

## JOHN THOMAS BLACKWELL

Like his father and one of his brothers, John Blackwell lived to be 97 years old.

He died on September 20, 2010, at Sherrill House in Jamaica Plain.



The crowning achievement of his life, for which he worked as a volunteer for 16 years, was the addition in 1996 of a previously unprotected urban wild to the Arnold Arboretum and the Emerald Necklace. It is the Bussey Brook Meadow, a 24-acre tract between the Forest Hills MBTA station and the South Street gate of the Arboretum.

Six years later, in 2002, Mayor Menino dedicated the Blackwell Footpath, which crosses the Meadow and enables visitors using the T to reach the original South Street Gate of the Arboretum by walking past fields of wildflowers, wetlands, and Bussey Brook. John Blackwell and the board of directors of the Arboretum Park Conservancy raised over \$800,000 from public and private sources to design and build the footpath and the granite and iron gates at its Washington and South Street ends.

"He never gave up," said Nina Brown, current president of the APC. "Lack of money, initial community opposition, piles of debris and old oil tanks on the property did not faze him. He wanted to enhance public access to the Arboretum by mass transit to benefit Boston residents and international visitors. He was a creative, intelligent, and dedicated volunteer with few equals. He was also extremely modest about his contributions to Boston and was surprised that the city named the footpath after him."

He was also a prime mover in persuading the Trustees of Reservations to acquire the Lucy Stone birthplace in West Brookfield, Mass. A great-nephew of the 19th century pioneer suffragist, he never forgot her last words: "Make the world better."

Marguerite Geis, longtime officer of the Quaboag Historical Society, said: "Although the farmhouse burned in 1950, the land where she grew up and developed her sense of justice, as well as a recognition of the need to attain equal rights for all individuals, remains untouched.

John was determined to see the site preserved and Lucy Stone's legacy remembered. The residents of West Brookfield and the members of the Society owe John a debt of gratitude for all he gave, quietly and without fanfare. He, too, made the world better."

John Blackwell was born December 14, 1912, and was brought up in Cambridge. He often said he went to Harvard because it was the only college he could afford. He was graduated in 1934. Later he earned a master's degree in City Planning from MIT's newly established School of Architecture and Planning.

For 15 years he was an independent planning and zoning consultant with a special interest in green space. Successively he was Urban Planner of the Charles River Study (concerning the dam) of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers; Massachusetts Department of Natural Resources; and president of the Charles River Watershed Association.

When he met Eugenie Beal in 1970, she had just been appointed first chairman of the Boston Conservation Commission. He instantly recognized that she had a great opportunity for which she was unprepared, although she had seen to the Commission's creation. He set about coaching her in urban conservation, then a field with few proponents. Their creative and productive collaboration lasted until his final illness. He was the planner with new ideas and she was out front arranging for their implementation and receiving awards. Each understood and valued the role of the other. Together they launched Boston Natural Areas Network, the Arboretum Park Conservancy, the Boston Greenspace Alliance, the Edward L. Cooper Community Gardening and Education Center, and the Arboretum Park Conservancy. In 1980 they were married.

As well as his wife, John is survived by two sons from his prior marriage to Ann Wrightington: Thomas Wrightington Blackwell of Ann Arbor, Michigan, and William Howard Blackwell and his daughters Lucy and Hannah of Waterloo, Belgium. ♣