Cheryl Kay O'Neil (Rt) with daughter Megan

WOVEN FROM THE HEART

by Cheryl Kay O'Neil

PART ONE

It has been said that grandmothers are special people, and mine was no exception. I am the granddaughter of Dorothy Tibbott Keener, who was well known in Ebensburg for her spinning and weaving, as well as for her love of history and antiques.
Whether it was the Cambria County Fair, a classroom, or one of Ebensburg's many community celebrations, Dorothy Keener could be found demonstrating her craft. Surrounded by a display of everything from her homemade lye soap, and handspun wool yarn, to the rag rugs, woven on her four-harness loom, my grandmother kindled a flame of interest in the old-timey crafts for passersby, and for those of us who loved her.
My grandmother's unabashed obsession with the forgotten arts was undeniable, and her wealth of knowledge and insatiable curiosity defined her as a never ending source of historical fact and folklore.

I inherited my grandmother's love for the old-timey crafts along with her loom, which I donated to the Historical Society in 1997. I have been invited to do a weaving demonstration on November 5-6 at the Historical Society building, which Dorothy's father and grandfather helped to build.

Dorothy Keener's legacy to all of us is one of passion for history and the forgotten arts, and the measure of pure joy it can bring. I am honored and humbled to have the opportunity to weave once again on my grandmother's loom and I look forward to sharing a small part of Dorothy Keener's legacy with you on November 5-6.

PAGE 4 IS RESERVED FOR YOUR CIVIL WAR VETERAN

Lt. John Humphreys served in the Union forces in the Civil War from Feb. 1862 until Feb. 1865 - but his journey to that war was not the usual one for most solders of that era. Humphreys, who once worked for state owned Allegheny Portage RR for twenty years, was a Capt. in the Mexican War with the 2nd Vol. Inf. (Co. B) from 1846 to 1848. After returning from Mexico, he formed the "American Junior Highlanders" a local militia unit made up of Portage RR employees and other members from Cambria County. A short time later he was elected local militia general representing four neighboring counties including: Cambria, Somerset, Bedford, and Blair Counties. He held this position of Major General (the youngest in the state) until the outbreak of southern hostilities in early 1861. At this time, he raised his own capital for his own company of men, trained and outfitted them, and then set out to Harrisburg to add his Highlander company to the state ledger of men - however Republican Gov. Curtin denied his request and he return to Summitville empty handed and let down. At this point, Humphreys now 40 years old and a recent widower with three young boys to take care of, could have easily sat out the war altogether. However he was still patriotic to his country and in the winter he disbanded his own unit, and shortly thereafter joined the 54th PVI, as a 2nd Lt. (Co. "I") in early 1862; his second war in 14 years.

Initially in 1862, the duty of the 54th was to guard the B&O RR lines and the C&O Canal line along the Potomac River against attack from Southern guerilla forces. It was ironic that the 54th from Cambria Co., Pa., the home of the old Portage RR, and the new Pennsylvania

RR was assigned to guard their old competitors transportation routes (B&O RR and C&O Canal) from sabotage from Confederate forces stationed in Northern Virginia. But, the logic was, who better to guard and repair rail lines than fellow railroad employees. After harassing raids by Gen. Stonewall Jackson in 1862 and 1863, the 54th went into the offensive mode and was sent south of the Potomac River and into Virginia to hunt down Jackson and his marauding raiders in the Shenandoah Valley. After just missing Jackson on several occasions, the 54th was put into the field as a battle unit in 1863. Battles in which the 54th was involved include: New Market, Piedmont, Lynchburg, Snicker's Gap, 3rd Winchester, Fisher's Hill, Cedar Creek, Hatcher's Run, Fall of Petersburg, and High Bridge. After his three year enlistment expired in Feb. 1865, Humphreys returned to Summitville to take care of his three young boys who by now were in the care of three different families in the area. While in service of his country, he had fought in two wars in a decade and-a-half and was never seriously wounded in battle.

After the Civil War, Humphreys continued as a merchant in Summitville and later moved to Johnstown and as far west as Pittsburgh to live with his oldest son John "William" Humphreys now a locomotive engineer on the Penn. RR. The elder Humphreys lived in Pittsburgh near his son in the "Strip District" from the 1870s through the 1890s and in his later years was a night watchman at the Black Diamond Steel Works before receiving a Civil War pension. Humphreys died in Pittsburgh in 1898, being one of the last survivors of the Mexican War from the 2nd Vol. Inf. He is buried in Headrick's Cemetery, just outside E. Conemaugh Boro next to his sister Mary (Humphreys) Wike and her husband William W. Wike.

Written by Chris J. Lewie, gr.-gr.-gr.-grandson of John Humphreys, and author of Two Generations on the Allegheny Portage RR (2001), now in its second printing.

Kathy Jones, curator; Sr. Elizabeth, Sr. Sally, and volunteer, Donna Mabry

❖*In The News*❖

Years As A Convent Remembered

from a Mainline Newspaper article by Suzanne McCombie

For Sr. Mildred Boeh, returning to the A. W. Buck House was something very special.

Boeh was the last of the Sisters of St. Joseph to leave the Holy Name Convent in 1990, which was the majestic A. W. Buck House, leaving it to become the museum and home of the Cambria County Historical Society.

On Monday, September 27, 2010, Boeh– along with nearly 30 other sisters– returned to the A. W. Buck House for a presentation made by the Sisters of St. Joseph of Baden to the Historical Society and the people of the Ebensburg community.

The presentation included the unveiling of a plaque and religious habit that have been donated to the Historical Society to be displayed at the museum.

"We believe it is important to have a visual record of our presence and ministries here, and we are honored to share these gifts with the wider community" said Sr. Sally Witt, archivist for the Sisters of St. Joseph.

The Holy Name Convent of the Sisters of St. Joseph thrived between 1923 and 1990, during which time more than 150 sisters lived there and worked at Holy Name School.

As described on the plaque that now hangs in the museum– in the room that was formerly the chapel– while at the convent, the sisters served the community by giving piano lessons, directing recitals and musical programs, directing the children's choir, teaching religion classes in Ebensburg and nearby towns during the weekends and summers, visiting the Cambria County Jail for prayer and GED instruction, visiting neighbors who were ill, serving as chaplaincy at the Ebensburg Center and offering summer enrichment programs.

Sr. Elizabeth Brown, who was responsible for the creation of the Habit that is now on display at the museum, explained the different details of the outfit as many of the sisters giggled in remembrance.

"It was sort of like a cooperative venture to put this all together," Brown said of the Habit.

Brown explained the Habit, which was worn by Sister Josephine (a mannequin), from head to toe.

"This is so unique," said Historical Society President, Fremont McKenrick. "We would

like to accept the Habit, explanation (of the Habit) and plaque from the sisters."

Sr. Mary Pellegrino also took the opportunity to thank the members of the Historical Society. "It's reassuring knowing that the legacy will be told through such an institution. How tenderly cared for our story will be here." she said.

(Sr. Mildred Boeh) "I spent many years up here at Holy Name with the children. They became a part of me and I hope I was a part of them."

Boeh continued, "When we closed the doors (of the convent) and turned over the key, it broke my heart. But, they (the Historical Society) took the key and opened it in the opposite way, to the public, so that the people could enjoy the history of Cambria County. These dear people have been and continue to be a gift in my heart." ◆