

Charles LeRoy Rockwell

March 21, 1849 - May 11, 1915

Plot 27 Lot 7

Charles Rockwell was born in Lake Luzerne on March 21, 1849. His father ran the Rockwell Hotel there. He married Helen Lapham (1830-1897), whose father Jerome made a fortune in the lumber business. Helen and Charles began their married life living with the Lapham family on Ridge Street near where City Hall is today. Helen and Charles's children were George, Bertha and Helen. George is buried beside his parents while the other children were married and are apparently buried with their spouses.

In his 20's Charles and his brother H J undertook what was the most expensive building project in Glens Falls up to that point: the building of the Rockwell House. With the hotel experience from their early years and the backing of a number of influential Glens Falls businessmen, including his father-in-law, they completed the building at a cost of \$60,000 (roughly 10 million today).

The Rockwell House is an important part of Glens Falls history. Situated at the intersection of Glen, Warren, and Ridge streets, the property held a lodging house called The Glens Falls Hotel in 1802. Run profitably by a succession of owners through 1852, it was then purchased by Wait S. Carpenter, who demolished the original building and constructed a large brick building which operated successfully until the Great Fire of 1864 when it burned to the ground.

After the fire, the rebuilding of the downtown area was planned, using a French design, in a modified spoked wheel. The only blockage in the wheel was the site of the former hotels. Clearly it was a critical part of the downtown plan. This is when the aforementioned group of businessmen stepped into action. They purchased the land for \$15,400 (over \$2,000,000 today) and offered it to anyone who would undertake the responsibility of constructing a hotel which would be an asset to the Village. Charles and H J accepted the challenge. Construction began on March 26, 1871, and the hotel opened for business on February 12, 1872.

H J, Charles and Helen lived in the hotel, with Helen serving as hostess. Famous travelers such as the Vanderbilt's, Whitney's, Buffalo Bill and William Jennings Bryan were guests at various times. Suffragette Conventions were held at the Rockwell House, as were musicales and dances. The front porch of the hotel was a focal point in the community.

Helen passed away at the age of 47 in 1897. Charles remained active in the operation of the hotel until his death in 1925 at the age of 78.

After Charles' passing, the Hotel began to decline, losing some of its reputation for grace and elegance. It was renovated in 1949 and renamed the Hotel Towers. On February 22, 1950, almost exactly 78 years from its opening, the building Charles named the Rockwell House was destroyed by fire.

Now the start of a roadway called Hudson Avenue, a fifth spoke in the wheel is on the site and there is no trace of Charles' famous building. The Rockwell House remains an important part of the history of Glens Falls.

Prepared by Evelyn Donahue from a theatrical script written by William Woodward for the Chapman Historical Museums fall Glens Falls Cemetery tour in 2005.

Questions and comments should be directed to the Glens Falls City Historian at: City Hall 42 Ridge St. Glens Falls, NY historian@cityofglensfalls.com 518-761-3871.

