

Remembering Edith Thurlow Keasbey, “Edie” (1930–2020) a life well lived, well loved, and a woman who made a difference!



Edie Keasbey

by Judy Kelley-Moberg¹

Our dear friend and founding member of FrOGS, Edie Keasbey passed away on November 6th, 2020, just hours short of making the trip from the hospital to the home and land she loved on Couch Road in Patterson. Six months earlier on May 5th, she had joined friends, neighbors and care-givers to celebrate her ninetieth birthday with cupcakes on her lawn.

FAMILY HISTORY²: Old family portraits and family antiques filled the rooms of her home.

Almost all of Edie’s family came from colonial New England—Salisbury and Litchfield Connecticut, and Newburyport and Salem, Massachusetts. They were ship builders, farmers, Revolutionary-war veterans, councilmen, and lawyers. In the 1800’s Edie’s great-grandparents looked for business opportunities in Ohio, Missouri, Texas and Colorado. Many of these ancestors earned college degrees from Harvard or Yale. Her ancestors and relatives included doctors, scientists, a cattle rancher, an innovator in the brick industry, a college professor, a librarian, justices, a US ambassador, a stockbroker, and even a coffee grower in Mexico.

Edie was the name sake of her beloved maternal grandmother Edith Sterling Simon (1868–1967) who was born and educated in St. Louis, Missouri, the daughter of Edward Canfield Sterling (1834–1911) and Cordelia Seavey. Edward’s father had moved the family from Salisbury, Connecticut to Ohio in 1849. Edward acquired the patent rights to a hydraulic brick press and started making machine-made bricks in Tennessee. His machine-made bricks “revolutionized” the brick industry! In 1868 he moved his Hydraulic Brick Company to St. Louis, Missouri and built it into a multi-million dollar business.³

Edie’s grandparents met in St. Louis, a bustling business center, and World’s Fair venue by the turn of the century. Edith, the daughter of wealthy brick magnate Edward Sterling, married Charles Fitzhugh Simon (1861–1926) the son of millionaire Henry T Simon (1828–1903) partner in a wholesale dry goods business. In 1903 Charles was running a large coffee plantation in the hills above Vera Cruz, in Mexico.⁴ A family photo showed the couple and their two young daughters Alma



Fig 2: Edith Sterling Simon and husband Charles Simon with their daughters Alma and Elizabeth at the coffee plantation in Mexico

and Elizabeth at the plantation (Fig 2). Although many foreign investors left Mexico in 1914 when President Wilson sent American troops to Vera Cruz during the Mexican Revolution, Charles stayed until 1916 when his hacienda was occupied and sacked by “bandits”. Edie said, “They were kicked out!”⁵

After leaving Mexico, Edie's grandparents moved to 64 East 86th Street in NYC. In 1918 Edith bought a historic farm, with its 18th-century farmhouse on Couch Rd in Towners, in the Town of Patterson, Putnam County, NY (Fig 3). The farm sat on the north slope of a ridge,

south of the hamlet of Patterson, its eastern border dropped down into the floodplain surrounding the East Branch Croton River commonly referred to as “The Great Swamp”.

The farm can be traced back to 1754, when Joseph Craw, was the tenant of what was then the 270-acre farm #59 in Lot 7 of the Philipse Upper Patent. It passed to Asa Haines then to Stephen Yale before Hezekiah Couch owned the



Fig 3: Sterling Farm--Couch Rd #180, 1921

farm in the mid-1800s and left his name on the road.⁶ The area around “Sterling Farm” was surrounded by dairy farms up to the 1940’s. According to Edie her grandparents had chickens, dairy cows, and pigs.⁷

EDIE: Her sewing room was filled with patches of fabric and her quilts brightened every wall. Colorful, primitive paintings from Antiqua surrounded her comfortable sitting room.

Edie was born in New York City in 1930 (Fig 4), the child of Alma



Fig 4: Edie’s framed baby picture

Sterling Simon (1893-1967) and her second husband John Woodwell Thurlow (1891-1966), born in Colorado Springs, Colorado. John’s father Charles, born in Newburyport, MA was listed as a “stock grower” in Colorado in 1886. John a third-year, nongraduate member of the Harvard class of 1914, served stateside in the 18th Field Artillery Brigade in WWI, and had worked in Newburyport and Boston, MA. He and Alma were married in Manhattan in May of 1926.

