

THE MOUNT AMWELL NEWS

Art Patron Barbara Harrison Wescott— Connected to National and Local History By Jerry Rosco



Barbara Harrison Wescott (1904-1977)
Photo courtesy Jen Ellsworth

When the Reading Burial Ground was restored in late 2006, it was clear that the Reading family's nineteenth century resting place was rich in history in several ways. Nearly hidden by a rock wall, trees and shrubs at the former Wescott farm near Rosemont, New Jersey, the burial site contains tombstones and markers—including that of Joseph Reading, grandfather of pioneer, explorer, businessman and politician Pierson Barton Reading (1816-1868). Aside from the notable old headstones, however, there stands a modern marble marker engraved with the names of another celebrated family whose members' ashes are scattered in this place. Their stories join the Readings in reaching all the way back to the California Gold Rush years, and also include the historic American Midwest and Paris of the Expatriate years.

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Barbara Harrison Wescott (1904-1977) led a colorful life that began with famous parents. Her mother was Mary Crocker, daughter of Charles Frederick Crocker, the California railroad and mining tycoon and granddaughter of Charles Crocker, the California pioneer. Her father was Francis Burton Harrison, who was a member of the United States House of Representatives and was later appointed Governor-General of the Philippines by President Woodrow Wilson. Unfortunately Mary died in an automobile accident in 1905, making for an unsettled childhood for Barbara and her sister Verna. Francis Harrison traveled constantly and eventually married five more times.

Barbara studied for three years at Oxford and then moved to Paris in 1925 at age 21. Unlike many of the American expatriates, she did it in style, with a home in the Left Bank and a lavish house in the Rambouillet suburb. She liked fast cars, horseback riding, outdoor sports and travel. But at a young age she was also very knowledgeable about art, and made important friendships among the expatriates. Most important among them in the late 1920s and early 1930s was Glenway Wescott (1901-87)—then very famous for two novels and a book of stories about the Midwest—and his partner Monroe Wheeler (1899-1988), who was publishing a series of deluxe small books by well-known writers.

In that era in Paris, the beaux arts deluxe books and fancy presses were greatly admired and Barbara joined forces with Monroe Wheeler to create Harrison of Paris editions. Years later Monroe Wheeler would go on to revolutionize museum publications and curate exhibits for the Museum of Modern Art. But between 1930 and 1934 they produced 13 amazingly beautiful titles of well-known books, such as Lord Byron's *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, Shakespeare's *Venus and Adonis*, the *Fables of Aesop* with drawings by Alexander Calder, and Fyodor Dostoyevsky's *A Gentle Spirit*. Incorrectly called "paperbacks" on Wikipedia, they were deluxe hard covers, often in slipcase, with rare typefaces,

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deluxe printers, and beautiful stock such as Montgolfier Frères paper or Iridescent Imperial Japan paper. There were two titles by Glenway Wescott, and the last of the series was *Hacienda* by Katherine Anne Porter.

Years later, Wescott's highly acclaimed and frequently reprinted *The Pilgrim Hawk* (1940) fictionalized a real day in Harrison's Rambouillet home with Barbara and her guests. And his 1945 bestseller *Apartment in Athens* is dedicated to her. As for Katherine Anne Porter, she remained a lifelong friend of Barbara and dedicated her blockbuster novel *Ship of Fools* (1962) to her.

Harrison of Paris is covered in-depth in books such as *Published in Paris* by Hugh Ford, but it is in New Jersey that Barbara Harrison became known as a patron of the arts. She followed her friends Wescott and Wheeler back to America and in 1935 married Glenway's younger brother Lloyd B. Wescott. In 1936, Barbara and Lloyd bought a large farm along the Mulhocaway Creek in Union Township, near Clinton in Hunterdon County. The Wescott brothers grew up on a small family farm in rural Wisconsin but this was another matter. Lloyd became a pioneer in cattle breeding and their Mulhocaway Farm became the headquarters of the Artificial Breeding Association. Eventually he also became chairman of the New Jersey State Board of Institutions and Agencies, as well as founder and first president of the Hunterdon Medical Center.



