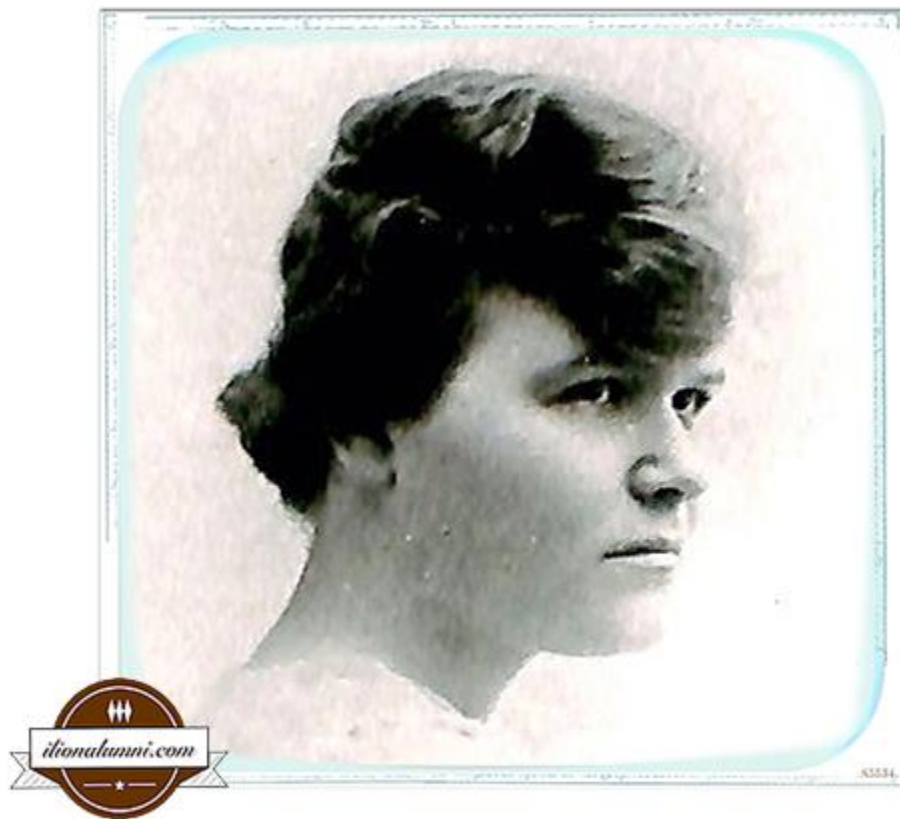


# Elsie (Whitney) Edsall

People Worth Knowing

November 2019

By Aileen Carney Sweeney



*Elsie Whitney Edsall IHS 1914*

1914 IHS Alumnus - Mrs. Elsie (Whitney) Edsall

## Who Was Elsie Edsall?

What made Elsie Whitney Edsall so special that she was featured in the 1958 Utica Observer newspaper feature, "People Worth Knowing"? Besides being the only child of one of Ilion's wealthiest citizens, Elsie Edsall was Ilion's own version of Martha

Stewart before there even was a real Martha Stewart empire. If you ever visited the Cooperstown Farmer's Museum, you might have seen the Elsie Whitney Edsall Collection of spinning and weaving tools.

Elsie Whitney Edsall was born on May 17, 1896, in Iliion, the daughter of [Frank Cole Whitney](#) and Helen Gertrude (Clapsaddle) Whitney. She was the only daughter, of three girls born to her parents, which survived beyond infancy. She graduated from Iliion High School in 1914. Elsie attended St. Lawrence University after graduation from high school. She also attended Cornell University and Oneonta Normal School.