Edie’s two older half-brothers, Elmore

McNeil Bostwick Jr. (1918–1945) and Fitzhugh Simon Bostwick (1919–1997) were the sons of Alma’s first husband Elmore McNeil Bostwick (1898–1970). Elmore’s father Arthur, born in Litchfield, CT, earned his PHD from Yale in 1883, worked in the NYC Public Library, authored several books, and moved to St. Louis, Missouri in 1909 where he became head librarian, and a President of the American Library Assoc.



Fig 5: Edie as a teen

Edie lived with her parents Alma and John Thurlow on East 72nd Street in NYC. She said her father’s fabric, ribbon, and pattern business had been very successful after the “crash” when many women took to making their own clothing.⁵ As a child (Fig 5) Edie spent as much time as she could at grandma Sterling’s farm in Towners. She collected, cleaned, and candled chicken eggs at

grandma's before going down the hill to spend time with the cows and horses at Cornwall Hill Farm. With a grin and a chuckle, Edie recalled that when she was a teen, she showed the girls from nearby Camp Brady how you had to pump the cow’s tail to get the milk.⁸ In 1941, her grandmother deeded her parents 10 acres for their country home.⁵

Edie’s father was called back into the service in WWII and worked with the OSS (which



Fig 6: Edie, center, with fellow students at PA School of Horticulture

became the CIA). During this time, Edie attended the red brick school in Patterson in the fall and spring and spent the winter in the south where her father was stationed.⁵ Her parents enrolled her in Rosemary Hall, a prep school in Greenwich, CT, from 1944 to 1948. In 1945 her older brother Elmore was lost in the war in the Philippines; she always hoped a DNA search would bring him home. After graduation she spent two years at The Pennsylvania School of Horticulture for Women in Ambler, PA. An excellent horse woman she also learned how to prune trees and care for livestock; and she made lifelong friends (Fig 6). After graduation in 1950, she and a college girlfriend took a driving tour through Europe. Only her best friend, “Pucci”, survives her.⁹



Fig 7: Edie in Ike skirt “Youth for Eisenhower”



Fig 8: Edie and Tom Keasbey’s wedding in 1953

In 1951–52 Edie joined “Youth for Eisenhower” in NYC where Tom Keasbey (1920–2007), a decorated WWII bomber pilot, scheduled “Meet Ike” events for Eisenhower’s presidential campaign (Fig 7). They co-chaired a few “Ike” events and the “tomboy” in blue jeans looked every bit the gorgeous deb in their 1953 wedding photo (Fig 8).

The Keasbeys were early settlers and businessmen in New Jersey. Tom worked as a salesman for their industrial

insulation company while the couple lived in NYC. In 1960 they welcomed their son Timothy into their lives. Tom left the family company sometime in the late 1960's around the time the couple bought Grandma's farm and moved up to Patterson. From 1973-1981 Edie and Tom shifted gears, investing in, and running "Callaloo" a small boutique resort in Antigua, in the West Indies.

COMMUNITY ACTIVISM: Her office was filled with the documents for her work, her computer, Tom's awards, his family photos and his scotch plaid hat.

Home to stay in 1982 (Fig 9), Tom and Edie became deeply involved with the local community. Tom was on the Patterson Town Board; the County Historic Preservation Board; and as chairman of the Patterson Historical Society, he moved and preserved the Little Red Schoolhouse. In 1986, Edie got involved with the North Birch Hill-Stagecoach Neighborhood Association's fight about land use and overdevelopment. It reconnected Edie to the "thread of her life", the land and protecting its value to the life upon it. She said, "The catalyst for my work became the Great Swamp. This magical place is center to my being!"¹⁰

In 1987, Edie was appointed to the Patterson Environmental



Fig 9: Edie and Tom with sunflower, side yard of the farm in Patterson

Conservation Commission (ECC), an advisory board meant to alert the Planning Board about proposals that would have a negative environmental impact. Its chairman, Marilyn Reed-Kelly was a friend and mentor as Edie educated herself about wetlands like the Great Swamp in Patterson, the threats, and government rules and regulations. Edie “believed that government was there for us” and couldn’t believe, “how disinterested residents were . . . obviously we had to wake them up!”¹⁰

The ECC “bullied”¹⁰ the Planning Board into requiring Environmental Impact Statements and encouraged them to write a Wetlands Ordinance at the same time the town was considering writing a new master plan. There were concerns about development and protecting The Great Swamp that ran along the town’s commercial zone on Rt 22.



