

Shirley Garner - The Leader Of The Band

by Lynne Belluscio

Shirley Garner's (Kinsella) white satin majorette uniform with gold trim has been hanging on the back of the library door since July 2013 and I thought it would be appropriate to put it in the new 2015 exhibit at LeRoy House. We also have the hat and the silver baton. It was brought to the Historical Society after Shirley died. She had told me all about the uniform and I was very interested in preserving the uniform, but more importantly, her story.

When her niece brought the uniform in, pinned to the hanger,

written on yellow paper was Shirley's story ... In high school she was a very talented baton twirler and when she tried out for the LeRoy High School Band as the majorette, she outperformed all the other girls. As she said in the note, she had taught most of them how to twirl a baton. She was selected to be the majorette, but due to - - as she puts it - - a "class" action of the school officials, she was told that whoever was leading the band had to buy their own uniform. She always believed that the school officials knew that her family didn't have the money to buy the uniform, and in their own way, were going to prevent her from being the majorette.

Shirley believed that there was some girl from one of the rich families that wanted to be majorette. "My mother hit the roof," Shirley wrote. So she sold eggs, chickens, canned fruit, and anything else they could do without. And when they had the money, her mother took her to Rochester to Royal Uniform - - because the school insisted that Shirley could not have a "hand-made" uniform. Her mother had made all of her other twirling uniforms, but that was not good enough. So with her store bought uniform and boots, and hat, Shirley led the band. But as she wrote, even in the school yearbook, they never gave her credit for being the band leader.

In the photograph of the band standing on the front steps of the library, it is clear that Shirley is alone in front of the band. She is leading the band as the majorette - but the caption lists two girls in the front row. Shirley always felt slighted. She wrote, "I'm eighty and it still hurts!"

When Shirley graduated, she was too young to go into nursing school, so she remained in high school for another year and she continued to lead the band. She and her mother were afraid that the school would insist that they buy a new uniform, so her mother turned

the skirt around and added the feathers on the bottom so "they couldn't say I was wearing some old thing."

Shirley went on to nursing school at St. Jerome's in Batavia and was a member of the Cadet Nursing Corps. She was a surgical nurse at Genesee Memorial Hospital and then went to Strong Hospital in Rochester where she was a head nurse on X3 for several years. After some time away, she returned to Rochester and worked at the Cancer Center at the University of Rochester.

So when you come to see the new exhibit at LeRoy House, make sure you stop to see the white satin majorette uniform. And think of young Shirley Garner, a girl who in spite of the odds, led the band.

The LeRoy House will open for 2015 on weekends beginning on May 3. During the summer the



Uniform after the skirt was changed and feather edge added.

house will also be open during the week. If you haven't visited LeRoy House lately, plan to stop by this summer. Or plan to visit during the Oatka Festival.



Majorette photo 1944 Oatkan.



Graduation photo 1943.