

H.B.S.

Harold Byron Smith

An Appreciation by Barbara L. Benson

One of the Barrington area's most influential and trend-setting 20th century leaders, Harold Byron Smith helped establish conservation as we know it today by creating and preserving the expansive, rural Village of Barrington Hills, as well as igniting a spirit of volunteerism and philanthropic fundraising—all Barrington hallmarks that we celebrate today.

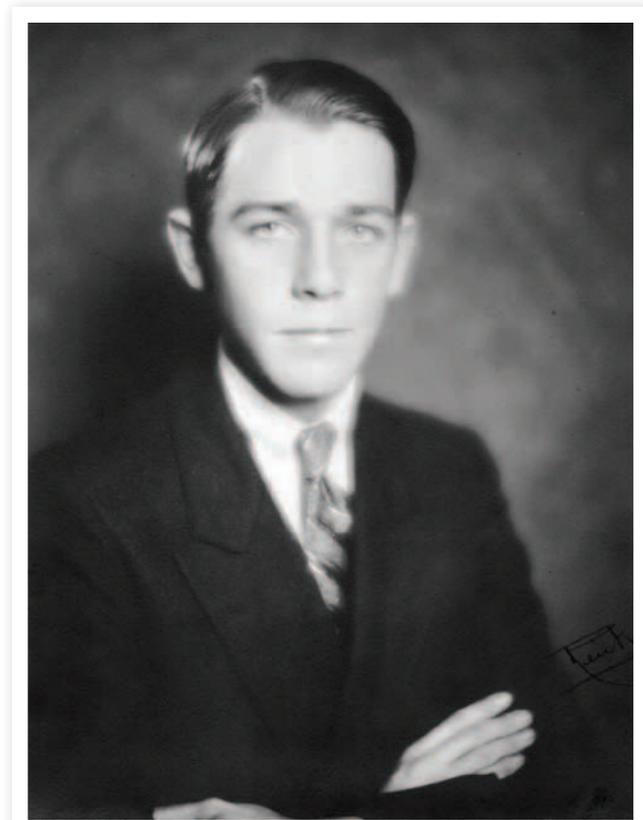
The unusual circumstance of my first meeting with Harold Byron Smith must be recounted to shed light on the vast range of interests that created the fullness of this remarkable man's life.

From the pinnacle of business, civic, and philanthropic leadership in Chicago and the Midwest, he had found a comfortable spot in the Wichman Blacksmith Shop on West Station Street after he had wandered in one Sunday afternoon in the mid-1970s, when some volunteers were enjoying a game of checkers on a faded old board resting on a cracker barrel.

The Blacksmith Shop was then home to the emerging Barrington Historical Society and Museum. A great collector, he expressed interest in the local memorabilia gathered there, and became a regular visitor. He joined the Board of Trustees and in 1980, with two stalwarts of old Barrington, Kenneth Grebe and Ruth Munson, and was asked to help find a new museum director. I had chanced to see an advertisement for the position in the Chicago Tribune, which, given my museum experience in New York, was intriguing and I followed up. I was asked to meet the search committee, twice. Years later, I was told that HBS had settled the matter by saying, "I think we should hire this English dame"! The well-being of his small hometown museum became a part of his later life, and as concerning to him as decisions made when he was president and chief executive officer of the family firm, Illinois Tool Works.

THE SMITH LINEAGE

Unlike Ken Grebe and Ruth Munson, Harold Byron Smith was not a Barrington native. He was born in Chicago, on September 19, 1909, to a family whose business and civic lives had already brought distinction to the city and to themselves for three generations.

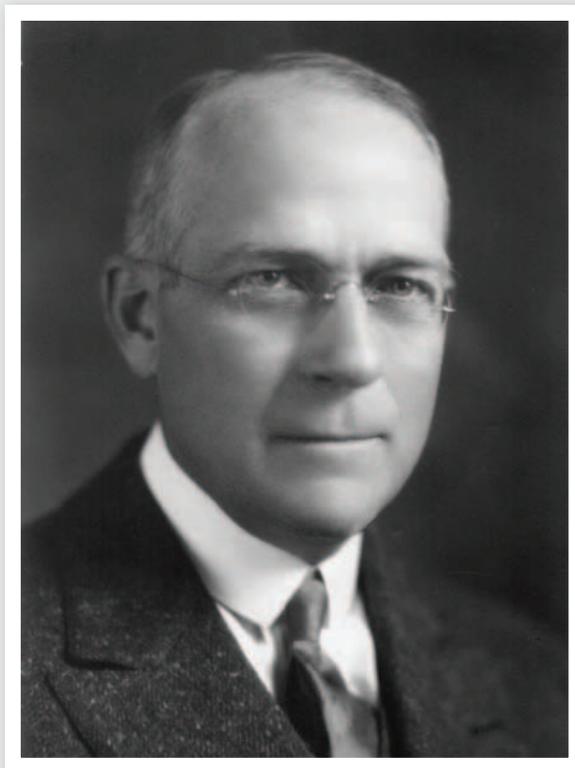


Harold Byron Smith as a student at Princeton, graduating in the Class of 1931.