## Elise Whitney - Teacher

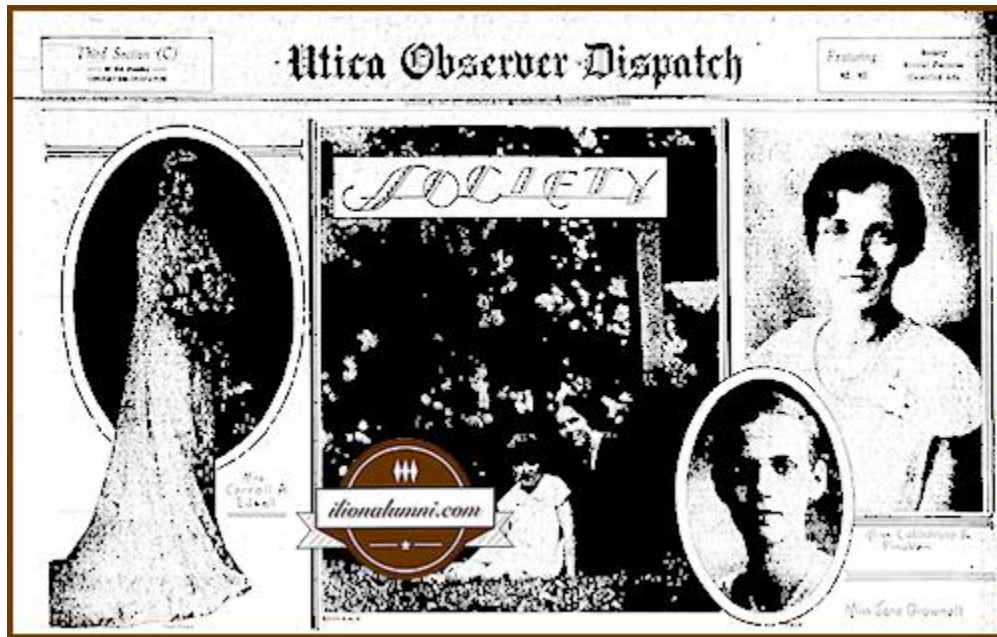
After college, Elsie Whitney taught in the former Old Forge Road School, in South Iliion. Her father served on the Board of Education of Iliion District Number 7. She later taught in the home economics department of the Iliion High School beginning in 1924. She remained in that position until 1930; the year that she married. Source - [People Worth Knowing](#) - Utica NY Observer May 18, 1958



Ilion Old Forge Road School - South Ilion District Number 7 - Built in 1910

Miss Elsie Whitney is included in the photograph below.

### Old Forge Road School Class Picture between 1922 and 1924



Bride on the left is Elsie Whitney. She married Carrol A. Edsall of Brooklyn

### Elsie Whitney Weds Carrol Edsall - 1930

Elsie Edsall married Carrol A. Edsall, the only son Dr. and Mrs. James Monroe Edsall, in Ilion's First Presbyterian Church on August 9, 1930. There were 400 guests at the ceremony. [Mrs. Earl P. Watkin](#), wife of the school Superintendent, was her matron of honor. Other bridesmaids were Miss Marion Moshier, [Miss Ruth Gordon](#), Miss Muriel Schmidt and Miss Mary Carney. Her husband, Carrol A. Edsall, was also a graduate of St. Lawrence University. He was the supervisor in the Department of Health, New York City. source - [Utica NY Observer 1930 a - 1634.PDF](#)

The couple lived in Brooklyn from 1930 until 1936. They returned to Ilion to assist her father in the operation of Pioneer Farms; the Whitney family farm on Otsego Street. source - source - [Ilion NY Sentinel 1947-1948 - 0658.pdf](#)

## The Edsalls Return to Iliion - 1936



Clapsaddle House - Corner of Otsego and Richfield Streets, 421 Otsego Street, Iliion NY  
Courtesy of Iliion Library

Frank Whitney gave his daughter this house when she married. This was the house where she was born. William Clapsaddle built the house in the late 1700s. It is still standing and is considered one of the oldest homes in Iliion. Only one home stands between it and her parents' home at 427 Otsego Street. Peter Clapsaddle inherited the Clapsaddle house from his father. Elsie's mother, Helen Gertrude (Clapsaddle) Whitney, was a descendant of Peter Clapsaddle. source - source - [German Flatts - By Susan R. Perkins, Caryl A. Hopson](#)

**History Preservationist**

## Ilion Alumni Association History

Elsie Whitney was active in the Ilion Alumni Association. She was one of the graduates who contributed to the 1925 publication titled **History of the Union School**". That publication was the source document used to list all the graduates from 1873 through 1925 on this web site. source - [June 10, 1925 - Utica NY Observer 1925 - 4399.pdf](#)

