

THINGS AND PEOPLE

Bellport Resident's Gift Bears Eccentric Provision

By Jeanne Marie Schnupp

Bellport's community center has been the hub of village activities since 1932 — it's been used for village meetings, art shows and as a recreation center for local youngsters.

But whatever else happens in the stately white building on Bell Street, one thing is certain: Nothing will ever be bought or sold inside the building. That's the way Lucy Mott wanted it, and so she coupled a magnanimous gesture of donating the land and part of the funds needed to build the center with a condition prohibiting the sale of any goods inside the building.

"She wanted it to be free for the people of the Village of Bellport," said Emily Czaja, village historian.

And her portrait, which hangs to the left of the center's stage, is a silent reminder of the stipulations of her largesse.

backed chair. The brown-haired beauty with a tiny waist smiles somewhat timidly at the artist capturing her likeness in pastels sometime in the late 1890s.

But those who knew Lucy Mott, the widow of a man who had made a fortune in the bathtub business, say there was little that was timid about the petite woman.

Mrs. Czaja remembers her as an outgoing woman who enjoyed tooling around the village in her electric car. And she was somebody who shared what she had with others.

Following World War I, Mrs. Mott turned her 36-acre estate — now the home of Bellport's Gateway Playhouse — into a recuperation center for veterans who had been gassed on foreign shores.

According to Mrs. Mott's goddaughter, Jean Steele, the lady of the manor often staged great dances for the recovering men in the estate's massive French provincial



This portrait of Lucy Mott hangs on a wall in the Bellport Community Center on Bell Street.

countryside, were free to roam the beautiful formal gardens on the manor property. Occasionally they accompanied Mrs. Mott on jaunts to Fire Island for a taste of salty sea air.

No one remembers the exact date of Mrs. Mott's death, just that it was in the late 1930s and that she was probably in her mid-60s at the time.