Left: Harold Byron Smith as a young businessman.



Byron Laflin Smith (1853-1914) is the grandfather of Harold Byron Smith. He founded The Northern Trust Company in Chicago in 1889, and in 1912 the nascent Illinois Tool Works, which became the second Smith family enterprise.



Harold Cornelius Smith (1882-1936) is father of Harold Byron Smith. Became President of Illinois Tool Works upon the death of Byron Laflin Smith in 1914.

In 1857, Solomon A. Smith had founded the Merchants' Savings, Loan and Trust Company. His son, Byron Laflin Smith, founded The Northern Trust Company, which opened for business in August 1889. The third of Byron Laflin Smith's four sons was Harold Cornelius Smith. He graduated from Princeton in 1904 and *de rigueur* for someone of his social milieu, went on the Grand Tour: Europe, the Middle East, India, the Far East, encircling the globe, and offering mind-opening experiences. On this tour he met Emily Birnie, a well-educated young lady of old Scottish lineage. Harold Cornelius and Emily were married in November 1907 at St. Paul's Church in Knightsbridge, London. Returning to the United States, they followed family traditions, with residences in Chicago and Lake Forest, and summers in Charlevoix, Mich. Harold Byron was their first born, followed by three sisters.

Byron Laflin Smith looked to diversify beyond The Northern Trust and in December 1911, took out an advertisement in the Economist, under the heading "Wanted". The advertisement indicated the interest of highly reputable people with capital to invest, preferably in a manufacturing business. It took several approaches and negotiations with the three inventors who responded with their idea for a hob-grinding business. The partnership was formed, and Illinois Tool Works (ITW) began business in 1912. When Byron Laflin Smith died unexpectedly in 1914, Harold Cornelius took over the presidency. With intelligence, good business practices, and a desirable work environment, ITW would prosper to a prominent place in industry and manufacturing in the Midwest.

HAROLD BYRON SMITH

Harold and Emily's family was raised much as they had grown up. Their son Harold Byron graduated from Princeton in 1931, and he also set off on the Grand Tour. He came back to work at ITW and enjoyed the social life of Chicago and Lake Forest. He rode and played polo, and began collecting antiquarian books. In his schooldays, he had met socially Pauline Hart. She was the youngest daughter of Cora and H. Stillson Hart. Harry Hart was among the railroad industrialists who had created estates in the Barrington countryside in the early 20th century, and in 1921, was a founder of the Barrington Hills Country Club, where he avidly played his favorite game of golf.

A WEDDING AT HARTWOOD

Harold Byron Smith (HBS) and Pauline Hart were married in June 1932 in the garden at Hartwood, the Hart's beautiful residence on County Line Road. Among their early residences was Greenhurst Farm on Oak Knoll Road. Even with the evolution of the countryside as pioneer farms became country estates, Barrington was still an outpost, remote from the North Shore and its civilized social order. Here, the descendants of pioneer farmers schooled the new country folk in the ways of the land.

While, for the rest of his life, HBS would uphold the civic, philanthropic, and familial responsibilities that were the inheritance of the large Northern Trust and ITW Smith families, he and Pauline embraced the still rustic lifestyle of the west countryside and raised their four sons there, a countryside which HBS would play a significant role in preserving. Their residence, "Bellebyron" on Donlea Road, became the center for large family gatherings and celebrations, and community events, too.

POLITE SOCIETY

Business responsibilities came suddenly when his father died in 1936. HBS was only 27 years old when he took over the presidency of Illinois Tool Works. He had



Harold Byron Smith and Pauline Hart Smith's wedding portrait, at "Hartwood", the bride's childhood home in the Barrington countryside in June 1932. Barrington Hills had not yet been incorporated.

wisdom beyond his years, an innate, what the French call *politesse du coeur* reflected in his relationships with his family, his business associates, and the employees on the assembly lines. As Illinois Tool Works grew into a multi-national company with his leadership, stories were told of his nighttime visits to assembly plants, and flowers sent to wives of workers when new babies were born. Years later, after his death, when his personal papers and collections were catalogued, the staggering range of his interests and activities, both as business man, philanthropist, community leader, collector, and sportsman, could be assessed. His letters reflected the man. The recipient was always the concern of the writer. Many of those letters, preserved on their onion skin copies, reveal a grace mostly lost in present-day communications.

