

Tom Marshall's Weekly News, December 5, 2016

The Emmerts of Delaware: Ruth Cowgill Emmert (ca. 1898–ca. 1990) was a Delaware restaurateur. Originally from the Dover area, she was a member of Camden Friends Meeting, and although she seldom lived near a Quaker meetinghouse, she retained her interest in the Religious Society of Friends all her life. In the early 1930s, she was operating a family restaurant in an old home on South State Street in Dover called the Duval Tea Room. One of her specialties was delicious homemade dinner rolls. By the late 1930s, she had built a new Duval on State Street just north of the Richardson Hotel, and her old restaurant became known as the Pleasant Inn. I think she still had a hand in operating it, as the food was very good at both locations. Before World War II, the name of the newer place was changed to the Dinner Bell Inn.

Mrs. Cowgill (pronounced “Cogle”), Ruth Emmert’s mother, was a respected real estate agent in Rehoboth Beach, and Ruth and her family moved back and forth between Dover and Rehoboth. It was not long before she opened a Dinner Bell Inn on Christian Street in the resort town which was open about six months each year. She and her elder son Lockwood continued to operate and expand the Dover operation, and she soon built a small motel that was attached to the Rehoboth property. Her younger son David assisted with the Rehoboth operation. Both Dinner Bells were highly successful from World War II until the 1980s.

Ruth spent most of her time in Rehoboth, while her son “Lock” and his wife continued a highly successful Dinner Bell restaurant in Dover. When Delaware’s General Assembly was in session, the Dinner Bell was a favorite early-evening watering hole. When I was active in the Delaware Travel Council in the 1960s, we had most of our Kent County meetings over cocktails and dinner at the Dinner Bell.

Ruth retained her interest in Quakerism, but there was no Friends Meeting near Rehoboth, so she had one in her home, usually attended by about six people. When our “Game Group,” half of whom were Quakers, gathered at my parents’ home over Labor Day Weekend, we would sometimes double the attendance at Ruth Emmert’s Friends Meeting on Sunday morning.

Dave Emmert, her younger son, had a son, “Butch,” a well-known auctioneer in the Rehoboth area. Butch auctioned off the furnishings of our Rehoboth house in 1983, but he is best known for his dealing in low-numbered Delaware license registrations, of which he has auctioned many. I think Delaware License #6 brought over \$600,000 a few years ago! Ruth’s daughter Edwina (“Win”) married Richard Macadam, whose father was an NVF executive and eventually sales manager for the company in California. Dick Macadam was an automotive designer and had top jobs in this field, first with Packard and then with Chrysler Corporation. He was a first cousin of Kathyne Schulz Mitchell of Woodside Farm.

When Ruth Emmert sold the Dinner Bell and retired, she intended to live in a Quaker retirement community. Her former employees, most of whom were black, tried their best to get her to stay in Rehoboth, promising to take turns in caring for her at no cost. Generous as this was, she thought better of it and moved to Penn’s Woods, a Friends Retirement Community in Newtown, Bucks County, Pennsylvania, where she died.