

## **JOHN HEYL: A BRILLIANT AND RESILIENT ROTARIAN**

John K. Heyl was born, 100 years ago next week, on April 26, 1906! John Heyl, in his own words, “I grew up in Allentown, [Pennsylvania], so I knew plenty of gals in the community.” John was 18 when radio came in to town, and so he will present to us a unique perspective on how America has changed during his lifetime. But, John will have to wait a few minutes to give his speech on this topic, because you all need to know more about our steady friend, resilient Rotarian, and brilliant individual, particularly because John has always been self-effacing and never self-promoting.

Like John’s grandfather, father, brothers, and son Tony, John Heyl attended Muhlenberg College in his hometown of Allentown, Pennsylvania. John was a commuting student during these four college years and earned his AB degree in liberal arts upon graduation in 1928.

John was brilliant, from a young age. He was an excellent student and scored very high on a Carnegie Association exam taken shortly after graduation from Muhlenberg. In fact, John was told by the examiners that he had the “widest knowledge of anyone at the college.”

John embarked on a life-changing trip with a German professor at Muhlenberg between the two world wars. They traveled to the Black Forest and Berlin in Germany, the Alps, toured through Rome in Italy, heard Mozart in Austria, saw the sights of Holland, observed France, and saw London in England, before sailing on the German ship Columbus back home. And all for \$800!

John went on to Harvard University where he earned his master’s degree in architecture in 1933. He was awarded the American Institute of Architects (AIA) Gold Medal for being the top architectural student in the country. Upon taking the Carnegie test again, he was told that he could be many things, including an attorney, medical doctor, or minister.

Instead of these alternatives, John chose to pursue his career in architecture. Arguably the best architectural student in the country when jobs were almost impossible to find during the depths of the Depression, John joined with two other men in Allentown to form Heyl, Bond and Miller. John worked on architectural designs in these early years for the original building at the

Allentown Airport, many Lutheran churches in the Lehigh Valley, and numerous local schools, including converting the Allentown Prep School building into a women's dorm and remodeling and building numerous buildings at Muhlenberg College.

John was attracted to Rotary at a relatively early age. At 32, in 1938, John joined the Allentown Rotary Club. He was an avid and active Rotarian and quickly rose to his club's board of directors and became vice president very soon as well. However, his architectural firm's directors would not permit him the extra time needed to serve as president of his Allentown Rotary club.

In 1940, at the age of 34, John finally settled down and married his wife of the next 65 years, Florence L. Heyl. Florence had already been the first full-time director of the Lehigh County Girl Scout Council in Allentown from 1934, until her marriage in 1940. She had founded Camp Mosey Wood, their first permanent resident camp. John and Florence had two sons and two daughters: Mary Liz, John, Frances, and Tony.

With the advent of World War II, at 35, John taught many Marine officers the skills of engineering drawing for two and a half years at Muhlenberg College. This was part of the Marines' intensive special education before they were shipped overseas. By the end of John's two and a half years of teaching, many of his pupils were already dead.

During the next 30 years, John designed over 40 church buildings throughout eastern Pennsylvania and western New Jersey, as well as other places such as Philadelphia and Washington. He restored many eighteenth century historic buildings, as well as some of more recent vintage. In 1958, John co-authored a book, Pennsylvania German Barns, now a classic book worth over \$400 each. John's original work was described a half-century later by Robert Emminger in his 2003 book The Pennsylvania Barn: “[John Heyl's book was] the first systematic study of Pennsylvania barns based on a morphology. It contains 150 illustrations and includes detailed analyses of the varied forms of the Pennsylvania barn, resulting in a classification system. Progressing chronologically from simple early barns to larger, more complex later barns, this system establishes an evolutionary process to explain the barn's origin.”

Upon retirement in 1973, John decided to move to Maine. His friend from Allentown, Reverend Walter Eastwood, had made a move to a place called Boothbay Harbor, Maine. John and Florence bought some land in Boothbay's first modern subdivision, Tallwood Estates, and the Heyls moved into their new home in 1973.

Also in 1973, John quickly joined the Boothbay Harbor Rotary club (as had his friend, Walter Eastwood), missing Rotary meetings for only a few months. He, at that point had already served 35 years in Rotary in his Allentown, Pennsylvania club. So far, John has served merely an additional 33 years in our Boothbay Harbor club. John Heyl has been a Rotarian for the past 68 years, an astounding feat! Soon, in just over two years, John will have devoted over half his Rotary life to our Boothbay Harbor club. Most importantly, John Heyl has for a full century faithfully followed the Rotary motto of "service above self."

