

Inductee fought for truth

By JACK ROSENBERRY

SENECA FALLS — President Reagan called Sandra O'Connor, his first woman nominee to the U.S. Supreme Court, "a person for all seasons." Alexander Sanger describes his late grandmother, social activist Margaret Sanger, about the same way.

Sanger was here Saturday as his grandmother and slave-turned-freedom-fighter Sojourner Truth were inducted into the National Women's Hall of Fame.

In accepting Mrs. Sanger's award, her grandson described the birth-control advocate as a woman of single-minded determination who led a life filled with contradiction.

"She fought for her truth, yet bent the truth when it suited her purpose," he said. "She led women to knowledge of birth control, yet insisted she was the only leader who could take them there."

"She fought for the poor, yet loved the champagne and parties of the wealthy," he continued. "She brought science and medicine into birth control, yet believed in seances. She was the complete feminist, yet lied about her age."

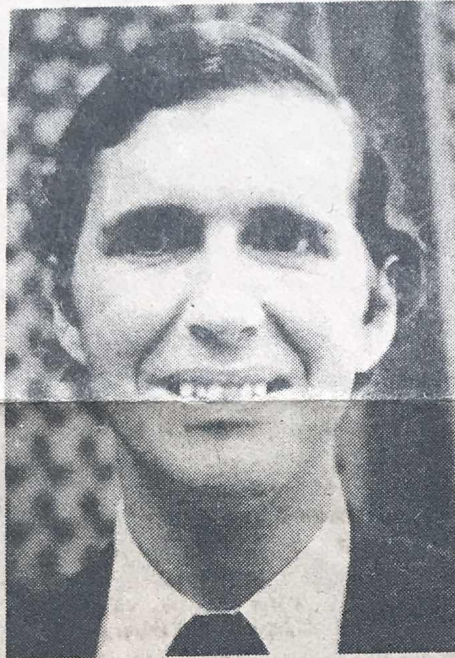
Sanger, a lawyer in a New York firm, continues his grandmother's work advocating birth-control "whenever anyone asks me to speak," he said. "I'm always happy to do it."

His memories of his grandmother are as a young boy. He was 18 when she died in 1966, but she was in ill health in an Arizona nursing home most of the last few years of her life, he recalled.

But he remembers her as "wonderful with young children," and playing ball with him and his brothers.

Sanger said as a child he didn't understand that his grandmother was world-renowned.

"It meant nothing to me as a 9- or



Alexander Sanger

10-year-old," he said.

But as he got older he learned about her, and in college wrote his thesis on his grandmother's work.

"What I knew about her before I started is that she was this great woman who accomplished this goal (founding the birth control movement) against impossible odds," he said.

But his research uncovered more.

Mrs. Sanger didn't start as a feminist, her grandson said. She was first a political radical and anarchist in turn-of-the century labor wars.

Her arrests on obscenity charges for distributing birth control information helped make Mrs. Sanger famous. But Alexander Sanger discovered her first arrest was in a labor riot.

"She was on a picket line and an Irish cop asked her to move so she belted him," Sanger said.

His research, however, hasn't uncovered why his grandmother was so strong-willed and obsessive. "I've never been able to put a finger on what drove her," he said.

It may have something to do with her upbringing, however. Her father was also a political radical, which led people in Corning (her hometown) to shun the family and boycott her father's business. As a result, the family of 11 children grew up in poverty, which may have embittered Margaret, Sanger said.

"I think that for whatever reason she wanted to be famous," he said.

The best example of her contradictory lifestyle is her approach to medicine and science, Sanger said. His grandmother was a nurse and wanted to make birth control clinically acceptable to organized medicine.

But in spite of this "She believed in quack cures for everything," he said. She spent much of her life attending seances trying to reach the spirit of her daughter who died at the age of 5.

Sanger's last memory of his grandmother is from Christmas 1965, and serves as a metaphor for her determination.

Mrs. Sanger was ill, nearly incoherent, when the family visited the nursing home on Christmas, her grandson said. His father Grant Sanger, had some champagne to toast the holiday, and he opened it in the room.

"She saw that bottle of champagne and she came back from wherever she was and asked for a glass," Sanger said.

The family and doctors told her she couldn't have it, but she insisted. Finally, they relented and gave her some champagne, which she sipped through a straw, Sanger said.

Also on Saturday, Frances Valentine of Battle Creek, Mich., Sojourner Truth's burial place, accepted an award on behalf of Truth. The award will be kept by the Historical Society of Battle Creek.

Two inducted into hall

(From Page C-1)

All signers were white except black abolitionist Frederick Douglass.

The signers had political roots in two major movements of the day. Wellman said the Free Soil Party, anti-slavery, pro-temprance, formed the basis for some signers, while the very liberal Quaker movement in Waterloo formed another group.

"The declaration took up where Jefferson had left off 72 years before," said Wellman.

The final panelists to speak were professors Paul Grebinger of Eisenhower College and Corrine A. Guntzel of Wells College. They researched Stanton's 15-year residency here from 1847 to 1862 and prepared a paper on her domestic economy and lifestyle.

Grebinger detailed the findings of an archeological dig around the Stanton house, while Guntzel discussed her feelings about family, homelife and home management in her papers.

In the morning, the Convention Days and sesquicentennial celebration began with the 2nd annual 10-kilometer race. Some 150 entrants participated in the 6.2 mile run.

Winners were Vicki Brown of Waterloo, Mary Bauer of Newfield, Jane Banks of Bethel, Vt. and Jane Shumway of Seneca Falls for the women's age divisions and Bret Yost of Rochester, overall race winner James Frazier of Moravia with a course-record time of 33:15, Murray Banks of Bethel, Vt., John Coons of Canandaigua and Bill Ireland of Gorham for the men.

The scene shifted to Elizabeth Cady Stanton Park for raising of the flag from the World War II troop carrier USS Elizabeth Cady Stanton, donated by the ship's last officer, Benjamin Reeves of Washington, D.C. who has had the flag since the ship was decommissioned in 1946.

Village officials also buried a sesquicentennial time capsule containing a variety of 1981 items, to be opened at the village's 200th birthday.

Among the speakers was Kathryn Clark Stanton, great-great-granddaughter of the famed women's rights leader Mrs. Stanton now lives in Atlanta, Ga.

"I was never led to believe I was second class as the only girl in a family of four brothers. I was encouraged to do anything I wanted. Elizabeth Cady Stanton was not so encouraged in her day and that made her all the more determined to fight for women's rights," said her descendant.

She agreed women have come a long way and won some battles, but "we still haven't won the war." She referred to the Equal Rights Amendment, first introduced in 1929 and still not made part of the Constitution.

She also said female stereotypes still exist. "There has been a lot of hard work and perserverence by men and women for this cause. We must not be smug and complacent, but make this a battle of love," she concluded.