## Family Historian

"Many of Ilion's oldest families... the Whitneys, the Clapsaddles, the Steels, and the Foltses; the Dygerts, the Divendorfs, the Burches and the Schumakers, along with other well-known names, are mentioned in the collection of ancient papers in the possession of Mrs. Carroll A. Edsall, 421 Otsego Street." source - [Illion NY Sentinel 1935-1937 - 0776.pdf](#)

## Donates Collection to Farmers Museum

Mrs. Edsall donated her collection of pre-Revolutionary hand weaving and spinning equipment to the State Historical association in 1942. The Farmers' Museum in Cooperstown became the permanent home for her collection. source - [Cooperstown NY Otsego Farmer & Republican Grayscale 1942 - 1943 - 0386.pdf](#)

"The collection consists of pre-Revolutionary hand weaving and spinning equipment, of inestimable value due to its rarity and the virtual impossibility of replacement. It includes more than 200 pieces, one piece of which is a large four-harness coverlet loom made of solid maple, which dates back to about 100 years before the Revolution."

The loom was purchased by her when the Storrs homestead antiques were sold in Sherburne by the great-great-great-granddaughters of Storrs. It had been brought to Sherburne from Connecticut, and its transfer to Ilion, and then to Cooperstown have been its Only moves.

Mrs. Edsall still continues her work of weaving, using more modern implements in her studio in the basement of her Ilion home. She is well known as a hand-weaver, having demonstrated spinning at the antique show in New York, and having also appeared at the State fair in Syracuse in recent years.

Mrs Edsall was a blue-ribbon winner of many awards and prizes. Her work was displayed at the Museum of Natural History and the Brooklyn Museum. She performed many demonstrations of spinning at the New York State Fair. "At one time she grew flax at her home on Otsego Street, Ilion, which she spun and wove into beautiful, artistic material. Rare specimens of her spinning and weaving equipment are on permanent exhibit at the New York



**MRS. EDSALL  
APPOINTED TO  
HOME BOARD**

ELION — Mrs. Carroll A. Edsall, 427 Otsego St., has been appointed a member of the General Herkimer Home Board of Managers to replace the late Mrs. Ella I. Dimock, it was announced today.

Mrs. Edsall, the former Elsie Whitney, was recommended for the appointment by Republican County Chairman L. Bentley Williams because of her wide interest in current and historical activities in the valley area.

Mrs. Edsall is a member of the New York State Historical Society, Herkimer County Historical Society, Oneida County Historical Society, New England Historical and

**MRS. CARROLL A. EDSALL**

November 22, 1963 Mrs. Edsall Appointed to Home Board

### Club Memberships

The organizations to which she belonged indicate her keen interest in preserving history and the arts. In 1963, she was recommended for appointment as a member of the General Herkimer Home Board of Managers to replace the, late Mrs. Ella I. Dimock. Mrs. Edsall was recommended for the position "...because of her wide interest in current and historical activities in the valley area." source - [Herkimer NY Evening Telegram 1963 03195.pdf](#)

Mrs. Edsall is a member of the New York State Historical Society, Herkimer County Historical Society, Oneida County Historical Society, New England Historical and

Genealogical Society. She is treasurer of Oliver Hazard Perry Chapter, Daughters of 1812, and a member of the Early American Industries Assn, as well as Iliion Historical Club.

She is a member of the Herkimer County Heart Society, treasurer of the Easter Seal Assn., member Herkimer County Tuberculosis and Health Assn., Iliion Hospital Guild, an honorary member of Iliion and Herkimer Garden Clubs.

Also, a member of Evening Star OES Chapter, chairman genealogical committee of the Mohawk Valley DAR Chapter; member Advisory Board of the DAR; secretary, Mohawk Valley Rose Society.

She was a former member of the Brooklyn Women's Club, Colonial Daughters of the 17th Century, Fort Green DAR Chapter, Long Island Historical Assn.; New York Historical Society, National Board of Review of Motion Pictures, New York Society of Arts and Crafts, Advisory Board of Leffert's Homestead, Brooklyn; Brooklyn Training School and Home for Young Girls Advisory Board.

She served as Herkimer county chairman of Victory Gardens during World War 2, and has been chairman of the Blind Sale and T. B. Seal Drives. She organized a Herkimer County Home Bureau Unit and served on food surplus and nutrition committee.