John rekindled, in retirement, his passion for architecture and for serving others. He has been instrumental in the following Maine restoration projects: Bath Marine Museum Preservation Workshop and Boat Restoration Building; the 1761 Pownalborough Courthouse; and the 1840 Nobleboro school relocated and restored for the Nobleboro Historical Society. John Heyl prepared botanical drawings for his wife's articles in the former *Maine Times* newspaper (Florence had started a nature column in the *Allentown Morning Call* newspaper from 1970 to 1973, and her same column continued from 1973 until 2000 in the *Lincoln County News* and the *Boothbay Register*; Florence also published a book, *You Can Find it Wild*, a selection of her writings, in 2002). John has recently completed a dozen historical illustrations for the 1983 manual of the Northampton County League of Women Voters, as well as an artifact sketch for the Boothbay Region Land Trust. John has also served for many years on the Maine State Museum commission, he was appointed by four different governors, and he is the second-longest serving commission member, second only to Tom Berry's father, Henry Berry.

Last year, John traveled to Italy, and we are honored to welcome some of his friends and family from Italy and Boston with us tonight!

John continues to hike, often with son Tony. John Heyl is the most erudite person and Renaissance man that any of us could hope to meet. John has had a scientific interest in most things, including botany, and he can

recognize many birds, amphibians, and plants, and he can recite their Latin names as well. Tony had a great conversation with his dad on a fairly recent trek, as they were walking along a road that they had traversed every day for a week: “I noticed down a steep incline that a shrub had been pruned. I said, ‘Dad, someone pruned the shrub down there,’ and he said, ‘Oh, I did that. It’s a horse chestnut, and I recognized the leaves; it probably came from the Tuilleries gardens.” John then went on to tutor Tony in great detail about how General Lafayette had found horse chestnut trees after he returned to France after the Revolutionary War, how Lafayette gave some horse chestnuts to President Washington, and how the horse chestnuts spread across the continental U.S.

John watches no TV, listens to only public radio, but remains a voracious reader, especially of nonfiction books and a wide variety of periodicals. For example, John has recently read biographies of Johann Sebastian Bach, John Marshall, Hat Shep Suit (the female pharaoh of Egypt for 17 years); and he has just read 1776 by David McCullough and The Lobster Coast by Colin Woodward. John Heyl is a Renaissance man.

This 1928 Muhlenberg College grad is visiting Allentown in May to accept his honorary doctorate of humanities degree from Muhlenberg!

By the way, for those who don’t know, John still remains very vital and active. Just last week, at Rotary, John just shook his head and told me, in almost disbelief, “The doctors just can’t find anything wrong with me.” He continues to drive all around the region, as well as hike and live a very healthy and active life. He continues to attend Rotary, more regularly than most of us.

John Heyl has been an incredible and tireless advocate, driver, and caregiver for his wife, Florence, for the past few years. That is why John routinely for the past few years would quietly leave early from Rotary each week, after the business program and just before the speaker. John lost Florence this past February 15, but not before they celebrated their 65<sup>th</sup> anniversary last fall. Their four children are scattered all over the country: John II in Maple Grove, Minnesota, Tony here in Boothbay, Frances in New York City, and Mary Liz (and husband Robert) in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania. John has two grandchildren and one great-grandson.

Former Boothbay Harbor Rotarian, Harold B. Clifford, charter member of this club from 1939 until his death in 1987 at the age of 94, was only 13 years older than John Heyl. Harold would sometimes stand up in our club, back when we had only men, and boldly proclaim, “Boys! People ask me the keys to my longevity. I reply, ‘No alcohol, no tobacco, and no loose women; and now it’s too late! Other than an occasional bit of wine, John Heyl can proclaim the same prescription for his own longevity, a rich and meaningful 100 years on earth and a remarkable 68 years in Rotary! John inspires me in yet another way: he regularly indulges in lots of ice cream! And, John Heyl continues to serve us and others, and tonight this brilliant and resilient Rotarian will share some first-hand insights as to how America has changed during his lifetime.

Chip Griffin  
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