

THOMAS CLINTON WICKENDEN FAMILY

By Thomas H. Wickenden II

Tom and Jean

Thomas Clinton met his future wife, Jean Dunn, in 1937, when she was just thirteen years old, in Awosting, NJ, where both their parents had summer homes. In 1942, after dating for years through high school and college, Tom and Jean were married at Jean's home in Paterson, NJ. They lived in New York City at that time while Tom attended Columbia University's College of Physicians and Surgeons. Their first son, Thomas Howard Wickenden II was born at Columbia Presbyterian Hospital in 1944, during a hurricane. The first Thomas Howard walked to the hospital from his office to see his grandson and Jean remembered that he arrived thoroughly soaked from the rain. The country was in the middle of World War II when Tom graduated, so he moved with his wife and son to McKinney, Texas, where Tom joined the Army and began a special program at the regional hospital for training as an Anesthesiologist. Their second son, Michael James Wickenden was born at that time.

First Homes

When the war ended in 1945, Tom was discharged and after a temporary stay at his parents' summer cottage in Awosting, they relocated to Paterson, NJ, near Jean's parents' home to complete an internship at a hospital there. Their first real home was in Hyde Park, NY, on the Hudson River, and Tom worked up the road at a hospital in Poughkeepsie. They loved their large, old Victorian house just a few blocks from the railway tracks and the river and only a mile or two from the Franklin Delano Roosevelt estate. I remember that it had a coal furnace in the cellar with a bin that had to be filled several times a week in the winter. It also had a barn, and an ice house in the field out back, which Tom had filled with cement to create a swimming pool for me and my brother. Each summer as a boy, Tom used to travel back to Covington, Ohio, to visit his grandfather Shuman on his Mother's side. In the afternoons, he helped his grandfather work mulch and compost into the big vegetable garden behind the house. In Hyde Park he followed this practice by putting in a large garden and raising rabbits in a hutch in the barn. I remember when the farmer who was driving a tractor across the field to prepare it for father's garden hit a wasp's nest, hopped off the tractor and jumped into the pool! Feeding table scraps to the rabbits and working their droppings into the garden soil, Tom was an organic gardener long before "organic" became a fad. I remember learning to ride a bike on the sidewalk but swerving and crashing over the handlebars into the compost bin on the side of the barn. Fortunately, the compost was soft enough to break my fall, so thank goodness for organic gardening!

Back to Short Hills

My sister Elizabeth was born at the hospital in Poughkeepsie and although we were close enough for grandparents and others to visit, Tom and Jean must have felt a bit isolated. After several years they relocated to Short Hills, New Jersey, where Tom joined his parents, Thomas and Dee, as well as his sister Mary Dee and her girls. Family continued to be an important experience for us, with many birthdays and holidays celebrated together with our grandparents and cousins. Not all my memories were joyous, however. One evening, after a joint celebration at our grandparents' house of my cousin Sally and my birthdays, I found it hard to walk without bending over. I remember crawling up the stairs to go to bed. After visits by my father and another doctor, I was diagnosed with appendicitis and my father drove me to a hospital in Newark that night, so I could have an emergency appendectomy. Except for trips to various vacation homes, the families of Thomas Clinton and Mary Dee were each raised in the village of Short Hills, New Jersey, living close to their parents Tom and Dee. Their children attended local schools until they went off to college and then on to careers that took them far and wide. Tom and Jean lived for several years in a home on Hobart Avenue, across from the Racket Club, where I took dancing lessons, and then moved up the hill to Minnisink Avenue, one block from the Short Hills Club, where we would swim in the pond, skate on the ice in the winter, and learn to play tennis and squash. My father put in a large organic garden which he worked each afternoon, perhaps to ease the tension from starting each day at 6 am in the operating room at Overlook Hospital in Summit. He also took a weekly trip into the country to a tuberculosis hospital in Glen Gardner, so that he would drive by the farms and pick up horse manure for his garden, which he would bring home in peach baskets in the trunk of the car. Our home was a beautiful old three-story stone house that mother christened "Stonewick."

