

## *Obituaries*

### JOHN WHITIN CURTIS

'Longtime civic leader.' That's how the *Worcester Telegram and Gazette* summed up the life of John Whitin Curtis. While John deserved to be celebrated by each of the solemn words in that phrase, the weighty and self-serious image which usually attends it does not apply. John leavened his leading role in so many Worcester institutions with a quick laugh, cross-generational spontaneity, and a natural good humor that was often devilish. John cared about people and, although a bachelor all his life, he loved their company. When a second martini was poured, his eyes would beam. The conversation was just beginning.

John W. Curtis was born in Worcester in 1912, the son of Philip N. and Marjorie Whitin Curtis. His Curtis ancestors linked him to the founding of Worcester. His Whitin ancestors linked him to the industrial development of the greater Worcester area, especially the Blackstone Valley. John's early academic preparation was at the Bancroft School in Worcester and at the Hotchkiss School in Lakeville, Connecticut. He graduated with the class of 1934 from Yale College and attended the Harvard Business School after that. This traditional progression was jarred by World War II, a substantial part of which he spent serving as a naval lieutenant in the Aleutians.

Just before and after the war, John worked variously for the Whittall Carpet Company, the Baker Box Company, and R. H. Macy's in New York. In 1957 he joined the Worcester County National Bank, from which he retired as a trust officer in 1976. Trusts and estates were a natural calling. John's good judgment, humor, and discretion made him a well-appreciated counselor. In a world of increasingly fast money, he was someone to be trusted.

Although John was successful at the bank, he made a broader mark on the city by leading, advising, and supporting many of its educational, cultural, religious, and historical institutions. The catalogue is long and bears listing. He was president of the Worcester Historical Society, the Worcester Players Club, the Bancroft School Alumni Association, and the Visiting Nurse Association of Central Massachusetts. He served as chairman of the Massachusetts Historical Commission and was a director of the Salisbury Mansion Associates and the Worcester Foothills Theater. His affiliations were long as well as deep. He was a trustee of the Bancroft School for twenty-five years. In addition to being a corporator and a trustee of the Worcester Art Museum, John was its treasurer for seventeen years. For thirty-three years he was a trustee of the Rural Cemetery and president of its board for eighteen years. He was a member of the Worcester Fire Society, the Worcester Club, and the Tatnuck Country Club.

John's engagement with the American Antiquarian Society was a full one. He was elected to membership in 1963 and attended meetings regularly over the next thirty years. He served on several committees: on the Hall from 1967 to 1971, nominating in 1971, and development from 1973 to 1976. In addition to supporting the Society on an annual basis, he contributed books and he remembered AAS generously in his will.

My earliest memory of John dates from the summer when I was three years old. He drove me down east from Worcester to Somesville, Maine, and I stared at him the whole way, some six or seven hours, which proves he could hold the attention of a demanding audience. In 1981 he and I also celebrated jointly 'The Party of the Century,' his seventieth birthday and my thirtieth. It was a bright fall afternoon in Woodstock, Connecticut. The celebrants were all ages and sizes. John was in his element, equally engaged with youthful friends of mine and more seasoned friends of his.

Over the years, our family stole him regularly as one of our own, although we did have to share him with his own family. He spent the summers and as much time as he could in Woodstock, Ver-

mont. He fished each year with a cousin at her lodge in Maine. He always seemed to be in transit visiting family and friends.

John combined several unusual traits: he listened well but he never missed a chance to speak; he loved meeting new people but he was loyal to old friends; and, most unusually, he laughed at other people's jokes as well as his own. That is one reason why people remember him for his vitality and brightness of spirit.

These days, it is more natural to achieve civic prominence from a position of commercial or public authority. As a well-respected trust officer at the local bank, John did not approach life that way. In fact, I doubt if he ever had any self-conscious interest in civic prominence *per se*. It simply crept up on him over the years. His commitment to local institutions came naturally. It was bred into him. But his enjoyment of the moment and his enthusiasm for the future was his own doing. He should be remembered well for both legacies.

His sister, Marjorie A. Pease of Woodstock, Vermont, predeceased him by a year. He leaves two nephews, a niece, and an extended network of cousins. He also leaves many friends, old and young.

John Herron, Jr.

### FREDERICK WILLIAMS HEQUEMBOURG

Elected to membership in the American Antiquarian Society in 1984, Frederick W. Hequembourg died on January 26, 1994, at the age of seventy-six. Born in Brooklyn, New York, Fred Hequembourg graduated from Union College and pursued graduate studies at the University of Rochester. After working for American Cyanamid for nine years, he became the proprietor of the Hequembourg Insurance Agency in Schenectady and later, in Charlton, New York, where he lived for forty-two years.

He was a leader in his community, serving as supervisor of the

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