

The Employees of Stan Hywet Hall & Gardens

Over the last several years, many historic sites have taken another look at the histories they tell. In doing so, they have tried to make their stories more complete by including the lives and work of the domestic staff that made homes like Stan Hywet Hall possible. Since 1991 the Curatorial Department at Stan Hywet has been re-examining our history through document-based and oral history-based research to determine who worked at Stan Hywet Hall, what they did, where they came from and what their whole lives were like.

As you might imagine, these individuals were never the subject of the portrait photographer's lens, histories were never formally written about them, they were never the subject of a newspaper account, Unlike their employers their lives were not documented by others. More often than not, if you find a rare mention of a servant in family correspondence, it's in reference to their lack of efficiency, worries over keys and possible theft, or if in a newspaper account, it might be a tiny article about FA Seiberling's chauffeur who was in a car accident. This kind of negative perspective is not unique to the Seiberlings domestics alone.

The Seiberling family lived at Stan Hywet from 1915 until 1955. During that time the domestic and estate staff at this country house would have numbered between 16 and 32 people working inside and outside the house. Domestic staff included the head housekeeper, butler, main cook, assistant cook, kitchen and scullery maids, parlor and chamber maids, a ladies' maid, a head laundress and her assistants, waitresses and a houseman who kept furnaces and fireplaces going, and handled all of the heavy and high household work.

Estate staff included his and her chauffeurs, an auto mechanic, a groom and riding master, a superintendent of the grounds, a poultry man, a head gardener, a greenhouse manager, and numerous groundsmen.

Some staff lived on-site while others were day help and commuted to work. The grounds superintendent lived in the Gate Lodge with his family; female house staff lived on the second floor of the house, male domestics on the third floor, the chauffeur and his family often shared accommodations with a mechanic and groom in apartments on the second floor of the Carriage House, living quarters were also located on the second floor of the conservatory's attached Service Building, and the poultry man lived in a house adjacent to the chicken houses to the west of the main house.

It is easy to quote numbers and statistics, but who were these people and what brought them to work at Stan Hywet Hall? As at many estates, the domestic staff was made up of working class people, many of whom were immigrants to this country. Switzerland, Ireland, Scotland, Sweden, England, Italy, Romania, Germany, Poland, and Hungary were all represented at Stan Hywet Hall at some time during the estate's history. Early 20th C. Akron was a boomtown with promises of newly created jobs owing to the rubber industry. Workers also came from surrounding states such as Pennsylvania, West Virginia, Tennessee and Kentucky.

Jobs in the rubber factories were not the only bonus of boom town Akron! Support industries and small businesses sprung up as a result of Industrial Akron. More people meant more building, more grocers, more druggists, more shops, and more wealth, and the wealthy that required workers to support their business and social lifestyles. Family

connections played an important part in the lives of these laborers and reflect common trends that were evident nationally:

- an individual would come to Akron in search for work and later send for their whole family proclaiming available jobs galore!
- after finding a job, a sweetheart from home might be sent for
- workers would propose family kin as potential employees to their employers
- and inevitably, romance might develop on the job and result in marriage
- and finally, marriage and families often translated into leaving domestic service and pursuing jobs with a “future” for advancement

All of these factors wove their influence into tales of service at Stan Hywet and other similar estates nationwide.

Who was Stan Hywet’s other half? We quite literally have dozens and dozens of individuals who worked here during the 40 years of Seiberling residency. In this lesson we are focusing on the staff members who were immigrants to the United States in the early part of the 20th century. Let’s meet some of them and learn their stories.

WILLIAM FRICKER

- William Fricker was the first and only chef hired to work at Stan Hywet Hall
- He was born in 1887 in Switzerland and left home at age 15 to be a culinary apprentice, studying in Italy, Austria and elsewhere in Europe
- In 1911 he immigrated to the US and worked in Virginia
- He eventually became the chef at the Portage Hotel in downtown Akron; FA Seiberling having heard of his abilities hired him away from the hotel to be the chef at his new home, where he served from 1916 until 1921.
- Fricker left Stan Hywet in 1921 owing to the decreased amount of entertaining taking place which had been caused by Mr. Seiberling’s loss of Goodyear. Things picked up at Stan Hywet once he had Seiberling Rubber firmly under way, but Fricker was a professional chef - he could not sit idle.
- Fricker became the chef at Portage Country Club just down the road and later became the head chef at the prestigious Firestone Club House where he spent almost 30 years. I understand Mr. Fricker was something of a Firestone Institution!