Charles Crocker (1822-1888)

Meanwhile, Barbara's reputation as a noted art collector and art patron grew. She'd begun collecting in Paris but over the decades owned paintings by Courbet, Gauguin, Derain, Picasso, Delacroix, Renoir, Bonnard, Soutine, Monet, Utrillo,

Tchelitchew, Morandi and others. Through the years she contributed work to museums and hosted large-scale fundraising events in their behalf. She also took charge of annual art fundraisers for the Karen Horney psychiatric clinic in New York. She and Lloyd had a daughter, Deborah, who would eventually be remembered for her own work for the Audubon Society and the New Jersey State Museum.

At the end of the 1950s, fate brought the Wescotts to the farm near Rosemont in Delaware Township. In order to create the Spruce Run Reservoir, the state had to flood the valley and all the farms in it. Barbara and Lloyd bought their new farm from band leader Paul Whiteman. Part of the charm of the land was in the fieldstone house and several acres provided for writer Glenway Wescott which he named Haymeadows—and there, behind the stone wall, the Reading Burial Ground, which they held in great reverence.

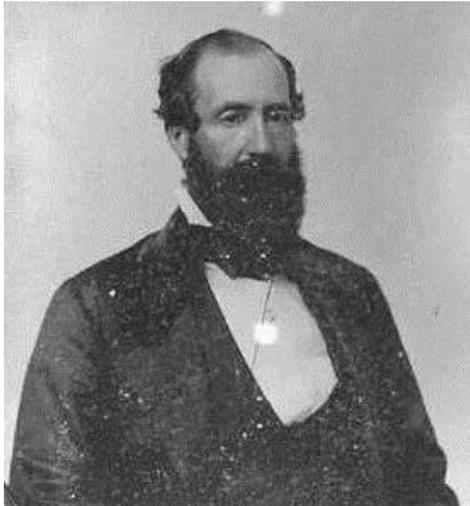


Francis Burton Harrison (1873-1957)

Through the 60s, 70s and beyond the remarkable family continued to flourish. Glenway became president of the National Academy of Arts and Letters and eventually his long-awaited journals would be published. Lloyd was honored many times for his work as a civil servant and philanthropist—Governor Robert Meyner once gave him a surprise birthday party in a state park and introduced him as “The First Citizen of New Jersey.” Shy of public attention, Barbara preferred that Lloyd take the public profile, but her generosity was known by individual artists and organizations. The *Newark Sunday News* (September 11, 1967) mentioned her donations to museums, citing a Gauguin to the

Newark Museum, and a 400 B.C. marble bust of Venus to the National Gallery in honor of her father. In 1966, she and Lloyd gave New Jersey part of their land to create the first county park, the Wescott Nature Preserve.

Barbara Harrison Wescott passed away on April 7, 1977 at the age of 72. On May 1, the New Jersey State Museum held a groundbreaking of a new sculpture garden in her honor, centered by mosaic murals by Ben Shahn. The May 2 *Trenton Times* reported, "400 Celebrate Memory of Barbara H. Wescott." Museum director Leah Schlossberg remembered decades of support, calling her "missionary, emissary, patron, benefactor, hostess and reporter-writer." She was praised for her work for the museum's Friends Fine Arts Committee, of which daughter Deborah was a board member, as well as her contributions to charities. Governor Brendon Byrne said Barbara had earned, "the kind of immortality we all strive for."



Pierson Barton Reading (1816-1868)

Part of that immortality included the lifelines that came together at the Reading Burial Ground at the Wescott farm. Her maternal great-grandfather Charles Crocker had made his fame and fortune from the mid to late 1800s in California, and was politically active in Sacramento. Pierson Barton Reading arrived in California in 1843, got a land grant of 24,000 acres in the Sacramento Valley, and in 1850 narrowly missed being elected governor. In business and in politics, Crocker and Reading shared that same exciting playing field for a number of years, and likely interacted in one way or another. A century and a half later, it's interesting to reflect on these lives and stories.

