

## **Philanthropy, vision, success, and madness**

Historic Ely estate coming to auction

Elyria, Ohio, Monday, August 28 by Deborah Cox

The city of Elyria exists as testament to the adventurous spirit and vision of Heman Ely and his heirs. During the 191 years since the city's founding, the Ely family have remained loyal benefactors and patrons to the citizens of Elyria. The lives of the Ely's were marked by many events, and they experienced success, tragedy, love, happiness, sadness, and even madness. Throughout those years, the Ely family amassed a unique and varied collection of treasures from around the world. On Saturday, August 23 and Sunday, August 24, John Farkas and Connie Rose of Antiques and Estate Auctioneers, in Wellington, Ohio will be showcasing many of the rarities from the Ely estate, including quality antiques and items from the original Heman Ely mansion. The auction will offer many personal and unique collectibles from the family that has garnered curiosity for generations.

Heman Ely (1775-1852) was an early entrepreneur and visionary who traveled to the Ohio area from Massachusetts. His father, Justin Ely, was a wealthy merchant, land developer, and a heavy investor in the northeast Ohio (Western Reserve) lands of the Connecticut Land Company of Hartford. When Heman arrived in the area, he found the area promising, and purchased the property from his father. He set about to found a city, which he named Elyria, on 3/17/1817. He built a dam, gristmill, and sawmill at the foot of what he called Main Street, and is now known as Broad Street. Mr. Ely's home was the second frame building in Elyria, built in the summer of 1817 on the northwest corner of Main Street (Broad) and East Bridge Street. Heman then began a lifetime of development and expansion to the area. Through the continued philanthropy of Heman Ely and his subsequent heirs, the city of Elyria has benefited in many ways. The Ely's have given the city, Elywood and Cascade Parks, the Elyria Library, Elyria High School, (incorporated in 1831 and said to be the first high school established west of the Allegheny Mountains), the original Lorain County Courthouse building, and have made substantial contributions to Elyria Memorial Hospital. The Ely's have been substantial donors to a vast number of other non-profit organizations, including the American Red Cross, YMCA, Lorain County Historical Society, Elyria Recreation Program, United Way, Boys Town, and others.

Heman was married three times, and had three sons and a daughter. His sons, Heman Jr. (b 1820), Albert (b 1825), and Charles Arthur (b 1829) each carried on their patriarch's philanthropic work in his own unique way.

Heman Jr. built the Ely Block, which was located near the square on Broad Street in Elyria. The Ely block was later destroyed by fire. In 1852, Heman Jr. and other investors were responsible for building the Lake Shore and Michigan Southern Railroad, then known as "Junction Road", from Cleveland to Toledo. He was named the first Postmaster of the City of Elyria, and served for 15 years. He also served in the Ohio State Legislature, from 1870 to 1873. He is credited with assisting in the development of the insurance laws in the State of Ohio.

Albert Ely, an intelligent and eccentric man, graduated from William & Mary College in 1847. He owned the Old Red Mill, which was located on the eastern falls of the Black River. He remained a bachelor his entire life, and was a benefactor to many in the area. He was a well-spoken man and an engaging character.

Charles Arthur continued the vision and desires of his father, marrying Louise Foot in 1854. The widely traveled and well-respected couple continued his father's patronage to the city of Elyria. He passed away when their son William A. was only 4 years old, in 1864, and his wife and son.

After Charles Arthur's death, Louise Ely carried on the Ely family tradition of service to Elyria in her husband's stead. Charles Arthur had donated the property and building for the first Elyria Library before his death, and had directed a provision in his will for the purchase of books and materials for the continued development and expansion for the future. The library began with 2,000 books; purchased with the funds from Mr. Ely's bequest. When the first library building experienced a devastating fire in 1873, only 375 books out of the then 4,000 were saved. Following the wishes of her late husband to ensure the continuation of the Elyria Library, Mrs. Ely had the library reconstructed, and new books were purchased. She designated a portion of the Ely's real estate holdings, the area known as Elywood, as a place of public recreation.

Louise Ely became critically ill, ironically on the very day that the Ely's were celebrating her son, William's 21<sup>st</sup> birthday. On that day, William came into the inheritance left to him by his father, Charles Arthur.

Louise Ely passed away only 2 weeks later. William was then left to carry on the Ely family's continued tradition of patronage to the city, which was founded by his grandfather Heman. William was home from college for the celebration of his birthday, and after the death of his mother, he returned to his studies at Ohio State University. The lonely young man soon met and fell in love with Iovia Fisher. Iovia was better known by her nickname, Kitty. The two were married in October 1882, and they began to build a life together. They were wealthy, happy and very much in love, and soon they had a son whom they named Arthur. Tragically, when Arthur was still an infant, Kitty became ill with what is now believed to have been acute appendicitis, and she suddenly died.