## Gardening, Flower Shows and Landscaping

Elsie was recognized widely as an expert in floral design. She was re-elected state vice-president of the New York State Federation Of Garden Clubs. She exhibited and judged floral arrangements at the New York State Fair and at other exhibits. If you ever toured the first barn at the Herkimer County Fair, back in the 1950s and 1960s, you probably saw flower arrangements that were judged by Mrs. Edsall.

Hollyhocks growing around the base of her home, at 421 Otsego Street, came from seed of those grown on George Washington's home, Mount Vernon. She also had an unusual plant in her garden known as the gas plant. A lighted match put to the flower on the plant ignites a gas which is generated in the plant and which burns with a clear blue flame. Mrs. Edsall explained that the plant was very poisonous to some persons and it has to be handled with care for that reason.

She donated the shrubbery for landscaping the grounds of the new Mohawk Valley General Hospital, in 1965, in appreciation for the excellent care her father had been receiving as a patient at the hospital. source - [Herkimer NY Evening Telegram 1965 01717.pdf](http://www.herkimernyeveningtelegram.com/1965/01/17/01717.pdf)



**PEOPLE**  
worth knowing

By AGNES DOYLE

Mrs. Elsie Whitney Edsall has established an enviable reputation through her appreciation, belief and use of the beautiful.

Serving as general chairman for the annual flower arranging held this weekend in Munson-Williams-Proctor Institute, Utica, Mrs. Edsall is a widely-known expert in floral design and garden club work.

This field is but one of her interests however, which deals with beauty. For many years she has been considered tops in her hobbies of flower work, table settings, sewing and ceramics. Latest addition to her long list of accomplishments is landscaping.

Daughter of Frank C. Whitney, former Elton mayor, and Mrs. Whitney, Mrs. Edsall lives in a two-century old home at 421 Otsego St., Elton. The quiet and peace of her hobbies have been transmitted to this home where she was born and which is part of the estate of her ancestors, the Whitneys and Caspades, original settlers of Elton.

Without flattery or self-aggrandizement, Mrs. Edsall lives among treasures handed down from generations of her family and among rare and beautiful collector items which she uses in her exhibits.

Mrs. Edsall was graduated from Elton High School and attended St. Lawrence University, Cornell University and Oswego Normal School. After college, she taught in the former Old Forge R.F. School in Elton and later in the home economics department of Elton High School.

In 1930, she married Carroll A. Edsall of Brooklyn, who died last year. While living in close proximity to New York City, Mrs. Edsall became interested in weaving and tapestry and ultimately became an authority on the craft.

Herbert mentioned Mrs. Edsall for her work.

*ditionalumni.com*

MRS. ELSIE WHITNEY EDSALL



source - [The Utica Observer Dispatch May 19, 1958](#)

Mrs. Edsall composed a poem which was published in the New York State Federation of Garden Clubs federation's yearbook and was included in the 1958 Utica Observer Dispatch article - People Worth Knowing, by Agnes Doyle.

I believe in the great fraternity of garden clubs.  
I believe that whatever enriches one community enriches the whole.  
I believe that our wonderful united garden projects are making a more beautiful America.  
I believe in the fellowship and the friends that are made in garden club work.  
I believe that progress is our most important product.  
I believe in the healing power of garden therapy and the singing of birds.  
I believe that gardening is one of the greatest forces in the world today for the betterment of the human race and I am glad to have my small part in it.

## 1956 and 1958 - Family Deaths

Elsie Edsall became a widow when her husband, Carroll A. Edsall, died December 2, 1956 in St. Elizabeth's Hospital, Utica. He was associated with his father-in-law, Frank Whitney, in the operation of the Capitol Theater. He later joined Frank Whitney in the operation of Pioneer Farms. Her mother, Helen 'Gertrude' (Clapsaddle) Whitney, died December 4, 1958. She died at her 427 Otsego Street home after a long illness. Sometime after that, Elsie Edsall moved to her father's home at 427 Otsego Street. source - [Herkimer NY Evening Telegram 1958 02980.pdf](#)  
sources - [Herkimer NY Evening Telegram 1958 02980.pdf](#) and [Utica NY Daily Press 1960 - 9173.pdf](#)

## 1960s and 1970s- Lawsuits, Lawsuits, Lawsuits

Perhaps like her father, she also became a little cranky in her older years. Elsie Whitney Edsall filed many, many lawsuits against the village, the school district and others in the 1960s and 1970s. As was her father, she was represented by Iliion Attorney Fred J. O'Donnell.

