

stant source of pleasure. In fact, she maintained a beautiful and original garden at her Worcester home. At an early age, she became a proficient horseback rider and a successful competitor. She was also an avid golfer.

Nat's generosity, spirit, and loyalty will be missed by her friends and all with whom she served.

Francis H. Dewey 3rd

### HELEN ESTABROOK STODDARD

Helen Estabrook Stoddard was a prominent philanthropist and cultural leader in Worcester, Massachusetts, where she died on November 28, 1998, at the age of ninety-four. Born in Worcester to Dr. Charles and Edith Estabrook, she graduated from Bancroft School and Vassar College, after which she attended the Katharine Gibbs School in Boston. In 1932 she earned a diploma in French civilization from the Sorbonne. This early stay in Paris prompted a life-long devotion to French art and culture. Returning to her hometown, she married Robert Waring Stoddard who, in his pivotal roles at Wyman-Gordon and *Worcester Telegram & Gazette*, became one of Worcester's leading businessmen of the twentieth century.

Helen Stoddard's indomitable spirit made her a community legend. She was as determined as she was elegant. Always energetic and impeccably dressed, this petite but strong lady commanded a great presence wherever she went and could hold her own on any topic of conversation, from bird hunting in Scotland to the art of the Bombocianti in seventeenth-century Rome. Perhaps her greatest asset was her inquisitive mind.

Like her husband, Helen Stoddard was an active force in Worcester society by the late 1940s. She volunteered for numerous organizations including the First Baptist Church and the Junior League of Worcester. Her interest in nature found her active in the Worcester Garden Club, which she served as president, and

The Trustees of Reservations, where she served as a director. For many organizations she was key to the realization of major new initiatives. At the Worcester Horticultural Society she was the honorary chairman of the Fund for Tower Hill, the first drive to establish the Tower Hill Botanic Garden in Boylston. She was also a founding member of the Worcester Art Museum's Members' Council, established in 1949, and in 1971 she joined the Museum's first class of volunteer docents. An inveterate learner, she continued to attend docent classes into her nineties. In 1992, at the age of 89, she helped to establish the Museum's major donor society, named after its founder, Stephen Salisbury. Always a major donor and often a key solicitor of funds for Worcester's many nonprofits, Helen Stoddard was recognized for her fundraising accomplishments by being presented the Alexis de Tocqueville Society Award in 1993.

Mrs. Stoddard shared many of her husband's interests, including big game hunting, which they pursued around the world, and fishing, mainly at their camp on the Miramichi River in New Brunswick, where in her late eighties she could still be seen catching her own salmon dinner. Her greatest interests, however, were horticulture and art. In 1941 she received from her father-in-law, Harry G. Stoddard, the gift of a garden designed by Fletcher Steele. This elaborate showplace, which extended into the laurel-filled woods behind the Stoddard home, was a labor of love, symbolic of Helen's passion for nature and artistic refinement. Always eager to share the picture-perfect garden with visitors from near and far, she also took special delight in viewing it from her dining-room window.

A long-standing member of Worcester's French club, La Quinzane, Mrs. Stoddard also expressed her Francophilic interests in her art collecting. Starting with a small painting by Renoir acquired in 1951, she built a distinguished collection that included a number of major nineteenth-century masters, among them Corot, Sisley, and Pissarro. In the case of some of the American artists she collected, such as Georgia O'Keeffe and Andrew

Wyeth, she made it a point to get to know the artists as well. She and her family were devastated when in 1978 many of their most important paintings were stolen. Pissarro's *Bassin Duquesne à Dieppe, Temps Gris*, which had hung for several decades over the living-room mantel and was always a favorite of Mrs. Stoddard, was the only work to be recovered. Missing for two decades, it was seized by the FBI at a Cleveland auction house only weeks before Mrs. Stoddard's death. Her joyful response and immediate action to ensure that the painting be given to the Worcester Art Museum, to which she and her husband had donated much of their collection, was testimony to her great love of art and her life-long tradition of giving back to her community.

Mrs. Stoddard received many civic awards and was named outstanding volunteer by a number of Worcester institutions. Several local colleges also awarded her honorary doctoral degrees. She was elected a member of the American Antiquarian Society in 1985 following the death of her husband, who had been a member for twenty-one years. In addition to her generous support of the Society, she served three years on its Nominating Committee.

One of Worcester's greatest boosters, Mrs. Stoddard was indefatigable in serving her community. She was particularly admired for her courage to remain fully involved in a wide range of organizations following her cancer surgery in 1978. Indeed, the last twenty years of her life proved extremely fruitful. Even in her final years, when confined mainly to her home, she took up writing poetry.

Helen Stoddard, a member of one of Worcester's leading families of the twentieth century, will long be remembered for all she did to add to her hometown's cultural and educational riches. This tradition of giving back to the community continues with her two daughters, Judith King and Valerie Loring. She is also survived by seven grandchildren and ten great-grandchildren.

James A. Welu

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