

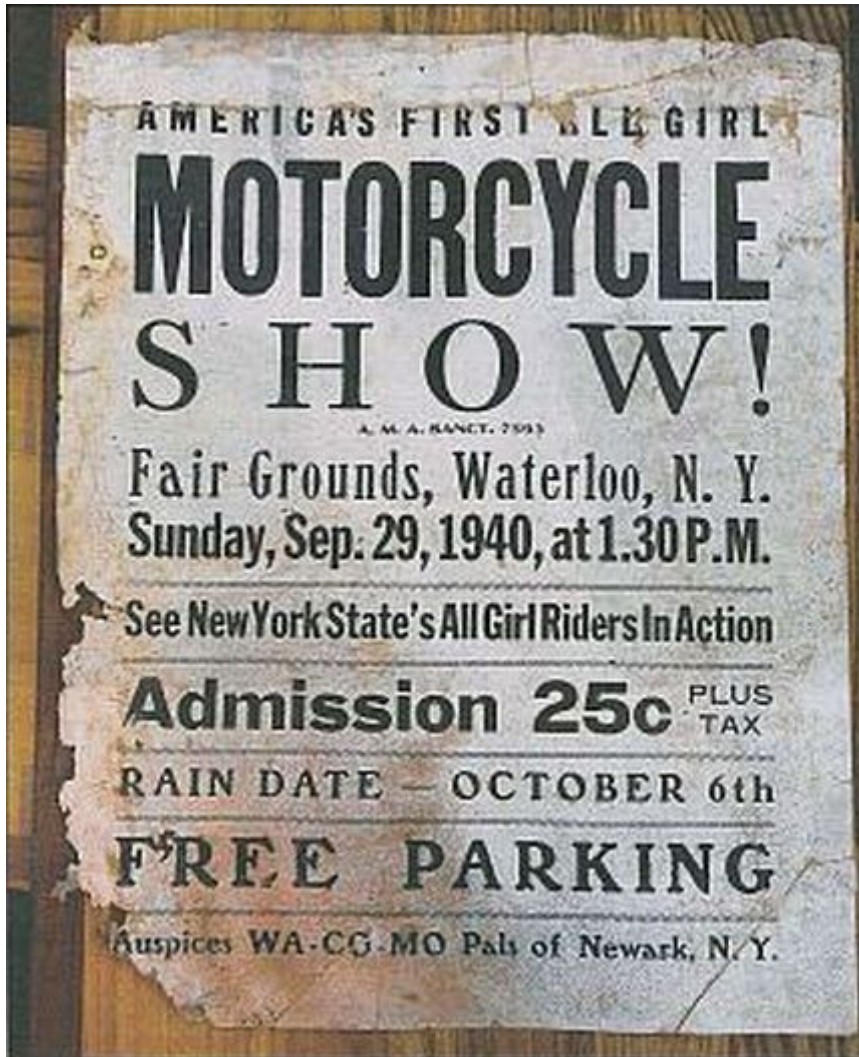
THE POST-STANDARD
THURSDAY, OCT. 1, 2009

Neighbors

CAYUGA COUNTY

Revving Up History

Man's find in a barn
could secure proper credit
for female motorcycle
pioneer Louise Scherbyn



