

Yorktown Memories – Christopher R. Tompkins (Part 2)

The Country Garage (1952) was about a small gas station and repair shop owned and operated by two brothers – uncles to a boy named Seth (named for one of the Beims' sons, whose names appeared in several books, as well as their daughter, Alice) who helped them out pumping gas. The garage, located just off the "parkway," provided assistance to people who had accidents or were caught in the snow or just needed gas and an oil change. While not specifically stated, the description was eerily close to Tompkins Garage on Route 129, which opened in 1932 and was operated by Henry and Douglas Tompkins, often with their nephew John R. Tompkins, my father, helping out and who eventually owned the garage.

In researching Mildred E. Strang, I also came upon a reference to the Yorktown Community Nursery School and its founding within the milieu of the "Strang changeover years in Yorktown, or that era just after World War II." (Anniversary Booklet on Mildred E. Strang, 1968) "Mrs. Jerrold Beim (Lorraine) was re-elected as co-chair of Yorktown Community Nursery School at its organizational meeting held in the Town Hall." As an author in her own right and a progressive person, as indicated in her writing and dedication to early childhood education, Lorraine Beim had an impact on children's literature and on the Town of Yorktown as it went through its own transformation from a small farming community to a bedroom community for New York City in the post-war era. The family, Jerrold and Lorraine, Alice, and the twin boys, Seth and Andy, resided on Van Cortlandt Drive (Circle).



*Andy and Alice Beim at home on Van Cortlandt Drive (Circle)
Courtesy of Andy and Sharon Beim*



*Andy, Seth, Alice, and Lorraine Beim in Yorktown Heights Courtesy
of Andy and Sharon Beim*

The Beims moved from Yorktown to Arizona where, during a summer trip to Mexico to celebrate the publication of one of their books in June of 1951, they had a car accident in which Lorraine Beim and their daughter, Alice, were killed. The untimely death of Lorraine Beim ended what was a fruitful career as a co-author with her husband, and as a prolific author in her own right. After recovering from their injuries, Jerrold Beim and his twin sons, Seth and Andy, returned east where they lived in Westport, Connecticut. On March 3, 1957, The Bridgeport Sunday Post stated "Death is no stranger to 11-year-old Andy Beim, who was orphaned

when his father and twin brother were killed in an auto crash here (Half Mile Common, Westport) today." Only six years later, Jerrold Beim and his son Seth slid off the road just a quarter mile from their home and died in another car accident. The story was a tragic one – one that ended lives, broke up a family, and left a young child without any parents or siblings. The story made me search some more until I came upon a site with a blog about the Beims. I learned that Andy Beim was living not very far from Yorktown.



Andy and Sharon Beim today, with permission

As any historian knows, we must track down all leads and make personal contacts wherever possible for primary source interviews. After reaching out on the blog, I was contacted by Sharon Beim, wife of Andy Beim. With great kindness, the Beims joined my wife and me for dinner where we had a wonderful time learning about the Beim family, their dedication to education and writing, and to their renewed interest in Jerrold and Lorraine as renowned children's authors who, in spite of their untimely and tragic deaths, impacted the literary world and the lives of children in innumerable ways through their extensive, inclusive, and incisive writing. Our plan is to return to Yorktown with the Beims, to reintroduce Andy to the town he once called home and a place that is enshrined in Children's literature as a result of the work of his parents Jerrold and Lorraine. To think, all this started with a simple trip to the John C. Hart Memorial Library over 40 years ago and was spurred on by my life-long interest in the Old Put and Yorktown history.