

**1945 April 23-29**

## **Mary Losey: Present at the Creation**



Mary Losey  
(*La Crosse Tribune*, 1945 April 29, page 10)

The World Health Organization (WHO), as part of the United Nations, has been in the news lately because of the COVID-19 pandemic. It might be surprising to learn that **La Crosse native Mary Losey** once worked for WHO, and she was also present at the 1945 San Francisco Conference that created its parent organization, the United Nations, during World War II.

Losey is a well-known name in La Crosse, and with good reason. Mary's grandfather, Joseph Walton Losey I, was a prominent lawyer for many years. He was instrumental in the establishment of Oak Grove Cemetery and the county fairgrounds in La Crosse. Losey was also responsible for the creation of Forest Avenue and his namesake, Losey Boulevard. The senior Losey died in 1901.<sup>1</sup> His wife, Florence L. (Lehman) Losey, came to the United States from Germany in 1854. She married Joseph Walton Losey in

1859 in La Crosse. She was an active member and supporter of the Baptist Church, as well as other public and private charities, and she was one of the founders of the Home for the Friendless in La Crosse. Florence Losey died in 1909.<sup>2</sup>



Losey Memorial Arch at Oak Grove Cemetery, La Crosse, Wisconsin  
(Jeff Rand, 2005 July 2)

Mary Losey's father, Joseph Walton Losey II, was born in 1879 in La Crosse. He was a football star at two colleges as a lineman. When his father died in 1901, Joseph Losey II quit Princeton to return to La Crosse. He started working for the Burlington railroad and eventually became a general claim agent for the railroad for 20 years. Losey was a director for the La Crosse Interstate Fair, and he also was in charge of the horse races there for many years. He married Ina Higbee, the daughter of Judge E. C. Higbee, in 1907. They had two children: Joseph Walton Losey III, and Mary Louise Losey.<sup>3</sup>

Mary Louise Losey attended La Crosse Central High School in the 1920s. She was part of the "Student Teacher Council Swing Out," the first vaudeville-type production ever done at the school.<sup>4</sup> Mary was also active in the Girls Athletic Association, particularly in swimming.<sup>5</sup> Losey graduated from La Crosse Central in 1927.<sup>6</sup>

Joseph W. Losey II died while his daughter was still in high school. He died in February 1925 of appendicitis; he was only 46 years old.<sup>7</sup>

Mary Losey's college education was of the exclusive kind. She attended what is now known as the [Stoneleigh-Burnham School](#) for girls in Northampton, Massachusetts. Then she studied at the

prestigious [Wellesley College](#), near Boston, Massachusetts, where she graduated with a degree in history in 1932. At Wellesley, Losey was the president of the International Relations Club.<sup>8</sup>

Shortly after her college graduation 1932, Mary's engagement to Frank Taylor Ostrander, Jr., of Syracuse, New York, was announced.<sup>9</sup> This either ended in a broken engagement or a very short marriage, because Mary Losey married another man three years later.

Following her college graduation, Losey became one of the original staff members of the documentary series March of Time.<sup>10</sup> She worked in the script department for [March of Time](#).<sup>11</sup>

In June 1935, Mary Losey married Spencer Mapes in New York City. He was from a prominent New York City family. Mapes had attended a prep school for boys in Orange, New Jersey, called the [Carteret Academy](#). His widowed mother had a home in New York City and one in New Jersey. Mapes was working as a publicist in New York City at the time of their marriage, and the couple made their home in New York City.<sup>12</sup>

Ten years later, at the end of April 1945, Mary Losey was working for the Office of War Information for the government of Canada while her husband lived in Chevy Chase, Maryland. Losey was charged with running a small theater in San Francisco at the [St. Francis hotel](#) for delegates to the conference that was organizing what would become the United Nations. Her theater would "show the documentary and information films of the various governments, news reels and any other important events that turn up" five days a week. There were also to be receptions and speakers at the shows. Her official title was "film exhibition director, secretariat, [United Nations Conference on International Security](#)."<sup>13</sup>

After nearly six years of war, the Allied nations wanted to formalize their alliance in the coming postwar world. They were also looking to create an international organization that could prevent war and be more effective in addressing world crises than the post-World War I League of Nations, which the United States had never joined.

