

Helen Adeline Kelley-Green 1875 – 1957

Helen Adeline Kelley was born to William Kelley and Nancy Van Ness Kelley May 27, 1875 in Cadillac, Michigan Wexford County. Her natural father, William died December 27, 1875. Her mother remarried George D. Van Vranken. Helen graduated 1892 from the Cadillac Public Schools. She was admitted to the University of Michigan (UM) in the fall of 1892, earned her PhB Degree in Philosophy (Literature Dept.) in 1896 and also studied in the School of Music.¹ She was a Sorority Sister of the Alpha Phi Sorority known at University of Michigan as the Theta Chapter.²

She demonstrated care and reciprocated when she returned to her beloved Cadillac community in the fall of 1898, to teach Arithmetic, Algebra, Civil Government, Grammar, Composition, Bookkeeping and History in the Cadillac School System.³

Helen and her Cadillac School classmate, Fred Warren Green started dating while students at UM. They married June 18, 1902, moved to Ypsilanti, Michigan where he was the City Attorney. However, by 1904 the couple settled at 532 Main Street in Ionia, MI with a two-fold purpose. Firstly, Helen and her spouse became interested in a partnership with the Ypsilanti-Reid Furniture Manufacturing Company whereby they soon bought out their partner. Secondly, her husband, Fred Warren Green's political aspirations were on the rise as well as her civic and community ambitions.

Helen's interests included domestic issues at the local, state and national levels. Locally, she assumed the role of "social worker" before the department of social welfare, as we know it today, was established in Ionia: her grandson, Fred G. Bradley spoke proudly of her having served those who had family, work, emotional and monetary problems. In addition, she was a Girl Scout Leader and Officer in the Red Cross.⁴

On a State and local level Mrs. Helen Green directed many of the political activities of the time, especially when her spouse served twelve years as mayor of Ionia prior to becoming Governor of Michigan. She wrote her own speeches and communicated with many dignitaries with ties to government officials as well as Stellanova Osborn, wife of the former Governor Osborn. For many years Helen had a high interest in the International Peace Movement that was a precursor to the Northwestern Treaty Alliance.⁵ However, The Movement went through changes and moved forward under many different names. At the time, "The International Peace Movement" initially was an effort to subdue Communism.

Helen was the first wife of a Michigan Governor, to select the Michigan Governors Annual Convention City held in Michigan in 1929. Not only did she choose Mackinac Island but hosted the First Michigan Conference while her husband was in office 1929-1931. Finally, in 1935 the Mackinac Island State Park Commission set aside one of the mansions⁶. To this day, the Governors' Annual Conventions are held on the Island.

Helen became the president of the world's largest rattan furniture company after her spouse died November 18, 1936. Mr. Green had gained court approval January 1936 to reorganize the plant secondary to financial problems, having resulted primarily from the Great Depression.⁷ Mrs. Green was sworn in March 18, 1937 as the president of the Ypsilanti Reed Furniture Company.⁸ Consequently, there were numerous problems to resolve with the reorganization that were felt not only in the Ionia Corporate office and Chicago Office but also the branches as well as their manufacturing company in the Orient (Singapore). With her strong conviction and managerial business skills she brought the struggling company through the Great Depression years. Before becoming active in the Ypsilanti Reed Company, this unique woman traveled frequently between the United States and the Orient inspecting and selecting the quality of the reed grown on the Green's plantation(s). This remarkable woman concentrated on quality, thus, contributing to the growth of the company. However, in 1942 plastics were on the rise and Ypsilanti Reed Company was one of three examples using a new plastic 'Tenite' in place of the more conventional reed.⁹

Approximately, in 1941-2 she sought a defense contract with the Ford Motor Company to convert the furniture company (part of the company) to a defense plant, thus, demonstrating her patriotism concurrently

while new plastics were becoming a substitute priority for defense work. According to her grandson Fred, “she got into her Lincoln and went to Detroit, Michigan to see Mr. Ford where she was greeted by Harry Bennett, mutual friends of the Greens. Mr. Bennett took her request to Mr. Ford and she left with a defense contract to make seats for jeeps during World War II.”¹⁰

In 1938 Don Mitchell became a sales manager for Ypsilanti Reed Company, two years following the death of Fred W. Green. The Greens and Don Mitchell had a long standing business relationship. In 1943 Mr. Mitchell became president and general manager of Mitchell-Bentley Furniture Factory. Mrs. Green continued as President of Ypsilanti – Reed until 1943, retiring at the age of 74.

