

WARREN SKIDMORE:: A BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE



I was born in Akron, Ohio in 1926 the son of Ernest Corydon and Inez May (Störmer) Skidmore, and the grandson of James Hanson and Amelia (Stonestreet) Skidmore.¹ While still in high school I apprenticed myself to Akron's leading antiquarian book dealer, working after school and on Saturdays. I went away in 1943 to St. John's in Annapolis, Maryland, the "great books" college. It was then more of a "prep school" than a college since WWII had reduced most of the student body to very young teenagers with a few somewhat older sons of the diplomatic corps in Washington who were not subject to the draft. My class of '47 celebrated their 55th homecoming in 2002 (without my presence).

I became interested in genealogy in the late-1930s, and my paternal grandparents sent me up to their box room to look in a trunk for the family papers. When I took my head out of the trunk I knew my Skidmore and Stonestreet ancestors back to 1750. The family had a spacious, high-ceiling, Edwardian house, in Geneva, Ohio and they had inherited and kept everything from family Bibles, letters edged in black, newspapers clippings, mustering in and out certificates, calling cards, old photographs, and all the other raw materials of a family history which are now, alas, largely discarded as trash. They had the luxury of space to save much of what I treasure today.

I was not a particularly good student at St. John's as I spent far too much time (when I should have been memorizing Greek declensions) working in the Maryland Hall of Records which was then on the St. John's campus. (I contributed in 1997 to a fund that changed the old state archives into a new library for the college.) Weekends were spent either in Washington, D.C., or in Manhattan at the theater. I had a Senate pass, and was in the gallery on the day that Roosevelt was in Yalta (a fact unknown to everyone else except perhaps Harry Truman, who presided). I exchanged pleasantries with an elderly woman who sat down on my left and flung half of her fur coat on me when she arrived. This was Alice Roosevelt Longworth, and I count her as the first of celebrities I have known briefly now and then.

¹See family no. 380 in my Westerleigh book on the *Scudamore/Skidmore CD-ROM*.

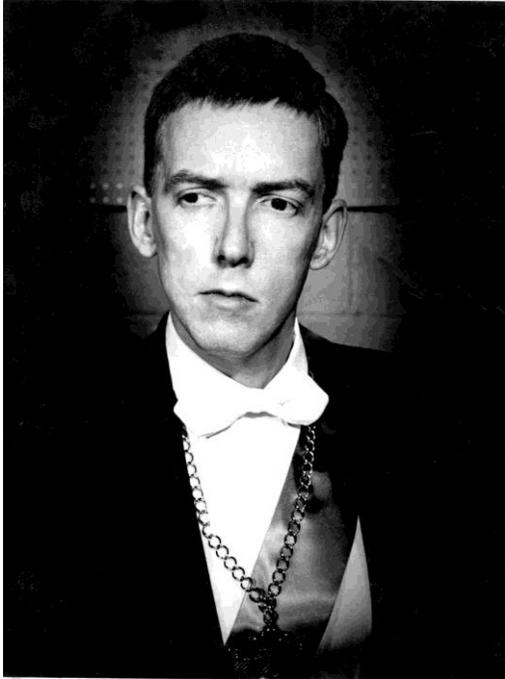
Recently I found my old senate pass (signed by Robert A. Taft who did *not* know me personally) and tucked in was a theater stub for an *orchestra seat* at the Schubert Theatre in Manhattan for a matinee on 15 March 1944 for which I paid \$2.75. (Obviously we have not really licked inflation.) For \$2.75 I saw Paul Robeson in *Othello!* I also remember a performance of the original cast of “Oklahoma” where I was surprised to find that a fictional “Skidmore’s Ranch” was a part of the plot.

I got into the classical piano in a big way at St. John’s. The college had a magnificent seven foot Steinway grand built in 1929, the most beautiful piano I have ever used. It was housed on the top floor of the Science Building. The building was completely dark at night and I spent many a midnight hour there plunking away unheard at Beethoven, Debussy, Satie, and a few other favorites. An instructor came down from the Peabody Institute in Baltimore every few weeks to judge the progress of myself and two or three other students on the piano. I learned one *enormous* truth about music there; that while I would never be a concert pianist the making of music (even *badly* as I did) was immensely preferable to just listening to it. Aldous Huxley once wrote that Beethoven’s String Quartet (Opus 132) proved that God exists... a judgement I would personally question. However I would have said then that the slow movement of the *Hammerclavier* Piano Sonata (Opus 106), which I attempted, was then the greatest spiritual experience that had yet come my way.