The seed was planted at the [Dumbarton Oaks conference](#) near Washington D. C. in the summer of 1944 with a proposal to establish a postwar international organization to prevent wars and promote world stability.<sup>14</sup>

With Allied victory almost assured in early 1945, delegations from 50 countries met in [San Francisco](#) from April 25 to June 26. The main Allied powers---the United States, Great Britain, Russia, and China--were the key participants in the conference. Over 2,535 press and radio reporters covered this momentous event in world history. What became the [charter for the United Nations](#) eventually was made up of 111 articles in 19 chapters. The purpose of the new international organization was delineated in the preamble:

- protect future generations from war
- acknowledge fundamental human rights
- support equal rights for men and women
- promote treaties and international law
- promote social progress and better standards of living
- practice tolerance and live together in peace
- maintain international peace and security
- discourage armed force in international relations

- promote economic and social advancement for all people<sup>15</sup>

Since its inception, the United Nations has been more successful in its humanitarian aims than in preventing war. Later on, Mary Losey would contribute to the humanitarian work of the United Nations.



([un.org/en/](http://un.org/en/))

Somewhere along the way, Losey taught at [Sarah Lawrence College](#) in Bronxville, New York. Spencer Mapes worked for the New York State Employment Service.<sup>16</sup>

Shortly after World War II, Mary Losey was one of the organizers and secretary-treasurer of International Film Associates (IFA), a business organization that sponsored documentary films. IFA provided research, production, and distribution of documentary films for organizations such as the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration, the Intercultural Education Bureau, the Children's Bureau, and the American Library Association. It also served as a professional organization for documentary filmmakers.<sup>17</sup> Mary Losey was the American Representative of International Film Associates in 1947.<sup>18</sup>

It was during this time that Losey had an encounter with the racist policies of the era. One hot summer day in Washington D.C., Mary Losey took her twin boys, the daughter of a friend, and the Losey's maid to a soda fountain in a drug store. They waited a long time without being served. Mary asked the clerk why they were being ignored, and the clerk replied that the store could not serve a "n\_\_\_\_r" [presumably the Losey's maid]. Mary Losey protested in person and in writing without a satisfactory response.<sup>19</sup>

Mary Losey made documentary films for England, France, Canada, and other countries.<sup>20</sup>

By the late 1950's, Mary Losey had become the film and photo officer for the World Health Organization in Geneva, Switzerland. Her main responsibility was producing documentary films on health for WHO. The work took her to many countries. Some of the films she made were silent to there would be no language barrier for anyone. On a visit to La Crosse during 11th World Health Assembly in Minneapolis held in the summer of 1958, Losey said she loved living in Geneva because of "its international atmosphere." Her twin sons, Peter and Anthony Mapes, were mostly educated in Switzerland, but they planned to attend college in the United States.<sup>21</sup>



(who.int)



Mary Losey Mapes in 1958  
(La Crosse Tribune, 1958 June 22, page 13)

Losey returned to New York City to work at the United Nations in 1960.<sup>22</sup> She was the information officer of the World Health Organization Liaison Office at the United Nations. Losey was a member of the [Wellesley Club](#) and the [Overseas Press Club](#). Her marriage to Spencer Mapes had ended in a divorce sometime before.<sup>23</sup>



In August 1963, she married her second husband, William Osgood Field, in New York City. Field, a 1926 graduate of Harvard University, was on the staff of the [American Geographical Society](#).<sup>24</sup> Field had been an officer in the Army Signal Corps during World War II, and he established the Department of Exploration and Field Research in the American Geographical Society in 1946. His specialty was studying glaciers and arctic regions. His first wife had died in 1960.<sup>25</sup> Field was also a descendant of Cornelius Vanderbilt.<sup>26</sup> The newlyweds made their home in New York City.<sup>27</sup>

They later moved to Putham County, New York. In 1978 they made their last move was to Great Barrington, Massachusetts.<sup>28</sup>

Field, who had started working for the American Geographical Society in 1940, retired in 1969, but he continued to do work on glaciers for the organization. He died in 1994 of cancer at the age of 90. He and Mary Losey Field were living in Great Barrington, Massachusetts by then. Dr. Melvin G. Marcus, a professor of geography at Arizona State University, said ". . . Bill Field is one of the few key elders who sired the field of glaciology."<sup>29</sup>

Less than a year later, Mary Losey Field died on April 21, 1995, in Lenox, Massachusetts, at the Kimball Farms Retirement Community.<sup>30</sup>

Both of the children of Joseph and Ina Losey chose careers in film. Although not as famous as her [film-director brother, Joseph Losey \(1909-1984\)](#), Mary Losey used her cinematic skills to inform and educate. During World War II, she had made her contributions on behalf of Canada and the San Francisco Conference, but her impact was even greater after the war in the work she did for the World Health Organization, birthed from the United Nations, that sought to improve the lives of millions of people around the world.

Revised: 2020 May 15

Jeff Rand  
Adult Services Librarian  
La Crosse Public Library  
jrand@lacrosselibrary.org

### Sources & Notes:

<sup>1</sup> "Funeral Of Joseph Walton Losey Will Be Held Wednesday," *La Crosse Tribune*, La Crosse, Wisconsin, 1925 February 17, page 1.

