

Mabel Henry Tabb
b. 1931

Mabel Henry Tabb and her family lived and worked on the Raymond Pitcairn “Cairnwood” estate in Bryn Athyn during the 1920/1930s when the Glencairn Museum was being built. Glencairn was the Pitcairn family home for more than eight decades before becoming the museum. Mabel and her brothers share memories.

Bryn Athyn Memories
Nelson Henry, Jr.

Our parents learned about the job at Raymond Pitcairn’s estate (Cairnwood) from previous employees (names forgotten). Nelson Henry, Sr., and Lucille Henry moved to Bryn Athyn October 8, 1927 with four children – Elizabeth (1919), Nelson, Jr., (1923), Forrest (1925), and Emmaline (1926). Alfred (1928), Mabel (1931) and David (1936) were born at Abington Memorial Hospital.

Our parents arrived at the Bryn Athyn train station and were met with a horse and buggy to transport them to the Raymond Pitcairn estate. Glencairn was under construction at that time. Their job duties included washing, ironing and pressing clothes, tending 3 furnaces, and feeding 2 liverymen. Also, turning on driveway lights at dusk and off at 11 p.m. nightly.



[Photo: Brother David and mother Lucille]

Our father was born in Florida and our mother in Georgia. They met in Georgia where Father was selling books on his way north. They married October 31, 1916 and moved to Philadelphia.

My early years in Bryn Athyn are recalled in memories of Heath’s Grocery Store, Bostocks, Pendletons, DeCharms, Hyatts, Simmons, Carpenters, Synnestvedts (residents of the Borough). The Cathedral with its well-tended lawns and stone cutters at work building additions to the church.

At Lower Moreland High School I played basketball, football and baseball.

Hang outs were Division Street in Jenkintown, Moore-Triplett (American Legion) Post. G. Lance Brown’s Drug Store on Second Street Pike (now Huntingdon Pike).

Movies: Hiway in Jenkintown.

Fast food: not invented yet. Ina Messina’s candy store next to Lower Moreland High School on Murray Avenue.

People and Places I Remember Growing Up in Bryn Athyn Mabel Henry Tabb

During my early years in Bryn Athyn, my siblings and I played ball on the spacious lawns near our house, next to Glencairn, rode bicycles in our yard and used clip-on skates to glide over the smooth surface of the macadam road by the Cathedral. The Pitcairn children our ages played ball with us from time to time.



Lena Barbour was the cook, and a fantastic one. I worked with her and learned so very much. When the Pitcairns went to their summer home in the Catskill Mountains every summer, I worked under Lena Barbour as the second cook and prepared the Sunday evening meal. I remember Beatrice Ashley as the governess for the Raymond Pitcairn children and manager of the household. Later, Joyce Bellinger managed the household.

[Photo: Glencairn]

The folks in the neighborhood who worked for the Raymond Pitcairn estate:

George O'Connor ran the Pitcairn dairy farm.

Peter Nielson was a cabinet maker (his daughter was our 5th grade teacher).

George Webster was a groomsman.

Al DeNio was the chauffeur.

Herman Leach was one of the later stablemen.

The Coleys (who lived across the Pike from us) took care of the greenhouses).

Earnest Belt was the night watchman.

I don't remember at this time who ran the Hennery (the chicken farm) located in the same area as the houses in which the Denios and Leaches occupied.

At the summer retreat home I learned to play Bridge and there were always enough folks to have baseball teams. I enjoyed hitting the ball over the roof, from time to time. Almost nightly, everyone would be taken to the "reservoir" down the mountain to watch spectacular sunsets.

Back at home, we walked the mile and a half to and from school daily since the Borough of Bryn Athyn paid for some of its residents to attend the public school at Lower Moreland in Huntingdon Valley but would not pay for those residents' school bus transportation. The school in Bryn Athyn was private when I was growing up, and members belonged to the church. I found out last year that a great-great-nephew won a football scholarship to the Academy of the New Church three years ago.

Our oldest sister Elizabeth attended Germantown High School and stayed in the home of the Reverend and Mrs. E. Sydnor Thomas, the pastor of our church, St. Barnabas Episcopal Church on Rittenhouse Street, in Germantown until her graduation. Betty attended Virginia State University and in her senior year was selected to present flowers to the President's wife, Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt, when she visited the university.

My brother, Nelson, Jr., was graduated from Lower Moreland High School and went on to attend Lincoln University until the Army called him for duty. Nelson, Jr. was sent to Cornell University after basic training. He obtained his degree from Temple University. Nelson, Jr. had excellent grades in school and should have been skipped a year in junior high at Lower Moreland, but due to the climate of race relations at that time, it wouldn't happen. Forrest (Dec. 1994), the second son, enlisted in the Navy and spent a good deal of his tour in Hawaii. Emmy, the second daughter, after graduation from high school, became the first Black model to appear in advertisements for Lucky Strike cigarettes. She was also crowned Miss Sepia (Philadelphia), I believe in 1946.



