



The Sly limestone operation is what brought Edith and her husband to the area in the late 1890s.

Edith Doe Sly

Giving her all for the community

Edith Doe Sly came to Northern Michigan with her husband, Homer, whom she married at the age of 25 on Dec. 21, 1894, in Big Rapids, where she and her family lived.

Homer joined his father and brother at the Bay Shore Lime Company as its treasurer in 1901. It was in this village the couple's daughter, Helen, was born at the end of that year. In 1902, Homer assumed management duties in the absence of his brother, Elliot, who fell ill.

In the fall of 1903, the Bay Shore Lime Company merged with the Elk Rapids Cement Company. Four years later, the main office in Petoskey was moved to Elk Rapids and Homer officially succeeded his brother, who wished to retire. This meant a move for the young family. But they still made their way often to Bay Shore to visit family in the summers and for holidays, even making a special trip in 1910 by automobile.

By the end of that year, Homer had announced plans to move his family back home. He began

by opening an office for the Elk Portland Cement and Lime Company at the First National bank building. By early January of 1911, he and Edith and little Helen were living temporarily at 209 Division St. A few months later, in April, they purchased a home at 518 Grove St.

The Grove Street neighborhood got together to throw a potluck party to welcome the Sly family. Toasts were given and Emma Barnes (Baker) responded by discussing the rules of Grove Street which “proved to be very strict but capable of adherence, nevertheless.”

No sooner than Edith and Homer were settled in Petoskey, the couple began to make their mark. They made a hefty donation to the Lockwood hospital (sizable enough to make the news), and they got involved in the Presbyterian church, where Edith served the Ladies’ Aid Society.

On Jan. 13, 1913, Edith was elected to the board of directors of the Petoskey Federation of Women’s Clubs (FWC). She was also a member of the Art Study Club. In early September of 1913, she regaled the club with stories of her recent trip to Scotland.

Edith was mentioned in the *Petoskey Evening News* several times as a hostess of the Ladies’ Aid Society, social circles from her church, card parties for friends, a theater party, Grand Opera Study Club and Shakespeare Class. For the federation, she was placed on the lace committee in 1914. What followed was a most successful lace exhibition, which she set up in her home and opened up to anyone interested.

Edith’s activities often involved her friend, Margaret Curtis, who is also listed as a member of the suffrage group. In 1914, she and Margaret were both on the Flag Day committee of which Edith was elected secretary and treasurer. (and



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re-elected to treasurer for the following year). This group sold flags to benefit the Child Welfare league. At the end of that year, Edith and Margaret were both judges of the annual high school debate.

In January of 1915, Edith was elected assistant secretary of the Emmet County Federation of Women’s Clubs.

The *Petoskey Evening News* reports a lot of productivity throughout 1915 from the Sly home. Edith hosted the Grand Opera Study club. She and her husband and friends traveled by boat to Houghton, and, on a separate occasion, an auto trip to southern Michigan. Edith took

her daughter, Helen, to Chicago to visit friends, and then back home to host more Grand Opera Study and Shakespeare and Ladies' Aid. By that time, Edith had gathered many friends and gained much experience, so it was no wonder when the Petoskey FWC elected her treasurer in June of 1916. She had, after all, been successful in raising money for the May Festival (an event put on by the federation) by directing a "Shakespeare in Grand Opera Concert" at the Temple theater with her friend, Margaret Curtis.

In January of 1917, Edith hosted yet another Grand Opera Study Club. During this event, the *Petoskey Evening News* reported "The beautiful story of the Knight of the Holy Grail, son of Parsifal, and champion of right and innocence was told by Mrs. Homer Sly, who portrayed the lyrical value of each character in the exemplification of the score that followed."

By the end of February, however, it seemed the fun was to be put on hold, not just for Edith, but for the world. In that month, according to the paper, "A party composed of Mrs. Leon Chichester, Mrs. Matie Bump, Mrs. Homer Sly and Mrs. Morgan Curtis went to Grand Rapids Thursday on a pleasure trip."

A news item placed a few days later, however, shows that this trip was not just for pleasure. Edith led a meeting of Petoskey women in the assembly room of the library in which she shared suggestions and information for the immediate organization of a Red Cross branch in this city. The response to Edith's presentation was that work should "begin at once." One month later, the Petoskey branch



Eugene, Edith's son, and his wife.

of the American Red Cross was officially organized for emergency work. Edith was, of course, elected president.

Edith took her new job seriously. Right away, the group, with Rosenthal & Sons, put on a spring fashion show, of which the proceeds went directly to the Red Cross. Edith was one of the models.

Then, as the call for war aid came from the national Red Cross down to the branches, Edith was also called to share everything she had learned. If any group (The Rebekahs, the Women's Relief Corps, the D.A.R. — even a Girls' Community Club and a group of high school girls from Harbor Springs) had a desire to join the work, Edith would go to them to confer, to educate, to speak.

From the April 16, 1917 *Petoskey Evening News*: "Red Cross work being enlarged. Headquarters to be open every day. President of Petoskey Red Cross branch, Mrs. Homer Sly, in a splendid talk to the women described the difficulty of conducting the organization, since it has grown to such large proportions, without more systematic voluntary service."

In response, Edith opened the Red Cross work room every day, rather than one day a week.

