

## *Obituaries*

### AMY BESS MILLER

Amy Bess Miller, a civic leader in Massachusetts and an active member of the American Antiquarian Society for twenty-seven years, died on February 23, 2003, at her home in Pittsfield, Massachusetts. She was 90 years old.

She was a woman of many interests, probably best known as the founder of Hancock Shaker Village, Inc., and its president from 1959 to 1990. John Ott, director of the National Heritage Museum, formerly director of the Shaker museum village, summed up her contribution this way: 'Miller would run the village, tend to restoration or a food festival or a craft fair, or to the publication of books, while at the same time engaging in fundraising. She was such a powerhouse. She practiced leadership in everything and kept her staff energized. She married the collections, the land, the philosophy and the buildings into one. It was a picture of the Shakers as they were in Berkshire County—a powerful story.'

She was also strongly committed to the success of fine libraries—the American Antiquarian Society and the Berkshire Athenaeum in Pittsfield among them. From 1964 to 1970, she served on the Massachusetts Board of Library Commissioners. To attend commission meetings, her custom was to travel to Worcester and ride to Boston with another commission member, Forrest W. Seymour, then editor of the Worcester *Telegram and Gazette*. Forrest seldom returned from those meetings without describing Amy Bess as 'delightful' and a beacon of common sense. The Berkshire *Eagle* once observed that 'she demonstrated a capacity for

straight talk, for unifying divergent interests in a single purpose, and for achieving a wide variety of goals with a minimum of fuss.'

Amy Bess and Lawrence K. 'Pete' Miller were married on October 14, 1933, at All Saints Church in Worcester. He was publisher and editor of the family-owned Berkshire *Eagle* between 1941 and the mid-1980s. He helped make it into one of the most respected small daily papers in the country. Pete died in 1991.

She was born in El Paso, Texas, where her father, Dr. Frederick R. Williams, was physician for a copper company. Her mother was Elizabeth Avery Taft Williams. Amy Bess came to Worcester when she was five years old, and was raised in the city. She graduated from Bancroft School in Worcester and Miss Hall's School in Pittsfield, then studied art history and architecture at the Sorbonne.

Growing up in Worcester, she early encountered the American Antiquarian Society. Her uncle, Frank C. Smith, was a prominent Worcester attorney, president of the Worcester Art Museum, and a director of the Worcester *Telegram and Gazette*. He was also a neighbor of Clarence S. Brigham, long-time librarian and president of AAS. 'As I grew older,' Amy Bess recalled, 'I was sometimes offered a de Voto martini by Clarence S. Brigham, my uncle's great friend. Very often I was invited to meet his visitors and listen to the conversation.' When she was elected to membership in AAS in 1976, she thought back to those early years.

Her interest in the Shaker religious movement developed after the couple received a Shaker dining table as a wedding gift. By the late 1950s, when the last few Shakers at Hancock were planning to leave, Amy Bess was immersed in Shaker history and culture. She was determined to preserve the village and the tradition as a gift to future generations. She toured museums and historical villages in the United States and Canada, and raised money to restore the seventeen buildings at the village. She wrote a book about Shaker cooking, another on the Shaker image, yet another on Shaker medicinal herbs, and a fourth describing Hancock Shaker Village as a 'City of Peace.' Shaker furniture from her fine collection was donated to the museum.

Among other interests, Amy Bess was a long-term trustee of Berkshire Medical Center, the Berkshire Museum, Miss Hall's School, the Massachusetts Audubon Society, and the Shaker Museum and Library (Old Chatham, New York). She received honorary degrees from Williams College, North Adams State College, Rhode Island School of Design, and Muhlenberg College.

As a member of AAS, she attended at least five annual or semi-annual meetings and was often in touch with the Society, which she presented with several volumes. One was her own book 'The Shaker Image,' and another Mary Richmond's bibliography of Shaker literature, which Amy Bess published. The arrival of the latter volume led Marcus McCorison, librarian and president from 1960 to 1992, to observe that the American Antiquarian Society has one of the strongest collections of early American printed material on the Shakers.

Amy Bess Miller leaves a daughter, Margo Miller of Boston, and three sons, Kelton B. Miller II of Shaftsbury, Vermont, Michael G. Miller and Mark C. Miller of Pittsfield. Her sister Margery Adams of Charlotte, North Carolina, five grandchildren, and three great-grandchildren also survive her. A memorial service was held at Hancock Shaker Village.

Robert C. Achorn

## ROBERT CUSHMAN

Robert Cushman, businessman, statesman, and Worcester civic leader, died on January 7, 2003, at the age of eighty-six. Bob graduated from Phillips Andover Academy and Dartmouth College. He was a good student and athlete, having been captain of swimming at Dartmouth. Soon after college, Bob married Mary 'Polly' Shorey after wooing her at Smith College. It was there that I came to know him, as he stayed overnight with me at Amherst College, between his 'trysts' with Polly. He often told me

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