She died at the age of 82 after a six year battle with cancer. Helen Kelly Green’s objectives did not end with local, state and federal affairs. Her grandchildren were of utmost importance to her. Both Helen and Fred loved their grandmother whom they called “Baba”. She was their primary and nurturing caretaker. She saw that both children received a good academic education. Fred was matriculated into both Catholic Boarding and Day Schools, and public schools. He lived with his grandmother usually during the summer as well as many week-ends were spent with her. He graduated from Michigan State University (MSU) Lansing Michigan with a five year degree in Civil Engineering. Peggy attended Ionia Schools and received a BA in English from The University of Chicago and teaching credentials from MSU.

Her grandson Fred had a plaque made, designed of wood: on the wood was mounted a brass name plate for Helen & Governor Green, his mother Peggy, his sister and himself. On said plaque he described the kind of woman “Baba” was. The inscription reads:

“Mrs. Helen Kelley Green
A truly remarkable woman
Who faced life with
Great Courage, Wisdom and Fertility.”
1875 - 1957

Mrs. Helen Green died November 16, 1957 age 82. She was buried November 21st in Highland Park Cemetery Mausoleum next to her husband, Fred W. Green, Ionia Michigan.

Submitted by: Therese A. King-Rich and Susan Bradley Kozlowski, the latter who contributed some oral history as her father shared with me.

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- ¹ . Necrology File, UM Bentley Library Ann Arbor, Mi., “in our necrology file Helen Kelley may have attended the School of Music. Unfortunately, I have not been able to find any further information about her in our collections....” This author observed that the necrology card indicated that she was Helen A. Green when she was matriculated into the school of music but no date recorded on card.
 - ² . Susan Kozlowski, designated family historian by her father, Fred G Bradley: Susan is great granddaughter of Helen Kelley Green provided the original group picture that had belonged to Helen when she was in the Alpha Phi Sorority known as The Theta Chapter at University of Michigan... U of M Bentley Reference Library could not find Helen’s name listed in either of the two Sorority Houses in Ann Arbor: this remains unresolved.
The “Chapter Advisor, for the Alpha Phi Sorority U OF Michigan, Theta Chapter wrote that the Chapter was started 1892 so Helen was a member at the beginning of the Chapter.”
 - ³ . Helen’s student grade book of classes she taught in Cadillac included names of several students with their grades. No year was found in the grade book. Susan Kozlowski researched and found the grade book of her great grandmother’s was at UM Bentley Library, Ann Arbor, Michigan. A Copy was obtained by the author of essay.
 - ⁴ . Daily Sentinel-Standard, Ionia Michigan November 20, 1957 Mrs. Fred Green was a Red Cross Officer. (no further information was found regarding her work with the Red Cross.
 - ⁵ . Helen’s high interest in the International Peace Movement led to an exchange of letters with Stellanova Osborn, whose husband was former Governor of Michigan. (U of M, Bentley has many boxes of S. Osborn they are stored off site) consequently, not researched.
 - ⁶ Weddon, Willah, “First Ladies of Michigan” p.93
 - ⁷ “Furniture Manufacturer” January 1936 ‘Affairs of the Industry’ Vol. 51-52, p.16
 - ⁸ Marilyn Webster, Ionia – author of many voluntary articles to Ionia Sentinel-Standard. Sent this author a notarized copy of Helen Green sworn in as President of the Ypsilanti Reid Furniture Company, Ionia, MI.
 - ⁹ “Furniture Manufacturer” October 1941 Column 1, p.9. ‘Plastics Are Forging Ahead.’
 - ¹⁰ Ford Benson Library searched for copy of Defense Contract. (Benson Ford Library completed a thorough search and none was found). I have the list of items searched by Benson Library. (Family history believes that the contract is with the Tyrrell Family – Helen Green (Peggy’s first husband).
 11. Willah Weddon of NOG Press, Lansing, MI. author “First Ladies of Michigan” Revised, 2’nd Ed. Copies supplied by Susan Kozlowski, Bradley Family Historian and U-Mi, Bentley library Ann Arbor Michigan.
 12. Found in “The Green Papers,” “Peggy’s Journal,” compliments of the Bentley Historical Library, UM Ann Arbor MI.
She began her diary, “Allow me to introduce you to yourself, you are a journal belonging to Helen Nancy Patricia Green, alias Peggy, ghem!! Help....”