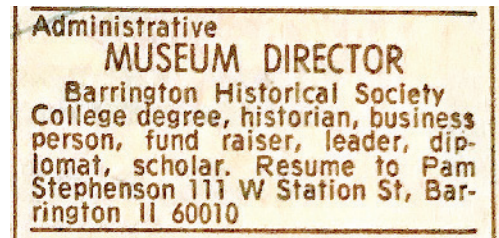




PHOTO: SUSAN MCCONNELL



The ad that brought Barbara L. Benson to Barrington. The Barrington Historical Society's board member Harold Byron Smith said "Let's hire the British Dame" in 1979 following interviews for a new museum director.



Barbara Benson helped Barrington's White House secure its National Register of Historic Places plaque.

The Girl from Bromley

BARBARA L. BENSON NAMED 2021
BADC CITIZEN OF THE YEAR

Each year, the Barrington Area Development Council selects a local resident who has demonstrated exemplary leadership and made significant contributions to the greater Barrington area. Octogenarian Barbara L. Benson is the BADC 2021 Citizen of the Year for her dedication to preserving Barrington area history. We spoke with Barbara to learn more about her role as our "Keeper of Time".

BORN BARBARA LANE 83 years ago in Kent, England, Barbara moved to America by twists of fate and choice. A classically trained ballet dancer, including the Royal Ballet School in London, her career was shortened by a serious knee injury. In the aftermath, friends invited her to the United States, where she eventually decided to stay. Her working life in New York culminated in a position at the Metropolitan Museum's Costume Institute. Moving to the Midwest in 1970 with her husband Larry, a Waukegan native, she opened a business with her sister-in-law

specializing in quilts and quilting. It was a little tiny ad in the Chicago Tribune that brought her to Barrington. The rest is history.

Congratulations Barbara on this exciting recognition. It follows a Barrington Cultural Commission Award as well as an award from the NSDAR Chapter for Conservation. What is it about the Barrington area that you love so much, having stayed here for 40 years? Does it remind you of Kent, England?

First, let me say that I am so pleased and honored for this award. It has been a great journey to try and keep alive our Barrington history!

The County of Kent has long been called the Garden of England, and our rolling landscapes have some familiarity.

QB has been very fortunate to have your historical knowledge captured in years of articles. Do you have a favorite article from this journey?

Every article is an adventure for me. Quite obviously one of my most treasured experiences was meeting and then writing about "The Indomitable Mr. D" [Richard Duchossois].

The quote, "He tried to write true history" is poignant for you. Where did that come from?

The most recent biographer of Sir Winston Churchill, Sir Martin Gilbert, had found this inscription on the headstone of a 19th century Anglican bishop. I find it apropos for my work.

As a young girl of 6 in Bromley, you read newspapers. Did this help you understand the encroaching World War II action in your hometown?

I was an early reader, and mostly books were my birthday and Christmas presents. I knew that we were in perilous times, but it wasn't until I was older that I understood the underlying reasons for it.

Please share your memories of living outside of London as a girl, and what your experience was during the war.

My father, who died in 1948, was a Blackout and Fire Warden, and I do remember very well when the V1 and V2 rockets began falling, that we had to leave our house several times for shelter until the rockets, doodlebugs as they were called, could be located. They fell silently, with a whistle at the end. I saw many bombarded houses in our neighborhood, which incidentally was only six miles from the famed and critical Biggin Hill Royal Air Force Station, where there is now a museum.

You left England for a life of new horizons. How did moving to America open opportunities for you?

I was welcomed into a new environment where I could try out activities that I had not strictly been schooled for.

You're a devotee of Winston Churchill. What do you appreciate about his service or abilities to lead in a time of war?

It was perhaps John F. Kennedy who said it best when Churchill was made an Honorary Citizen of the United States, that he took the English language and sent it into battle. But it was also his presence among the victims of the previous night's air raids with tears streaming down his face at the loss of life and devastation. Good Old Winnie was called out, "We knew you would come."

German Shepherds have played a central role in your life. How did this benefit you?

German Shepherds had been the dogs of choice in my husband's family, and so when I no longer lived in the city, they were a natural for us, too. From having them at home, I have also graduated to co-owning some special Shepherds with Kent Boyles and Liz Oster in Edgerton, Wisconsin. One of my current dogs is a daughter of the recent Westminster Best in Show winner named Rumor. I wrote about her in the September/October 2017 issue of QB. Besides loving them, they bring discipline into one's life. They fare best with good routines.



On August 6, 2020, Grassy Lake Site Stewards Carol Hogan and Wesley Wolf guided Barbara Benson through the thick woods off the Grassy Lake Trail to a place at water's edge on the Fox River. The goal was to find where the first settlers in Cuba Township, Joseph Flint and his son, Amos, had built their log house—where Flint Creek flows into the Fox River. Barbara Benson calls this unofficially "Amos Point".



A Citizen of the Year 2021 luncheon in Barbara Benson's honor was held at Chessie's. From left: George Yapp, Beth Raseman, Jack and Carolyn Schaefer, Dave Benson, Barbara Benson, Pete Benson, David and Carol Nelson, and Sam Oliver. The centerpieces were a gift from Kim Duchossois.

How do you keep such a massive amount of local historical data and anecdotal information organized and always at the ready?

I have copied and saved much information through the years, so that in a way I have my own archives. Every article or program has its own workbook.

What are your favorite books?

The works of David McCullough. "The Path

Between the Seas", "Mornings on Horseback", and above all, "John Adams" are masterworks of research, and his writing has an easy narrative form which makes our history so readable. I mostly read history and biographies, along with current affairs. My fiction lapses incline to the stories of author Rita Mae Brown! 