Fig 10: Edie in her office; Danbury News Times article 1991-03-31

In 1987 two dumping sites in town became an issue (Fig 10¹¹). A loophole in the Environmental Conservation law allowed the dumping of construction and demolition materials for a year without a permit. Contractors from the city were filling in every hole they could find using the demolition material to hide and

absorb hazardous waste. Edie joined the CEC (Citizens’ Environmental Coalition) based in Albany and learned “the fine art of lobbying” about dump sites and toxic waste issues all across the State. It was her introduction “to large government agencies that do not enforce their own regulations. “They . . . are not proactive, they are reactive. You can only accomplish your goals by continually being in their face (!), nicely of course.”¹⁰

Two organized groups began to form in Patterson, the environmental group of which Edie was a part and a well-financed pro-development group. Town Meetings got nasty. The environmentalists started the Patterson Residents Association or PRO, a town-wide effort to educate the residents about the need for environmental legislation. They raised the money to produce an informational brochure that helped stop the two dumps.

On January 27, 1989, Putnam County announced its solution to the County's solid waste problem. They would simply construct a 500-acre landfill on a plateau east of Route 311 in Patterson and another along Rt 22. Patterson residents were stunned! Town Board Meetings were packed! The ECC held educational meetings that warned of the effect on the environment and public health, and the possibility of toxic waste seeping into the water of the Great Swamp that fed NYC reservoirs, the elementary school, and local wells. Patterson Residents for a Decent Environment or PRIDE was born. Street captains collected money to hire lawyers and Watchtower added its legal staff. Newspapers featured the controversy and Michael Garland's cartoons (Fig 11). A thousand

residents wearing tiny red paper PRIDE hearts showed up at a county-wide meeting. The County decided it was best to send its solid waste out of the county! Edie wrote, "You need to wake up citizens about how political events shape their lives. It always seems to take a crisis to move people to become involved."¹⁰

