

In Memoriam Robert D. Romeril 1930-2021



A life well lived. Long time resident of Bethlehem's Historic District, Robert D. Romeril passed away at age 91 on January 19 at St. Luke's Hospice House. Born on Manhattan Island, NY, Bob was the second of three sons to Albert John Romeril and Winifred Gosman DeBevoise Romeril. He grew up in Bellerose, NY, graduating from Sewanhaka High School. A Scout Master at 15 years old, he served scouting for the rest of his life. He was an Eagle Scout and twice recipient of the Silver Beaver Award for distinguished service.

He earned a B.S. in Mechanical Engineering from Tufts University.

Bob served with the U.S. Army Field Forces Board No. 2 at Fort Knox. Earning a citation for service during the Korean War, he experimented on metal fatigue in weapons and the impact of jet aircraft on ground combat forces. He served in the Army Reserves until 1961.

Bob's 41-year career with Bethlehem Steel included one patent. He specialized in all things plate mills, which included playing a key role in bringing to fruition the 160" plate mill at Indiana's Burns Harbor- the largest private construction project in the world at that time. He later worked internationally for steel.

At 90 years old, Bob returned to Burns Harbor as a special guest for two half-century steel-making anniversaries. He discussed history and future plans with management, and met steel workers who even today use his ergonomic designs.

Bob solved problems in a way that improved the human condition rather than slap-ping a bandaid on them. He taught African American steel workers in 1950's Mary-land to read, after he observed a spike in worker injuries resulting from the intro-duction of complex new equipment with printed instructions and discovered high illiteracy rates among the crew. He taught job skills to people in prison and was a founding member of Essex Community College, where ex-cons could receive an education and thereby secure better jobs upon release.

In Indiana, Bob welcomed the first women steel workers to the Burns Harbor plant by painting every third bathroom door pink and outfitting the plant with smaller sized equipment. Bob and his wife were among the first parents to lobby the school board for new education techniques to benefit all for dyslexic children not only their child.

In Pennsylvania, he routinely hired clients of the Hogar Crea rehab program for handyman jobs, knowing that work and dignity are intimately linked. He asked every person "how are you?" and really listened to the answer no matter who it was.

He modeled how to be a good citizen: vote in every election, give generously to those in need, and "never read a book by it's cover."

Bob was an avid gardener known around town as the "Dahlia King." He shared his passion for gardening with everyone, delivering his prolific output of beautiful flowers to nursing homes, medical offices and shut-ins for many decades.

In retirement, Bob stayed active in the church and his community. He supported his wife Gwendolyn-Jane, an Episcopal priest, at the Cathedral of the Nativity, Trinity Easton and St Andrew's. He was President of the Greater Bethlehem Council of Churches, President of the Incorporated Trustees of the Episcopal Diocese of Bethlehem, served on the Commission on Ministry, the annual Advent Breakfast committee, the Interfaith Coalition on Poverty, the Bethlehem Authority, Bethlehem Historical District Association, the Lehigh Valley Community Foundation, the Bethlehem Christmas City Committee, and was a Judge of Elections for the 7th ward.

Bob loved playing pinochle, woodworking, home renovation, genealogy, Civil War history, and sailing. His life motto was to leave the world a better place than he found it. He succeeded.

Bob Romeril is survived by his wife of 67 years, The Rev. Canon Gwendolyn-Jane (Heiter) Romeril, four sons, Robert D. Jr, George H., Andrew E., Martin A., and one daughter, Winifred E. He was the proud grandfather of five grandchildren and two great-grandsons. He is preceded in death by his parents and his two brothers Albert John (Jack) and Stanley.

Donations can be made in Bob's name to the Romeril Campership Fund at Lehigh Valley Community Foundation or the Minsi Trails Council of the Boy Scouts of America at www.minsitrails.org/give. Arrangements Entrusted to JAMES FUNERAL HOME, Bethlehem. More info at www.jamesfuneralhome.org.