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Ellen Holmdale

March 9, 1913 - July 22, 2006

When Ellen Holmdale arrived in Miami, FL in 1916, she was three years old and unaware her family – Adolph, Edna, and sister, Eugenia – were pioneers in that South Florida city. Ellen recalls, in her unpublished memoir, "Pioneering in Florida", that it was the coldest day of the winter when she, sister Eugenia, and parents boarded the train for Florida. "We came from the snows of Minneapolis to a tropical paradise."

Ellen thrived in the sunny climate, enjoying the sandy beach adjacent to the hotel her father operated. Years earlier, while managing a small resort hotel in the Montana mountains, Adolph Holmdale met Edna Woley of Chicago. They were soon married and settled in Minneapolis, MN. After several cold winters, they decided the opportunities for resort hotels on the newly developed Miami Beach were better and warmer than in Minneapolis. They took the recently completed Florida East Coast rail road to Miami. A new life adventure had begun.

Ellen was a Pisces, born March 9, 1913. She was always proud of her combination of Swedish and Scotch-English background and did not hesitate to remind friends that her father had graduated from the University of Uppsala in Stockholm, Sweden and came to America on a boat, seeking his fame and fortune, settling in Minneapolis.

Although Edna Woley was living in Chicago at the time she met Adolph, her family members were also pioneers in the early 1700’s when they settled in upstate New York. The Whalley family, respelled in America Woley, emigrated from England. They went first to Connecticut and later to Watertown, New York. Her family prospered in the coffee and mercantile trade. Her grandfather and father were both respected Doctors in Watertown

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As a young girl in Miami, Ellen lived in a new "storm proof" house near where the Orange Bowl is today. At that time the "bowl" was a swampy city park. She recalled many funny stories in her book of her life and some not so humorous, such as surviving the terrible hurricane of 1926. After graduating from Miami Senior High

School, Ellen attended Florida Teachers College the forerunner of Florida State University. After completing a course in business she worked with the Hartford Insurance Company and later for a Doctor, who had a contract with Dade County to insure that the ladies of the evening were healthy. At the time prostitution and gambling were both legal in Florida. Her humorous stories were recorded in a recent article she wrote entitled "Working Girls."

Ellen met her future husband Walter, while he was working his way through the University of Florida, delivering milk to her father's hotel. Early morning courtship bloomed and they were married at Trinity Episcopal Church, Miami, in 1936. Their best friends, Norman and Mini O'Brian, were their attendants.

Walter and his father were in the window shutter business constructing awnings which could be closed for hurricane protection. Ellen quickly became involved in the daily activities of the Schwab Awning Company, later to become the Schwab Jalousie and Awning Company. During WW II, while Walter was serving as a Company commander with the Fifth Air Force in the Pacific, Ellen continued to operate the business while keeping up with two small children Hank and Ed. After the war during the 1950's and 1960's the company prospered. Many projects were completed for the US Navy in the Middle East and in the Pacific. Ellen was an important part of the success of the business.

During the war, Ellen made several trips to North Carolina where her father was managing a hotel in Hendersonville. She fell in love with the mountains and continued to make trips to Asheville, Black Mountain, and Hendersonville. Later, the family owned a summer cottage in Maggie Valley.

After retirement Walter and Ellen built a home in Morganton, NC on Mimosa Hill, where they lived for many years. They were especially proud of the home because it had been built by their son, Jim, who, after finishing at Georgia Tech, became a

builder of fine homes in Morganton and was designed by their son Henry, an architect in Atlanta.

Sickness led them to Asheville where medical attention for Walter was more readily available. Still very active, they enjoyed their home near Mirror Lake and entertained neighbors and children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren. After the death of her husband in 1999, Ellen lived with her son, Edward and his wife, Sue in Arden, NC in a town home built for her by Edward. With the passage of time she grew less active and relocated back to Morganton. She lived quietly at Grace Ridge retirement community until her death. Ellen Foster Holmdale Schwab passed away peacefully at the age of 93 on July 22, 2006.

Ellen is survived by her three sons, Walter Henry Schwab, Jr. of Atlanta, Edward Charles Schwab and his wife, Sue of Asheville, and James Carl Schwab and his wife, Elizabeth of Morganton. She has six grandchildren, Walter Henry Schwab, III, Robbie Ellen Stadter, Margaret Bentley, Susan Schwab, Carrie Schwab, and Michael Schwab; and five great grandchildren, Laura Stadter, Matthew Stadter, Daniel Stadter, Lauren Bentley, and Emily Bentley.

Following Ellen's cremation a memorial service will be held at 11:00 a.m., Thursday, July 27, 2006 at Grace Episcopal Church in Morganton with the Reverend Bruce Walker presiding. The family will receive friends at the church starting at 10:00 a.m. In lieu of flowers the family requests that memorial contributions be made to Options Victims Assistance Program, P. O. Box 2512, Morganton, NC 28680. Written condolences may be sent to 101 River Ridge Dr., Morganton, NC 28655. Sossoman Funeral Home is assisting the family.

Tribute Wall

No tributes added yet.