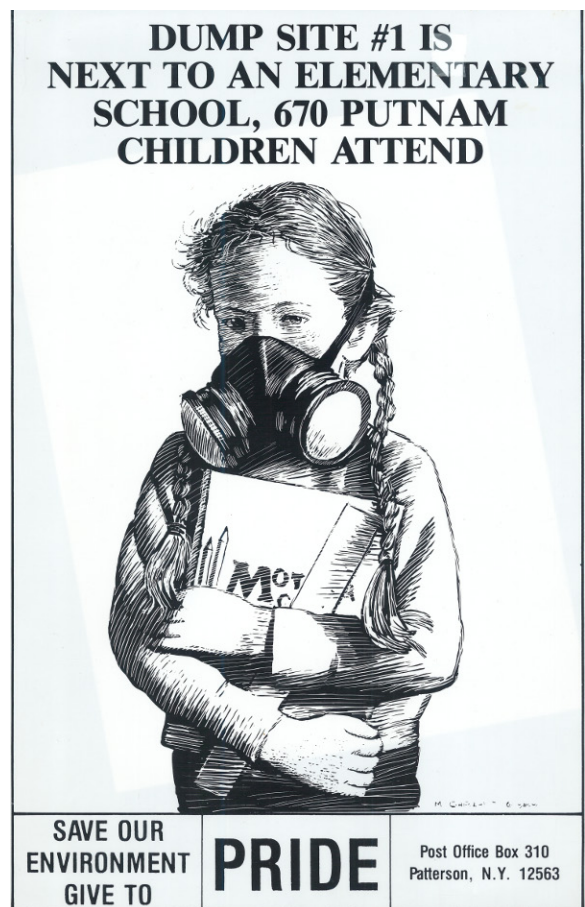


Fig 11: Michael-Garland cartoon

The “Dump Fight” highlighted the environmental role of the Great Swamp and in 1989 The Regional Plan Association (RPA) started a study of the South Flow in Putnam County. Edie was a member of Putnam County’s Environmental Management Council (EMC) that gathered The Nature Conservancy (TNC), DEC, DEP, Putnam County EMC, and SUNY Purchase environmental scientist Dr. Jim Utter to help conduct scientific studies. At the time, Edie was also chairing the ECC and working on drafts of new watershed regulations. In 1991 the RPA published the “Great Swamp Conservation Plan”. 1990 was the beginning of the idea of an organization called Friends of the Great Swamp, or FrOGS (Fig 12).



Fig 12: FrOGS' logo

In 1995, The Nature Conservancy with the assistance of the DEC received a \$150,000 federal EPA grant for a three year study to design a plan to protect the entire Great Swamp, the south flow in Putnam and the north flow in Dutchess County. Towns, government agencies, sporting groups, Audubon, Land Trusts and environmental groups were all participants. Researchers mapped rare species, defined wildlife corridors and migratory bird routes as well as identifying reptiles, fish, insects, birds and amphibians. Edie and Tom learned



Fig 13: Ice Pond tracking team, Tom and Edie; Meryl and Herm Weber; and Martin Brech

mammal tracking skills and monitored a corridor along Ice Pond in Patterson (Fig 13). In 1997 Edie was the director of the Croton Watershed Clean Water Commission when she and Tom donated 37 acres of their farm, “The Sterling Preserve”, to the Putnam County Land Trust.

In 1999 The Nature Conservancy published *The Great Swamp--a Watershed Conservation Strategy*, the result of all the surveys and municipal meetings. It outlined a plan that would support conservation priorities and compatible economic growth in the Great Swamp Watershed.¹²

Tom was the first chairman of FrOGS and worked with Gordon Douglas for official non-profit 501 (c) (3) status in 1998. Friends of the Great Swamp emerged from the watershed studies as a grass-roots advocacy group that would speak up against proposals or actions harmful to the Great Swamp. Its mission expanded to include research, education and conservation. Edie served as a director and board member, attending Town Board Meetings to learn about projects or legislation that might affect the Great Swamp. She didn't hesitate to speak up!



Fig 14: Great Blue Heron Award, PCLT 2003

In 2003 she received The Great Blue Heron Award from The Putnam County Land Trust (Fig 14) and the Women of Distinction Award in 2017 for the 40th Senate District sponsored by State Senator Terrance Murphy for her environmental advocacy (Fig 15).

In her college paper “The Education of a Community Activist and Beyond” written in 1997 for her 2003 Bachelor of Professional Studies degree earned from Empire State College (when she was 73!) Edie concluded, “If I have learned anything since 1996 it is that in the end it’s mostly politics and you cannot separate politics and environment, they require each other to reach agreement.”¹⁰



Women of **DISTINCTION**

HONORING WOMEN IN
THE 40TH SENATE DISTRICT

**Edith Keasbey
Patterson**

*E*dith Keasbey, of Patterson, has been a staunch environmental advocate in the Town of Patterson for as long as anyone can remember.

Mrs. Keasbey is a member of the Patterson Environmental Conservation Commission, as well as the Friends of the Great Swamp and Putnam County Land Trust. Among her most notable accomplishments is bringing greater recognition to the Great Swamp, and in 1989, fighting to prevent a landfill from being placed in the center of Patterson.

Mrs. Keasbey, along with her late husband Tom, donated two nature preserves to the Putnam Land Trust: Tom's Path Preserve and Sterling Farm Preserve. The Keasbeys also worked to preserve and restore one of the last remaining single room schoolhouses in the Town of Patterson.

Mrs. Keasbey has always been dedicated to the protection of our natural resources, and the preservation of the historical and rural character of the Town of Patterson. Her involvement in these areas has unquestionably improved the quality of life of every Patterson resident.

