

The following was presented by Jonathon Mason at the Hall of Distinction Induction Ceremony of the Dover Historical Society, on Sunday, April 23, 2017.

## John Ohly Carlson

John Ohly Carlson was born in 1917 in Brooklyn, New York. He was a second-generation Swedish immigrant and spent his formative years in Brooklyn with his four siblings. Brooklyn was where he met and then in 1942 married the love of his life, Ruth Elizabeth Spikins. They fell in love while regularly attending Sunday School at the Good Shepherd Lutheran Church. Ruth's father was Superintendent of that Sunday School, so needless to say that Ohly was a life-long devout Lutheran. Ohly and Ruth had four children, Peter Spikins (1944), Susan Ruth (1946 dies of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome – SIDS), David John (1948-1961), and William Douglas (1950). Ohly passed away at the early age of 73 as a result of several strokes and heart attacks.

Ohly became a committed Buckeye after attending Ohio Wesleyan University on scholarship majoring in chemistry and graduating in 1939. He embraced life in the Midwest which was far removed from the big city and chose to escape life on the east coast with Ruth. Ruth's parents were not totally convinced that this was a wise and grand move to the Midwest but they were convinced by Ohly's passion for the "wilderness."

Ohio, one may ask. Rubber and chemistry may be the underlying answer. In 1949 John Ohly and Ruth Spikins Carlson departed the east coast for manufacturing opportunities in Tuscarawas County. Ohly had just completed his law degree in 1947 from St. Lawrence University and his time in the US Navy obligation was concluded. Their move was predicated on the development of a new company to produce construction-related materials which was the Ohio Adhesives Corporation. Ohly's expertise as a chemist and as a lawyer would develop and direct the product line for the building trades and the abundance of re-claimed rubber in Akron, Ohio would provide the raw material and the post WW2 building boom would complete the business plan. The venture was a success. Over the years Ohio Adhesives thrived and provided hundreds of jobs for local residents. During the mid-1970's, Ohio Adhesives was sold and Ohly then founded another company, Permaset Products, which was then sold to W.W. Henry adhesives during the 1980's. Ohly was an incurable entrepreneur whose only answer was always "Yes."

The Carlson's were charmed by their new Midwest community and their freedoms from the hectic demands of the east coast. Their youngest son William Douglas was born in 1950 and was the first authentic Buckeye with the Carlson name and that made the new adopted home a permanent fit. Their involvement in the community was an urgent priority as Ruth and Ohly championed important groups and causes. Ohly was generous with his time serving on Grace Lutheran Church councils and building projects, YMCA boards and fund raising, Dover Library development and many more. It is fair to say that Ohly was smitten with the honesty, the

sincerity, and the friendships that he shared with this extended community. At the end of the day he was immensely proud to be a part affecting the quality of life for his adopted hometown.

However, Ohly's primary commitment was devoted to Ruth's chosen work and her efforts with representing the needs of the mentally retarded citizens of the community. Ruth and Ohly shared this passion and he followed her extraordinary leadership in searching to build a support system for these under-served individuals. That effort has become Starlight School and Sheltered Workshop. Their own personal experiences drove their focus on this and compelled its importance. And yes, Ohly was always keenly aware that he had the great good fortune to have "married-up."

## Ruth Elizabeth (Spikins) Carlson

Ruth E. Carlson was one of those extraordinary individuals who is able to live life as a consistent and energetic force for love, empathy, inclusion, and action. She was born in Brooklyn, New York in 1920 and graduated from Skidmore College where she studied marketing and design. Directly after college she followed those early professional interests and was employed as a manager by several significant New York department stores.

She married John Ohly Carlson in 1942 and was mother of four children, Peter Spikins (1944), Susan Ruth (1946 dies of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome – SIDS), David John (1948-1961), and William Douglas (1950). She passed away at the much too early age of 59 as a result of complications of cancer.

Her true life's passion was sparked by the loss of a daughter, Susan, in 1946, followed by severe hydrocephalic mental retardation suffered by her son David. She was repulsed by the deplorable and impersonal State institutions that housed the mentally disabled and increasingly devoted herself to establishing a nurturing community-based alternative for the disabled. She completed a master's degree in Special Education at Kent State University.