Jerry Rosco is the author of *Glenway Wescott Personally: A Biography*

Editor's note:

I had wanted to do a piece on Barbara Harrison Wescott for some time, but felt inadequate to write it myself. I called Jerry Rosco, a professional writer and editor who knew the Wescott family well, and asked him if would write a short article for the newsletter. He graciously agreed and the beautifully written article above was the result.

*Jerry Rosco was co-editor with Robert Phelps of *Continual Lessons: The Journals of Glenway Wescott 1937-1955* and he is currently working on a second collection of Wescott journals.*

Jerry is an avid amateur softball player, a pitcher, who tells me he is pretty good. He must be. After working until late in the evening to write the draft of the Harrison article, he pitched in his team's season opener the next day – and won.

D. Reading

Corrections

Please note the following errors in the last newsletter article "For love or Loyalty: Richard Reading sides with British." In paragraph four, the dates for John Reid birth should be 1656 not 1756 and John Reading's should be 1657, not 1757. In the last sentence of that paragraph "George Keith, who had fomented a schism among the Quakers in 1670". The date should have been 1690.

Thanks to Marfy Goodspeed for alerting us to these errors.

Announcements

New Members

We welcome new members Mark Reading (life) and Sharon (Reading) Lake from Pennington, New Jersey. Marfy Goodspeed has renewed her membership as a life member.

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Board of Directors Meeting

A board of directors meeting was held in Flemington on January 15, 2011. The officers elected were Jen Ellsworth Chair, Richard Reading Secretary/Treasurer, and David R. Reading Executive Director. It was agreed that the two open board seats would be temporarily left unfilled.

RBG Final Report

A final report on the restoration of the Reading Burying Ground has been prepared and is available on the website. The report includes several photographs and a detailed history of the ownership of the plot. This report is a PDF document and is free to the public.

A Review of John Reading’s Diary

“John Reading’s Diary is a rich cornucopia of details of daily life in mid-eighteenth century colonial New Jersey. The diary records buying and selling, lending and borrowing, and services rendered and payment received between John Reading and hundreds of customers and employees in New Jersey and beyond and his own family members. These transactions are recorded in multiple currencies at constantly fluctuating exchange rates (much like Europe before the implementation of the single euro currency in 1999). John Reading enjoyed high political and economic status. His life illustrates a prominent leader of the rising American political class. His diary is must reading for any student of eighteenth-century colonial American history.”

– Dr. Alvin Rabushka, David and Joan Traitel Senior Fellow, Hoover Institution, Stanford University. Rabushka’s most recent publication is *Taxation in Colonial America*, which received Special Recognition as 2009 Fraunces Tavern Museum Book Award.

John Reading’s Diary is now available for purchase on Amazon.com. Go to books and search on “John Reading’s Diary David R. Reading.”

Web site Members Access

Reminder - The MTAP web site includes a member’s only page. Content includes current newsletters. To access simply click on the members page and enter user: member, password: mtap2008

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Membership

Help grow the Mt. Amwell Project. Show this newsletter to your friends and acquaintances with an interest in historical preservation. Tell them becoming a member is easy. Send \$10 for annual membership or \$125 for a lifetime membership to the Mount Amwell Project, 1673 Hunting Creek Drive, Alexandria, VA, 22314. Remember all membership dues and donations are tax deductible. The Mt. Amwell Project is a 501 (c) (3) charity. Members receive all MTAP communications including this newsletter and the members’ page on the website.

Members

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| Carl Shuster, Ph.D. - life | John & Marielle Reading |
| Brian & Cindy Murphy - life | Romy Reading-Leo |
| Jen Ellsworth- life | Sybil Albrecht Lewis-life |
| Bill & Marjorie Luken, PhD. - life | Joan Phoenix |
| Rick Hayes-Roth, Ph.D. - life | John G. & Susan Reading- life |
| Ruth Meeker - life | Leigh Braun-life |
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| Chris Solliday - life | Shawn &Theresa Reading |
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