### Russell Park Law Suit 1963

The Russell Park Law suit, started by Frank Whitney, was not settled until 1970. Whitney's daughter, Elsie Edsall through her counsel, she was also represented by Attorney Fred O'Donnell, sought to recover 33 acres of annexed land in Russell

Park. She claimed the land was owned by her father, the late Frank Whitney. The suit was settled in the village's favor and the village was granted \$2,190 in court costs against Mrs. Edsall. A Supreme Court jury decided, in November 1970, that Russell Park belonged to the village and the village can continue to use the park property. source - [Herkimer NY Evening Telegram 1970 02269.pdf](#)

"Before turning the case over to the jury, Supreme Court Justice Richard Cardamone dismissed two companion suits against the village charging trespass and damages. Judge Cardamone dismissed suits against the Town of German Flatts, which was brought in as a defendant because of annexation proceedings, and against John LaFlair, a home building contractor, who had also been named a defendant. Attorney Fred O'Donnell, Ilion represented Mrs. Edsall, while the village was represented by Leightan Burns of Kernan and Kernan Utica, as counsel for Mrs. Mary Panarites, village attorney. LaFlair was represented by George Getman, Ilion, and Grover Radley was attorney for the Town of German Flatts." source - source - [Herkimer NY Evening Telegram 1970 a 01244.pdf](#)

### **Mrs Edsall sues over Antenna-Vision Inc. 1964**

Mrs. Edsall, who was represented by Attorney Fred O'Donnell, in the complaint, stated that on May 27, 1963, the mayor and Village Board proceeded to grant a franchise to operate a community antenna and closed circuit television system in the Village of Ilion to Antenna-Vision Inc., without legal right to do so. The plaintiff asked the court direct removal of poles, wires on village light poles, and also asked \$15,000 damages. source - [Herkimer NY Evening Telegram 1964 00758.pdf](#)

### **Edsall and Ilion School District - 1967**

#### **School Superintendent George Anderson Rebutts Charges claims harassment of the Board of Education**

"The appeal brought by Mrs. Marcia Daz Butler, 43 Grove St., charging Ilion School elections in 1965 and 1966 were illegal because of unlawful sloppy voting procedures, was dismissed yesterday by State Education Commissioner James E.

Allen, Jr., Albany." Superintendent of Schools George Anderson rebutted the charges. Anderson's concluding statement read:

"In closing, your deponent (Anderson) would like to add that this current harassment of the Board of Education by Marcia Daz Butler and by Elsie W. Edsall is a continuation of some two decades of constant and continual harassment and abuse of the Board of Education, and innumerable law suits, all of which have been without foundation, but which have subjected the people of the district to substantial expense and to considerable delays in carrying forward much needed educational programs.

"There is only one irregularity either in the 1966 or 1965 election and that was the irregular act of Marcia Daz Butler in writing in the name of Elsie Whitney Edsall in one of the machines in addition to casting a ballot on the same machine."

The 1965 election to which Mrs. Butler referred was voting on a school construction bond issue, the 1966 election was the annual district meeting.

## Urban Renewal Lawsuits 1968 - 1970

### EDSALL v. MURRAY

The proposed urban renewal project had already been the target of a lawsuit. Mrs. Elsie Edsall, Upper Otsego Street brought suit against the Urban Renewal agency and Stears & Wheeler, Cazenovia, consulting engineers, in March 1966. The case was taken to the Appellate Division Fourth Department, Rochester, which upheld a lower court decision dismissing the litigation. Later, Accordingly, the petitioner's motion for summary judgment was denied and the complaint was dismissed, with costs. Iliion teacher, Bernard Murray, was mayor at the time and was named in the lawsuit. source - [Herkimer NY Evening Telegram 1967 00173.pdf](#) and source - [EDSALL v. MURRAY | Leagle.com](#)

## **Ilion Legal Sub-Committee Recommends Hiring Corporate Defense Attorney 1970**

### **James Parker cites Edsall lawsuits**

In the May 19, 1970 edition of The Herkimer Evening Telegram, recommendations for handling lawsuits by Fred O'Donnell, representing Mrs. Elsie Edsall, were presented to the Village Board, by James Parker, chairman, legal study committee. The committee spent two months in a study of those lawsuits filed against the village. At that time, Parker said there were three active lawsuits, involving the water department, four involving urban renewal, and three related to the parks.

