



William F. Foshag

August 28, 1928 - April 27, 2017

William Frederick Foshag (1928 – 2017)

Carlisle lost a brilliant, eccentric, gregarious citizen, William Frederick Foshag, affectionately known as “Willy,” on April 27, 2017, at the age of 88. Anyone who encountered Willy would have observed a spritely temperament and a razor-sharp mind that never quit.

Willy’s adventures involved growing-up near Washington, DC, and Mexico; studying at the University of Chicago, University of Maryland, and The Maryland Art Institute; designing flight technology in the Baltimore-D.C. corridor, participating in the bluegrass music scene, and retiring in Carlisle at Heishman’s Mill.

Willy was the son of an internationally renowned geologist and an accomplished artist. His father, William Frederick Foshag, was a geologist/mineralogist at the Smithsonian Museum who published nearly 100 papers

and described 13 new minerals, including foshagite. Much of his research involved the Parícutin Volcano in Mexico, which gave scientists an opportunity to study a volcano's entire "life cycle" for the first time.

Willy's mother, Merle Crisler Foshag, was an outstanding artist who studied at the Corcoran School of Art, and several pieces of her work can be found in the permanent collections at the Smithsonian.

Like his family, Willy, too, will be known in history for three major contributions: mill restoration, bluegrass, and flight technology.

Willy fulfilled a lifelong dream of owning a gristmill when he purchased Heishman's Mill in 1969. During nearly a half-century, he conscientiously and creatively worked to preserve the 200 year-old building. Heishman's Mill is characteristic of other mills within the Mid-Atlantic region, and it remains one of the best-preserved historical buildings in south-central Pennsylvania. His work in reconciling tensions between environmental conservation and historic preservation concerns culminated in the construction of the first designed and engineered fish passageway in North America. This addition to the site not only preserved the historical features of the site, but the passage also fulfilled environmental regulations that threatened the removal of the millpond's dam.

During his decades of living in the Washington-Baltimore corridor, he also was

a contributor to the region's indigenous bluegrass music scene, hosting “picking parties” and jams sessions with major groups such as the New Lost City Ramblers, Stanley Brothers, and the Country Gentlemen -- and major folk performers, including Bill Monroe, Doc Watson, Libby Cotton, Mike Seeger, and Alice Gerrard. Willy also chaired the early Smithsonian Folk Festival.

Socially, Willy loved to tell stories. He recounted the tales of bicycling to Chicago, motoring to Taxco, Mexico, living on a houseboat in DC, and listening to bluegrass music all weekend long. Willy told the tale of living down the street from Trotsky in Mexico and remembered the day Trotsky was assassinated. The list goes on.

In early years, Willy never let school get in the way of his education, preferring to conduct his own guided research on topics ranging from anything Mexican to string-band musicians to biological species and flying machines. With his parents in Mexico, Willy spent most of his early training conducting research and pursuing his own interests. Returning to the D.C. suburbs., Willy lived in the Library of Congress., thus avoiding the classroom.

Professionally, Willy worked as an aeronautical engineer. Generally, he specialized in aircraft that can hover, take off and land vertically, or take off and land on short runways. Specifically, he made substantial contributions to technological advances in the development of sailplanes, ornithopters, and a variety of non-fixed wing aircraft.

Most of Willy's work was located in the Baltimore-D.C. corridor, except for his first job at Sikorsky Aircraft in Bridgeport, CT. At Sikorsky, Willy learned the discipline of technical innovation, flight design, and the details of the different aeronautical sciences. Next, Willy worked at Glenview Metal Products Company of NJ as it developed and produced its first two-place helicopter and at the U.S. Army's aviation schools and laboratories at Fort Eustis, VA, where his work ranged from developing the syllabus for helicopter maintenance to developments in the design of low-flying Army fixed-wing aircraft. Willy's background in vertical flight characteristics of helicopters led to his position at Fairchild Hiller in Hagerstown, MD, and the development of a type of wing flap, a jet flap, which would permit fixed-wing airplanes to take off much like a helicopter. His work in STOL, for short takeoff and landing, and VTOL, for vertical takeoff and landing, led to the development and deployment of military aircraft including the tiltrotor Osprey, a version of the F-35 joint strike fighter, and the C-17 Globemaster large transport.

Finally, Willy worked on visionary flying machines. At the U.S. Navy's David Taylor Model Basin in Potomac, MD, and Spacetrionics in Bethesda, MD, his focus turned from finding ways for aircraft to leave the earth and fly to applying aero-physics to suspend land and watercraft just above the surface. Known today as hovercraft and wing-in-ground effect, these "aircraft" remain an innovative means of transport with untapped potential. Next, Willy was the chief engineer of the Aerophysics Company in Washington, D.C., where Willy applied his wealth of aeronautical knowledge to tackling a wide variety of visionary aircraft still under development today or awaiting the materials, computing, and control capabilities that would enable his innovations to take

flight.

Willy remained colorful until the end. His friends will miss his enchanting conversations, his adventurous stories, his love of flying machines, his gregarious visits, his utter showmanship, and his love of life. He will always be missed.

Willy's memorial will be held on Saturday, July 29, from 2 – 6 p.m., at the Stern Center at Dickinson College. In lieu of flowers, contributions may be made to the Cumberland County Historical Society, Dept of Building Preservation, in Carlisle, PA.