For Harold Byron Smith, the Barrington countryside was his community. He and Pauline participated in social activities, and Harold was a founding board member of The Riding Club of Barrington Hills, the Fox River Valley Hunt, an early Polo Club (they played in a field along Hart Road), and was prominent in the Countryside Park District. As the Riding Club trails expanded from their informal neighborly beginnings over a few properties, and rights of access were needed, the diplomatic skills of HBS were called into action to meet with uninitiated new owners and explain the commitment of the equestrian community to good stewardship of the land.



Pauline Hart Smith (1912-1986) attended Miss Porter's School at Farmington, Conn., and Les Fougères in Switzerland. Pauline (Polly) grew up in Chicago, and in Barrington in a house to the west of Old Hart Road on County Line. Old Hart Road was originally a farm road at Hartwood Farms, which included the land Barrington High School sits on today and extended west to include what became part of Barrington Hills Country Club, and north to the railroad tracks at Rte. 14.



Above: Members of the Fox River Valley Hunt in 1958 are (from left) Joshua D. Derry, MFA, Harold Byron Smith, and Sylvia Bennett. (Source: Hark Back to Barrington)



Left: Harold Byron Smith's portrait was painted in 1941. He was 32, and a member of the Fox River Valley Hunt.

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POST WORLD WAR II HOUSING BOOM

After World War II, changes came along the borders of the west countryside when an explosion of development pushed out from Chicago's older neighborhoods, and affordable housing was needed for veterans back from the war. Besides the emergence of gravel mining, Meadowdale, with tiny lots and strip malls, was crammed onto the previously rolling hills and woods which had stretched to the Fox River.

Concerned with the density, over which there was no local control, a group of longtime countryside residents, pre-eminent among them, Harold Byron Smith and Andrew Dallstream, researched the legalities, and the Village of Barrington Hills was incorporated in 1957. It would encompass 26.8 square miles in land area, and was said to be the largest village in the United States. Andrew Dallstream was the first village president; HBS followed him from 1961 to 1965.

For the rest of his life, he kept close watch on village affairs and behind the scenes, worked with property owners and conservation organizations including the Cook County Forest Preserve, to ensure that thousands of acres of prairie, woods, and wetlands would be maintained as public open space. Subsequent community leaders would often seek counsel from his experience and wisdom.

A DEVOTED COMMUNITY LEADER

Harold Byron Smith can be said to have started a trend, manifested in remarkable ways in the Barrington community today, in the volunteerism and fundraising for deserving causes. In the early 1980s, the Historical Society was not well funded, and HBS suggested that it replicate an annual event at Children's Memorial Hospital; the display and auction of volunteer decorated Christmas trees. Treescapes, and then Winterscapes, evolved from that idea suggested by HBS.

By the late 1980s, the Society was raising up to \$75,000 a year at this event. Apart from the support for Good Shepherd Hospital, it was probably the most successful fundraising event in community history, and set in motion the extraordinary generosity towards many worthwhile organizations that contribute to the community's quality of life. With Mr. and Mrs. Harold Byron Smith as Honorees, their involvement signaled that it was appropriate to support local causes and charities, in addition to the traditional Chicago institutions.

Harold Byron Smith received many honors and awards of regional and national significance even after his "official" retirement in 1982. The Barrington Historical Society had created an annual award, named for the area's iconic historian, Arnett C. Lines. It was for people who had shown devotion to the Society's mission in different ways. It was a heartfelt award. In 1983, at the Society's Annual Meeting, it was given to one of the best friends that the preservation of Barrington's history and spacious environment would ever have. The tribute to Harold Byron Smith concluded with those famous lines of Rudyard Kipling, that, "He walked with kings, but never lost the common touch."

And so it was for the man whose "HBS" initials had signed off on thousands of letters, memos, and documents, and who had found time and shown interest for people in all walks of life. At his death in 1990, he was remembered for his integrity and humanity. And it was perhaps, his stamp of approval that gave "this English dame" the opportunity to walk with Barrington history for the past 38 years, and to write about him with fondness as a part of that history. U



Polly and Harold Smith in the farm truck, late 1930s.



Harold and Pauline at home in 1965 before one of their famous formal dinner dances.



Harold Byron Smith (1909-1990) in his heyday. Upon the death of his father Harold Cornelius Smith in 1936, Harold Byron Smith became president of Illinois Tool Works and would lead the company to world-wide success. He retired from ITW in the early 1980s.