



Clayla Ward (1889-1973)

"Clayla" Ward was a leader in Rochester's social life in the broadest sense. She founded or led countless political, civic, and philanthropic organizations. As public affairs director for Sibley, Lindsay, and Curr, she fostered art exhibitions.

In her youth Clayla Ward studied in New York to become an actress, but gave up the career to marry F. Hawley Ward, grandson of the founder of Ward's Natural Science Establishment. Wherever she went, Mrs. Ward was "on stage" and she created an image which approached the mythological.

In support of historic preservation and the cause of downtown, she bequeathed her home on Grove Place to the Landmark Society of Western New York as a memorial to her husband.

Clayla Ward, Blithe Spirit

Clayla Ward (1889-1973) loved a good time. Formally named Clara Louise (Werner) Ward, she was a social and civic leader, patron of the arts and friend of thousands of Rochesterians. Clayla, as she named herself, grew up as one of the three daughters of William E. Werner, who with their mother, Lillie, were known in Rochester society as great beauties. Music was important in the family's life, and Clayla from early childhood wanted to become an actress. She studied acting in Paris one year and singing in Munich a second year. In 1912 she went on a cruise to Greece and Egypt with her lifelong friend, Charlotte Whitney.

When World War I interrupted such pleasant occupations, Clayla did her part by teaching German and French diction to soldiers bound for Europe, heading the local Women's Land Army and helping transport war wounded for the area Motor Corps. With peace restored, there was opportunity for diversions such as her friendship with George Eastman, who, she later revealed, once suggested that they elope. E. E. Cummings wrote other youthful charm in an early version of his poem, "The Rose." She and Charlotte acted in productions of the Prince Street Players, and she was serious enough about acting to go to New York City to consider the chance of a role in a proposed Broadway play. She gave up that possibility, however, to marry F. Hawley Ward, then vice-president of the Ward Scientific Establishment, which his father's cousin, Henry A. Ward had founded.

Besides raising three children, Mrs. Ward began the club and committee work which would come to dominate her life. Serious and constructive as much of this was, she brought to it her own brand of informality and good spirits. She was a founder of the Susan B. Anthony Women's Republican Club, a charter member of the Junior League and prominent in activities of the Alliance Francaise and the Chatterbox Club. President of the Broadway Theater League of Rochester, she also helped establish the Community Players, often appearing in their productions. She worked hard in support of the Memorial Art Gallery, established the Women's Circle of the Rochester Museum and





Science Center and was initiator and first president of the Civic Music Association. She and Mr. Ward contributed to the Steigenwald-Ward-Watson Collection of Fine Art given to Rochester's James Madison High School.

In 1944, Mrs. Ward took the position of public relations counselor for the Sibley, Lindsay and Curr department store. Over the years she instigated many promotional events, notably the firm's annual Scholastic Art Awards. In this work, her talent for getting along with others came to the fore. Equally at ease with executives and underlings, she was said to know every clerk in the store. "She greeted you as if you were the one person in the world she most wanted to see," an associate recalls. Mrs. Ward once expressed her concept of leadership, saying, "Any executive must make it possible for other people to come forward and take responsibility. Part of leadership is priming other people for leadership. If you can develop a good leader while you're leading, you're doing everyone a service." Another time she said, "It doesn't take a lot of time and patience to help people. It just needs thought. Lots of times I can't sleep for thinking of ways to do what I think is important. And that is to dignify human beings."

Such philosophical reflection, however, was not typically "Clayla" humor was much more her style. By never taking herself too seriously she could emcee a firemen's ball, star in a Bachelor's Cotillion spoof and sing an adaptation of "Hello Dolly" at a Memorial Art Gallery party. In a concert benefiting the Rochester Philharmonic Orchestra, she took part in a parody of modern music, "playing" a floor polisher. "Make it a small machine. Dar-ling," she instructed the stage manager. "I've never worked in my life!" The untruth of this statement was recognized by the Rochester Museum and Science Center when in 1965 it made her its first woman commissioner and gave her its second civic medal. As she grew older, Clayla Ward refined her image. Always bejeweled and perfumed, elegantly dressed and coiffed, she addressed one and all as "Darling" in a throaty contralto voice and was the friend of every Rochester cab driver. When she was once mugged and robbed near her Grove Place home, her children and friends urged her to move to a safer neighborhood, but she pro-tested, "I was here first!" and stayed. "Because I was mugged and robbed once shouldn't make me afraid of everyone," she protested. "It isn't life so much that matters. It's the courage you bring to it. I love the people who have helped me with it."

This gracious lady's eightieth birthday called for a gala celebration, and she herself contributed to it. In memory of her husband, who had been first president of the Society for Preservation of Landmarks in Western New York, she had previously given her home (subject to her lifetime use) to the society. A belvedere, or widow's walk, which had once graced the roof of the house had long before been taken down, but "I didn't want to leave the Society only half a house," she said, "so I had the widow's walk restored as my eightieth birthday present to myself." The management of Sibley's gave a party with the original intent of inviting a round eighty other "favorite men," but she said, "Oh, do come to my party. Darling," so many times that 123 men showed up. "I'm shameless in saying that I like men better than women!" she admitted.





Equally appropriate after Clayla Ward's death were two celebrations of her life. The Rochester Philharmonic Orchestra dedicated to her memory a concert which included Beethoven's Eroica Symphony, followed by a champagne reception to which Sibley's invited the audience of several thousand people of all ages to be their guests.

