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01/23/25 Chestnut Hill Newsletter (/detail.html?sub\_id=35330) / Charles Day Dilks, Hill conservation giant, dies ...

## Charles Day Dilks, Hill conservation giant, dies at 83



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Charlie.jpg)

**Charlie Dilks, sailing near his easement-protected farm in Maryland.**

PHOTO COURTESY OF THE FAMILY

Posted Thursday, January 23, 2025 12:00 am

by **Len Lear** (/browse.html?byline=Len Lear)

Charles Day Dilks, a Chestnut Hill giant in the field of conservation, died Dec. 28, 2024, of cardiac amyloidosis at his home. He was 83. Dilks served on numerous boards, including the Schuylkill Valley Nature Center, Friends of the Wissahickon, Natural Lands, Woodmere Art Museum, School Committee of Germantown Friends School, Pennsylvania Environmental Council and Chestnut Hill Conservancy.

"Charlie joined the Board of the Chestnut Hill Conservancy in 2016, sharing his deep commitment to and knowledge of environmental protection and conservation," said Eileen Javers, Chestnut Hill Conservancy board president. "He introduced the 'Catalyst' program, the highest level of Conservancy membership. This initiative established a full-time Easement Manager at the Conservancy, enhancing our ability to protect what is now 106 acres in the Wissahickon Watershed.

"In many parts of our mission, Charlie's visionary leadership has brought long-lasting benefits to our community," Javers said. "His friendship, kindness and wisdom were shared with us and are now a guide to all we will do in the future. After our Spring Gala on June 14 honoring him, we planted one of Charlie's favorite trees, the rare Lois Magnolia, in Pastorius Park. This tree will serve as a lasting tribute to his many contributions enriching our community for generations to come."

"Charlie was in home hospice care for the last six months, but he was alert until the last few days. He still was enjoying the Eagles' games," said Kathi Clayton, former president of the Chestnut Hill Community Association. "I can't say enough about Charlie. He was a true gentleman, a really nice man. I am so glad I knew him. We were next door neighbors for 12 years." She added that she and her late husband Walt, along with Charlie and Jean, his wife, and two other friends traveled to Israel for 16 days before the pandemic. "I also would like to compliment Gene [Felix Dilks], who loved him dearly and welcomed us to visit with him anytime it was convenient during his time in hospice at home."

Born Nov. 28, 1941, Charlie grew up in Chestnut Hill, the son of Margaret Day and John Dilks. He attended Chestnut Hill Academy and graduated from the Westminster School in Simsbury, Connecticut, in 1959. He attended Yale University, majoring in American Studies and singing in the Yale Glee Club. After graduating in '63, he continued supporting Yale as a class representative, eventually being honored with the Class Distinguished Service Award.

He served as president of the Philadelphia Yale Club from 1972 to 1974. One of his deepest Yale connections would be formed years after graduation when he and Gene (nee Felix) joined the Yale Alumni Chorus. They traveled the world sharing music, bringing instruments to youth orchestras and raising money to help struggling communities in Africa, South America and Eastern Europe.

After completing the ROTC program at Yale, Charlie served as a lieutenant in the U.S. Navy for two years. According to his family, working as the navigator on destroyers in both the Mediterranean Sea and Persian Gulf made for exciting stories of using stars to guide the way across the oceans.

Dilks returned to Philadelphia in 1965 and began working at the then-new University City Science Center, the country's first urban research park. Over the next three decades, he oversaw the financing, development and management of more than 20 buildings in West Philadelphia, laying the foundation for what has become one of the nation's most successful university research parks. He was eventually named executive vice president at the Science Center.



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According to Chrissy Clawson, Programs and Communications Manager for the Chestnut Hill Conservancy, "Dilks' conservation journey began in childhood, inspired by his mother, a naturalist who founded the Women's Committee at the Academy of Natural Sciences. Growing up near Cresheim Creek, he spent countless hours exploring the Wissahickon, collecting salamanders, minnows and crawfish. His passion for the environment deepened when he discovered a new crab species in Maple Shade, New Jersey, with Dr. Horace R. Richards from the Academy of Natural Sciences. Richards named the new species 'Prehepatus Dilksi' in honor of Charlie Dilks in 1962."

"My wife, Toni [Seidl], and I had a great trip with Charlie and Gene Dilks and Walt and Kathi Clayton in April of 2019," said Richard Berkman. "We traveled across Israel and Petra in Jordan. When you travel with people, you really get to know them. Charlie always gave me a hard time because I went to Harvard and he was committed to Yale. Again, it was friendly competition that led to shared, thoughtful discussions. Charlie never complained. He always had a positive outlook on life. He made a great contribution to his family and the many communities in which he engaged. We will all miss him."

William Potter, another close friend, said, "Our friendship with Gene and Charlie was formed outside in the gardens, porches and patios around our houses at the intersection of Seminole Street and Willow Grove Avenue during the beginning of the pandemic. Although it's been said that one never makes new friends after 50, it is notable that we were all in our 70s when we began gathering. Charlie and Gene's devotion to each other was a constant inspiration, and their deep wisdom about life and their generosity in sharing it has had a lasting impact on us and those who were privileged to be their friends."