Stephen Cannerelli / The Post-Standard

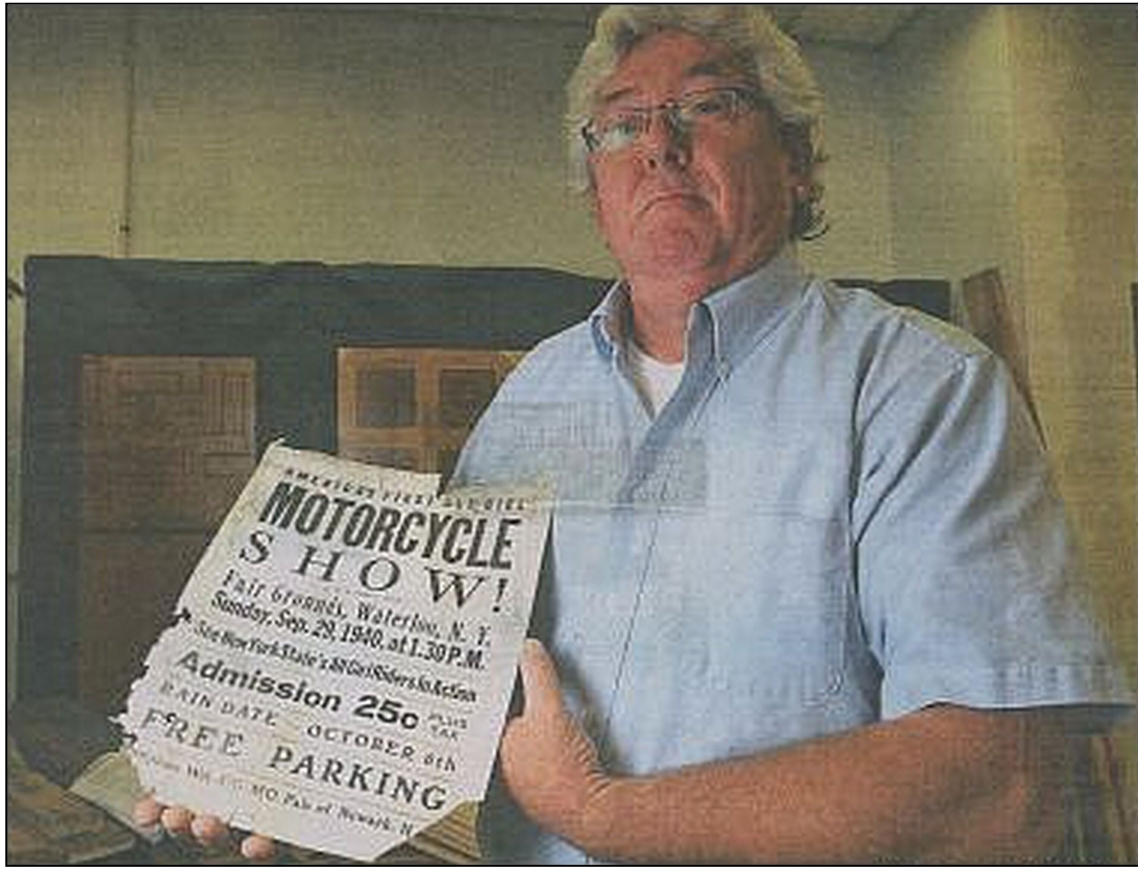
THIS POSTER promoting “America’s First All Girl Motorcycle Show” could be the impetus that finally puts a Finger Lakes native into a hall of fame. Doug Holland, of Auburn, found the poster last fall when he was working in an old barn.

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“We thought once you made an application it is open for five years, but I talked to someone who said it only came up for vote once. We are preparing to send it again.”

— Alice Sexton

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Doug Holland, of Auburn, found this poster promoting the first all-girl motorcycle show held in Waterloo on Sept. 29, 1940. The poster could be the impetus to get Louise Scherbyn, who grew up in Waterloo, inducted into the American Motorcycle Association Hall of Fame.

Stephen Cannerelli / The Post-Standard

Poster Promotes Pioneer

Old barn yields evidence that shows motorcyclist's importance among women bikers

By Dorothy Long
Contributing writer

It was a routine day and Doug Holland was doing a routine task for his business, Levanna Restoration Lumber, when he stumbled across a bit of local and international history.

"I have a reclamation business. I dismantle barns to a certain point — all in Central New York — and make flooring from the barn timbers or siding," Holland said.

"I'd finished dismantling the siding of a barn. This barn was filled with basically a lot of junk. It was used as more of a storage facility and had been for years," Holland recalled. "I was doing me final walk-through before toppling the barn. It was originally a

three-bay English barn and the front bay was converted for horses. In the second stall from the south is where I found a poster sitting on a cardboard box. Dust had collected on it."

Holland had found a piece of history.

"I liked it for the simplicity and the historical reference in Waterloo," Holland said. "It was for an event at the Waterloo fairgrounds. I liked that the admission was 25 cents plus tax — leave it to New York to charge tax on 25 cents. It said 'See New York State's all girl riders in action.'"

That's motorcycle riders. And the show was scheduled for 1:30 p.m., Sunday, Sept. 29, 1940.