Alfred, the third son, enlisted in the Army and was such a good sportsman, was assigned to a "special services unit" and played baseball most of his tour which he served in Yokahama, Japan. After his military service, he became a super car salesman. David, the youngest sibling, who left us much too early in 1995, also loved his sports in school. After school he not only became a top auto salesman but owned his own dealership in Odessa, DE. Myself, next to the last child, was graduated from Lower Moreland High School in 1949 in a class of 49 students. Living abroad in Belgium, Norway, Australia, Portugal and Germany, while working for the Departments of State (Foreign Service) and Defense was enjoyable, enlightening, and rewarding.

[Photo: Mabel's parents, Lucille and Nelson Henry]

Nelson, Jr., Elizabeth, Forrest and Emmy contributed to the war effort with various jobs at Budds, in addition to Nelson, Forrest and Alfred serving in the military as previously mentioned.

My good buddies at school were Paulina Messina, Josephine (Trotter) Jefferson and Dorothy Jones. During my years at the Lower Moreland schools, there were teachers who were obviously prejudiced and some who were generally good people. In a home economics class that teacher made a racial comment while teaching the students how to wash a baby (doll). "Wash good around the neck; you don't want to leave a 'n..... neck'," she stated. Then her face reddened a bit. The Jewish student, Edward Goss, in our class, also suffered indignant remarks. He and I would just look at one another after incidences. I participated in field hockey but really enjoyed playing basketball. I was made captain of the team.

Another "sign of the time" was when I completed Temple University's Secretarial School in the Fall of 1951. I responded to an ad in the newspaper about a secretarial job in an office in Bethayres. I phoned from the Bethayres train station and was told to come to the office for an interview. Upon arrival, seeing me, a little more than ten minutes later, I was told the position was filled.

I attended Lower Moreland High School's first "Hall of Fame" celebration. Franklin Barrett was one of the honorees. At this event, I spoke with the principal of one of the schools and inquired if there Black teachers now at Lower Moreland High School. He not only changed the subject but quickly disappeared. At the table with me was a young Black man, I believe his name was Swann, who had graduated from Lower Moreland High School. He told me that when he was in school here, he had attained perfect attendance. The certificate for this achievement was presented to him in the principal's office rather than in an auditorium setting with the whole student body assembled, as is usually done. This young man was still bitter and hurt from this experience.

Shortly before I returned to live in the Philadelphia area, on a visit (in 1990), I drove to Bryn Athyn to look around. It was a depressing visit. The house in which I grew up was shabby looking from the outside and the bottom portion, which was a garage, of the property across the street was boarded up. During a fire in the hayloft next to our house, our family was relocated to the portion above that garage until our house was repaired.

It's amazing to me how the area surrounding where I was brought up and enjoyed my childhood has been so drastically altered. So much of the greenery of the property that was always so pristine was now overgrown or no longer there. The vibrancy that was there when I was growing up is no more. Time marches on!



[Photo: Left to right - Nelson Jr., Elizabeth "Betty", Alfred "Al", Emmaline "Emmy", Mabel, Forrest]

The Cathedral area is still magnificently kept and Cairnwood is still beautiful. Glencairn is now a museum. Family members and I had a tour through it in the later 1980s when Joyce Bellinger was there. I fondly remember the times we played in the pool at Cairnwood and my nephew, Dean Henry, playing with Laird Pendleton. To date they still are in touch.

Emmy left us in May, 2007 and her Memorial Service was on the beautiful grounds of the Bryn Athyn Cathedral in June, 2007 during a glorious sunset.

A Sports Memory, "Al" Henry b. 1928

I enjoyed playing sports and was active in baseball, football and basketball. One of my favorite stories concerns a Basketball Championship. The Pennsylvania Interscholastic League consisted of two parts, the upper half and lower half. Each part had six teams. Lower Moreland High

School was in the lower half of the league. The championship playoff between the winners of each half would be held on a neutral court. Lower Moreland, of which I was a team member, emerged the champions, so one can imagine this was the highlight of the season.

After the game, three full school busses full of cheering crazies headed for somewhere to eat on the way home. We stopped at a diner and our group easily filled up the place.

Halfway through the meal a cheer leader suggested they kiss all the guys of the winning team. I was the only African American on the team. Guess what?

Benjamin (Ben) Saint, a classmate and basketball team mate has visited me since I moved to San Diego and we reminisced about this memorable playoff.