

## **Willard Penfield Seiberling (1892-1981)**

Willard Penfield Seiberling was born on June 28, 1892, in Akron. He attended The Lawrenceville School in Lawrenceville, New Jersey before enrolling in Princeton University. At Princeton, he was a member of the gymnastics team, and he was also a contributing photographer and editor of *The Pic*, or *Pictorial Review*, Princeton's student newspaper. He graduated in 1915 with a degree in economics.

Willard immediately returned to Akron and worked for The Goodyear Tire & Rubber Company, entering the ranks in the sales department. By 1921, he had risen to manager of the Goodyear Aeronautics department. He had a lifelong interest in air flight, having closely followed famous aviator and balloonist Melvin Vaniman on many of his early projects, and even participating in several balloon races. The first was the 1921 National Balloon Race, with co-pilot Ward Van Orman in a balloon called "City of Akron." The race started in Birmingham, Alabama and the "City of Akron" landed in Lebanon, Tennessee 24 hours later — taking third place and qualifying the team for the international competition held in Brussels, Belgium. In this race, Willard and Van Orman traveled over 350 miles from Brussels to Exeter, England but ultimately did not place.

When his father left Goodyear in 1921, Willard also resigned. He joined the newly formed Seiberling Rubber Company as the manager of the sealed air tube department and remained with the company until his retirement.

Willard married Mary Harris Gerrish on July 18, 1923 at the Gerrish home in Oberlin, Ohio. The couple had three children: Julia, born on March 30, 1925; William, born on January 28, 1927; and Mary Anne, born on October 15, 1929. The couple had hoped to build a Tudor Revival style home in Fairlawn Heights, and worked with Stan Hywet's architect, Charles Schneider, on the design. But the stock market crash in 1929 prevented the project from taking shape, and instead, Willard and Mary purchased a home on Merriman Road close to Stan Hywet Hall.

With a lifelong interest in photography, Willard designed Stan Hywet Hall's darkroom for his own use. He was also an avid chess player and loved to ice skate. In 1965, Willard repurchased Cedar Lodge, the family summer home near Hessel, Michigan — it had been sold ten years prior. It is still owned by his descendants today.

Mary Gerrish Seiberling died of cancer in 1950. Willard spent the next three decades traveling around the world with different family members, documenting his trips through photography. Willard died on April 3, 1981, in a single car accident near the Ohio/Michigan border, while returning to Akron from Hessel, Michigan.