<sup>2</sup> "Mrs. J. W. Losey Expires Today," *La Crosse Tribune*, La Crosse, Wisconsin, 1909 February 6, page 6.

<sup>3</sup> *La Crosse Tribune*, 1925 February 17.

<sup>4</sup> "Central High Vaudeville Is Big Success," *La Crosse Tribune*, La Crosse, Wisconsin, 1926 March 20, page 6.

<sup>5</sup> "Seniors Win Swimming Meet At Central," *La Crosse Tribune*, La Crosse, Wisconsin, 1927 April 10, page 5.

<sup>6</sup> "High School Swimming Clubs Hold Joint Tourney Friday," *La Crosse Tribune*, La Crosse, Wisconsin, 1927 April 10, page 19. This article mentions that she is one of the top swimmers in the senior class.

<sup>7</sup> *La Crosse Tribune*, 1925 February 17. Surgeries for inflamed appendixes have been routine for decades, but not in the 1920s.

<sup>8</sup> "Mary Losey Finishing Wellesley," *La Crosse Tribune*, La Crosse, Wisconsin, 1932 June 20, page 4.

<sup>9</sup> "Mary Losey Engaged to New York Man," *La Crosse Tribune*, La Crosse, Wisconsin, 1932 June 27, page 4.

<sup>10</sup> "Mary Losey Field," *La Crosse Tribune*, La Crosse, Wisconsin, 1995 April 23, page B7.

---

<sup>11</sup> "Mary Losey Mapes Here From Switzerland For 11th World Health Assembly," *La Crosse Tribune*, La Crosse, Wisconsin, 1958 June 22, page 13.

<sup>12</sup> "Mary Louise Losey Is New York Bride Of Spencer Mapes," *La Crosse Tribune*, La Crosse, Wisconsin, 1935 June 9, page 4. The newspaper article spells the school as "Cartaret."

<sup>13</sup> "Mary Losey," *La Crosse Tribune*, La Crosse, Wisconsin, 1945 April 29, page 10. At this time, her mother was living at 250 West Avenue South in La Crosse. Another local person who was present at the San Francisco conference was former Bangor resident Clifford Gessler. Gessler, then living in Oakland, attended a session of the United Nations Security Council. He reported that he saw V. M. Molotov, Soviet commissar of foreign affairs; Sir Anthony Eden, Great Britain's foreign minister; and Field Marshal Jan Smuts, chairman of the South African delegation. (*Bangor Independent*, Bangor, Wisconsin, 1945 May 3, page 3.)

<sup>14</sup> Louis L. Snyder, *Louis L. Snyder's Historical Guide to World War II* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1982), 200.

<sup>15</sup> Snyder, 612.

<sup>16</sup> Edward B. Marks, *Still Counting: Achievements and Follies of a Nonagenarian* (Lanham, Maryland: Hamilton Books, 2005), 207.

<sup>17</sup> Marks, 207.

<sup>18</sup> "Wellesley Club In Busy Program," *Washington Evening Star*, 1947 February 13, page 29.

<sup>19</sup> Marks, 207-208.

<sup>20</sup> *La Crosse Tribune*, 1958 June 22.

<sup>21</sup> *La Crosse Tribune*, 1958 June 22.

<sup>22</sup> *La Crosse Tribune*, 1995 April 23.

<sup>23</sup> "Mrs. Mary L. Mapes Is Wed Here to William Osgood Field," *The New York Times*, 1963 August 9, page 11.

<sup>24</sup> "Mary L. Mapes Eastern Bride," *La Crosse Tribune*, La Crosse, Wisconsin, 1963 August 13, page 8.

<sup>25</sup> Maynard M. Miller, "William Osgood Field, 1904-1994," *The American Alpine Club*, 1995, <http://publications.americanalpineclub.org/articles/12199536300/William-Osgood-Field-1904-1994>. Miller also recounts that Field made 25 scientific trips to Alaska during his life, with his first visit being in 1925. Field published many articles in *Geographical Review*, numerous glacier maps for the American Geological Society, and the three-volume *Mountain Glaciers of the Northern Hemisphere* (United States Army, 1975). He accumulated many honors for his work, including an honorary doctorate from the University of Alaska-Fairbanks. Miller writes that Field "had a deep respect for nature" and was "an early conservationist."

<sup>26</sup> *The New York Times*, 1963 August 9.

<sup>27</sup> *La Crosse Tribune*, 1963 August 13.

<sup>28</sup> *La Crosse Tribune*, 1995 April 23.

<sup>29</sup> "William Osgood Field, 90, Studied Glaciers," *The New York Times*, 1994 June 19, page 6B.

<sup>30</sup> *La Crosse Tribune*, 1995 April 23.