William was devastated. The loss of his beloved Kitty sent him spiraling into an emotional abyss, from which he never truly recovered. William became an embittered, delusional man, who seemed to blame his wife's death on their infant son. His emotional state continued to deteriorate. As the years went by, he became a complete recluse. He cut himself and his son off from everyone, and he allowed the once stately, elegant mansion to fall into a state of complete disrepair. He refused to allow the house to be heated, and insisted upon drawing water from an outside well, in all kinds of weather. William refused any help and continued to live as if his life ended when Kitty died. Despite his wealth and position, William forced his son to endure a life with little food, without heat or running water, and without friendship or companionship, as William retreated into his own mind. Arthur tried to make friends with his schoolmates, but his father never allowed him to socialize or to become involved in the world outside of the crumbling mansion. As Arthur grew into a young man, his father immediately quashed each attempt that he made to display interest in a young woman. He never was allowed to have any lasting relationship with any one, especially a woman. His father's behavior resulted in their continued existence as hermits. Even the vast Ely fortune, did not prevent the meager lifestyle imposed by William's madness. Arthur spent decades living in that macabre lifestyle, existing in the decaying home along with the father who had completely lost touch with reality.

When William passed away in 1946, Arthur was suddenly alone. His father had spent 62 years mourning his bride, and his son had lived his entire life in that home as it literally began to fall down around them. To escape the painful memories, and to begin his own life, Arthur had the decrepit family manse torn down, in 1947. He yearned to explore the world outside the walls that had secluded him for so many years.

Arthur began construction on a large brick ranch home on the site where the mansion had once stood. He began to venture out and meet the people who lived in the city that his great grandfather had founded. His father's will stipulated that the Ely family tradition of service to Elyria would continue, and the city would still benefit from the Ely family's bequests. The majority of the Ely estate would be entered into a trust that would retain its real estate holdings, and would continue its patronage to Elyria. Arthur was to receive an allowance for his own expenses.

At the age of 63, he met a woman, named Helen Jasany Monroe, better known as Sally. Sally owned and operated the Northwood Inn. As owner of the business, she acted as the tavern's bartender. Sally was 40 when she met Arthur. She was boisterous, friendly and worked hard, but she loved it. One day, Arthur stopped in for a bowl of soup, and they struck up a conversation. She could see how lonely Arthur was, and she invited him to come back the next day for lunch, which he did. Arthur was shy and not used to socializing, and although Sally was sometimes brash and colorful, they enjoyed one another's company, and began to spend more and more time together. They fell in love and married 13 months later, on July 4, 1951.

The couple then began their life together in the Washington Avenue home. Sally worked hard to show Arthur the love and joy that he had never learned in his life with his father. Arthur returned that love and devotion and the couple enjoyed their life together, treasuring their happiness and building new memories to replace the sadness that had marked the first six decades of Arthur's life. The couple acquired a collection of elegant furnishings, art, and decorative items and enjoyed dining out as well as spending time at home. Sally was always a hard worker, who continued to operate the Northwood Inn for the first three years of their marriage, but then Arthur's health began to falter. Sally sold the Inn at that time to care for Arthur in the home that they loved. Arthur and Sally believed that the "members of society" in Elyria spurned Sally, due to her previous occupation as a bar owner, but they continued to act as patrons to the city. Arthur Ely passed away on November 4, 1958.

Sally Ely was always an outspoken woman, and she continued to make herself heard after the death of her husband. She strived to carry out what she believed to be Arthur's wishes and desires. She fought to become one of the trustees of the Ely estate, and eventually procured a court order to secure that right. She was vocal about any issue that

she felt affected the city that her husband's great grandfather had founded. She was well known for her spunky attitude, colorful vocabulary, vast collection of stylish and sometimes outlandish hats, her jewelry, and her love of life.

She continued to be a patron for the many charitable organizations, which she and her husband had supported. Before Arthur's death, he made it known that he did not wish to be buried underground, and he had plans drawn up for a large, pink granite mausoleum, which he intended to have built to house himself, and Sally after their deaths. Arthur stated his wishes that all of the Ely family members who had previously died and were buried at Ridgelawn Cemetery be moved to the new mausoleum which he envisioned. Sally attempted to carry out that request, but because the other Ely Estate trustee did not agree that the projected mausoleum cost of \$35,000 should be paid by the estate, Sally was unable to honor that wish. When the legal wrangling had finally ended, he was laid to rest in the Ridgelawn Cemetery near his ancestors.

Sally went on to continue to make her opinions known, frequently writing letters to the editors of the newspapers, and speaking out for anything she supported, and against anything that she did not support. She and Arthur had only a few years together, but Sally spent the rest of her life acting in her husband's stead as the last of Elyria's founding family. Helen C. "Sally" Ely passed away at age 82, on November 27, 1993.

The city of Elyria will always admire and honor their founding family, and appreciate the Ely's for their dedication and philanthropy. Soon, the public will be offered the rare opportunity to own a piece of Elyria's history, when Antique and Estate Auctioneers bring many of the Ely family's treasured antiques and collectibles to auction. For more information, please contact John Farkas or Connie Rose at 440 647-4007 or visit [www.estateauctioneers.com](http://www.estateauctioneers.com).