Fig 15: Women of Distinction Award 2017

Edie was the “heart” of FrOGS. She tabled at innumerable events (Fig 16); led canoe trips (Fig 17); helped organize the Art Show (Fig 18); collected invertebrates in stream studies (Fig 19); hiked through swamps, up rocky hilltops, and over icy rivers in winter. Her long dining-room table was the gathering place for FrOGS dinners, assembling the newsletter, feeding visiting guests, and designing and working on the Great Swamp Quilt for FrOGS’ 25th Anniversary (Fig 20).

Tom passed in 2007. Edie donated “Tom’s Path”, a 5-acre parcel with a small stream where he used to walk, to the PCLT in 2009. She was honored at FrOGS’ 25th Anniversary Celebration in 2015 not only as a founder but for her ceaseless efforts to protect the Great Swamp (Fig 21).

Edie’s adventurous spirit took her to Machu Piccu, the Galapagos, Iceland, and Patagonia. She enjoyed her garden, loved her pets, lunches with her friends, serving ice tea on the porch in summer, and making Sterling Farm Spiced Grape Jam in the fall. She reconnected with relatives, enjoyed family events, and sent heirlooms home. During her last



Fig 16: Tabling for FrOGS at Harney Tea Event 2015



Fig 17: Edie in canoe in the Great Swamp



Fig 18: Edie, the FROG (Ann Huibregtse), and Bill Hamilton at the annual FrOGS’ Art Show



Fig 19: Stream Studies, Mill Stream, Patterson; Lauri Taylor, Edie, Liz Cowan, Rick Saracelli



Fig 20: 2015, The Great Swamp 25th-Anniversary Quilt; Edie, Nancy Clark, Judy Kelley-Moberg, Beth Herr, and Liz Cowan



Fig 21: Great Swamp 25th-Anniversary Celebration honoring founders: Dr. James Utter, Gordon Douglas, and Edie; MC-- Judy Kelley-Moberg

two years, her health declined. Friends and neighbors drew closer, supporting her, until she was in the capable and caring hands of her round-the-clock aids.

Edie was independent, persistent, and “stubborn” at times, a generous spirit, a loving friend with a brilliant smile, a wicked sense of humor, and always up for fun and adventure.

She is survived by her son Tim, grand-daughters Athena and Karina and their children. It was Edie’s wish that her ashes and Tom’s would be part of the preserves and the farm she loved.

The Putnam County Land Trust and FrOGS agreed to work together to change Sterling Farm Preserve to “Edie’s Path”, just down the road from “Tom’s Path” and on the land she loved. Edie’s Path will serve to remind us of a woman who did make a difference!

ENDNOTES

1. Formated and edited by Ron Taylor. Image sources or credits: Patterson Historical Society --Figs 1-9, 11, 15; Judy Kelley-Moberg--Figs 12-14, 16, 18-20; Dr James Utter--Figs 17, 21.
2. The Patterson Historical Society (PHS) has in its possession an extensive collection of family documents and photos including: documents referenced in Endnotes 5, 7, 10, 11, 12. In addition to the documents in the PHS collection, and the US Census, family information in this article was drawn from the following sources:

BOSTWICK

- Bostwick, Arthur E. 1939. *A Life with Men and Books*. At PHS.
- Bostwick, Henry Anthony. 1901. *Genealogy of the Bostwick Family in America: The Descendants of Arthur Bostwick of Stratford, CT*.
- *Wikipedia*. "[Arthur Elmore Bostwick](#)" (1860-1942) with photo (accessed 2021-09-07).

SIMON

- *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*. 1967-02-17. "Mrs Edith S Simon Dies". Page 7. Newspapers.com (accessed 2021-09-10).
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STERLING

- Sterling, Albert Mach 1909. *The Sterling Genealogy. Vol 1.* and *Vol 2:* At Internet Archive (both accessed 2021-09-14).
- The Brooklyn Daily Eagle (pub). 1912. [The Brooklyn Daily Eagle Almanac](#) 27:573. "General Necrology of 1911: . . . Sterling, Edward C. multi-millionaire inventor of pressed brick process, Redlands, Cal., Feb. 25." At Google Books (accessed 2021-09-26).
- *Wikipedia*, "[William Townsend Porter](#)" husband of Alma Canfield Sterling, photo and portrait (accessed 2021-09-07).

