

Lenore Zaunere, Hermon Town Historian
Dedication of Hermon's First NYS Historic Marker and
Completion of the Renovations of the Historic McBrier Keystone Arch Bridge
- October 3, 2020

*The following is a clip from a September, 1875
 issue of the Hermon Advertiser.*

"The stone arch bridge is nearly completed, and the arch now supports itself. The authorities of the town have come well up to the mark, and have constructed strong wing walls which add much to the beauty of the structure as well as being a material strength and protection to the bridge. The enterprising contractor has taken pains to make every part strong and durable. The bridge will be the pride of Hermon, and will long stand a monument of the enterprise of the people and the contractor."

Thank you all for coming this morning to join us in celebrating the renovation and opening of the McBrier Bridge an setting of Hermon's first NYS Historic Marker. I want to thank all the people who have participated and joined in, since 2015, to make this day possible; this includes the Hermon Village and Hermon Town Board members, engineers, designers, Hermon Highway Supervisor and his team, and those who have contributed financially - this truly was a team effort.

This artistic keystone arch bridge was built in 1875 for the purpose of enabling an easier way to cross Elm Creek in a town that was growing and thriving. A team of Hermon workmen tireless worked to erect it. When at some point, they got stumped as they strove to place the keystone on the arch, they found a helping hand in the person of John C. Murphy an engineer who was an expert in the construction of keystone arch bridges. He was helping the noted bridge builder, James Buchanan Eads who was building the steel arch bridge

across the Mississippi, when his daughter, Naomi Ruth Murphy, asked him to come to Hermon to help with the keystone. He did, and helped the Hermon team to set the keystone and finish the bridge.

The NYS Historic Marker was received through a grant that I wrote to the Pomeroy Foundation. It required the submission of substantial research about Mr. Edwin Merton McBrier, which I provided from various historical newspapers and his personal genealogy.

The reason I focused on Mr. McBrier was that he generously donated his time and wealth, earned as a founding partner of the Woolworth 5 and 10 cent corporation, to the modernization and improvement of Hermon - the hometown he and his wife, Carrie Loucks McBrier, loved.

He purchased several old homesteads on Main and Water Streets and converted these plots into the park we are standing in now.

This was in coordination with the modernization of the artistic old stone bridge which arched Elm Creek at the intersection corner. Stone balustrades were built on each side with a light on each of the four pillars.

The park and bridge modernization were the most important part of the improvements to Edwin and for both McBriers was a very rewarding experience to be able to do something constructive in their old home town.

They wanted to create a beautiful park so that people driving to Hermon would be met with a view worthy of the town and it's people! and be able to enter Hermon over a keystone bridge fashioned after Ancient stone bridges he had seen in his European travels.

They initiated a project for paving of all unpaved village streets, and presented the village with a new system of ornamental street lights, fed from underground conduits.

McBrier led the purchase of acreage upon which it's excellent series of water springs were located. It was unsatisfactory to him that it shouldn't own the property.

Enamel lined water storage tanks were installed at the springs, the plot was newly fenced and reforested to secure an abundant supply of pure spring water for future generations.

He purchased and rebuilt the Hermon Hotel, with a bubbling fountain of spring in the lobby with water from that village water supply and custom plumbing into some of the rooms.

Still standing is a granite McBrier Memorial Chapel dedicated to the memory of their parents and more family members. Edwin's mother was born in Hermon, and his wife was born on the Loucks farm in Russell.

They made many visits to Hermon, their first undertaking was the landscaping of the Hermon Cemetery which extended over a period of several years. Mrs. McBrier, the former Carrie Loucks, was an active participant in these activities finding expression for her artistic skill and interests.

Edwin Merton McBrier was born, July 16, 1865 in a small farmhouse in Russell. In a few years, his father, Albon, bought a farm in Hermon and moved into a small farmhouse where Edwin and his brother Mason attended school. A sister was born and his father was able to build a larger home.

Edwin graduated from the Hermon High School in June, 1884 which was the second graduating class from this school and had attained the status of a District High School during the previous year. He taught there for a while, and also taught at Loucks District School about two miles from Hermon and at the Bigelow School. For a while, he was Principal of the Gouverneur School on the Brooklyn side of the Oswegatchie River.

For a while, Edwin worked as an agent for the Albany publishing house and travelled through NY and New England engaging book agents. During this time, he frequently visited his considerably older cousin Frank Woolworth who had begun to open small stores, and Edwin soon became interested in the new five and ten cent business. His cousin, Seymour Knox, whom he had grown up with, living only two miles away in Russell was interested in partnering with Edwin, and after a bit of "wrangling," with Frank, a new store was opened in Lockport, NY under the name of Woolworth and McBrier.

At the age of 22, in 1887, Mr. McBrier joined in the large family partnership begun by his older cousin, Frank Woolworth. In 1892, he married Carrie Loucks.

Fast forward through the years, the businesses grew into a huge chain of 5 and 10 cent stores. and in 1894, Edwin and Seymour opened up the "high class" store in Detroit. McBrier was completely in control of that store, and over time the family corporation grew into five chains with different partnership combinations.

By 1921, Edwin looked to retirement, when he would be free to give his time to various church missions, activities as a Mason and in the Rotary, to travel extensively in Europe and for he and his wife to become the great benefactors to their beloved hometown of Hermon.

