

## The Careys of Millsboro

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It is not always that we aspire to do a great thing. Moreover, it is simply in striving to do that which is placed before us that greatness is revealed.

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My grandfather, Elijah E. Carey, was the only child of Elijah W. and his second wife Lavinia E. Mears. Born February 24, 1876, he would grow up working on his father's farm. The Carey family farm was comprised of several tracts of land totaling approximately 300 acres, extending out from the present day location of Carey's Camp, in what would be the farm's southeast corner. Conway Road which today intersects Careys Camp Road did not exist. There was no road through the farm north to Phillips Hill Road or south to Mission.

With the passing of his father, in 1887, when he was just eleven, young Elijah Edward would learn all too quickly some of life's tough lessons. His mother certainly understood the burdens that would come with trying to manage a large farming operation of the day, and within a year of the passing of Elijah W., the bulk of the farmland was being sold.

Not much is recorded as to Elijah Edward's activities from that time until 1897, when in October of that year, at the age of twenty-one, he established a mercantile business in Shortly, about four miles north of the farm. In that same year he married Mary L. Wharton, also of Shortly, and in 1898, a son, Leroy (Lee), was born to the couple. A second child was born in November of 1900 who survived for just one hour. Sadly, this would mark the beginning of a pattern that was to plague the Careys.

By 1901, grandfather had relocated to Millsboro, forming a partnership with his father-in-law, operating under the name of Carey & Wharton, and during which time a third child, Mary E., had come along. In 1902, the couple was blessed with a second daughter, Edna M., only to suffer the loss of Mary in 1904 to measles. Edna would pass away from causes unknown in 1905.

Grandfather Carey continued with the Carey & Wharton business until sometime in 1905 when Mr. Wharton sold his interest to Walter P. Monroe who would later operate a clothing store, in a partnership with his brother, in downtown Millsboro.

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By 1906 another daughter, Mildred, was born to Ed (as he now referred to himself) and Mary. However, the child was not to see her first year and passed away later in 1906.

On October 6, 1907, another daughter, Bertha Eleanor, was born, and although her prospects for survival held promise, her formative years would not be without anxiety and suffering from the effects of tuberculosis, known as “consumption” in those days. By the beginning of the 19th century, tuberculosis killed one in seven of all those who had ever lived.

Ed and Mary began married life living in Shortly and at some point built a house on the corner of today's Morris and Church Streets. Grandfather continued in the business partnership of general merchandise with Walter Monroe as Carey & Monroe until about 1911, at which time he began conducting business solely in his own name, continuing for two more years.

In 1913, he was appointed postmaster by President Woodrow Wilson, continuing in that position until 1922, all the while operating his mercantile business and even forming a new partnership, Carey & Truitt. This operation continued until sometime in 1925. Following the business partnership of Carey & Truitt, in 1925, grandfather began a farming, trucking, and retail coal business under the name of Carey & McGee.

On January 4, 1914, another child was born to Ed and Mary, only to survive until May of that same year, and as if all of the losses grandfather had experienced at this point could not possibly be enough, his beloved wife Mary would pass away on January 9, 1915.

World War I had begun in 1914, but America did not enter until April 2, 1917. We know that grandfather's first son, Lee, served in the army during that period but have no knowledge as to where his service may have taken him or what his experiences may have been. I have his helmet somewhere in my collection.

On December 26, 1917, grandfather married Bessie B. Johnson of Millsboro. Bessie had grown up in the family home built by her father, William Johnson, a blacksmith, in 1884, on what was then Morris Avenue, just across the street from the Carey home. Great-grandfather Johnson's blacksmith shop was in the building behind the house, and opened onto Central Alley behind. I vividly remember visiting the remains of the old forge many times when I was growing up, while spending countless hours with my then widowed grandmother and my Aunt Ann.

On Saturday, the 26th of July, 1919, Grandfather Carey's only surviving daughter, Bertha, passed away at Hope Farm, later known as Emily Bissell, located in New Castle County, a facility constructed for the sole purpose of treating tuberculosis.

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Death certificates were not always issued in those bygone days, and the causes of death of the other children of Ed and Mary are not all known. We can only speculate as to the effects of this dreaded disease and how it may have impacted the other family members.

The widespread use of formal birth certificates was not in place back then with most such recording performed carefully on a front page of ever-present and very large family bibles. In the cases of those Carey children who survived only hours or days, no names are recorded, the sex of the child is not known, and places of interment are not documented. The three young girls who were named are buried at Carey's Cemetery, in what was originally the family cemetery of Elijah W. Carey. Bertha is buried in Millsboro Cemetery, then known as Brotherhood, as is her mother, Mary.