MARIE REIDER

- Marie Reider also hailed from Switzerland having been born there in 1891. In 1907 she moved to London, England as did many young Swiss girls who wanted to train in service and learn English.
- During this time Marie worked in Buckingham Palace.
- In 1912 she immigrated to the US and found her way to Canton, Ohio where her brother Fred already worked. Marie traveled by boat to get to the United States it took 3 weeks and she was seasick the entire trip. She vowed never to get on a boat again, she never did and never returned to Switzerland.
- Between 1915 and 1917 Marie worked at Stan Hywet and lived-in as Mrs. Seiberling's ladies maid, fixing her hair, dressing and undressing her, maintaining her wardrobe and accessories, laundering by hand delicate articles of clothing, repairing and altering clothing as needed, pressing delicate items, packing and unpacking suitcases, and any other personal need of Mrs. Seiberling's. Ladies maids frequently assisted the employer's daughters and any female guest of the house.
- Marie's work at Stan Hywet influenced her later lifestyle as she liked being fancy, loved dancing and loved serving fine meals with fine linens and service pieces.



MARIE & ARLIE CROSS

- As was to happen over and over again at Stan Hywet, Marie met her future husband, Arlie Cross while in the Seiberlings' employment.
- Arlie was from Maryland and worked as the Seiberlings' head chauffeur from 1915 until 1917. Arlie lived in residence in the second floor apartment of the Carriage House.
- After their marriage in 1917, Marie and Arlie left Stan Hywet Hall. He served in World War I. They lived in the Goodyear Heights community of Akron and had six children. Forsaking a career as a chauffeur, Arlie worked for the Goodyear Tire & Rubber Company, first as a mechanic and later in the chemical plant until his retirement.

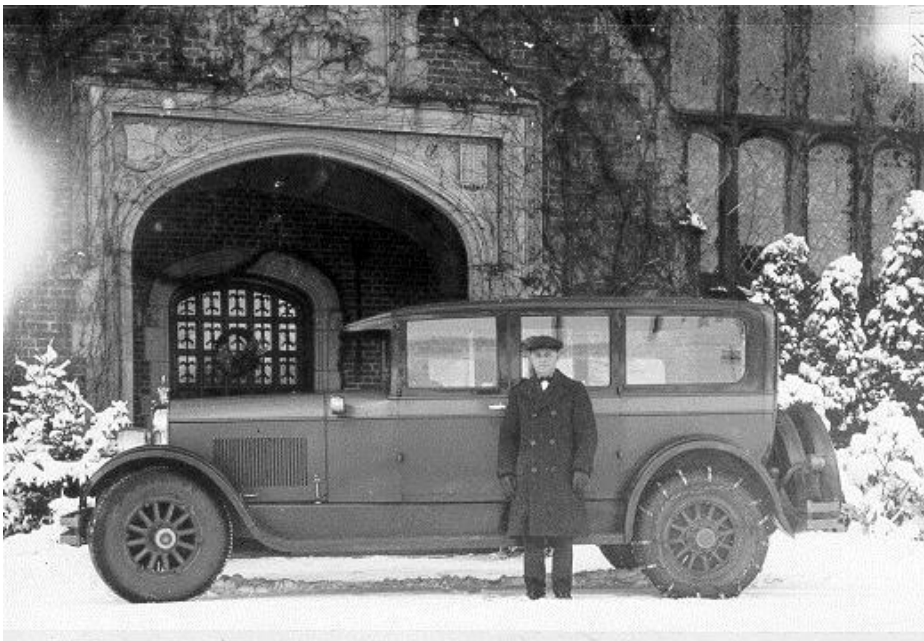
Chauffeurs did quite well at Stan Hywet since another chauffeur also met his bride while working here. Guy Graber worked at Stan Hywet in the 1920's and met the English-born Kathleen Hemmings who was an upstairs maid and a kitchen assistant during mealtimes. Kathleen was often asked to serve Guy his meal in the servant's dining room and it was not uncommon for him to eat alone owing to his chauffeuring schedule. Fricker, the chef, noticed the growing attraction and interest, and teased Kathleen unmercifully. One day he dared her to put a rose on Guy's plate. She did and the romance was off in high gear! They were married in July of 1921.



MARIE & ARLIE CROSS, 1920s

TOM MORTON

- Tom Morton was born in Scotland and was yet another chauffeur at Stan Hywet, this time in the 1930's.
- He lucked out too and married Molly Breckenridge, the cook at Stan Hywet. They stayed in residence however.
- Molly began working at Stan Hywet in the late 1920's and earned \$ 60 a month in addition to her room and board. The whole Breckenridge clan just about lived and worked at Stan Hywet! Her brother Jim worked as a butler and his wife Meg worked as a Chambermaid or upstairs maid. Sandy, yet another Breckenridge brother, worked as the houseman!
- All the Breckenridges, including Tom Morton, returned to Scotland in 1935 owing to the Great Depression and lack of work in the US. For them, the "American Dream" did not pan out.



