

“THE GIRLS OF 1776”

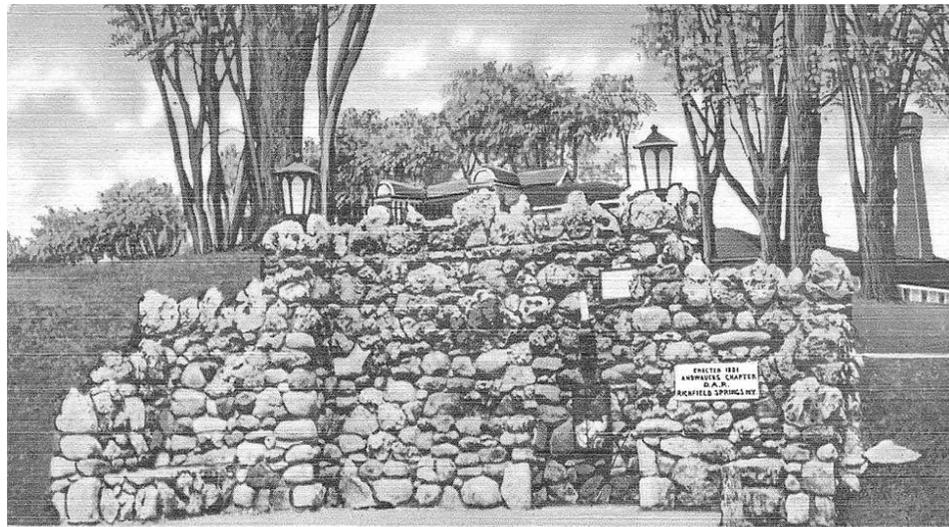
Submitted by Village of Richfield Springs Historian Harriett Geywitz

The Ganowauges Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution was organized on January 27, 1912. Over the years, the chapter took a prominent part in the community, state and national affairs. Their many projects included planting twenty Norwegian pines at the southern end of the Village reservoir in memory of deceased members, restoring and enclosing the old burying ground adjacent to the Presbyterian Church (now the Church of Christ Uniting), giving flags to each school homeroom and the library as well as providing for New York State Historic markers placed on thirteen Revolutionary soldiers' graves as well as ten historic sites in the area. Perhaps their most memorable and visible contribution by the chapter was the erection of the fountain for the Great White Sulphur Spring on Main Street in 1932. During the World Wars, members subscribed to War Bonds as well as selling large numbers of them. They contributed their time and talents to the work of several other agencies such as the Red Cross as well.

During 1918, one of the ways that the DAR raised funds was by presenting a three-act play, written by Dora Adele Shoemaker, called 'The Girls of 1776'. Their performance was held at Shaul's Theater with tickets at thirty-five cents for seats nearer the stage or twenty-five cents for those further away. Tickets could be purchased at Getman's Bookstore and all proceeds were used by the chapter in their war relief work.

The MERCURY reported the event as follows: "As presented by the members of Ganowauges Chapter DAR in Shaul's theater, 'The Girls of 1776' was decidedly attractive in dress and charming in manner. The play itself gave opportunity for a display of 'talent before the footlights' and each member of the cast went into battle bravely and came out with flying colors. Unqualified success, both in pleasing the audience and in raising an appreciable amount for the war relief work, attended this effort. Frequent bursts of applause indicated the hearty approval of those in the seats and a gross sale of \$123.50, with an expected net of about \$100, indicates the measure of financial success. Community singing of the old familiar songs between the acts led by Doctor H V. Frink and J. Gordon Black, proved highly enjoyable and indeed brought a community feeling of those gathered.

Really admirable work was of course expected by Mrs. Herman Egerland and Miss Hinds and they disappointed no one. Miss Daisey Reed, around whom the plot centered, was more than successful. Miss Elwood, Mrs. John A. Losee, Mrs. Lewis A. Williams and Mrs. Isaac J. Kent were good while Mrs. Richard Owen as a French maid, Mrs. Charles Chamberlin as Betsy Ross and Mrs. Willard Bullion as a servant, gave excellent characterizations. Isabel Andino, Louise Wetzel and Gwen Owen as little children danced and sang admirably with Mrs. Bullion who acted the part of 'Troubles' in the play without any trouble whatsoever. She portrayed the character of the dusky maiden very cleverly and, with the other members of the cast, is entitled to great appreciation. Mrs. George T. Brockway gave an excellent portrayal of a very old lady. The other members of the chapter who were either guests at the garden party or who danced the minuet were Mrs. Oscar B. Chapman, Mrs. F. E. Mungor, Miss Helen Weeks, Mrs. Willard A. Palmer and Mrs. S. S. Kinne. Mrs. Palmer, Mrs. W. T. Welden, Mrs. A. W. Kayner and Mrs. C. E. Ackerly also dressed in the fashion of '76 and officiated at the door and in ushering. Mrs. John D. Cary acted as stage manager.



Sulphur Spring Fountain, Richfield Springs, N. Y.

The members of the chapter acknowledge with gratitude the material assistance given by Mrs. J. D. Reed in arranging and making the costumes



worn, especially those of the two ardent young patriots 'in disguise' and which were so greatly admired. The log cabin was also furnished by Mrs. Reed and constructed under her direction. The audience, as well as the chapter, appreciated the kindness of Mrs. Davis and Mrs. Durward Weaver in furnishing the instrumental music."

The play was popular during the early 20th century as women's contribution to the independence movement and reinforces patriotic historical narrative from the female view. It was used for educational purposes, emphasizing resilience from a female's point of view. It challenged traditional gender roles in drama while promoting use of non-professional performers, especially in schools and women's groups. The copy of the play not only provided the verbiage for the three acts, but also gave suggestions as to how to create the scenery, dances and music.

Based in the Philadelphia area, the play covered a variety of plots including treachery, the difficulty involved in getting important papers to Col. George Washington in New York by devious means, possible arrest, slavery, warnings from the enemy, loyalty and, of course, love.

The author, Dora Adele Shoemaker (1873-1962) was born in Philadelphia, the daughter of the founders of the National School of Elocution and Oratory, Jacob and Rachel Shoemaker. She was well educated and from 1915, she served as principal of the school which offered courses in journalism, among others. She was head of the school until the late 1930s when the school closed. She then became a teacher at several institutions and lectured on literary subjects and elocution.

Dora was the author of a collection of poems entitled 'Out O' Doors' which emphasized rural landscapes and nature's tranquility. Her three plays became well known as easily performed by non-professional groups. They included 'A Patron of Art' - 1901 - a comedic presentation in one act that emphasized the social ambition in the art world; 'A Fighting Chance, or For the Blue or the Gray' - 1900 - which had a Civil War Theme; and 'The Girls of 1776' - written in 1905.

The presentation of the Ganowauges Chapter DAR was very successful and they were asked to do repeat performances at Shaul's as well as having several requests to present the play in the vicinity, including the Warren Grange #810. Miss Shoemaker would have been proud of their achievement.