

# MASTER LYMAN

*Submitted by Village of Richfield Springs Historian Harriett Geywits*

During the resort era of Richfield Springs, all varieties of entertainment were presented for the enjoyment of visitors to the various hotels. Whether it was band concerts, dances (or hops as they were called), solo presentations by the singers and instrumentalists of the day, plays, or any other offerings that the people staying here might enjoy, there was a constant choice of what to attend.

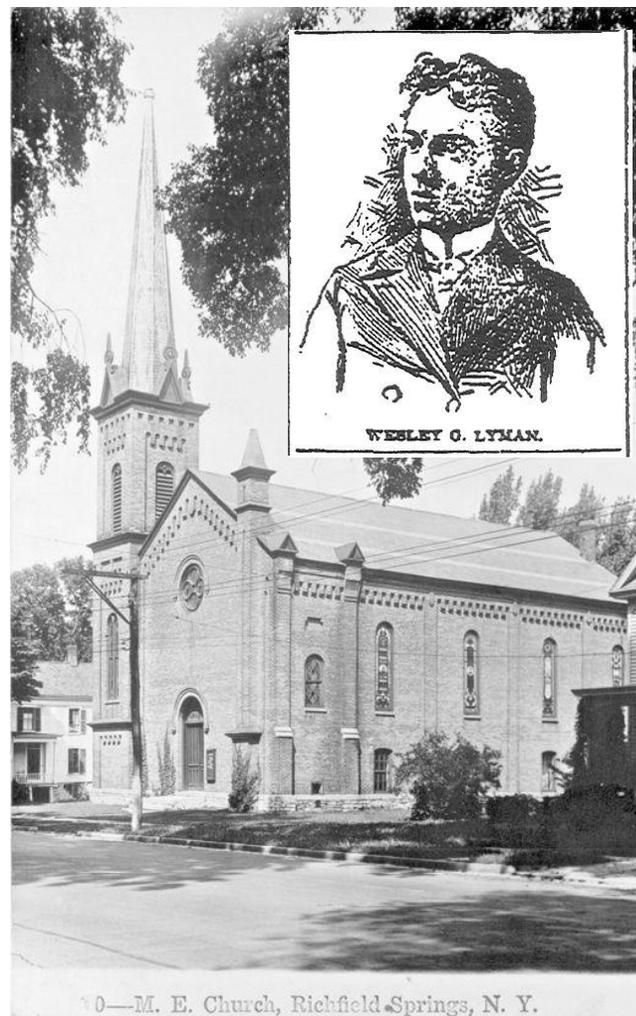
The churches, hotels and summer theater frequently offered such entertainment in the form of an elocutionist, someone who was considered to be a specialist in the art of expressive and effective speech, having the proper articulation, pronunciation and intonation for delivery of a dramatic or poetic recitation.

It was, however, unusual to have a young person show expertise in this role. Master Wesley Lyman proved to be such a person. Born in Syracuse on December 10, 1872, the son of Justus H. and Mary E. Lyman, he had a special gift which was recognized early in his life - that of elocution, which he displayed throughout the state during the nineteenth century when this form of entertainment was most popular.

In 1886, at the age of fourteen, he entertained at the Methodist Church in Richfield, having already established a reputation for himself. The *MERCURY* of that time reported: "The noted boy orator of Syracuse N.Y., now in his fourteenth year, will give an entertainment at the church. He developed rare gifts of memory and histrionic ability at a very early age and has been before the public more or less during the past seven years. This is his first appearance at Richfield Springs, and it is hoped that he may be greeted by a good audience. All who come to hear him may be assured of a rare treat." (The cornerstone of the church building was laid August 20, 1872.)

The *SYRACUSE JOURNAL* said of him: "He is indeed a wonder. Art and nature seem to have opened up a wondrous future before him. Except for his stature and volume of voice, he is today quite the peer of the best elocutionists before the public and in some particulars is better than the best. We were not prepared for such an exhibit of talent by him, and his readings seem today more a dream than otherwise. One listens to him, forgetful of time as he enters more and more deeply into the spirit of the text he recites and we constantly are wondering how a child so young can hold attention while the best elocutionist of years' experience can scarcely command such attention. We unhesitatingly pronounce him to be the most intellectually gifted child in America, and the statement will be fully sustained by all who have witnessed his marvelous performance."

The *SYRACUSE DAILY COURIER* said: "Master Wesley Lyman, the boy orator whose youthful genius is the wonder of all who have ever seen him, was greeted with a large audience composed alike of young and old who were equally delighted by the display of his phenomenal declamatory powers. His renditions of the various selections were characterized with the same vigor, graceful and artistic handling that have marked his previous performances and



which long ago stamped him as one of the greatest attractions of the platform."

What did the future hold for Wesley? After graduation from high school, he entered the Long Island Medical College, but after six months, found that he had a disinclination for that line of work and decided on a literary life for which he had a natural talent.

As the age of seventeen, he became a reporter for the *BROOKLYN EAGLE*. Later he was connected with the editorial staff of a trade journal and after a

time went to Chicago as the representative of the *AMERICAN CABINET MAKER and UPHOLSTERER* of New York. In 1894 he returned to Syracuse and read proof for the *JOURNAL* for a short time. He then became a reporter for *THE HERALD*, but after a few months returned to the *JOURNAL* and became a member of the reporting staff. As an all-round newspaper man, Mr. Lyman was recognized as one of the best in the city and some of the best of the local stories were written by him.

For a half dozen years, Wesley was a contributor to weekly and monthly publications. He also possessed what was considered a rare ability as a poet and a writer of prose. He showed his talent as a short story writer by contributing frequently to magazines and periodicals. He was adept at writing short humorous sketches as well.

Unfortunately, his physical condition had begun to deteriorate by this time. He continued to work until 1896 when he went to the Adirondacks for his health, returning after a month, apparently having benefited from the change of climate. He never did much active newspaper work after that and his health continued to gradually fail.

In 1897, he made the journey to Derange, Colorado where he was in the care of his uncle. It was hoped that some of his strength would return, but that wasn't to be. On July 2, 1897, at the age of twenty-four, he succumbed to tuberculosis.

Considered a prodigy whose talent for entertaining the public whether through his artistry as an elocutionist at an early age, his career as a literary contributor or as a member of the press, Wesley Lyman was considered to be a professional who filled his short life with meaning for himself and others.