

**Heroism of Teacher Is Commended**  
**Mr. Rosseel Suggests Carnegie Medal For Miss Helen Ackerman,**  
**NURSED EPIDEMIC VICTIMS**

Republican Journal, June 29, 1920

The New York World says:

During the influenza epidemic last winter the school was closed in the lonely little village of Oak Point which is in the Thousand Island district and six miles from the nearest railroad station in St. Lawrence County.

At the time Miss Helen Ackerman was wading in snow waist high to teach the little flock in the district school. She is a frail young woman and was told by the trustees to take a vacation until the epidemic was over. The school teacher went to a nearby village, but only remained there a few days, for she heard that every family in Hammond had been stricken with the dread disease.

Miss Ackerman returned to Hammond and by unaided work as a nurse saved the lives not only of her little school boys and girls, but saved the parents of some as well. She is now being recommended for a Carnegie Medal by Frank M. Rosseel, a summer resident of Hammond, and D. D. Hill, keeper of Cross Over Lighthouse Station.

Mr. Rosseel has sent the following self-explanatory letter of Miss Ackerman's heroic work to the Carnegie Hero Fund Committee at Pittsburg recommending a medal for her.

**Mr. Rosseel's Letter**

"Oak Point is a small hamlet on the St. Lawrence River in Northern New York, situated midway between Ogdensburg and Alexandria Bay, the hub centre of activity for summer tourists to the Thousand Islands. It is six miles from the nearest village on the railway and consists of 7 houses occupied by natives, a small summer hotel and one store. Fifteen or twenty summer cottages are scattered along half a mile of the river shore above and below, near the Canadian shore. Both Canadian and American shores are high and heavily wooded.

"Cross Over Island Light is a mile and a half upstream and well out in the middle, and Cole's Reef Light a mile below, near the Canadian shore. The summer houses are hidden in the woods of pine, hemlock, cedar and birch.

"In summer no more charming spot can be found on the river, but in winter the snow lies deep, and icy winds rush over the wide sweep of the frozen river and shriek and moan among the pines. The thermometer goes down to twenty degrees below zero and life is pretty bleak.

"The terrible winter of 1919-20, its fierce storms, deep snow and bitter winds will go down in local history at Oak Point, coupled with the epidemic of influenza and the name of the teacher in District No. 4 on the River Road. Whole families were laid low by the disease for weeks.

“The school was closed and the teacher, a slender girl of 21, voluntarily assumed the duty of nurse and ministering angel, going from house to house, despite the danger, unmasked and without thought of financial reward, nursing the sick and doing the housework.

“I have heard the story from grateful people she helped through that time of stress and strain, but she herself like all other heroes and heroines, makes light of the whole matter. Now she is teaching again, and to help a younger brother through school she is aiding with the housework on the farm where she boards, milking 5 cows night and morning and walking a mile and a half each way to and from her school.

“When school closes she intends going to work in the summer hotel at less than \$10 per week.

“She deserves a Carnegie Medal and a long vacation and I am telling this story in the hope that someone with an open heart and purse will see that she gets a vacation.

“I have asked the keeper of Cross Over Island Light, who, with his family lives at Oak Point in the winter to tell you briefly of conditions at the Point last winter and of the school teacher’s work in relieving distress, and I enclose this letter herewith.

“The teacher’s name is Miss Helen Ackerman and her address is Hammond P.O., St. Lawrence County, N.Y.”

### **Lightkeeper’s Plea**

Following is the letter of Mr. Hill, keeper of the light station:

“Mr. Rosseel has asked me to make a written statement of the conditions at this place during the epidemic of influenza this past winter and of the work of Miss Helen Ackerman, teacher of the local district school, in assisting those who were ill with the flu.

“There were 5 families ill with the flu at one time and in most cases the whole family was ill at the same time. In our case, as in other families, nearly all were helpless. The only available physician was six miles away; roads nearly impassable, trained nurses entirely out of reach and other household help not to be had at any price.

“School was closed and Miss Ackerman left for a vacation. Word reached her that the family where she boarded was ill. She promptly called up on the phone for particulars, saying she would come back and assist if needed, which she did the same day.

“She did the major part of the cooking, washing and nursing for this family of 11, two of them small children and 8 of the 11 ill, requiring attention day and night. In addition to the work at this house, she found time to visit 4 other houses where there was illness.

“At one she would get a bite for the patients to eat, at another she would bathe and feed the baby, clean up the house and speak a word of cheer and pass on to the next, wading snow more than knee deep on her grounds of more than one and a half miles.

“She also bought fruit from her own slender purse for the families who were ill. In this way she served five families utterly regardless of the danger to herself.

“In our own case, with four ill and three small children, one of them a baby in arms to look after, she was a Godsend.

“No one who has not been in an isolated location and ill and without help can appreciate the value of the work she did for this community.”

(This newspaper article was retyped on April 23, 2020 by Donna Demick, Town of Hammond, NY, historian. After doing some research, she was unable to determine if Miss Ackerman received the Carnegie award.)