



Anne Moreau Thomas

May 23, 1930 - September 11, 2022

Anne Moreau Thomas, of Flemington, died on Sunday, September 11, 2022. She went as she hoped she would – at home, peacefully, in her sleep. She was 92 years old.

A life-long pillar of her community, Anne was active in dozens of organizations at the local, county, and state levels. She broke barriers as the first woman to lead several of these, including the N.J. Press Association and the Rutgers University Board of Governors. Anne and her family helped to start Hunterdon Medical Center and for many years she served as a trustee of the hospital and its foundation.

In those roles, she was no stranger to legislative battles or the strife of public life, but Anne carried herself politely and respectfully, so that even those who opposed her views admired her. She usually thought before she spoke.

Among her many other boards and causes over the years: Hunterdon County Historical Society, the Flemington Library, the Large Foundation, the Flemington Presbyterian Church, Middlebury College, the Flemington Woman's Club, the Red Cross, the Girl Scouts, the Boy Scouts, Flemington Choir School, Bloomfield College, Hunterdon Hospice, Prospect Hill Cemetery, and the American Cancer Society. Anne helped organize many reunions for her class of 1947 at the former Flemington High School.

Born on May 23, 1930, Anne Clotilde Moreau was the second of four daughters to Daniel Howard Moreau and his wife Dale Simmonds Moreau. He owned and edited the local newspaper. Before marrying, Dale taught home economics at Flemington High School. Their other daughters were Dale, Margaret, and Janet, all now deceased.

Anne met future husband, H. Seely Thomas in 1947, the first weekend they were at Middlebury College, where their fathers had been roommates a generation before. After graduating in 1951, Anne and a friend of hers became the first home economics teachers at the brand new North Hunterdon Regional High School. They were given a small budget and were sent out over the summer to buy appliances and supplies to set up their department, which needed everything from stoves and sewing machines to measuring cups and thimbles.

During her long life, Anne Thomas sat with governors and met presidents, yet she never lost her hometown charm. The house where she lived for 67 years, and in which she died, was across the road from the one she and her sisters grew up in. Anne sometimes joked that she “didn’t get very far in life, just across the street.”

Of course, nothing could be further from the truth. In 1999, when her contributions to society and to education were recognized with an honorary Doctorate of Humane Letters, the president of Rutgers University proclaimed Anne to be “the quintessential good citizen.” He got no arguments, only applause. It delighted Anne that, while she served as chair of the Rutgers Board

of Governors, she got to hand three of her grandchildren their hard-earned diplomas.

Her resumé looked daunting, but Anne's humor and grace put everyone at ease. At events and fancy dinners, she could chat with anyone, no matter how famous or how reticent. Rutgers often seated her beside its honored guests, to make sure they were relaxed and charmed. But Anne was just as friendly with the local butcher and his wife, all three of whom were high school classmates.

Born into a newspapering family, Anne was the daughter, the wife, and the mother of publishers. Her family owned the Hunterdon County Democrat weekly newspapers for 80 years, until she sold them to Advance Publishing in 2001. For nearly five decades, Anne was food editor and was renowned for her weekly column, typed in her kitchen. Before trusting any recipe, she cooked it – to her children's mixed reactions. They remember phone calls at the worst times, day or night, from readers with kitchen emergencies. ("I know, I'll ask Anne Thomas.")

In March of 1932, little Anne was just the right age and had just the right curly hair that police stopped her family car and made her mother prove that this child was not the kidnapped Lindbergh baby – by pulling down Anne's diaper to show that she was a girl!

In January and February of 1935, Anne trudged to and from school through the crowds outside the Hunterdon County Courthouse, where Bruno Richard Hauptmann was accused of the Lindbergh kidnapping. Inside the courthouse Anne's father, the local editor, covered that "Trial of the Century" and earned national respect for his little weekly newspaper. Upon Howard Moreau's death in 1963, Anne's husband Seely became publisher until his death in 1994. Then their daughter Catherine served as publisher, through the sale of the papers and into 2002. Son-in-law Jay continued as editor through 2008 and son John managed operations through 2009.

