

James Penfield “Penfield” Seiberling (1898-1982)

James Penfield Seiberling, known as “Penfield,” was born on July 3, 1898. He graduated from The Lawrenceville School in Lawrenceville, New Jersey, in 1917 and then joined his brother, Willard, at Princeton University where he majored in economics. Penfield wanted to join the military after the U.S. entry into World War I, but his father persuaded him to wait a year before enlisting, but by then, the war had ended.

Penfield was a spiritual person with a philanthropic heart. While at Princeton, he spent a summer teaching and mentoring at the State Home for Boys in Jamestown, New York. He experienced a spiritual awakening in 1920 after attending the national conference of the Student Volunteer Movement in Des Moines, Iowa, an organization which actively recruited for missionary work. Penfield considered entering the ministry, but his father urged him to pursue a business career.

After college, he moved to Chicago to work as a sales representative for the Seiberling Rubber Company before enrolling in the University of Michigan Law School. After graduating in 1927, Penfield then joined the Akron law firm of Slabaugh, Seiberling, Huber & Guinther.

Penfield remained with the law firm for only a year before joining the Lambert Tire & Rubber Company of Barberton, Ohio, as the vice president of sales. By 1931, he was working for the Seiberling Rubber Company as its sales manager. He succeeded his father as president in 1938, and became chairman of the board in 1950. Penfield retired in 1962.

He married Harriet Robinson Manton on February 3, 1923 at the Biltmore Hotel in New York City. Penfield and Harriet had three children: James Penfield Seiberling, Jr. born in 1924 and who lived only 3 days. Mary Margaret Seiberling was born on October 9, 1928; and James Henry Seiberling was born on September 4, 1936. The home of Harriet and Penfield on North Portage Path still stands today.

During his lifetime, Penfield sat on the board of Old Trail School and People’s Hospital. He also became very active with the Stan Hywet Hall Foundation, assuming the position of family representative after his brother, Fred, passed away in 1962. He held this position until his death from lung cancer on October 13, 1982. His wife, Harriet, had predeceased him in 1973.