

The Woman's Christian Association By Douglas H. Shepard

The Historical Background

The turmoil and disruption of the Civil War permitted women to have a greater involvement in social work of various kinds. The first Woman's Christian Association was formed in Boston in 1866. Gradually others were organized throughout the country. (There were some 50 such groups by 1894.) They all came under the general leadership of the "International Board of Women's Christian Associations." [The name is usually "Woman's" but sometimes given as "Women's," perhaps a typographical error by the newspaper or magazine.]

The groups each seemed to take on a particular social "cause." the Boston group focused on encouraging neighborhood libraries to be established. The Jamestown W.C.A., organized in September 1884 and chartered in June 1885, worked at improving hospitals and hospital care.

The Fredonia W.C.A., incorporated in May 1892, dedicated itself to "general charitable work and to establish and maintain at Fredonia, N.Y., a home for aged and indigent women." The official name according to their charter is "The Womans Christian Association."

The Fredonia W.C.A.Home

The building itself was put up as a private home for Aaron O. **Putnam**. Designed by E. A. **Curtis**, it was begun in June 1878 and the **Putnams** moved in in April 1879. In 1893 the W.C.A. of Fredonia bought the property and had their formal opening in November 1893.

Records

The local W.C.A. began issuing annual reports in the *Fredonia Censor* beginning in February 1894. However, they gave only aggregate numbers without names. There are city directories for 1894, 1896-97, and 1898-99, but they do not list the names of residents, just the home itself at what was then called 99 Temple Street. The modern house numbering system came into effect in Fredonia in 1899 and the directory for that year does list eleven names of residents. (The listings use the terms "inmate" and "boarder" which seem to be different categories.) The February 1899 report, referring to 1898, states that there were 14 residents of whom "two had died replaced by four."

Other resources are the various censuses. The Federal Census for 1900 lists 12 boarders by name. Thereafter the New York State and Federal Censuses give names for 1905, 1910, 1915, 1920, 1925 and 1930. These can be compared with entries in the city directories, which appeared roughly every other year.