On April 23, 1921, a son, Elijah E. Carey, Jr. (E. Edward, Ned) was born in the family home on the corner of Church and Morris Streets, and on June 22nd the following year, a daughter, Ann Elizabeth, was also born at home. Recorded in the cement sidewalk approaching the side porch of the house were Dad's and Aunt Ann's initials and their dates of birth. I have always regretted not having mentioned something to the new owners when I had the opportunity. The porch disappeared in a renovation as did that small section of sidewalk.

Lee was married to Evaleah Lance Green on June 2, 1923, and they are remembered to have made their home in the Georgetown area. Just five years later, on October 27th, 1928, grandfather's only surviving child from his first family, Lee, passed away at the Georgetown home of his in-laws. Grandfather was reported to have collapsed at Lee's funeral.

Just how long grandfather continued in the partnership with Mr. McGee is unclear, but by 1928 he had become an insurance agent for the United States Fidelity and Guaranty Company. In that year he was also elected Mayor of Millsboro, a position he held for several years. Although perhaps unsolicited, his presence in the town's mayoral office provided ready accessibility for his insurance clients. This worked to his disadvantage politically, however, as some evidently took exception to the practice and it eventually cost him an election.

Grandfather was also involved in a business venture with two other men that made him part owner of a tomato cannery on Old Landing Road. It would later become the Millsboro Poultry plant, just across the street from present-day Merck Company. Dad worked in the cannery as a young boy, making 10-cents an hour; great money at the time.

In 1937, grandfather was appointed Deputy State Treasurer by Dr. Blackstone, who had just been elected to the Office of Treasurer. Dr. Blackstone was a local pharmacist, operating his business

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in the building in which Carey's Frame Shop is now located, and in that earlier time a popular political gathering place.



In the early 40s, a property that contained a house and a general store became available on Laurel Road, two miles west of Millsboro. Grandfather and Grandmother purchased the property, a move that allowed him to resume his business pursuits. It also allowed him to have his insurance agency in his own space, located in a separate room of the residence.

They are believed to have sold the Morris Street house at this time to a lady always known to all of us as Aunt Elsie Wharton. She is thought to have been related somehow to Grandfather's first wife, and was living there as far back as I can remember.

Grandmother had inherited the Johnson Property and she rented it to a young undertaker, Ronald James, who was then in the formative days of his funeral business. Viewings were actually held at the house with coffins passed through the front porch window of what was then the parlor.

By 1939 the world was at war, and with the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941, young Ned Carey, my father, just twenty years old, began making his plans for military service, but not before marrying Beatrice Mae Wells of Milton on August 1, 1942. Dad's service in the Army Air Corps kept him stateside in training squadrons, serving at Shaw Field in Sumter, South Carolina, and in Lincoln, Nebraska.

In 1944, Grandfather Carey suffered a heart attack, whereupon Dad was summoned home and was subsequently granted an early discharge in order to help his mother with the family business. Dad and Mother rented the Johnson property from Grandmother Carey and set about preparing their new home for an addition. On the morning of October 30, 1944, a son was born to the couple, Elijah Edward Carey, III, yours truly.

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Sadly, that evening, Grandfather Carey passed away. His life was filled with many challenges and much grief. Whether his entrepreneurial spirit was driven from desire or necessity, no one knows. We do know that he must have sustained serious financial burdens arising from the medical and funeral costs of the day. My mother has told me often that she never heard a single complaint from him, and how impressed she was of his calm resilient demeanor. He was just 68.

Grandmother Carey exchanged residences with Mom and Dad as they assumed full responsibility of the general store business, sometime in 1945. From my time growing up there, I clearly remember the shelves lined with canned goods, the glass front meat case, the butcher block, the cold storage room, the gas pumps, the pickle barrel, and farm machinery. I also recall clandestine trips to the ice cream and cold soda cases, more than one of which ended in temporary banishment.

Having relocated back to town, to the Johnson property, Grandmother continued with the insurance agency which grandfather had established. I spent a lot of hours with grandmother and my Aunt Ann who had continued to live at home with her mother. Aunt Ann had had serious plans for Flight Officer Morton Donaway when he went away into the service, but he was killed during a bombing raid over Italy on April 10, 1945. Consequently, Aunt Ann remained single for quite a few more years after that loss. All of this was to my advantage, however, as I never lacked for great experiences.

In 1948, my brother, William Frederick (Fred) came along, and we shared many happy childhood days together growing up and running practically free-range in the country, and later, in much the same fashion, in smalltown Millsboro.

A country general store may conjure up nostalgic thoughts and visions - it does with me - I lived it, but for a husband and wife team who are married to it as well as to each other, the long hours are a grind, and by 1950, Mom and Dad were making plans for something else.

