

Our Story: Lebanon woman known for philanthropic deeds

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This is a photo of Elizabeth Shindell Hutter of Lebanon, whose philanthropic works were well-known in Philadelphia. Hutter, whose life took her to Washington, D.C., entertained and worked with some of the nation's historic figures, including several U.S. presidents. (COURTESY OF THE LEBANON COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY)

Recently, I came across the biography of a local woman who turned out to have some VIP connections in Washington, D.C., prior to the Civil War. And, according to her obituary, her name became "a household word in the land."

She was Elizabeth Embich Shindel Hutter - or E.E. Hutter. She was the granddaughter of Baron Peter Shindel, who was a state senator for many years, and daughter of Col. Jacob Shindel of Lebanon County, a veteran of the War of 1812.

Elizabeth married the Rev. Dr. Edwin Hutter of Allentown in the 1830s. After their wedding, they lived in Allentown, where he was editor and owner of a newspaper called the Independent Republikaner. Edwin then took a job as the state printer, and the couple moved to Harrisburg. Under Gov. David R. Porter (1839-1845), he was appointed the deputy secretary of the commonwealth.

Following Edwin's service with the state, the couple moved to Lancaster, where Edwin became editor of the Lancaster Intelligencer & Journal.

In 1845, he was appointed assistant to then-Secretary of State James Buchanan of Lancaster, and the Hutters moved to the nation's capital. According to a biography of Elizabeth Hutter, she was "a star" in the society of Washington, D.C., and a "favorite of the Diplomatic Corps." She entertained and mingled with many of the VIPs of the day - among them U.S. Sen. Henry Clay (once speaker of the house), Jefferson Davis (later president of the Confederacy), future President Gen. Zachary Taylor, and national war hero Gen. Winfield Scott, to name a few. She also met such famous women as Harriet Lane Johnston (Buchanan's niece who later acted as his first lady when he was president), author Harriet Beecher Stowe (who wrote "Uncle Tom's Cabin"), and feminist leader Susan B. Anthony.

The Hutters apparently were good friends of James Buchanan. Edwin and Elizabeth had two boys, one of whom they named after the future president. The boys - Christian Jacob and James Buchanan Hutter - both died in infancy. Buchanan was the godfather of the Hutters' second son.

After the death of their sons, Elizabeth's husband decided to enter the ministry, and despite a plea from President James Polk (1845-1849) to stay, the couple moved to Philadelphia. In 1854, Elizabeth helped to establish and was the first president of the Northern Home for Friendless Children, which helped children in need under the age of 12. The first year, the home housed 47 children. To support the home, Hutter and the 24 women who helped to manage the home held a series of floral fairs. An adjoining building to the home would later house the Soldiers' and Sailors' Orphan Institute for victims of the Civil War.

In 1879, Hutter became president of the Newsboy's Aid Society to provide lodging and education for homeless and indigent boys who sold newspapers and magazines on the streets.

When the Civil War broke out, the Hutters helped sick and wounded soldiers, traveling to the battlefield in Gettysburg. In 1863-1864, Elizabeth helped provide shelter and provisions in Philadelphia for refugees who sought shelter after the Confederates raided and burned Chambersburg. (The town was raided and burned several times between 1862 and 1864.)

During the war, the Hutterers were guests of President Abraham Lincoln. According to one biography of Hutter, one of her most-prized possessions was a visiting card with Lincoln's signature. The card was addressed to Secretary of War Edwin Stanton, and read: "I really wish Mrs. Hutter to be obligated in this case. She is one of the very best friends of the soldiers. Hon. Sec. of War, please see her."

In 1864, she helped to raise \$247,500 (roughly \$2 million in 2011 dollars) for the Sanitary Fair, a project to benefit the United States Sanitary Commission. Proceeds provided money for supplies and health information to the troops.

She helped raise money for other causes, too, including the great Chicago fire (Oct.8-10, 1871) and the Johnstown Flood (May 31, 1889). In 1876, she headed the committee in charge of the State Educational Department of Pennsylvania during the Centennial Exhibition in Philadelphia. The Centennial Commissioners presented her with a diploma and a medal of honor for her work with the Northern Home. And, the city of Philadelphia presented her with a silver service on the 25th anniversary of the home in recognition of her service in 1878.

Hutter was well-known in the city of Lebanon, which she visited at least once a year to see family and friends until her brother, J.M. Shindel, who was Lebanon City controller, died.

Just four months after her brother died, news came of Elizabeth's death. On June 18, 1895, Lebanon City solicitor William D. Fisher received a telegram telling him that Hutter, 72, died from heart disease at 9:30 a.m. that same day. She is buried in Laurel Hill Cemetery, Philadelphia.

Sholly's column appears periodically in the Lebanon Daily News. She can be reached at chrissolly@ldnews.com, or at 272-5611, ext. 151.

Home started by local woman still going strong

Elizabeth Shindel Hutter's Northern Home for Children opened its doors on Aug. 3, 1853, on Buttonwood Street in Philadelphia. Today, the home is still a friend to children.

The home was incorporated on Jan. 26, 1854, as the "Northern Home for Friendless Children." The mission of the home was to educate and provide for "friendless and destitute children," according to the home's website, www.northernhome.org.

The home had several locations, but today is located at 5301 Ridge Ave., Philadelphia, a six-acre site in the Roxborough section of north Philadelphia, and employs 300 full- and part-time workers.

Northern Home was a residential facility that served children whose parents or guardians had died or who were left without parents or guardians through other circumstances. Children received food, shelter and clothing, as well as an education. The campus included four dormitories, an infirmary, a dining hall and kitchen, a gymnasium and a library. It could house as many as 100 children.

In 1997, the Board of Trustees shaped a new plan to extend its services to more children and families in the Philadelphia area. The program provides services to children directly in the community, as well as maintaining its program of residential and emergency shelter for young boys.

Today, it provides a broad range of services to families, which include residential care, outpatient counseling, partial hospitalization, recreation, foster-care placement, parental education, alternative education, truancy prevention and juvenile delinquency prevention, according to the website.

With its long history of service, it is the only surviving facility of its kind in Philadelphia.