

IMAGES

...THEN AND NOW

From the Indian Hill Historical Society



**Buckingham Lodge
1861**

Remembering Lucile and Albert Berne

Both Cincinnatians with German roots, Lucile and Albert Berne were married for only nine years. Their stories provide a glimpse into a bygone era of privilege and culture.

Albert Berne, an only child born in 1877, was raised in Mt. Auburn and attended school in Mt. Adams. Like many in the Queen City, he was exposed to the arts from an early age. In high school he studied drums, violin, and piano; and he sang in the church choir. At age 18, he enrolled at the Cincinnati Conservatory of Music, and upon graduation, he taught voice and piano there, and at other educational institutions nearby. About 1900 he moved to Germany to study music for four years. There he married a “striking looking” woman from Berlin. The couple moved back to Cincinnati, where Albert resumed teaching at CCM. In 1912, Mrs. Berne perished under the wheels of a trolley car. Eyewitnesses called it a “deliberate suicide”, and it was a blow that left Albert Berne prostrated with grief. But, he would find love again.



Albert Berne, Sr.



Lucile Kroger Berne

Lucile Ida Kroger was born in 1889 to Mary Emily and Barney H. Kroger. She was the third of seven children, the first girl. Both of her two older brothers died – one at age 12 and another later in an auto accident. Lucile was the grocer’s oldest daughter. In 1900 her mother died. The Kroger family then lived on Reading Road. In the home, there were the 6 remaining children, Aunt Ida (Barney’s unmarried sister who managed the household) and Barney, also a nanny, maids, and a cook. The grocery business thrived, and the Kroger children attended many local musical events such as concerts in local parks, Music Hall, singing societies, and an opera house at the zoo. Lucile was educated at Miss Doherty’s, a college preparatory school, and was the first person in her family (male or female) to go to college – during an era when it was a more acceptable practice for young women to settle into married life. She attended Wellesley in Massachusetts, flourished there, and graduated in 1911. Then she returned to Cincinnati where she took classes in practical nursing and home economics.

When World War I broke out in 1914 and the Kroger sons enlisted in the Army, B.H. Kroger asked his oldest daughter to work at the company as his private secretary. There she acted as treasurer of the growing business. This she did until her brothers’ return after the war, when they rejoined the Kroger enterprise. In 1919 Lucile joined a group of Wellesley women who went to France as relief workers in a reconstruction effort. She returned to Cincinnati a year later to her father’s home. All three of her sisters had children, and her brothers were busy at the Kroger Company. Lucile met Albert Berne at an evening reception where he was an invited soloist. It was 1922, and redheaded Lucile complimented Berne on his performance and invited him to a dinner party the next week. She seated herself beside him and after dinner they danced together. Lucile was 33, and Albert was 46. He later reflected about that dance, “Our cheeks touched, and that was it!” Lucile and Albert were married eight months later in 1923. Together they enjoyed music, books, and nature. They had 2 sons: Albert and Henry. In 1928 Barney Kroger bought about 100 acres on Cunningham Road and built houses for his 5 remaining children, establishing a Kroger family compound in Indian Hill. The Bernes lives at 9825 Cunningham, a Colonial Revival designed by Guy Burroughs. Here Lucile tended her garden, raised her boys, read voraciously, and did crossword puzzles for amusement. Albert sang at home in his baritone voice every morning, and kept involved in Cincinnati’s musical scene. In 1932, Lucile died of abdominal cancer at age 43, creating a void in her family’s life.

The widower Albert Berne took his sons to Cape Cod the following summer, where he enrolled in an art class. He seriously started painting when he returned to Cincinnati that fall, taking lessons and developing his own style he exhibited locally and on Cape Cod, and painted his own original Christmas cards for years. He married a third time in 1948, but his wife divorced him in 1959. He continued painting into his 90s, and died in 1973 at age 96. Berne lived 41 years after the death of Lucile, the Kroger heiress. He maintained their Indian Hill home as well as one on Cape Cod. A wealthy couple, their too brief life together represents a unique chapter in 20th century local history.

Missing Lucile by Suzanne Berne was most helpful with this article.