

## ELEANOR ABBEY – A CHARTER MEMBER’S MEMORIES

*by William A. Stanley*

On a warm spring day in June 1940 in Washington, D.C. Eleanor Quirk and Richard Abbey wed. For the next sixty years their love and devotion for each other prevailed through world conflicts and numerous assignments on two continents. Eleanor was born in the front room of her home in Erie Pennsylvania. She attended Central High in Erie where she met her sweetheart, Richard. During their courtship, the Abbey's spent most of their time in Washington, D.C. where Richard's family resided. The young Richard loved flying and coming from a military family; entered West Point where he graduated in June of the same year they were married.

The newlyweds lived in the D.C. area. However, Lieutenant Abbey was soon assigned to Randell - Kelly Air Corp Base near San Antonio, Texas. The base was nothing more than a dirt landing field where Lt. Abbey began his flight training. In traveling to their first assignment, Eleanor and Richard drove the distance to Texas via West Virginia and on south through Oklahoma. While traveling in West Virginia in June 1941, Eleanor took note of the names of towns, river crossings, and other landmarks. She recalls many of those locations stirred her interest in geography. Names like Sunday Creek and Monday Creek, West Virginia. She wondered how they got those names, was it a person or family that named them or was there some other event that attributed to the locations' names?

Lieutenant Abbey began his career with the Army Air Corps. During their time in Texas Eleanor took up reading about American history and noted where geography had played a role. Soon after his training was complete, he was assigned to McDill Air Field, Tampa, Florida (today McDill AFB). In the late fall of 1941 the Abbey's briefly returned to Washington, D.C. After December 7, 1941 they were ordered to return to West Point where there in early 1942 Captain Abbey was assigned to Stewart Air Field, New York. This was a short dis-

tance from West Point where the Abbey's were quartered. Abbey continued his flight school training in New York and remained at Stewart until 1943 when he was sent overseas. In 1946 Colonel Abbey returned to Washington and was assigned to the Pentagon. During this tour he attended Georgetown University where he earned his Master of Science degree in political science. Soon thereafter, 1952 Eleanor and Richard were reassigned to the U. S. Embassy in The Hague. Colonel and Mrs. Abbey and their three sons, ages 6, 8, and 11 were soon involved in the Dutch community and the Abbey's found themselves entertaining foreign visitors and other government officials, this included social invitations and dinner parties as well as other aspects of military protocol. Colonel Abbey had a young looking appearance for his age and rank, which added another dimension to his work with foreign officials. It was while the Abbeys were in Holland that Eleanor resumed her interest in geography and mapping. She met Jim Clore, the Cultural Attaché for the Embassy, and was fascinated with his interests in antiques and history. She began to attend local auctions and shows with Mr. Clore and it was at one of these events that she bought her first map. It was a Blaeu 16th century map of the world. The place names, the art work that embellished the map, and the time that she believed went into compiling it; all this further drew her into historical cartography and an appreciation for antique maps. Mr. Clore was an accomplished amateur chef and enjoyed the opportunity to show off his culinary skills.

In order for Eleanor to see and go to as many places as possible in her quest for antique maps; she would accompany him on his trips through the Dutch capital and the outskirts of the city to purchase various ingredients for gourmet dishes.

During these jaunts into the Dutch countryside Eleanor saw and bought her first maps of the United States. They were by Dutch mapmaker

Isaak Tirion and she purchased several of North America for \$10 each. While making this purchase the map dealer offered her a *Blaeu Atlas* of 1640 for \$600. The atlas, however, was presently in Bermuda. The dealer offered to have it shipped to Holland but Eleanor declined the offer. Perhaps an error on her part since today such an atlas would be valued well into the thousands of dollars. Each time Eleanor bought a map she would take it back to their quarters and look it over with all the excitement of a child at Christmas. During one of many trips Colonel Abbey made for the Air Force (after Sept. 1947 - the U. S. Force replaced the Army Air Corps) he visited Venice where in 1956 he wrote to Eleanor and said "I found a map for you of California showing it as an island". Eleanor can not remember who the geographer was that produced the map but it was a "classic" and this

was the first time her husband had purchased a map. After that purchase, Richard showed an interest in antique maps and began to seek out maps of the Civil War, the Napoleonic era, and prints of battles. She said "not bad for a guy who only knew about flight charts". From that time on she concentrated her interests in collecting maps of the United States and North America. Her major concern was that she had limited wall space and most of the maps that she and Richard had bought were very large. She recalls that on a double date in 1935 (with a former beau - before she had met Richard) her girl friends date suggested they go by his home. There she saw a room where the boy's father had covered the wall in nautical charts of the U.S. Coast & Geodetic Survey. Ever since then Eleanor has always wanted to paper a room in charts and maps. A project still in her future plans.



