

This Week in Saratoga County History

Doctor Helen Hosmer: A Life of Service and Adventure

Submitted by Dave Waite August 26, 2026

Dave Waite has a lifelong interest in regional history and the Adirondacks. He has authored articles in the New York Archives magazine and many other regional publications and has published two anthologies of his stories. He is the videographer of the Forgotten Crossroads and the One Room Schoolhouse film series for Brookside Museum.



Dr. Helen Hosmer 1884-1966

In 1934, Doctor Helen Hosmer opened a physician's office on West Street in the Village of Galway. Originally from Billerica, Massachusetts, when Hosmer came to Galway, she was 50 years old, and though an experienced chemist and scientist, she was just beginning her career as a physician.

Helen Hosmer graduated in 1906 from Massachusetts Institute of Technology with a degree in chemistry. She then worked in the General Electric Research Laboratory in Schenectady for eight years. In 1915, she relocated to Cleveland to work for one year with Dr. Crile, an expert in physiologic surgery and the founder of the American College of Surgeons.

Dr. Hosmer next joined the faculty of Albany Medical College, where she taught physiology for eight years and, at the same time, completed three years toward her Doctor of Medicine degree. It was during her years in Albany that she first volunteered to work at the medical clinic established by Sir Winfield Grenfell in Labrador, Canada. After one year in the north, she returned to America and, in 1931, completed her fourth year of medical study at Tufts College, graduating with a Medical Degree.

From here, Helen Hosmer spent two years as an intern at Samaritan Hospital in Troy, New York. At this time, an internship was considered the final step before a doctor opened their private

practice. During this time, the intern often “took up residence” at the hospital, working long hours for low pay, often doing menial tasks and riding with ambulance crews on calls.

It was during her internship at Samaritan Hospital that Helen gained experience in medical fieldwork. In late October of 1934, Dr. Davenport of Samaritan Hospital received a call from the family in Taborton, a rural community fourteen miles from Troy, that someone was seriously ill. To make matters even worse, the man was too ill to make his way to the hospital, and the cabin where he resided was a mile from the nearest road. Soon the doctor was on the way by ambulance, accompanied only by his assistant, Dr. Helen Hosmer, and their driver. It was a long walk in and likely seemed an even longer walk out, carrying their patient on the mile-long woodland path, but soon the ambulance was back on the road. In recalling the incident later, Doctor Davenport praised Hosmer as being a “great help,” and the ambulance driver for his role as a stretcher bearer.

Once Doctor Hosmer had completed her internship, she took a position as College Physician to Keuka College, where she served for two years. After her time in Keuka, she moved to West Street in Galway in Saratoga County, where she served the community as a physician from 1934 to 1937.

Though why Helen Hosmer chose Galway is never revealed, she was quickly embraced by the community. As the local newspaper was a community bulletin board for both social and personal events, Dr. Hosmer's work as a physician was occasionally noted. Some of her patients were likely related to those still in the area today; people such as William Ingersoll of Mosherville, Mrs. William Sabo of Barkersville, and young Helen Jaworsky of Galway.

As part of her work in the community, Dr. Hosmer provided physical examinations at local schools and administered diphtheria vaccines in pre-school clinics. While in Galway, she had not forgotten her time in Canada, as she gave a lecture on Dr. Wilfred Grenfell's work in Labrador at the Galway Presbyterian Church.

Dr. Hosmer left Galway and returned to the Grenfell medical clinics in May of 1937, where she was given responsibility over the St. Mary's River Hospital. During the years that she oversaw the facility, she began cultivating a garden to help provide much-needed vegetables for the patients and staff. Along with the short growing season was the abundance of blackflies and other biting insects. Those working in the gardens were forced to wear thick veils that had to be tucked deeply into their outer garments.

After three years in Labrador, she returned on furlough to the States for the winter of 1940. She took time to visit friends that she had made in Galway, such as Cecil Anibal and his wife, before returning north in the spring. During her 1941 furlough, Helen was in residence at Ellis Hospital in Schenectady. Also, during her time away from Grenfell, she gave lectures about her experiences

in Labrador, including a broadcast on the Farm Forum Program on General Electric's Schenectady radio station, WGY.

After her return to Canada in early 1942, Dr. Hosmer traveled by boat and Inuit dog sled from St. Mary's River 32 miles to the logging village of Port Hope Simpson. Later in the winter, she again headed out by dog sled, this time 95 miles to Forteau Nursing Station. As the winter had been mild up to that point, the dogs had a hard time on the thin layer of snow and slush. In telling of her time that winter, she recalled that her only consolation was that "I did not get thrown off any oftener than my driver."

In early 1943, Dr. Hosmer left Labrador and returned to Saratoga County, where she took the position as first assistant to the physician at the Homestead Tuberculosis Sanatorium in the Town of Providence. When she first arrived, the head physician position was temporarily vacant, so for a few weeks, she stepped in to administer the sanatorium's work until Dr. Emond Suss arrived in early February.

Dr. Helen Hosmer served as a physician at the sanatorium from 1943 until 1956, when she retired for a time. She returned in 1961 to serve as the resident physician at the infirmary. During her years at the Homestead, Helen Hosmer lived in Middle Grove, where her hobby was raising Nubian Goats, her animals winning many prizes in New York and New England.

Dr. Helen Hosmer passed away in 1966 at the age of 82, having lived a full life of service in both Saratoga County and the northern wilderness of Labrador, Canada.

Sources: *Among the Deep Sea Fishers* of July 1943 and April 1941.
online newspaper archives at fultonhistory.com, newyorkhistoricnewspapers.org,
photograph - *Saratogian* newspaper, June 7, 1956