



This portrait of Shirley Peterson ran in the August 31, 1994 Pioneer Press newspaper to publicize a local bird seed sale. Lorraine Westcott (on left) joins Shirley Peterson at her farm in Burlington, Wisconsin on August 26, 2001. (Images courtesy of Barrington Area Library's photo archives.)

SHIRLEY J. PETERSON'S BARRINGTON LEGACY

A PIONEER IN MEDICINE AND CONSERVATION

THERE WAS A TRAILBLAZER in our midst, at a time when Barrington area residents, who took their children to the doctor in the little brown house at the southeastern corner of Grove Avenue and East Lake Street, perhaps gave it little thought.

Dr. Shirley Peterson opened her pediatric medicine practice in her home there in 1955, helping children and their parents for the next 32 years. She came to Barrington with an exceptional path of experience behind her.

Born in Chicago in 1922, she grew up in Park Ridge and graduated from Maine Township High School in 1940. Receiving a Bachelor of Science Degree from the University of Chicago in 1944, at the height of the Second World War, she headed to the Medical School of Washington University in St. Louis and received her medical degree in 1949.

Returning home, Peterson received a Fellowship at St. Francis Hospital in Evanston. This was a time when entrants to medical schools and practitioners in the medical profession were 93% male, according to American Medical Association records. Peterson went in another challenging direction when she served for two years in the United States Naval Reserve as a LTJG. Stationed at the Patuxent Naval Air Station in Maryland, she became the station's first lady doctor and practiced pediatrics.

With her course set, after her Navy service, Peterson returned to Washington University and obtained her pediatric certification. That led to service at the Municipal Contagious Disease Hospital in Chicago, St. Louis Children's Hospital, and Children's Memorial

Hospital in Chicago.

In 1955, she came to Barrington and opened her pediatric practice in what was one of the original village houses. She was affiliated with Sherman and St. Joseph's Hospitals in Elgin. Settled in, with her practice well established, she found her niche in community life to become one of Barrington's most distinguished conservationists. In 1963, she joined the Natural History Society of Barrington. In 2006, she received an Honorary Life Membership, one of only five in the Society's 64-year history. The Natural History Society nominated her to the Barrington Area Council on Aging (now Bacoa) Hall of Fame in 2002.

Peterson was a member of Citizens for Conservation from its founding in 1971. In 1986, she received their prestigious William Miller Conservation Award. Among her local accomplishments was the volunteer stewardship of Baker's Lake Savanna, organizing the removal of non-native species, and the planting of native wildflowers.

Retired from her practice in 1987, she now set about completing the transformation of the 102-acre farm she had bought in 1962 in Burlington, Wisconsin, from farmland into a nature preserve, including planting over 60,000 trees. In 2008, 86 acres of the property were donated and dedicated to the Seno Center of the Wisconsin Woodland Owners Association.

Peterson died on January 17, 2009, after a brief illness. What would she say, today, if she knew that the Association of American Medical Colleges says that there are more women than men now enrolled in medical school? U