Eleanor's expanding interests in antique map collecting now included oil company road maps. On one of her many shopping sprees she saw and bought several ESSO road maps and a large number of Johnson and Colton maps of the United States. They were priced a \$1 and \$2 each. She thought that while she really didn't want that large a number of maps, she felt that she should give them a home so they wouldn't be "tossed out". She began to supplement her maps with historical prints such as one she bought for her husband, a 17th century print of the *Siege of Nieupoort - 1620*.

In 1960 now Brig. General Abbey was assigned to Williams AFB, Arizona to be in charge of pilot training for jet aircraft. While there the Abbey's had their fourth child, a daughter and soon thereafter General Abbey was sent to Vietnam where he was on General Westmoreland's staff handling combat air crew activities.

Upon returning to the United States General Abbey was promoted to Major General and in 1969 was assigned to head one of NORAD's (North American Aerospace Defense Command) regional command centers at Great Falls, Montana. Their residence was in Colorado Springs near the Cheyenne Mountain Operations Center. Eleanor had friends that also enjoyed map collecting who lived near Great Falls. One of the Colton maps she had purchased in Europe of Montana for \$2. It turned out to be the only map (19th century) of the state that showed the name as Campbell instead of Great Falls. On most maps of that period Great Falls was the name given for that location. The region is named for the magnificent waterway of the Missouri River. The falls were first noted by Lewis & Clark (they heard the roar of the falls seven miles away). This discrepancy in the local

name on the Colton map intensified Eleanor's interest in geographic names and, in turn, added to her ever-growing interest in map collecting. Her collection grew with maps of the mid-west by Johnson and Ward, Tanner, and Colton. By now her treasure trove of antique maps was considerable, numbering well into the hundreds.

In 1971 the Abbey's returned to Washington, D.C. with the General assigned to the Pentagon. In 1977 by chance Eleanor saw an ad in the *Washington Post* concerning a meeting of the "International History of Cartography", i.e. *Imago Mundi*; to be held at the Smithsonian Institution. She thought, what the heck, I will go down there and see what this is all about. This was her first mapping event. Not knowing a soul, she wandered through the building and ended up at the registration desk for the symposium. At the registration desk she was told that she must be registered in order to attend the various sessions. She said that she only wanted to sit in on this particular session "just to see what it was all about". The registration staff relented and allowed Eleanor to go into the auditorium. She saw a woman sitting in one of the back rows. Eleanor approached the woman and introduced herself and sat down. The lady was Mary Larsgaard. They began to talk and from that chance meeting they became good friends. Mary then took Eleanor under her wing and briefed her on what the symposium was about and identified the people that were attending the event.

Later in 1979, Mary called Eleanor and suggested she join a new mapping group that was being formed. It was to be called the Washington Map Society. Eleanor joined, and according to the records of the Society, was at the first meeting with some 40 other invited guests. After a short time she thought the best way to get involved was to volunteer, and so she did. Since she had done a lot of entertaining while in Europe and when the General was at NORAD; she thought she would volunteer to handle the hospitality aspect of the WMS meetings. At one of the early meetings at the then Eads Street facility of the Geography & Map Division she was asked, "do you know how to

set-up the refreshments for this type of meeting" and she replied "you bet I do". She then suggested that rather than have the refreshments after the meeting they should have the wine and cheese before the meeting; "in that way we could get better acquainted before the speakers presentation."

One of her friends from an officers' wives club was Janet Green. Janet's husband was in the military. Eleanor told her what a great group the WMS was and Janet soon joined the society.

Eleanor was off and running with the WMS. In one of the meetings in 1982 she required assistance with preparing the cheese and pouring the wine. She said "I saw a nice looking young man .... rather quiet standing off to the side, so I approached him and asked if he would help me with the food. He agreed and impressed me with this willingness and politeness". That person is the author of this article. It was from that encounter in 1982 that Eleanor Abbey came to me this year and said that she wanted me to handle the disposition of her collection of maps and prints which she had decided to sell. I asked her why she selected my company over other dealers. She said "because you were such a polite and helpful young man". The lesson - always remember your manners ..... you never know how it will affect your future.

In later years the General was known to have attended WMS meetings with Eleanor. Many of us had thought the principal map collector of the family was the General. Mrs. Abbey is still very active, recently giving a membership application to a Beaufort, North Carolina Visitors Center staff person and another application to an employee of the National Geographic Society. General Abbey passed away in December of 2001. Mrs. Abbey presently lives in Galesville, Maryland with a view from her side porch of a portion of the West River, an estuary of the Chesapeake Bay. She is indeed a lady of mapping and a person I am so glad I've had the honor to know.

—WMS Vice President Bill Stanley is proprietor of *Cartographic Associates*.