Tuscarawas County was home and that is where she began her work. She organized the first community classes for the disabled in 1955 in the basement of the old Methodist Church. This initial effort would continue to grow into what has become the Starlight School and Sheltered Workshop. In the early years she was the organizer, janitor, bus driver, and the whatever needed to be done person for this fledgling mission. It was Ruth who drove the mission and told the story to the public creating an awareness of the plight of the mentally disabled. The power of her story and the early visibility of her efforts resulted in a growing institution with the increased financial support from the public.

Ruth was the public "face" of the mission and the Administrator of the Tuscarawas County Board of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities. Her influence and example spread throughout the State of Ohio and beyond. She had established a model of an on-going nurturing community-based alternative for the mentally disabled. Tuscarawas County and the State of Ohio have been enriched by her efforts that have touched so many lives of those who would have otherwise been hidden away in the shadows of society. She gave a voice and a place to the forgotten.

Seen from today's perspective it is hard to imagine the barriers Ruth had to continuously confront in the social environment of the 1950's. Given that male-dominated world in which she lived, what she accomplished was more than remarkable. What she achieved during her life was transformational as she embraced and became a Mother for all mentally disadvantaged individuals. Her impact and role in bettering the lives and well-being of the mentally disabled has been widely recognized and honored nationwide.

## Peter S. Carlson

Peter is a proud 1962 graduate of Dover High School. He went on to attend Kenyon College and was awarded a Doctorate from Yale University in Genetics.

Peter's early professional career included several academic positions and concluded with his appointment as the John Hannah Distinguished Professor of Agriculture at Michigan State University in 1974. During 1980, Peter lived for a year in Beijing, China, where he was the first "Foreign Expert" employed by the government of China to introduce modern agricultural genetic technologies. He is the author of numerous scientific publications and a prolific inventor with many issued patents.

Peter's later career focused on commercializing agricultural and pharmaceutical biotechnologies. He acted as consultant and advisor to these industries and was instrumental in the introduction and commercialization of genetically modified organisms (GMO's) for agricultural applications. He enjoys being an entrepreneur and working with Venture Capital firms to visualize, initiate and grow biotechnology companies.

Peter was born in Brooklyn, New York in 1944 as a fortunate child of Ruth Elizabeth (Spikins) and John Ohly Carlson. (Yes, he chose his parent well!) He is happily married to Mary Helen Carlson with seven grown children and eighteen grandchildren. He is a resident of Potomac, Maryland.

## William Douglas Carlson

William is an artist who is a proud amalgamation of the Ohio Valley circa mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. His art and sculpture are informed by the environment of his youth. Clay, glass, metal, and adhesives have been materials of choice with his artistic career.

Art and sculpture making began early in Carlson. After graduating from Dover High School in 1968 he went to the Cleveland Institute of Art to focus his efforts. While at CIA he was instrumental in initiating heir glass sculpture program. A travel fellowship in 1973 allowed him to continue his education in Europe. He then attended school at the New York State College of Ceramics earning a degree in 1976.

With the degree in hand he expanded his focus from strictly a maker of art to become a Professor at the University of Illinois. Time there was artistically productive with academic research exhibitions and international travel. His sculpture became more complex and unique with those methods and materials. Early works that had been modest sized gave way to large scale architectural efforts that are installed at various locations around the country. His art is also exhibited in museums throughout the world.

Twenty-seven years at Illinois was enough. In 2003, Carlson took a leap to the University of Miami as Art Department Chair. He learned that University administration can be a thankless endeavor, so he returned to teaching with an endowed Professorship with time to address the opportunities with sculpture.

Carlson left the U of M in 2013 and moved to rural Massachusetts and lives at the end of a long driveway with artist Anne Shatas, two dogs and a very good attitude about a prolific art career and numerous opportunities for the future.

Retrospectively, Carlson always intended to move back to Atwood Lake and Dover and ride a bike around towns just like the iconic Mooney Warther...he was my role model.