

Irene Seiberling (1890-1999)

Irene Henrietta Seiberling was born on February 25, 1890. She attended public school before entering the Dana Hall Preparatory School in Wellesley, Massachusetts in 1905. After graduating, she enrolled in a Paris traveling school for one year, spending time in France, Algeria, Italy and England. Between 1910 and 1915, Irene lived intermittently in Boston and New York City taking a series of music lessons to determine if she should pursue a singing career which ultimately did not materialize.

Defying societal norms of era, Irene remained unmarried until she was 33. She lived at Stan Hywet Hall with her parents, and was actively involved with many philanthropic and cultural organizations in Akron, such as the Red Cross, the women's suffrage movement, and the Akron Art Museum.

Irene married Milton Whateley Harrison, a New York lawyer, banker and railroad executive, in the Music Room of Stan Hywet Hall on December 25, 1923. The couple built a Tudor Revival style home in Bronxville, New York called Fairedale, where they lived for the duration of their marriage. They had three children: Sally Ann, born on June 25, 1925; Gertrude, born on August 14, 1928; and Robert, born on May 24, 1930. Milton was probably best known for being the editor of the *Savings Bank Journal* from 1926 until 1942, when it ceased publication.

Like her sister-in-law Henrietta Buckler Seiberling and mother Gertrude Seiberling, Irene was involved in the Oxford Group, a spiritual movement that was introduced to the Akron community in 1933. Prior to this, Irene had studied tenets of the New Thought movement. She also experimented with the supernatural world taking multiple readings from Edgar Cayce a well-known American mystic. She believed that personal dreams foretold future events or informed important decisions.

As a young adult, Irene became ill and was sent to a sanitarium in Colorado to recuperate. She credits a young doctor at that institution with introducing her to a healthy, organic lifestyle which she maintained throughout her life. Irene exercised daily, ate only fresh foods and dabbled in a number of experimental health treatments throughout her lifetime. Her healthy lifestyle turned political when Akron proposed fluoridating the city's drinking water. Irene became a vocal opponent of the measure which successfully passed in 1968. After that, she refused to drink the Akron city water.

This was not the first time Irene had become politically active. She and Milton campaigned to clean up corrupt local governments in Yonkers, New York and were involved in other civic issues. Irene also regularly wrote letters to local and national politicians on a number of topics. After Milton Harrison died in August 1949 from heart failure, Irene returned to Stan Hywet Hall to care for her ailing father, and assist in the management of Stan Hywet Hall.

She lived at the estate for the rest of her life, relocating to the Gate Lodge after the Manor House became a museum. Irene died on January 21, 1999, a month shy of her 109th birthday.