Dilks enjoyed weekly tennis games at the Philadelphia Cricket Club, squash matches at the Philadelphia Racquet Club and season tickets to the Philadelphia Orchestra. He also enjoyed gardening with his wife and cheering on his beloved Eagles.

Dilks was predeceased by his parents and brothers, John and Peter. He is survived by a sister, Anne Dilks Grandin; his wife of 56 years, Gene; their three children, Christina Taylor, Charles Jr. (Chay) and Mark; five grandchildren and numerous nieces and nephews. A memorial service was held Jan. 12 at the Church of St. Martin-in-the-Fields.

In lieu of flowers, the family asks that donations be made in his name to: The Class of 1959 Fund at Westminster School, 995 Hopmeadow Street, Simsbury, CT 06070; The Yale Alumni Chorus Foundation Scholarship Fund, Box 209036, New Haven, CT 06520; The Association of University Research Parks (AURP), 5470 E. Broadway Blvd., Tucson, AZ 85711; or Chestnut Hill Conservancy, Conservation and Easement Program, 8708 Germantown Ave., Phila., PA 19118.

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OTHER ITEMS THAT MAY INTEREST YOU

**Beloved Hill portrait painter for 80 years dies at 104 (/stories/beloved-hill-portrait-painter-for-80-years-dies-at-104,35238)**

**Media scholar and military leader Howard Myrick dies (/stories/media-scholar-and-militar-y-leader-howard-myrick-dies,34857)**

**Longtime Woodmere museum personality dies at 74 (/stories/longtime-woodmere-museum-personality-dies-at-74,34834)**

**Local mother of four was known for her kindness (/stories/local-mother-of-four-was-known-for-her-kindness,34744)**

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842&oadest=https%3A%2F%2Felfantwissahickon.com%2F)

LOCAL CALENDAR

- Fri, Jan 24** Sponsored **Library Playgroup - Charles Santore Library**  
Charles Santore Branch  
Philadelphia, PA  
Thu, Jan 23  
**Community Health Fair - Nicetown-Tioga Library**  
Nicetown-Tioga Branch  
Thu, Jan 23  
**LIVE THEATER - HOLY GRAIL OF MEMPHIS**  
The Arden Theatre Company  
Thu, Jan 23  
**Thursday LEAP Construction Club - Queen Memorial Library**  
Queen Memorial Library
- Sat, Jan 25 @4:00pm** Sponsored **Opening Reception: Bucks County Guild of Craftsmen**  
Bucks County Community College  
Northwest, PA
- Tue, Jan 28 @1:15pm** Sponsored **Faculty Senate Social Committee**  
Holy Family University  
Philadelphia, PA

See All Events (https://chestnuthilllocal.com/events/)

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THE LATEST



**SCH basketball finds rough going against Episcopal and Notre Dame (/stories/sch-basketball-finds-rough-going-against-episcopal-and-notre-dame,35331)**  
Last week the girls of Springside Chestnut Hill Academy took on the team smack in the middle of the Inter-Ac basketball standings, then faced the squad ranked first in the league. The SCH Blue ...

(/stories/sch-basketball-finds-rough-going-against-episcopal-and-notre-dame,35331)

**Hill duo collects computers for Ugandan school trip (/stories/hill-duo-collects-computers-for-ugandan-school-trip,35328)**  
The life work of Barbara Wybar isn't local to Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, or even the United States. To locate the roots of Wybar's life work, one must visit the village of Bududa in the African nation of Uganda.



(/stories/hill-duo-collects-computers-for-ugandan-school-trip,35328)



(/stories/two-1930s-comedic-treasures-return-to-the-screen,35327)

**Two 1930s comedic treasures return to the screen (/stories/two-1930s-comedic-treasures-return-to-the-screen,35327)**

The Chestnut Hill Film Group will screen two lesser-known 1930s comedies Jan. 28 for its Tuesday Nights at the Movies program at Woodmere.



(/stories/ava-sings-and-will-the-wanamaker-organ-play-on,35326)

**AVA sings, and will the Wanamaker organ play on? (/stories/ava-sings-and-will-the-wanamaker-organ-play-on,35326)**

Philadelphia's Academy of Vocal Arts will present its annual concert "Jubilate!" Jan. 25 and 26.



(/stories/mt-airy-authors-new-book-blasts-pit-bull-myth,35325)

**Mt. Airy author's new book blasts 'pit bull myth' (/stories/mt-airy-authors-new-book-blasts-pit-bull-myth,35325)**

People I have talked to who own or have owned pit bulls say they are sweet and friendly, just like almost all other dogs.



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**The Chestnut Hill Local**  
21 hours ago

The Zoning Board of Adjustment voted today unanimously approving the variances needed for Bancroft Green's development at 7600 Germantown Ave., despite the objection of Councilmember Cindy Bass. Read more about the project in our previous story below.

CHESTNUTHILLLOCAL.COM  
**Bass objects to coal site to...**  
A proposed development at 7600 ...



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