

Tom Marshall's Weekly News, April 6, 2015

Eleanor Marshall Reynolds (1924–1999): This past weekend's Easter Egg Hunts at Auburn Heights bring back memories of the hunts between 1926 and 1939 for the benefit of Eleanor Marshall and her three male cousins, all born in 1924. These hunts were held on the lawn at Auburn Heights; on the lawn at Woodcrest, Eleanor's parents' home in Yorklyn; or on the lawn of Linger Longer, the Mancill family home on Kennett Pike between Mendenhall and Hamorton. Eleanor's three cousins were twins Bob and Alan Mancill and yours truly, and all the hunts, usually on Easter Sunday, were photographed by my father on 16 mm. black-and-white movie film. The Mancill twins were sons of Warren and Clarence Marshall's only sister, Anna Marshall Mancill—Alan was killed in action in Europe in World War II; Bob is still living.

Eleanor Annette Marshall was born on January 8, 1924, the eldest of the four cousins. She had one sister, Lorraine, 11½ years older, who was married in 1935. Eleanor attended Wilmington Friends School through the 10th grade and then was enrolled in Miss Baldwin's School for girls in Bryn Mawr. She completed her education at Oberlin College, graduating in 1946 (I think). During the 10 years she and I attended Wilmington Friends, one of the two families alternated in getting us to and from school. In looking back, this was quite a time commitment on their parts. It seemed that most mornings it was John McGovern, who worked for Eleanor's father, Warren, or my father, who had retired from National Fibre and who would do Wilmington errands and often call at the Packard Motor Company of Wilmington. The substitutes were Bertha Marshall, Eleanor's mother, and Clifford "Cliffey" Murray, who worked at Auburn Heights. Through June 1937, Eleanor and I attended the "old school" at 4th and West Streets; after that it was at the Alapocas campus.

The Mancill twins and I often kidded Eleanor mercilessly. She usually took it well. Her parents and most of her friends called her Bonnie. The twins and I called her "Elner" or even "Elmer," which she didn't like. She was very active in the Young Friends (Quakers) movement around Philadelphia and became involved as a spokesperson for liberal causes. For a time after World War II, she lived in the university section of Philadelphia and worked on affordable housing and other needs of the poor. She became interested in Friendship House (English translation) near Hannover, Germany, and raised funds in this country on its behalf. Just after World War II, she bought the 140-acre Oversee Farm near Yorklyn, most of which was bought by the state about eight years ago and now is a part of the Auburn Heights Preserve.

Eleanor was much like her mother, Bertha, in that both enjoyed the symphony and the opera as well as evening lectures, and neither was afraid of anything. Sometimes together but mostly by themselves, they would drive into Philadelphia, returning alone late at night through the worst sections of the city with no fear of being apprehended. They never were.

On January 2, 1960, Eleanor married Benjamin J. Reynolds of Avondale, Pennsylvania, a conservative Republican, which somewhat tempered her humanitarian activities. They had two sons, Warren and John, and the family lived in the old Reynolds homestead near Avondale. They restored the historic Miller House, also near Avondale, and developed Somerset Lake, an upscale housing area on Broad Run, a tributary of White Clay Creek. Ben was a member of the Pennsylvania Legislature at Harrisburg and was interested in many conservation projects. He was one of the first to promote spray irrigation for farmland, which he put into practice, reducing the load on sewage systems. Unfortunately, he died in 1976 at the age of 50.

While raising her two boys, Eleanor continued her active life style. She was especially supportive of worldwide efforts to improve the lives of the under-privileged and undernourished and was a longtime advocate for CARE. She moved back to Woodcrest, her parents' old home at Yorklyn, and restored and refurnished it beautifully. She had a knack for acquiring fine furnishings and arranging floral decorations. As did her parents, she loved travel and bought some priceless pieces in places like Bangkok and Singapore. Active until a few weeks before she died, she passed away in the summer of 1999 with complications from melanoma.

In preparing for her demise, Eleanor created the Marshall-Reynolds Charitable Trust, the income from which supports the many causes in which she had great interest. Her longtime financial secretary, Jacklen Powell, is managing director for this trust, which has been very supportive of the educational efforts of the Friends of Auburn Heights Preserve. After all, Eleanor hunted a lot of Easter eggs on the lawn at Auburn Heights.