

Watson Claims Writing Competition Top Prize

POTSDAM - With more than five months invested into research, writing and re-writing, a South Colton woman has been named the winner of the first Researching the North Country Writing Competition.

Mary Jane Watson has claimed her first prize winnings of \$1,000 from the Northern New York Library Network for her essay on "St. Lawrence County Native Leads New Deal Opposition." The second place winner of \$500 was Laura Halferty of Ellisburg, for her essay on "Irish Women in Oswego, 1855 and 1915."

The Northern New York Library Network was pleasantly surprised to receive a total of 36 essays for the writing competition. Submissions were judged on quality of the scholarship; originality of topic and treatment; and use of local libraries, archives, and cultural resources. The two winning essays may be found on the Network's website at www.nnyln.org, and click on "Researching the North Country Writing Competition Results."

Watson's essay focused on a portion of the political career of South Colton native Congressman Bertrand H. Snell. It was described by the Network as demonstrating "good documentation, a well-developed and well-supported argument, clear writing, and generally good integration of local and national politics."

Upon being notified of receiving first place in the competition, Watson said she was "very happy and pleasantly surprised." She is already looking forward to participating in next year's event.



MARY JANE WATSON

"I find the research more fun than the writing," she smiled. "I was glad to hear of such a competition. There is so much to be discovered (in the region). A lot of local people went on to fame."

Watson noted she had worked for 30 years, and then went back to school. She earned her Masters degree in history at McGill University, and during her last semester had to work on a major research paper. She turned to SUNY Potsdam and the assistance of Archivist Jane Subramanian there to conduct research in the Bertrand Snell Collection. After earning her degree, she took some writing classes at SUNY Potsdam.

"My paper for McGill had a federal emphasis. In taking the writing class I re-did it to have a St. Lawrence County slant," she said, noting that final work was what she submitted for the competition.

"Research is like a mystery. You start out trying to find information on a person or event. Each thing is a building block to that person or event," Watson said. "There is fun in

the pursuit. There is history here people don't know about."

Republican Bertrand Snell represented New York's 31st Congressional District from Nov. 2, 1915 to Jan. 3, 1939. Watson noted if the Democrats (Franklin D. Roosevelt) would have lost the election, in 1932 Snell would have been Speaker of the House.

"Snell was the first to introduce legislation in Congress for the joint United States-Canadian construction of the St. Lawrence Seaway Project. One of the Seaway locks near Massena is named after him," Watson notes in her paper.

The major focus of her paper was on the New Deal presented by President Roosevelt. Watson pointed out, "Through its trial and error methods, the Roosevelt administration destroyed the thrift that had made America great."

Watson referenced a statement made by Snell attacking Roosevelt's efforts at tax reform: "No matter where taxes are levied, every man and woman in the Nation pays them. They are paid in daily toil, in higher prices for every necessity of life, in cruel assessment upon industry, thrift, and frugality. Excessive taxes, wherever laid, sap the productive energies of a people and prostrate the spirit of ambition and invention, which is the keystone of America's greatness."

Those interested in reading more about this interesting time in history, as well as about the lives of immigrant women in Oswego, may find the essays at www.nnyln.org. A complete list of names of everyone who entered the competition and the title of their essay may also be found here.