

On Monday, August 5, 2024, 01:52:15 PM EDT, Tony <askeller@aol.com> wrote:

Hello Cousins,

Today Bob and I are lovingly remembering Al Keller, our dad, on his 119th birthday and thinking of Carolyn, our mom, who died 56 years ago last month. They were both remarkable people, caring parents and models of public service. They haven't been with us for a long time now, but we continue to feel their presence.

Below is an excerpt from the evolving "Keller Ancestral History" archive.

Please share memories of your loved ones when you can.

Love,

Bob & Tony

Dad, Alexander Keller (1905 – 1958), the oldest of the four sons of Elsie Davidson Keller and Sidney Keller, was born in New York. He graduated *cum laude* from Harvard in 1926, an English major whose senior thesis was on language in the plays of Ben Jonson. Graduating from Harvard Business School in 1928, Al walked right into the Depression. He took over the Keller Mechanical Engineering Company in 1930 when his father died, and stabilized his family's financial future by selling the rights to the KME's Keller machines to the Pratt & Whitney Machine Tool Company.

Carolyn Henrietta Witmark (1910 - 1968), was born at home, an apartment on New York's Riverside Drive. Early on, her parents, Isidore and Viola, moved the family to Woodmere, Long Island – for Isidore a daily trip on the Long Island commuter train for Isidore to his New York City office in the six-story Witmark Building the Witmark brothers built on West 37<sup>th</sup> Street in 1903. At Woodmere Academy Carolyn was an honors student, the class valedictorian, editor of the school newspaper and a pitcher on the boys' baseball team. She went on to Wellesley College but rheumatoid arthritis kept her from completing her senior year, and she never got her degree. One compensation for the illness that had confined her to her bed for a year was the consistent attention of a young friend of the family, Alexander Keller, who visited her frequently. In 1932 she became Carolyn Witmark *Keller*.

In 1931 Al was hired by Pratt & Whitney as vice-president, general sales manager and head of the new Keller Division. He moved to West Hartford, and was joined by his new bride Carolyn in 1932 and his brother Richard who took on major engineering responsibilities at the plant. Under the brothers' guidance the scope of the machines' capacity was once again expanded and Al traveled extensively around the world to market the new products. There was no machine tool big enough to make the dies to produce solid steel automobile tops until very large Keller machines were produced in the 1940s, and by the beginning of World War II, Pratt & Whitney was also turning out airplane propellers.

In 1937 Alexander and Carolyn became parents with the birth of Robert, followed in 1939 with Anthony and Elizabeth in 1942. Al and Cal were well known in the Hartford community during the 1930s and 40s for sponsoring, and obtaining U.S. citizenship, for European refugees fleeing the Holocaust – sponsoring dozens of people who, without their intercession, would not have survived the war. Al signed affidavits accepting responsibility for each one and it was a point of great pride for him that none of the affidavits ever needed to be activated. In 1949-51 Alex was selected by the State Department to lead Holland's post-war industrial recovery through the Marshall Plan, and the Keller family lived in the Netherlands during that time. He was knighted by Queen Juliana for his impact on the Dutch economy. Back at home in the 1950s one of Alexander and Carolyn's most enduring achievements was their successful lobbying for the establishment of the University of Connecticut Health Center – a medical school, dental school, hospital and research facility. Before the Health Center was created the state's only medical school was at Yale and it accepted disproportionately small numbers of Jews, African-Americans and women. For the Kellers the solution to the discriminatory policies of the time was to create a public school that would not impose quotas on admissions. Today at the University of Connecticut medical school women outnumber men and the enrollment of minorities receiving training for careers in medicine is very large. Al was the chapter chairman of the American Jewish Committee in Connecticut and Cal took his place in that work after his death, at 52, in 1958. When he died she became the curator of the Alexander Keller Memorial Lecture series in her husband's memory at the University of Hartford, a program which, between 1958 and 1976, presented over 65 world leaders – statesmen, scholars, performers, diplomats, scientists and writers – as lecturers and participants in convocations, performances and seminars.