



Mr. and Mrs. Fowler McCormick arrive in New York aboard the "SS Conte Di Savoia" on May 9, 1935.

When Fifi Lived in Barrington

FRONT PAGE NAMES IN EARLY SOUTH BARRINGTON

ON MAY 23, 1937 the *Chicago Sunday Tribune* published an article by Al Chase headlined "Barrington District Proves Lure to Farm Minded Dwellers of Chicago Suburbs." Over 100 farm properties totaling 14,000 acres had been purchased by families of wealth and note for country retreats, hobby farms, and practical farms. Among these notables were Mr. and Mrs. Harold Fowler McCormick, Jr. They bought 440 acres on Penny Road [that was] "attractively landscaped and improved with a modern farmhouse style of home."

A simple statement, but the background of Mr. and Mrs. Fowler McCormick, Jr. was far from simple. Their marriage in 1931 was the culmination of years of rumor and family saga that had fascinated high society and headlined the front pages of major newspapers. McCormick, Rockefeller, and Stillman were the famous names that caused this furor.

The bride at Pleasantville, N.Y., in June 1931 was 51-year-old Mrs. Anne Urquhart Potter ("Fifi") Stillman, newly divorced from James A. Stillman, former president and largest stockholder of National City Bank, founded by his father.

The bridegroom was 32-year-old Harold Fowler McCormick, Jr., the son of Harold Fowler McCormick, and grandson of Cyrus Hall McCormick, inventor of the reaper. Harold Jr.'s mother was Edith Rockefeller, daughter of Standard Oil co-founder John Davison Rockefeller.

Family, fame, fortune, the bride and groom's age difference—and the bridegroom a Princeton roommate of the former Mrs. Stillman's son, James A. "Bud" Stillman—all propelled curiosity in the drama. The two young men had also sought to produce evidence against Mr. Stillman when he first tried to divorce Anne in 1920. After years of reconciliations and separations between the Stillmans, Anne obtained a secret divorce, hours before she married Fowler McCormick, Jr.

They lived in Chicago. The bridegroom was an executive in his family's

International Harvester Company, and in their circles, a country retreat was *de rigeur*. The McCormicks' neighbors along Penny Road were Mr. and Mrs. Harold C. Holbrook, who owned approximately 200 acres. Fifi remained close to the sons of her marriage to James Stillman, and in 1938, her youngest son Guy married the Holbrook's daughter Nancy.

After the Second World War, Fifi's second son, Alexander Stillman, was deeded 80 acres of the McCormick property and built a residence close to his mother. A Harvard graduate, "Aleck" spent most of his life traveling, and collecting antiquities and curiosities. During WWII he served in the Navy, receiving many commendations for his leadership and bravery in the Pacific theater. Later, he became devoted to the environment, which earned him a Certificate of Life Membership in the National Audubon Society. This was the impetus for the 1977 donation of his Penny Road property to the Chicago Audubon Society.

By the mid-1950s, his mother and step-father had left Barrington for their enormous ranch in Scottsdale, Arizona—the McCormick Ranch. When Fifi died in 1969, the ranch covered almost seven square miles. Her husband died in Los Angeles in 1973.

Alexander Stillman died in January, 1984. He was buried in the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific in Honolulu. The McCormick name is gone

from South Barrington, but the Stillman Nature Center is the lasting legacy of two storied families whose stars collided more than 80 years ago. U

Barbara L. Benson grew up in Kent, England, and later moved to New York. She settled in Barrington and has walked with our history since she first arrived here in 1980. (Photo: Susan McConnell)