“This is no time to talk of peace. We now are under the knife of The Great Surgeon, and we must go through the operation in order that good may come.”
— *Edith Sly*

In April, delegates from several Michigan cities came to learn from Edith at the Red Cross headquarters in Petoskey.

From the May 5 issue, “Under the leadership of the president, Mrs. Homer Sly, women of the city have given generously of their time, while the support of the men of Petoskey has been unstinted. The community spirit that has pervaded the rooms and every effort toward advancement of the work has been perhaps the finest development.”

Under the direction of Edith, Boyne City, Levering, Pellston, East Jordan, Brutus and Bellaire, also initiated branches of the Red Cross. Harbor Springs became the host of the Emmet County Chapter of the Red Cross.

At the annual Petoskey FWC meeting in May, the theme of the day was “War aid.” Edith gave an address on peace. In it, she said “This is no time to talk of peace. We now are under the knife of The Great Surgeon, and we must go through the operation in order that good may come.”

At the same meeting, Edith moved that the federation, and all of the women’s clubs should eliminate refreshments normally served during functions. The motion was carried by the FWC and its members with the addition of giving up prize money for the cause.

On May 11, when the Emmet County Chapter of the Red Cross organized, Edith was one of only two women named to the executive committee. She was also chosen as the chairman of the Bureau of Supplies and Shipment.

By the end of June, Edith got a much-needed respite. From the June 25, 1917 *Petoskey Evening News*: “Mrs. Homer Sly, whose faithful work for the cause of the Red Cross during the last three months has required every moment of her time, has gone to Burt Lake for a much needed rest of several days. She was accompanied by Mr. Sly and their daughter, Miss Helen Sly.”

She didn’t rest for long though. Just three days later, her involvement in the “Heart Day” fundraiser for the Michigan Child Welfare League made mention in the news.

The urgency of the war work fizzled by then, too, but the need for work did not. So, on July 7, Edith made a strong appeal to the “women of Petoskey to rally to the support of the Red Cross in an effort to make the work of the summer as splendidly loyal and patriotic as that of the spring has been.”

Edith continued her leadership and work with the county chapter as chair of the supplies and shipments and as president of the Petoskey branch for the next two months. But everyone has their limit.

With no explanation given, or perhaps, needed, a Sept. 26 headline in the *Petoskey Evening News* reads “Mrs Sly resigns from Red Cross.” This news didn’t mean her attention to the war work wavered. She was in charge of an exhibit of the needlework of the Red Cross at the fair. Also, when the county’s supply of yarn arrived, Edith was the one to rally the women to pick up their needles for the 500 knitted items required from the national war council. And when she hosted the first meeting of the Art Study Club that fall, she made it clear the club would focus on sewing and knitting and that no refreshments would be served.



In October, at an annual Red Cross meeting, a vote of thanks was given to Edith for her untiring effort during the last six months. Still, they asked for more a week later when, at a meeting of the directors of the Emmet County chapter, she was the only woman to be elected to the executive committee. At this meeting she was also made a delegate to attend the national Red Cross convention in Chicago and to a state convention in Detroit in December.

At the end 1917, Edith, as chair of the Bureau of Supplies, reported to the county chapter that "the value of the shipments from Emmet County for December computed on the basis of the wholesale prices for the articles shipped was \$1,000" (which was above average).

Things settled down war-wise in 1918 for Edith, as her name

appeared in the local paper throughout that year in the usual manner: as hostess of several church activities and parties. She and her family passed the summer in Bay Shore, and would come home to Bay Street in the winter.

On March 6, 1919, Edith was one of 24 Petoskey people to be decorated and honored for their work in the Red Cross. At that time, she still served on the executive committee and for the Bureau of Supplies. Later that spring, she was added to a new committee — the Nursing Activities of the Red Cross.

Edith stayed involved in church activities all her life. According to her obituary, she was "prominent in church work." In fact, she was appointed as patroness of the Westminster Guild of the Presbyterian church seven days before her death at age 55 on Feb. 17, 1925.

MRS. HOMER SLY PASSES AWAY

PROMINENT IN CHURCH
WORK AND ACTIVE IN
RED CROSS.

Funeral Thursday Forenoon From
First Presbyterian Church
of This City.

Mrs. Homer Sly, one of the city's most active church workers, passed away early Wednesday morning at her winter home on Division street, following an illness of several years. She was 55 years old. Her condition had been serious for several weeks.

Mrs. Sly was born at Grand Rapids, December 17, 1869, and when a small girl moved with her parents, Mr. and Mrs. Calvin W. Doe, to Big Rapids. She was married there December 21, 1904, to Homer Sly, and the family came to Petoskey in 1911. For the past several summers the family occupied the Sly summer home at Bay Shore.

During all her years in Petoskey Mrs. Sly was an active leader in the work in the First Presbyterian church. She was also active during the World War in Red Cross and other war work. She was also an active club and social worker.

Surviving her, besides the husband and one daughter, Helen, are her mother, Mrs. Calvin W. Doe, of Big Rapids; one brother, Bartlett Doe, and one sister, Mrs. Edna Binney, of Big Rapids.

The funeral will be held from the First Presbyterian church at 10 o'clock Thursday forenoon with Rev. H. M. Allbutt, pastor of the church, in charge. Burial in Greenwood.