I frequently baby sat for Nicholas Nabokov (a cousin of Vladimir), a composer and a tutor at the college, who lived with his wife and son in Blair House. This was a magnificent Georgian house which the college had taken over (with several others) during the Great Depression when the banks were ready to foreclose on them. Nabakov’s piano was usually loaded with Stravinsky manuscripts, a great friend of his, which I found truly impressive.

Mortimer Adler, the great propagandist of the “great books” movement, lectured several times a year during my time at St. John’s. He taught at the University of Chicago, and I often wondered (but never asked him) how he got to Annapolis. He must have come the same way from Chicago that I did from Akron, on the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad, continuing on the rickety little single car Baltimore and Annapolis interurban train. There was precious little gasoline for civilians during the war and no interstate highways, and seats on such flights as there were took a military priority that I expect that even the great Mortimer did not have. The first leg of the journey meant putting up with drunken sailors in rolling stock so old that much of it had horsehair upholstery. (I frequently had to sit on my suitcase until Pittsburgh.) There was no dining car, only water out of a folding paper cup. Students, faculty, and administration were all frightfully impressed by this famous Tomist philosopher. I must admit I was also impressed by his tailor, one of the trades not in short supply during the war, and I figured his lovely suits must have cost at least \$300 each and seemed such an unlikely extravagance for a true philosopher.

Another student in Annapolis at that time was President Carter, who was at the Naval Academy across the street from my dormitory. I never went out in Annapolis without passing a hundred “middies” (midshipmen) and he must have been among them on a number of occasions.



Later I lived for a time with two elderly Quaker ladies on Penn Street in Germantown, Pennsylvania, worked at a Hot Shoppe as a carhop (where I made the best money in tips ever for the energy expended). I was there when President Roosevelt went up Germantown Avenue in a gorgeous open car on a chilly day shortly before being elected to his fourth term. I returned to Akron and the book business, and a new avocation: the theater. I started my career at the Weathervane Playhouse as Guildenstern in "Hamlet," a totally thankless role. But I sat backstage for some 20 or 25 nights and memorized the entire play. I had only a meager talent, but could have gone on in an emergency and at least said the lines of any part (even Gertrude or Ophelia in drag) if necessity had required it. I went on to bigger and better things (Jupiter in "Amphytrion 38"), and to directing some Sean O'Casey, T. S. Eliot, and Christopher Fry plays which time has not dimmed although these playwrights are now largely forgotten.

WS as Prince Bounine in Anastasia.

I agitated for classical phonograph records at the local library, and when this cause fell on the receptive ears of a great director (Russell Munn) I volunteered one evening a week to set up one of the very first collection of classical shellac 78s in a public library. I already knew something about books, and learned still more about the library business. I went back to graduate school, did the (largely useless) classroom stuff while a graduate assistant, researched and wrote a thesis in 13 days, passed a qualifying exam (GRE) in French, and earned my M.S.L.S., all in eleven months. (An expenditure of energy that now leaves me exhausted even in remembrance.) I had already become a member of middle management (Head of Adult Services) while working at the library and soon after took over the largest subject division of Language, Literature (including fiction), and History in a new building. My section happily included both local history and genealogy. I could now sometimes indulge my principal hobby between confrontations with a sometimes annoying public. I occasionally had little old ladies who came in to see the "gynecologist" but restrained myself from telling them to go into my office, take off all their clothing, and that I would be with them shortly.

I got involved in the project to index the 1820 and 1830 census of Ohio and was the principal lieutenant of the late Mary Harter, F.A.G.S., double-checking the work of the other volunteers we had recruited. She used to keep the Skidmores in choice vegetables and chestnuts brought in from her husband's dairy farm near Doylestown. She drove Bert's "classic" lavender Thunderbird, which gave a touch of class to our suburban driveway. These two indexes were published anonymously by the Ohio Library Foundation, a subsidiary of the Ohio Library Association, where I was very active. The 1850 index was done by most of the same corps, now

seasoned transcribers, but was published by private initiative. Several other books (mostly with my name now on the title pages) have followed, and also a CD-ROM with about 6000 pages of books and articles of Scudamoreana.