The subcommittee recommended that a corporate defense attorney be hired to specifically handle such lawsuits at a salary of from \$15,000 up to \$20,000. Parker estimated that the village was spending that much defending legal actions through the village and water department attorneys.

"Costs average about \$50 per taxpayer annually, he noted. Calling the legal situation an 'unbelievable mess.' Parker said the subcommittee would advise the village to spend the money for a corporate defense attorney in order to spend less in the future." source - [Herkimer NY Evening Telegram 1970 a 00232.pdf](#)

## **Elsie W. Edsall v. Village of Ilion - 1971**

### **Board of Water Commissioners**

In 1971, she sued the Village and the Ilion Water Commission over a permit that was granted to erect one or more dams in and divert water from Steele's Creek. She tried to prevent the building of the dam and sought damages, as well. [source - Herkimer NY Evening Telegram 1967 00173.pdf](#) and [source - ELSIE W. EDSALL v. VILLAGE ILION ET AL. \(06/25/71\) ny.findacase.com](#)

## **Elsie Edsall - Hospital Patient sued over \$21,314 Ilion Hospital Bill**

## June 1975

Elsie Edsall's father was a patient in the Mohawk Valley General Hospital from 1964 until his death, four years later. He had a private room with round the clock private-duty nurses. Just like her father, Elsie also became a patient in 1971 and had a private room. She had three nurses around the clock that she paid for herself. She paid mandated state pension rates for the nurses, unemployment insurance, and workmen's compensation rates. Mrs. Edsall paid \$91,000 for three and a half years of her care. Fred O'Donnell claimed the hospital raised its rates "through no formula we can understand and ignored provisions of the state's Public Health-Law," and did not notify her. The hospital, represented by Philip O'Donnell, nephew of attorney Fred O'Donnell, sued for \$21,314 and claimed she owed for room, board and care she received from September 1, 1974 to April 30, 1975. Attorney Philip O'Donnell, said Mrs. Edsall owed the money and she was "already getting special consideration because she is the daughter of Frank Whitney or she would be discharged to a nursing home." [source - Utica NY Observer 1975 - 5896.PDF](#)

Another related case was filed as Edsall v. Whelan, 82 Misc. 2d 952 (1975) and was decided in the hospital's favor. Mrs. Edsall eventually became a patient at the Mohawk Valley Nursing Home.

Petitioner is a patient in the Mohawk Valley General Hospital in Ilion, New York, where she has been continuously confined to a private room and bed since March 21, 1971. Mohawk Valley General Hospital is owned by the Towns of German Flatts and Frankfort, New York, which admits both private and publicly assisted patients. It is licensed under the provisions of the Public Health Law of the State of New York. Petitioner is a private patient, having paid from her own funds the full costs of her medical care and treatment including services of private physicians and nurses from the date of her admission through August 31, 1974. Petitioner has failed to pay her hospital expenses since that date although she is still confined. The respondent, hospital, has sued petitioner in a related action for the costs of her room, board and care from September 1, 1974 through March 30, 1975, which action is still pending.

The application of petitioner for judgment pursuant to CPLR article 78 is hereby denied. The cross motions of respondent, Robert Whelan, State Commissioner of Public Health, and respondent, Board of Managers of the Mohawk Valley General Hospital, for dismissal of the petition are hereby in all respects granted. [source - Edsall v. Whelan, 82 Misc. 2d 952 \(1975\)](#)

# Elsie (Whitney) Edsall Died

## 1980 Obituary

Elsie Whitney Edsall, 84, formerly of 427 Otsego St. died Wednesday, July 9, 1980 at the Mohawk Valley Nursing Home.

She was born on May 17, 1896, in Iliion the daughter of Frank and Helen Gertrude Clapsaddle Whitney. She graduated from Iliion High School and St. Lawrence University. She was married to Carroll Edsall, on August 9, 1930, in Iliion. He died on December 2, 1956.