Holland decided to keep the

11-by 15-inch poster, frame it and put it on the wall at home.

But he was curious about the event scheduled 69 years ago.

"Within a few days, I did an Internet search. I really was expecting to find nothing. But I found exactly what I was looking for from the WIMA (Women's International Motorcycle Association) historical page."

In an article about WIMA's founder, Louise Menzer Scherbyn, Holland discovered that Scherbyn had helped produce and starred in the first all-girl motorcycle show that was held 69 years ago in Waterloo.

"I had found a reference to the poster I had in my hand." Holland took the poster to a document conservator in Skaneateles. He

MOTORCYCLIST, PAGE

Motorcyclist promoted riding hobby for women

MOTORCYCLIST, FROM PAGE 3

learned the poster — which had black letters and a whitish on clay-covered poster board — was typical for the time period. But the conservator was surprised that the poster was in such good shape. Such advertisements were often posted outdoors and would dissolve in water.

Holland contacted the WIMA and the president of the USA Division, Alice Sexton responded with a “holy cow!”

Sexton e-mailed Holland saying “We’ve been trying to get Louise Scherbyn into the AMA (American Motorcycle Association) Hall of Fame and I think this poster will be the crowning item.”

In a phone interview, Sexton said it has been five years since the WIMA first submitted an application to include Scherbyn in the museum.

“We thought once you make an application it is open for five years, but I talked to someone who said it only came up for a vote once,” Sexton said. “We are preparing to send it again.”

Sexton said she now understands that the committee that approves the applications does not meet to vote. The applications are sent out and people send in their votes.

She said more information has been added to the application nominating Scherbyn to the hall of fame.

Sexton said there are not many women in the Hall of Fame. “It is a sore subject,” she said.



Image provided by Maggie Humberston

THIS PANEL SHOWS female motorcycle pioneer Louise Scherbyn (bottom left), who founded the Women's International Motorcycle Association. A poster discovered in an old barn by Doug Holland might help Scherbyn, a Finger Lakes native, secure a spot in the American Motorcycle Associations Hall of Fame.

“There are not enough to reflect the women riders, I feel.”

When researching Scherbyn, Holland discovered there is no surprise that the groundbreaking event — first all-girl motorcycle show — took place in Waterloo. According to the WIMA biography, Scherbyn was born Nov. 9, 1903 in Waterloo.

Scherbyn's first experience with a motorcycle was when she was about 20 — sitting astride her sister's boyfriend's

1921 Indian motor-cycle. In 1924 she had her first ride in a sidecar.

By 1932, with her husband George Scherbyn's encouragement, she was riding her own bike.

George Scherbyn, another Waterloo native, was a motorcyclist himself.

It wasn't common for a woman to ride a bike in those days and Louise had some reservations. She didn't want to endanger her position at Kodak in Rochester. But she decided to buck a

popular opinion and bought an Indian Scout motorcycle. She became a lifelong Indian brand enthusiast and bragged she had only once ridden another brand — as a passenger. Scherbyn loved touring on her bike. And she was active in groups such as the American Motorcycle Association, the Canadian Motorcycle Association and The British Pathfinder's Club.

Her 1940 Indian Junior Scout was said to be the most photographed

motorcycle in the history of Indian News, published from 1926 to 1950.

Scherbyn wrote a column for Motorcycle Magazine. She was a member of the Motor Maids and helped found the Waterloo Twilight Roamers Motorcycle Club. Her 350-piece collection of motorcycle miniatures was famous.

She was inducted into the Indian Motorcycle Museum in Springfield, Mass., and in 1981, she donated her bike, her trophies and her collection of miniatures to the museum.

By the 1940's, more women were riding and Louise found herself communicating with women in other countries.

“I believed there should be a worldwide organization for all women motorcyclists,” she said in a 1952 magazine interview.

“Why not unite as a body in exchanging ideas and opinions, problems and advice.”

That was the beginning of the WIMA, the only women's international motorcycle club. It boasts 3,000 members in 20 countries. The group supports several international charities.

Louise Scherbyn died in 2003 in the hospital in Clifton Springs. She was nearly 100 years old.

Holland found that interesting. “She died in the same hospital where I was born,” he said.

He said he is still considering what to do with the poster.