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As 1953 dawned, Carey's Paint & Hardware was making a colorful addition to downtown Millsboro. The building was sporting the bright orange and white colors of the Athey Paint Company of Baltimore, and Mom and Dad were open for business. The Laurel Road store was sold to the Mumfords who operated a business there until the 1970s.

On October 19, 1951, Ann married Clayton McCabe Dukes of Selbyville. They would start married life in Millsboro and eventually move to New Castle, to be nearer to his work. Aunt Anne and Uncle Clayton would raise two sons, Clayton, Jr., and Bill.

In 1961, Grandmother Carey passed away at the home of Ann and Clayton. Dad and Mom bought the Johnson property and set to making renovations to what would become our new home by late 1962.

Over the years, Dad served the community of Millsboro in many ways. He is remembered by many for his devotion to the fire service and by still others for the life-saving dashes he made as a volunteer driver in the local ambulance squad. Mother was very supportive of his efforts and filled his vacant spot in the store whenever the alarm for help was sounded in our community.

Dad worked outside the shop in various ways, and one in particular provided many unique experiences for me. We were very good friends with a local funeral director, and the business end of that relationship enabled me to put a value on mortality at an early age. I went with Dad many times when he would be called to assist to transport someone. Dad would eventually serve as Deputy Coroner when the funeral director was elected to the post in the 60s.

For many years, Mother wrote for several local newspapers as the Millsboro social editor and provided what we always teasingly referred to as the "gossip column". Her Royal typewriter sits today as a quiet reminder of the many nights it filled the air with its clickety-clack keyboard and ding-dinging carriage return, the social media machine of a bygone day.

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Never lacking for an outlet in his desire to serve, Dad would be appointed Town Alderman during the 70s. The many cases that came before him added a colorful flavor to dinner time conversations and provided an otherwise unknown insight into community happenings.

Mom and Dad developed a loyal customer base with the paint and hardware business, and over time increased the diversity as they added lines arising from hobbies in which they each had developed interests. Mother had taken up painting, and soon the store was experiencing an influx of customers from the local art community. Dad acquired a horse (and later two more for Fred and me), and this interest led to the addition of saddlery.



By the mid-sixties, Mom and Dad were feeling the effects of competition from a new store in town that was part of a regional chain that sold the very same line of paint. Understanding the situation that Mom and Dad were in, but powerless to do anything directly, the paint company sales representative encouraged them to look into custom picture framing. This business line became their crowning glory and Carey's Paint and Frame Shoppe was well-known throughout the area. In the 80s, they added a limited line of paint products under the Devoe label.

Dad passed away in 2004, and Mom continued to operate the business until health deterred her in 2016. After a brief period of inactivity, I reopened the store doing business as Carey's Frame Shop in May 2017 and in 2018, added lamp repair.

After working for the L. D. Caulk Company in Milford and living there for about twenty years, I moved back to help Mother, a situation which also put me closer to my daughters' families and six wonderful grandchildren. My brother retired from the postal service several years ago and lives a few miles outside of Millsboro. Fred and his wife have a daughter and two grandchildren.



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With the passage of time, the “Careys of Millsboro” will ultimately become just a memory, as any hope of carrying the name forward sadly disappeared with the untimely death of the last male in our line, my brother’s son, just a few years ago. But, those offspring even without the family name, both now and in the future, nevertheless follow with Carey blood in their veins and can claim the legacy of the Carey/Cary line with justifiable pride. May they in turn give each successive generation reason to be proud of their contributions to the Carey legacy.



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### Credits:

Delaware Public Archives

Carey Family Bible

Short Family Bible

History of Delaware, Past and Present, E. Melvin Williams

Blackstone Pharmacy photo courtesy Dick Carter

### Bio:

Ed Carey grew up in Millsboro and received his formal education in the public school system, and was among the first to complete training in electronics at a then new technical school, in Sussex County. Upon graduation he continued his training in electronics technology at Capitol Radio Engineering Institute, in Washington, DC. He subsequently entered military service in the United States Air Force, receiving specialized training in electronics technology and in guided missile systems. Ed married the former Ann Brumley of Georgetown in 1967, and continued his military service for eight years, at various locations. Upon leaving the Air Force with his growing family of two daughters, he became a licensed insurance agent and built a home in Georgetown. Ed and his wife were divorced in 1983. He served as the Director of Emergency Operations for Sussex County from 1987 to 1992. Following his time with the county, he worked for the L. D. Caulk Company of Milford, where he lived until his retirement in 2009. Ed currently resides in Millsboro.

He is a member of the Carey/Cary Family organization and made a presentation at one of our reunions entitled “The Careys of Sussex *or what I learned about my relatives and am willing to admit!*”.