At one time. Mrs Edsall was a Home Economics Teacher at Iliion High School. She was an accredited floral show judge and an award winner in the skill of handloom weaving. She attended Iliion Presbyterian Church and was an honorary member of the Iliion Garden Club. Mrs Edsall was a member of the Floral Arts Club, Utica; New Century Club, Utica; Herkimer Garden Club; Herkimer County Humane Society; The Historical Club; The Mohawk Valley Hospital Guild; and the Herkimer County Historical Society. She was a resident member of the Mohawk Valley Chapter of the DAR and a former member of the Fort Schuyler Club and the Yahnundasis Club. [Note - She could only have been a member of the Fort Schuyler Club through her deceased husband's membership as the club did not allow women members until 1981.]

Funeral services will be held at 11:30 am Friday at the Applegate Funeral Home, Iliion with the Rev David Jones officiating. Interment will be held at Armory Hill Cemetery. Calling hours are Thursday. 2-4 and 7-9. [source - Utica NY Daily Press 1980 a - 3412.pdf](#)

Elsie Whitney Edsall is buried in [Armory Hill Cemetery](#), Iliion, New York.

## DAR Scholarships and Grave Site

## Commemoration

Elsie Edsall was a member of the Mohawk Valley Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR) chapter for over 40 years. Maybe her affinity for the organization began when she was presented with a DAR while she was still in high school. In June of 1912, Superintendent Harwood M. Schwartz announced that Miss Elsie Whitney had won the D. A. R. prize of \$5, her subject being "Marlon and His Men." source - [Utica NY Herald Dispatch 1912 - 1944.PDF](#)



ILION - The members of the Col. Marinus Willett-Mohawk Valley Chapter NSDAR met on Thursday, Oct. 11 [2012], to honor Elsie W. Edsall with marking her gravesite, located at Armory Hill Cemetery, with the national organization emblem. From left, Eleanor Angell of Oneida Chapter NSDAR, Col. Marinus Willett-Mohawk Valley Chapter NSDAR members Marsha Roseen, chaplain; Barbara Yates, regent; Betsy (Rathbun) Tanner (IHS 1968); Donna Rubin; Carolyn Beran, recording secretary; Cheryl Robinson, treasurer; Barbara Kolar; Ramona Kane, historian.

Photo courtesy of The Utica Observer Dispatch source - [Utica NY Observer Community News Photos for week of Oct. 28, 2012](#)

## **Clapsaddle Historic House Contents for Sale to benefit DAR**

### **1982 House Sold**

Elsie Edsall left the Clapsaddle house to the Mohawk Valley Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR) source upon her death. She was a member of that chapter for over 40 years. The money raised was used by the DAR for a scholarship in Elsie Edsall's name.

"Along with the house, she left a cellar full of antiques to us. Many are Early American collectibles including looms, candle molds, spinning wheels, trunks, all kinds of antiques. We would have like to have kept it as a chapter house and have meetings of the DAR there, but there was no way we could keep it, no money to keep it up." source - [Utica NY Observer 1982 a - 6519.pdf](#)

Today, the historic Clapsaddle house is owned by 1973 graduates David and Linda (Burnside) Doty.

## **IHS Elsie W. Edsall Memorial Home Economics Award**

### **Class Graduation Awards**

A few of the recent recipients of the Elsie Edsall award have been:

- 2001 - Sarah M. Palmitesso
- 2002 - Katharine E. Olson
- 2003 - Kristy K. Buhaj
- 2004 - Allison V. Luther
- 2006 - Alec S. Piaschyk

## **Elsie (Whitney) Edsall Remembered**

### **Ilion's Martha Stewart**

As kids, we used to see Elsie Edsall's midnight blue luxury car in the neighborhood. We never really saw her in person. We always thought that



she was so rich that she had her own chauffeur, which probably was not the case. Don't you just love the alliterative sound of her name? She definitely was among the elite citizens of Ilion.

With her love of gardening and focus on beauty and the finer things in life, one wonders how many spins she has done in her grave as Otsego Street has declined. If she were still alive, one thinks that she would be filing lawsuits aplenty about the appearance of the village.

**BACK**

Created and maintained by [Aileen Carney Sweeney](#) - Class of 1974

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