In addition to public school, and like her sisters, Anne attended the Flemington Choir School. Until she quit. She was more of a tomboy. During the Depression and WWII, she rode her bicycle for miles across Hunterdon's dirt roads and farm lanes. She collected scrap metal to help win the war. She and her father, who was a Civil Defense warden, sat out on hilltops at night, to watch for silhouettes of enemy airplanes. During Prohibition, she sometimes went with an uncle to visit his bootlegger – she was useful as camouflage, he said.

Anne's nickname as a child was Annie-Ro, a contraction of her full name. She recalled walking home from school, past the house that is now Teaberry's Restaurant, and an old woman sitting on the porch who called out, "Come on up here, Annie-Ro, and talk to me for a while." It was that sort of small town, and she was that sort of kid. People enjoyed being with her. Anne remembered folks gathering to skate on a farm pond at the foot of Thatcher's Hill. And when heavy snow cancelled school, the police closed Maple Avenue so kids could sled down its hill.

She recalled wartime rationing and terrible cardboard shoes. And her mother's orders during the Depression to say nothing when she saw another child wearing one of her own old coats that had been given to a worthwhile cause. She and her sisters raised chickens in the back yard and named them after workers at the feed and grain store. The family named their dogs after postmen or store clerks. And she recalled readers who didn't have the cash to buy a newspaper subscription dropping off a ham or some cordwood.

Anne knew the names of almost everyone who lived in every house on every street in Flemington during the first three or four decades of her life, until growth and commuting changed things. She'd been inside most of those homes, for birthday parties, or while caroling or babysitting. And she had stories about them all. This one was the aunt of movie actor Jimmy Stewart. That one was a celebrated singer as a child, until his voice changed, and then he became a circus ringmaster!

Driving Anne home from dinner always included a long string of memories about who lived in that house or what used to stand in what is now a parking lot. "But that's progress," she'd say with a sigh.

Anne wed Seely in 1952, and he died in 1994. They are survived by their three children and spouses, six grandchildren and spouses, and one great-granddaughter.

Daughter Catherine Thomas Langley lives with husband, Jay, in Raritan Township, grandson, Thomas, lives in New Hampshire, granddaughter, Dale, lives with husband, Dennis Lullo, and great-granddaughter, Evelyn, in Morristown NJ.

Son John Martin Thomas lives with wife Mary Lou in Raritan Township NJ. Granddaughter, Kelly lives with husband, Jesse Hubbard, in Washington, D.C., and granddaughter, Sarah, lives in Denver CO.

Son Howard Moreau Thomas lives with wife, Linda, and granddaughter, Ellen, in Alexandria Township NJ, while granddaughter, Lauren, lives in Philadelphia.

A memorial service is planned at 2:00 p.m. on Thursday, September 22, 2022 at Flemington Presbyterian Church, 10 East Main Street, Flemington NJ. Inurnment in Prospect Hill Cemetery in Flemington will be private.

Arrangements are by Holcombe Fisher Funeral Home, 147 Main Street in Flemington NJ. More detailed remembrances of Anne are welcome on the website at www.holcombefisher.com.

In lieu of flowers, the family suggests donating in Anne's memory to The Hunterdon County Historical Society, at 114 Main Street, Flemington, NJ 08822; or to the Flemington Free Public Library at 118 Main Street, Flemington, NJ 08822; or to Hunterdon Medical Center, now called Hunterdon Health Foundation, 9100 Wescott Drive, Suite 202, Flemington, NJ 08822.

Cemetery



PROSPECT HILL
CEMETERY

61 Capner Street,
Flemington, NJ 08822

Events



MEMORIAL
2:00 PM

Flemington
Presbyterian Church
10 East Main Street,
Flemington, NJ 08822
