



Haverford Township Historical Society



EDITH HANNUM (1885-1979)

By Richard D. Kerr

Edith P. Hannum was the daughter of William K. and Catherine C. Hannum, and great-granddaughter of John Hannum (see separate biography). She was born in Haverford Township on November 26, 1885. The family lived in the historic Simon Litzenberg house, which dated back to about 1750. The house incorporated a log cabin and was situated along Darby Road, one of the first roads laid out in the township, at present-day Dartmouth Lane in the historic Coopertown area. (Simon Litzenberg was the blacksmith that supplied ironwork to the nearby cooper for the construction of barrels.) A reporter from the Philadelphia *Inquirer* newspaper noted, "The Hannum House first appears on the tax rolls in 1798, when Philadelphia was still the capital of the new republic." After her parents died, Edith continued to occupy the house.

In November, 1922 Hannum was appointed Haverford Township Commissioner for the Fourth Ward, to serve the remainder of the term of Horatio Gates Lloyd, the wealthy financier who lived nearby in the Allgates manor. When that term of office ended, she won public election for the next term, thereby gaining the distinction of becoming the first woman elected as a township commissioner in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. She went on to win a long string of four-year terms to that position. Miss Hannum was publicly honored by the Township Board of Commissioners and the statewide township commissioners' organization in October, 1949. She then continued to serve as a township commissioner another twenty years beyond that, until 1969, racking up an incredible 47-year stint.

In her career of public service, she was known for taking her own position on issues and holding to it. She was not one to be readily swayed or silenced by being in the minority, preferring to take a stand and have her opposing vote counted. She tended to advocate for public services and against relentless development pressure on lands in the township.

In 1933, as Fourth Ward Township Commissioner, Edith Hannum attended the initial meeting concerning the establishment of a public library in the township. At the second meeting, she was chosen to chair a Library Committee. At a following meeting, she became temporary president of the formative Haverford Township Free Library Association. The library opened on May 28, 1934, with Helen Sharpless as its first librarian. It quickly outgrew its original "make do" location. Horatio Gates Lloyd appeared again in Hannum's history. He offered (in the middle of the Great Depression) the funds needed for Haverford Township to purchase the vacant Haverford Township Title and Trust Company building, at Darby and Mill roads, from the failed bank's court-appointed receiver. Lloyd died before all of the inspections, negotiations and legalities were completed, but his heirs honored his intentions and followed through with the needed funds.

In 1935 Edith Hannum took the job of library director, adding to her service to Haverford Township. She stands as the original and longest-serving director of the Haverford Township Free Library during its history. As the needs of the library continued to grow, in concert with the burgeoning of the township's population, Hannum was instrumental in building a "nest egg" fund for expansion of the building. In

August, 1967 she resigned as library director after 32 years of service. Her action was triggered by a township proposal to relocate the library to a planned new administration building at Manoa and West Darby roads, the site of the police station. She forthrightly stated, "I refuse to acquiesce to a political move." Hannum was succeeded as library director in 1968 by Justine Hocker, who then served for 18 years, another long tenure.

In the January, 1969 reorganizational meeting of the township commissioners, Hannum asked not to be appointed to head any board committees. In her decades of service, she had already served as chairman of every such committee. Her long span of service, however, did not end because she bowed out, but because she was defeated in the elections of Autumn 1969 by a Democratic challenger, after not receiving the support of either the Republican committee or a splinter Republican group.



Edith Hannum died on April 1, 1979 at the advanced age of 93. She was buried at Marple Presbyterian Church Cemetery in Broomall. The "Hannum House" was dismantled in 1989, after a long battle to preserve it, so that new property owners Nicholas and Angelina DiMedio could build a new residence. It had been restored as recently as 1981 by Mr. and Mrs. Francis Dougherty, who received a Heritage Commission Historic Preservation Award for their efforts. The venerable structure was taken apart, log by log and stone by stone, and removed to a storage area in the hopes that it could be re-erected elsewhere. That never happened, and so Edith Hannum's own lifelong home fell victim to the constant press of development that she had opposed in her lifetime.

Today, Widener University has an Edith Hannum Scholarship, described as "a partial scholarship awarded with preference given to women who are non-traditional undergraduate students."

Explore for More... Edith Hannum

Read about Edith Hannum's role in the creation of the Haverford Township Free Library:
<http://haverfordlibrary.org/about/history-policies-more/library-history/>

(Note: Subscription may be required for newspaperarchive.com links below.)

"Edith P. Hannum Honored for Service to Haverford" (1949 news story):
<http://newspaperarchive.com/chester-times/1949-10-11/page-15>

"Edith Hannum Quits Library; Claims Politics in Haverford" (1967 news story):
<http://newspaperarchive.com/delaware-county-daily-times/1967-08-22/page-11>

“Commission ‘Dean’ Faces Foe” (1969 election news story):

<http://newspaperarchive.com/delaware-county-daily-times/1969-05-16/page-24>

“Haverford Twp. Dem Ends Miss Hannum’s 47-Year Reign” (1969 election news story):

<http://newspaperarchive.com/delaware-county-daily-times/1969-11-05/page-11>

See images of the Simon Litzenberg or Hannum House from the Haverford Township Historical Society:

<http://haverford.pastperfect-online.com/36017cgi/mweb.exe?request=record&id=3EE80203-E9C5-43DB-976B-055461453172&type=102>

More on the fate of the “Hannum House”:

http://www.delconewsnetwork.com/articles/2009/12/01/news_of_delaware_county/news/doc4b0d878cc29cc316231732.txt?viewmode=fullstory

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