- a cost totaling close to \$260,000 dollars. The front door of the library is an ornate bronze panel weighing over one thousand pounds that was shipped to Tarrytown from Florence by Mr. Warner. The Warners knew how important a public library for

both Tarrytown and Sleepy Hollow would be for the people living here and the library was their way of having their name make history. The Warners were always supporters of education no matter where they lived. They knew the significance of having the right educational resources, and gave the students them.

Mr. and Mrs. Worcester Warner had between them the money and knowledge to accomplish their goals, and the love and tenderness to share their good fortune with others. This inspiring couple gave so much to our community asking for nothing in return. They never stopped in their acts of charity whether it was the construction of a library for the locals, donating to a park for the children, giving the land needed for an extended hospital, or even just participating in the Red Cross community drives. The Warners are a perfect example of people who truly want to improve the life of others and will do whatever they can to benefit as many people as possible. The Warners were driven, ambitious, personable, community minded and generous- they deserve to be in the Tarrytown- Sleepy Hollow Hall of Fame. I am proud to have my grandmother associated with such giving and generous people.

### Citations

Variety of Sources in the files of the Historical Society, Serving Sleepy Hollow and Tarrytown, One Grove Street , Tarrytown, NY.

Cornelia Blakemore Warner obituary, Tarrytown, NY, The New York Times, March 23, 1947, p. 61.

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