Vacation Homes

Vacation homes were always important places for the Wickenden families to gather, starting with the TRW family cottage at Lakeside on the shores of Lake Erie about 60 miles East of Toledo. After moving to the New Jersey, Thomas Howard and his family spend many summers in Awosting sailing their star boat in the fleet on Greenwood Lake, which was situated half in New Jersey and half in New York state. In the races on Saturdays, Thomas Howard would captain the boat and his son would crew while in the race on Sunday, they reversed roles. Both won many sailing trophies on behalf of the family boat. In my study in Flagstaff, AZ, I still have some of the racing trophies commemorating those victories by my father and grandfather. Jean Dunn's parents also owned a summer cottage in Awosting, and Jean and Tom met one summer when they participated in some of the activities and outings arranged to keep the teenagers busy. One day, on a trip to a park at a nearby lake, Jean, who was in the back seat of Tom's

car, noticed that he had positioned the rear-view mirror so that he could look right at her. Not old enough to drive yet, Jean still thought to herself that Tom must be interested in her because she knew the mirror should be in a different position. They were together from that time on. During high school, Tom would drive from Short Hills over to Patterson to visit with Jean, and when they both went off to college, Tom would drive to see her each weekend from Amherst in Massachusetts over the hills to Skidmore in New York State.

When they had returned to Short Hills with their family, they purchased a summer home in Mantoloking on the Jersey Shore and Tom's sons took up sailing the local duckboats and sneakboxes, names which are an indication of the shallow depth of Barnegat Bay and the history of duck hunting in the region. I followed in the family footsteps by becoming the 1954 Class B Sneakbox Champion of Barnegat Bay. Later, tired of the party atmosphere that dominated the social life, Tom and Jean purchased an old farm in Cavendish, Vermont. Tom enjoyed being a gentleman farmer almost as much as sailing the lakes. Together with Jean, Elizabeth and the boys, they repaired and added a dorm room to the farmhouse and dug out a farm pond for us to swim in. We all spend many summers enjoying the farm, playing with neighbor's children, catching fish in Twenty Mile Stream across the dirt road, as well as learning to play golf at a local course and skiing Mt. Okemo in the winter. However, when the Schmonsees family decided to sell to family and friends land around their home on Cape Cod, Tom and Jean bought a lot and build a beautiful wooden cabin, so we spent summer time there with Aunt Dee and Uncle Charles and our cousins. The property was an old girls camp located on Laurence Pond, a small body of freshwater situated between Cape Cod Bay to the north and Woods Hole and Nantucket Sound to the south and located near the Cape Cod Canal, between the towns of East Sandwich and West Barnstable. When our generation began to start families and there were too many children to fit into the two cottages, we would all move into the bungalow, a big barn of a structure left over from service as the dining room for the camp.

Florida

As Tom approached retirement, he arranged with a fellow anesthesiologist at Overlook Hospital in Summit, NJ, to split the job. With six months off each year, he and Jean boat a 42-foot ketch, named it "Half Time," and enjoyed sailing up and down the Inland Waterway, with trips through the Cape Cod Canal up to Maine down to Florida and out to the Caribbean islands. Looking for a new challenge, Tom studied up on College Medicine, took the Boards, and was offered a job at the University of Florida in Gainesville. After a year or two, Tom switched fields, took another set of exams and was put in charge of the Community Medicine program at the Medical School. He hated the administrative paperwork but loved driving out to the rural clinics and eating catfish in the local cafes.

They purchased a nice home on the golf course at the Gainesville Country Club. Attracted by the beautiful Arabian horses at a nearby farm, mother took up horseback riding, which she continued after they moved back north to Dryden, NY. One day, astride a retired jumper given to her by a friend, the horse was spooked by the wind and she was thrown off and broke her back. She never rode again, saying that you know you're too old for riding when you fall off and brake rather than bounce.

Dryden, NY

When my sister, brother and I were married and starting families in New York and Vermont, Tom and Jean decided to move back north to be near us and their new grandchildren. They settled on 60 acres overlooking the town of Dryden and the beautiful valley below. They built a house, dug a farm pond, raised a barn, boarded horses, grazed cattle, cut paths for hiking and cross-country skiing through the woods and put in a clay tennis court as well as several flower beds. Dad loved once again being a gentle farmer, but mother, always the practical one, told him to plant only trees that would mature in 15 years. Sure enough, 15 years later, they decided to purchase a cottage as part of Kendal, a new retirement community being built on the outskirts of Ithaca, just down the road from Cornell University. They moved and loved living in the cottage, until first mom and then dad needed more assistance, when they moved to a different location within the residence.

My sister Elizabeth, her husband Kevin and her two boys saw their grandparents often, as they lived just down the hill in Dryden. I was living in Ithaca at the time, but when I took a job at Tompkins Cortland Community College, I drove right by their farm every day on my way to work and would drop by to see them each week.

When Dad began to drive his car off the road during the winter, Elizabeth took away his keys. Our mother passed away of Alzheimer's in 2011 and dad, who as a former physician never liked that euphemism, died in 2015. Elizabeth organized a memorial service for each of them and a reception at her home, which was attended by many relatives and friends from the area. Their ashes are both interred at the old cemetery in the town of Dryden on a hill, beneath a beautiful maple and next to a section of civil war veterans.