

IMAGES

...THEN AND NOW

From the Indian Hill Historical Society



**Buckingham Lodge
1861**

Remembering Beatrice Shillito (1884-1964), Part 1 of 2



Beatrice Shillito was the granddaughter of John Shillito and daughter of Stewart Shillito, respectively the founder and treasurer of the John Shillito Company. She was one of five siblings; there were four daughters and one son. Her childhood was spent on East Auburn Avenue, now renamed William Howard Taft Road.

In 1879, a new six story Shillito's store was built at the corner of 7th and Race Streets in downtown Cincinnati. At the time it was the largest department store west of New York City. The structure, designed by James McLaughlin, had a 58-foot skylight dome, marble staircases, elevators, and over a thousand employees. John Shillito died soon after its grand opening. His four sons were his successors. Only one son, Stewart, remained in Cincinnati and managed the flagship store. He was described as a "millionaire dry goods merchant."

The Stewart Shillito family was raised in regal style. Stewart's wife, Lizzie Gaither Shillito died soon after her son's birth in 1893. The children: Elizabeth, Mary, Mildred, Beatrice, and John traveled widely with their widower father. The Shillitos were connected to the magnates of industry, including the Tiffany family and the J.P. Morgan family. Almost every summer they sailed from Maine to New York on the family schooner, stopping at various New England ports to call on friends. One year they toured Europe instead of the east coast. Stewart was a gregarious man and liked traveling. His acquaintances included European royalty, with whom Beatrice later maintained relationships.

Beatrice attended Miss Spence's School in New York City for her formal education. The school, founded in 1892 by Clara Spence was located in a brownstone home on West 48th Street. Then an all-girls boarding school, it was not a finishing school, but one that espoused higher education for women, with emphasis on politics, the arts, and the community.

Three of her siblings married, but Beatrice and her older sister Elizabeth lived with their father until he died in 1926. Shillito's Department Store was then bequeathed equally to all his children. In 1928 the store was sold to the Lazarus family for stock and cash. Over the decades it evolved into Federated Department Stores and is now known as Macy's.

Beatrice had money, social connections, and an education. She was fluent in several languages, very smart, and vocal. She assumed the role of matriarch of the Shillito family when her brother John moved to Boston to practice neurosurgery. Bea loved to travel and went on trips for months at a time. Then her maiden sister, Elizabeth died in 1928, and Beatrice was alone. Soon after, she built a house in the Spanish Colonial Revival style in the country, specifically Indian Hill. The house was situated at the end of a private lane on approximately 78 acres. It had a spectacular view of a bend in the Little Miami River which encompassed both Hamilton and Clermont counties. On one occasion at her Indian Hill residence, she hosted a debutante party for her niece. For guests to take in the vista of the river valley, she had a huge picture window installed in her living room. Entertainment was provided by both the Tommy Dorsey Band and the Count Basie Orchestra. Her home was considered distant from town in those days, but she enjoyed the country. At least two servants lived there with her. Beatrice liked watching the Camargo Hunt traverse her property in pursuit of foxes. She had a vegetable garden, grew some flowers, and enjoyed the wildflowers on her land. She did not drive but engaged chauffeurs or taxi cabs for up to an entire day to drive her to meetings of numerous organizations or social events.



"Highland Terrace" in Indian Hill

To be continued next month