

Forward, into the Past

“In All Our Hours of Need”

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Eighty-one years ago, at about this time of year, Ralph Budd and a small group of members of the *George D. Cook Post* of the American Legion were discussing the need for a hospital in Ellenville, and that such an institution would be the finest type of a memorial to its citizens who gave their lives in “the Great War,” now known as World War I. Additionally, a hospital would be of great service to this area.

Dr. George F. Wilklow, himself a veteran and member of the Legion, appeared at the next American Legion meeting to propose raising the funds to establish such a facility in Ellenville. Dr. Wilklow was not physically able to stand for more than a few minutes at a time, but his presentation was so forceful that the Legion members considered it thoroughly and soon gave the project their full support.

After considerable discussion, the Legion committee decided that the centrally located and beautiful residence of the *Scoresby Estate* could be remodeled to provide a functional hospital and secured an option to purchase the property for twenty-five thousand dollars.

Professor E.C. Hocmer agreed to chair the fundraising committee, whose goal was to raise \$40,000, and the drive was launched in May 1923. By the last day of October of the same year, the full amount had been subscribed. It should be noted that the drive for funds received considerable impetus at the beginning by the subscription of Mrs. Norbury (see “Wonderful Women of Wawarsing” in the November 2003 issue of *Wawarsing.Net*), for the sum of five thousand dollars.

When the financial success of the drive was obvious, the committee formed a membership corporation known as *Veterans’ Memorial Hospital* and the first meeting was held November 5, 1923, in the rooms of the American Legion. M. Eugene Clark was elected president; Ralph Budd, vice president; Deyo W. Johnson, secretary; and Burton H. Wood, treasurer. Professor Hocmer, William L. Douglas and Clarence A. Hoornbeek were named to the executive committee.

The money that had been collected and the pledges that were in the hands of the fundraising committee were turned over to the directors of the *Veterans’ Memorial Hospital* and the purchase of the property was completed. Plans for remodeling the Scoresby mansion were made by architect Robert R. Graham and Charles F. Goldsmith was engaged as the contractor.

The brick dwelling which was to be remodeled was originally built in 1832 or 1833 by Willets Griffen at the Southwest corner of **Center Street & Circle Avenue**. He was in the lumber business, so it seems strange that he chose brick, but tradition says that the bricks came from the Leurenkill yard of Horace Weston. Mr. Griffen owned many acres extending westward from **Market Street**.

In the next thirty years, prominent citizens such as Brookins Blackmon, Nial T. Childs, and Jacob Hermance lived in the handsome structure. Dr. William F. Scoresby purchased it in 1868; the deed refers to Circle Avenue as Prospect Street. (Photo, above right)

The Scoresby family had its origins in England: Captain William Scoresby (born 1760) commanded a whaling



ship and became an authority on navigation in the Arctic; son William also commanded a whaling ship to the Arctic and surveyed a large portion of the coast of Greenland, published many scientific studies, and achieved influence in the ministry; son Thomas published a book known as “Scoresby’s History of the Arctic Seas.” He studied medicine and came to the United States in 1834. Dr. Thomas Scoresby is known to have practiced in Port Jervis and Fallsburg, as well as Ellenville. William Scoresby was born before the family moved to Ellenville, but he attended school here before studying medicine at Columbia, then returning in 1864 to practice here under his father’s tutelage.

Dr. William F. Scoresby was not only a gifted and trusted physician and surgeon, but also a dedicated public servant. He served the Village as Health Officer, Trustee, and then President, the Town as Supervisor, and the State of New York as Senator for one term.

His nephew, Dr. John Frederick Scoresby Eastgate, practiced with his uncle for a few years and then continued in the same home long after Dr. William’s death until his own early death at the age of 44. Other family members continued in the Scoresby home: his mother, an aunt, a cousin and her husband, the well respected surveyor, P. Edwin Clark, until there were no more Scoresbys.

With the changes to the mansion, the home of doctors would once again care for the sick, and on Decoration (Memorial) Day, 1924, the *Veterans’ Memorial Hospital* was dedicated. (Photo, below)

The June 5, 1924, *Ellenville Journal* described the new facility as “a 12-bed hospital. The woodwork throughout is in white and the walls are painted in a very pleasing shade of ivory. The floors, like the equipment are of the latest construction, laid in a concrete mixture and finished off with a composition in a tone that matches the walls. The ladies say they are ‘wonderful’.”

