

Malta's Literary Tradition.

It is unusual for a small Town like Malta to be the home of two internationally recognized writers, but what are the chances that they would live in the same house? That is the case with the Hill-Porter-Willison House on Cramer Road.

In 1941, Pulitzer Prize winning author Katherine Anne Porter was staying at Yaddo, the Saratoga artist's community, but looking for "A House of My Own" as she said in a short story of that name. At that time she was known for her short stories but would later attain world wide recognition for her novel, Ship of Fools. A rolling stone throughout her adult life, Porter came to realize that "I want a house of my own, where I can put my books and papers and little dear worthless belongings and I want to sleep and wake in the house, and work in it and fuss with it a little, for the rest of my days."

Using Yaddo as her base, she searched throughout the Northeast but eventually found what she was looking for within ten miles of Yaddo on the edge of Tommy Luther's forest preserve. The house, built in the early nineteenth century, had been home to the Hill family since 1857. Porter purchased it upon first sight, named it South Hill and subsequently discovered what many first time homeowners have learned. The house was a money pit, requiring new plumbing, heating and electrical systems. In addition it was poorly insulated and during the record cold winter of 1942-43 Katherine vowed that she would never again spend a winter at South Hill. From that point on, she spent little time there before selling it to friends George and Florence Willison in 1946.

George Willison was a scholar and author. He studied at Oxford as a Rhodes Scholar and at the Sorbonne in Paris. His most recognized book was Saints and Strangers, a standard reference book on the Mayflower and the Pilgrims. He also penned a biography of Patrick Henry as well as other works on Colonial Virginia and New England. During his years in Malta he served on the staff of Governor Averill Harriman and as a member of the Malta Democratic Committee, even running unsuccessfully for a position on the Town Council.

Today Malta's literary tradition lives on in the form of Sarah Evans, who published her first book as a freshman at Ballston Spa High School. Sarah writes under the pen name of S. Annetje Evans and her first book, The Sour Little Lemon Tree. Sarah's tale makes the point that everyone is unique and capable of great things. Will Sarah someday live at South Hill?

Paul Perreault
Town of Malta Historian