ROSE KOEHLER

- Rose Koehler was another of Mrs. Seiberling's ladies maids. Rose was born in Akron of German heritage in 1911. She worked at Stan Hywet between 1930 and 1937 when she married Karl Sommerfeldt.
- Prior to Stan Hywet, Rose worked as a housemaid in a private residence. Her brother, Fred, called her attention to an advertisement in the newspaper seeking a ladies' maid for the Seiberling residence. Even though Rose was nervous and worried about her interview and the possibility of working for the Seiberlings, she got the job right away and reportedly loved the position.
- Unlike other types of maid, ladies' maid typically had a more glamorous job, handling and caring for the finest of garments and belongings, the intimacy of a relationship with the mistress of the house, often receiving gifts of beautiful items from the mistress who no longer wanted them. Yes, some jealousy from other staff always surrounded the ladies' maid position, even on both sides of the Atlantic! Through Stan Hywet, Rose acquired a taste for and an appreciation of lovely belongings - she later worked for the M. O'Neil's Department Store in downtown Akron, working in the Silver Department, polishing, displaying and selling silver and surrounding herself with beautiful objects!



ROSE KOEHLER

VICTORIA MOTYKA

- One of the many Stan Hywet laundresses was Victoria Motyka who was born in Poland in 1891. Her husband Anthony came to the US first to get himself established, then in 1913 sent for Victoria and their 10 month old son. Tony had come directly to Akron upon arrival in the US as their neighbors from the old country were living in Akron. Tony spent most of his career working for the General Tire Company.
- Victoria did not live-in, rather she commuted daily from her home in nearby North Hill which was predominantly a Polish and Italian community. Her days were spent ironing great quantities of regular household and party linens. Victoria also helped

when parties were scheduled, assisting with the polishing of silver and helping to set the dining room table.

- It appears that Mrs. Seiberling was always well satisfied with Victoria's work, and in addition to her duties at Stan Hywet, Victoria also found time to act as a laundress for one of Mr. Seiberling's sisters, Cora Seiberling Wolle, who lived nearby. Well-liked by all, when Victoria's grandson was born, Cora's daughter Helen Wolle hand delivered a hand-embroidered baby blanket for the newborn to Victoria's home.

LIBBY CIRIACK

- Libby Ciriack worked at Stan Hywet as a cook in the mid-1940's.
- Libby's mother was the head laundress at Stan Hywet for 23 years. Elizabeth Ciriack was born in Romania in 1889 of Romanian and Italian parents. She married Alex Ciriack in 1908 and they had two children who died before their parents immigrated to the US in 1910. Elizabeth did not live-in, but maintained her own house for her family. She and her husband divorced in 1930, later remarrying each other, they had 7 children in all, and Elizabeth continued to work at Stan Hywet full-time even though pregnant and with a growing family.
- When Libby was 19, her mother asked her to fill-in for an upstairs maid who was vacationing. She helped with some cooking, and since Mrs. Seiberling liked her, Libby was hired in the kitchen.
- This was a family affair because Libby sister-in-law, Lila, also got a job at Stan Hywet as a live-in housemaid! Lila clearly remembers one incident at Stan Hywet that pretty much sums up Mr. FA Seiberling, the Napoleon of the rubber companies! - One day Mr. Seiberling returned early to the house and walked into the Billiard Room only to



VICTORIA MOTYKA



LIBBY CIRIACK & first husband Nick Ardelian, 1946

find Lila and Libby shooting billiards! Both recall being very frightened of losing their jobs after having been caught red-handed. Mr. Seiberling smiled and waved them on with “Continue your game girls!” while disappearing into his private office!

- These three ladies are good examples of employee-employer relations and feelings as witnessed in this 1946 letter from Mr. Seiberling to his daughter Irene:

Libbie, the cook, is a young woman doing good service, but I am inclined to think she is at the stage of being interested in boys, which means that she is not always on the job. Her assistant Lila is one hundred percent good. Her mother Elizabeth is a fine worker, but her dominating disposition she cannot be trusted to get along with all kinds of help.

WILLIAM DENNIS

- Mr. Dennis was hand chosen by Warren Manning, the landscape architect of Stan Hywet, to be the head gardener of Stan Hywet. He had been working for Warren Manning up until that time.
- William was born in England and died in Akron Ohio in 1923.
- William lived in the Gate Lodge of Stan Hywet with his wife and 3 children from 1913-1923.
- The Head Gardener was crucial to the successful operation and maintenance of large estates; he was responsible for the estate’s conservatory or “hot house” which produced such out of season luxuries as fruits for the table and flowers for the house. While the Head Gardener was responsible for the maintenance and supervision of these prized collections, he typically hired a full time foreman or assistant whose duties were concentrated in these structures.
- Country estates typically possessed vegetable and cutting gardens, providing necessitates to the house, and it was the Head Gardener who planned and supervised these areas, as well as the estate’s fruit orchards.
- Pleasure gardens and expanses of lawn required constant maintenance and the Head Gardener oversaw a crew of regular garden staff and seasonal help. Lawn moving alone occupied enormous amounts of time and physical labor. Prior to fuel powered machinery, lawn mowing was accomplished by hitching draft horses to mowers which were hand-walked by garden staff.



William Dennis - Peach Orchard (date unknown)