

GLEANINGS FROM THE CORN FLATS (published in *Your Niskayuna* 12/6/2019)

STANFORD HEIGHTS

By Rita Ogburn-McCall, Vice-Chair Niskayuna Historical Committee

In 1902, Austin Yates of Schenectady wrote, "Men born on heights which shadow the picturesque or pastoral beauty of the world's scenery, may not cease to admire, but become so used to the panorama that they cease to note it."

Stanford Heights is one of these panoramas and it lies to the southwest of Niskayuna. Stanford Mansion is one of the most beautiful mansions I had never noticed, until a World War II veteran in full uniform waved from his wheelchair as I powerwalked down Consaul Road past Ingersoll Place into Balltown Road's Mansion Square in Niskayuna.

Then, I walked over to State Street. What had once been the Ingersoll Memorial Home for the Aged Men had become a pristine Berkshire Bank, keeping company with Walmart and Wendy's. This transformation was tumultuous, angered many, and was only finalized after years of vocal protest and litigation.

The hamlet now called Stanford Heights was named for Josiah Stanford, father of State Senator Charles Stanford of Schenectady and California Governor Leland Stanford, the founder of Stanford University in California.

Josiah Stanford, like his father Lyman Stanford, owned inns and taverns about Watervliet, New York, including the old Elm Grove Hotel in Roessleville.

Stanford purchased the Schuyler Mansion at the intersection of Balltown Road and State Street in Niskayuna. In 1859, the area was called Locust Grove.

The building dated to 1815 and Stanford updated the exterior in a Victorian fashion, which was popular at the time.

The Stanford Mansion was transformed into the Ingersoll Memorial Home for Aged Men in 1922. It remained such until a new facility was built in 2008 on Consaul Road and it became Ingersoll Place. The old mansion was moved from its original location and placed further back on the property.

Berkshire Bank held its soft opening on July 1, 2013 and became the new occupants of the Stanford family's historical Locust Grove. The Stanford Mansion will be around for us to admire for quite some time, although the "pastoral beauty" Austin Yates wrote about is now long gone.

Nevertheless, Josiah Stanford's business acumen and cooperative spirit resonates in this southern patch of Niskayuna. Residents of this corner of Niskayuna, Stanford Heights, and Colonie enjoy a shared history of advocacy in public safety and education through the Stanford Heights Fire Department and the South Colonie School District.

Around 1920, before Stanford Heights became a taxable district of the Town of Niskayuna, the residents of Stanford Heights and Colonie, concerned with a rash of fires in the areas, met to form "a new fire protection unit," according to the Stanford Heights Fire Department's history. The Stanford Heights Ladies Auxiliary was also formed that year to raise funds and offer public support to their new fire station.

The Stanford Heights Fire Department became a legal entity on May 23, 1923 and for almost a century has faithfully served residents of both Colonie and Niskayuna.

Similarly, South Colonie School District serves the children of Niskayuna and Stanford Heights as well. Veeder Elementary, Lisha Kill Middle School, and Colonie Central High School provide excellent resources for the children and parents of the Stanford Heights area.

In keeping with Austin Yates' citation, let us not cease to both admire and note what we share and have together become.

Author's Note: We encourage any past or present town residents to contact the Niskayuna Town Historian at dbrennan@niskayuna.org regarding any information, resources, or stories they might like to share about Niskayuna's distinctive history.