

Tom Marshall's Weekly News, June 8, 2009

Katherine Harper Hastings Wright (1909–1999): In 1942, Kitty Hastings and her husband, Calvin, built a small but comfortable home on Benge Road, next to the present home of Anne and Steve Cleary. When completed, they moved in, with their daughter Gail, who was two years old. With World War II under way, Kitty joined my mother's sewing group, where the women of Yorklyn made surgical dressings for the Red Cross in the sun parlor of Auburn Heights. When I was away, my father was very good about writing to me at least twice a week. Subsequently, one of his letters told me that they had met this nice young couple, Calvin and Katherine Hastings, and that he was 39 and she was 33 (my father always had to establish people's ages before he could talk about them). The Marshalls successfully interested the Hastingses in attending Hockessin Friends Meeting. In turn, the Hastingses convinced several other young couples who had recently settled along Benge and Meetinghouse Roads that they, too, might enjoy coming to Meeting, or at least to Sunday School, which Quakers call "First-Day School."

I got to know the Hastingses when I returned home in 1946, and Calvin and I worked on several projects together, including the establishment of a Boys' Club in Yorklyn, with permission to use as a clubhouse the former community building owned by the George W. Helme Snuff Company. The club might have been a great success, except that mill families were fast moving away from company houses in Yorklyn to seek better living quarters. The Hastingses also got me to be in a community play, which was not my thing, but I have a photograph to prove I performed. In 1953, Calvin Hastings died suddenly of a heart attack at the age of 50.

George S. Wright, a lifelong friend of Kitty's (they had lived in the same household in Dover when they were teenagers), became a widower about the same time Calvin Hastings died, and in less than a year, he and Kitty were married. It was a wonderful thing for them both. George sold his home in Brandywine Hundred and moved to Benge Road. Being very handy with tools and woodworking, he enlarged and improved the Hastings' home and did excellent carpentry for neighbors, charging very little for his work, if anything at all. After he retired from a top job with Acme Markets, he built tall clock cases, and before he stopped, he had built 100 of them. All the oak, poplar, cherry, and maple would come from fallen trees he would observe, cut up, and take to Kennedy Crossan's saw mill near Landenberg for having it sawn into usable lumber. Then it would be stored above his garage/shop to dry before he would begin the building of a fine clock. Kitty would help him sand and finish, then sand some more, to attain the wood finish that distinguished his clocks. My mother, in her last years, admired an unfinished cherry clock in George's shop, I asked him if he could finish it by Christmas, and I bought it for her Christmas present in 1974. The clock moved with us from Auburn Heights to Cokesbury last fall.

Gail Hastings, having developed into a beautiful young lady, died from hepatitis early in 1960 at the age of 19. When my mother became housebound in the early 1970s, seldom a day went by when Kitty Wright did not stop to see her. When Ruth and I were married, the Wrights' wedding gift to us was dinner at their home four times, one for each season. Kitty was an excellent cook, and George always had a new game to teach us.

Ruth and I took George and Kitty to the Chautauqua Institute for a three-day stay in the summer of 1986, which both seemed to enjoy very much. George died less than a month later. Kitty, who had long been interested in the Hockessin Interfaith Association, continued to host a picnic for that group in June each year, and Ruth was her assistant. The last of these picnics were held at Auburn Heights instead of the Wright home. About 1990, she knew she should sell her home, and in the midst of moving out, she fell and broke her leg. She had been accepted at the retirement community of Kendal-at-Longwood, however, where she lived out her life, passing away shortly after her 90th birthday in 1999.