In my spare time I fathered a couple of delightful children, indulged my taste for medieval genealogy at the Public Record Office in England once or twice a year, and kept up with the new singers and operatic productions in Cleveland, New York, and London. As a young man I had several thousand operatic 78's in my mother's dining room, which had to be sold to an eastern dealer when they started sinking slowly into the basement. Many of them had been picked up for nickels (10 inch) and dimes (12 inch) at the local Salvation Army thrift store which was full of old wind-up Victrolas and acoustic records trashed when radio came in. All collector items today, but I now have much of the same collection copied over commercially to CDs which happily weigh several tons less.

I still write the occasional article for genealogical press, and in 2001 dealt with the captains (and their men and the citizenry), nearly 40,000 of them, who fought or supported Dunmore's War in 1774 in Virginia. Putting it together with a complete index of that many personal names was like walking a tightrope for several years, but I trust will sometime win me a lifetime achievement award from those Oscar people out in Hollywood.²

I coped with the computer *most* reluctantly, and none of my books, the CD, or the website would be half so elegant without the help and cooperation of my alter ego Frank Skidmore (Colonel, USA, retired) of Winchester, Tennessee. His strength in the PC department complements my lack of it, and led to his publishing in 2006 of a CD of *Scudamore/Skidmore Family History*. Then he established a website with much the same title to which by now (2011) I have contributed some 44 "Occasional Papers" with information on discoveries of new material. Amusing myself with the bottomless pit of the *personalized crossword puzzle* (that is, family history) still consumes much of my discretionary time. It kept me out of pool halls when I was young, and bingo parlors now that I am old.

Not a bad life in retrospect at 86 in 2012 as I coast downhill to oblivion.

²*Lord Dunmore's Little War of 1774, his captains and their men who opened up Kentucky & the west to American settlement* (Heritage Press, 2002). It is still in print (and with the other books published by the same firm) earns a generous royalty not yet commensurate with the effort spent in the writing.

RETIRED LIBRARIAN LOVES TO TALK ROOTS

[This article appeared on Wednesday, May 16, 1990, in Fran Murphey's "Good Morning" column in the Akron *Beacon Journal*. (WS)]

Retired librarian **Warren Skidmore** is often invited to talk about genealogy. He speaks about Climbing Your Family Tree.

He has had plenty of experience researching his own family, the **Scudamores** or **Skidmores**, way back in English history.

The former head of the Language, Literature and History Division of the Akron-Summit County Public Library will be the featured speaker at the annual meeting of the Friends of West Hill Branch Library at 2 p.m. Thursday. A big announcement sign is in the window at the library at 807 W. Market St., Akron.

The program is free and open to the public. Refreshments will be served.

When Skidmore led a tour to London in April, he toted a suitcase full of a genealogical book he wrote. They were destined for relatives in England. The 132-page volume, entitled *The Scudamores of Upton Scudamore: A Knightly Family in Medieval Wiltshire, 1086-1382*, was first published in 1982. The second edition came out last year.

He has written 400 pages into a computer for a new book tentatively called *Thirty Generations of the Scudamore/Skidmore Family in England and America*.

The Akron Anglophile started in 1980 with a book that had a mouthful of a title, *Thomas Skidmore (Scudamore), 1605-1684, Of Westerleigh, Gloucestershire, and Fairfield, Connecticut: His Ancestors and His Descendants to the Ninth Generation*.

Then he worked with retired Army Col. **William F. Skidmore** of Knoxville, Tenn., to produce *Skidmore - Rickmansworth, England; Delaware; North Carolina and West, 1555-1983*. Then came three printings over three Years of *Thomas Stonestreet of Birchden, Withyham, East Sussex, and of Birchden in Charles County, Maryland, with Posterity to Sixth Generation*.

He found the seal of **Peter Escudemor** from 1323 and printed it to illustrate "the first known use of the stirrup in the Scudamore arms." The spelling has a Latin look - **Petri de Escudamor**.

Skidmore's two-week Potluck Tour VII last month home-based in London at the Bloomsbury Crest Hotel, near Russell Square. Surprisingly, a hotel clerk there was named **Harriet Skidmore**. She said her mother was more knowledgeable of the family history than she was.

Joining the tour in London were **Howard** and **Zaza Skidmore** of Carmel, Calif. Howard and Warren are cousins. The Californians were on a similar trip in 1987. Mr. and Mrs. Skidmore went on to the two Berlins. Howard formerly lived in Cleveland and was a vice president of the Chesapeake and Ohio Railway. He was a frequent visitor at the home and farm of the late **Cyrus Eaton Sr.**, C&O official, in northern Summit County.