THURLOW

- *Boston Globe*. 1909-06-23. "Anne Woodwell Thurlow daughter of Pres. Charles Thurlow of the Five Cents Savings Bank married Lawrence Payne Dodge (Harvard class of 1906)." Page 7. Newspapers.com.
- Mead, Frederick S, AB (ed). 1921. *Harvard's Military Record in the World War* . 871, 947. At Google Books (accessed 2021-09-29).
- Saltonstall, Leverett, Class Secretary (ed). 1915. [Secretary's First Report, Harvard College Class of 1914](#) and 1917 [Harvard College Class of 1914, Secretary's Second Report](#) . At Google Books (both accessed 2021-09-14).
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- Waszut-Barrett, Wendy Rae. Blog post 2017-02-08. *Historical Excerpt* - "[Women in Scenic Art.](#)" [Gretl Urban](#) (accessed 2021-09-25). References the 1927 issue of "The Scenic Artist." Gretl Urban Thurlow (1898-1997) married in 1917 John Woodwell Thurlow (1891-1966) who married 2nd Alma Sterling Simon in 1926.

3. Brick business references:

- Hall, Henry (ed). 1896. [America's Successful Men of Affairs: An Encyclopedia of Contemporaneous Biography](#). 759. At Google Books (accessed 2021-09-26).
- Saint Louis University Museum of Art. 2004. Exhibit *Brick by Brick: Building St. Louis and the Nation*, article by Stritz, Mimi "[Hydraulic Brick Company: The Early Years](#)" about Edward Canfield Sterling. (Accessed 2021-09-08).
- and Windsor and Kenfield (pub). 1904. "The Clay Working Plants of St. Louis". [Brick XX](#),5:235-39. Google Books (accessed 2021-09-26).

4. Mexican enterprise references:

- United States Department of State, Bureau of Foreign Commerce. 1903. [Commercial Relations of the United States with Foreign Countries During the Year 1902 I](#):461. At Google Books as *United States Congress Serial Set 4520* (accessed 2021-09-14).
- United States Senate, a Subcommittee of the Committee on Foreign Relations. 1920. [Investigation of Mexican Affairs: Hearing Before a Subcommittee . . . Part 22](#):3293. At Google Books (accessed 2021-09-26).

5. Keasbey, Edie 2017-12-12- ☺ -12-31, taped interview by Vincent Leibell for PHS.

6. Paschke, Pamela Ricciardi. 2018. *The South Precinct of Dutchess County, 1768-1777*.

7. Eisenstein, Anna and Krista Gabarro. 2008. "The Way it Was, Life on the Farm", essay and taped interviews. at PHS.

8. Keasbey, Edie. 2007. interview for *Vignettes of Patterson's Past* by Judy Kelley-Moberg, not recorded.

9. Kelley-Moberg, Judy. 2021-05. Unrecorded phone conversation with "Pucci"--Frances Howes.

10. Keasbey, Edie. 1997. "The Education of a Community Activist and Beyond". Paper written as part of her Bachelor of Professional Studies degree from Empire State College. At PHS.

11. *Danbury News Times*. 1991-03-31. "Illegal NY Dumps Ooze Long Trail of Crime." PHS.

12. Sieman, Dan. 1999. *The Great Swamp--a Watershed Conservation Strategy*. Available on FrOGS' website, <http://frogs-ny.org/research/> (accessed 2021-09-26).

The Friends of the Great Swamp and the Patterson Historical Society gathered as much of Edie's work, and family history as possible after her death. Contact the Historical Society for information on records and photos. The author of this remembrance tried to honor Edie as a person, her family history, her work to protect the environment, and the history of the farm.



"EDIE"

Many thanks to the Patterson Historical Society and the members who have spent an enormous amount of time organizing and scanning the photos and documents gathered after Edie's death. --And for having interviewed her on tape about her life, as well as researching family histories and the history of Sterling Farm, the home she loved.

Judy Kelley-Moberg