

John Frederick “Fred” Seiberling (1888-1962)

John Frederick (Fred) Seiberling was born on July 24, 1888 in Akron. He attended The Lawrenceville School in Lawrenceville, New Jersey. He enrolled in Cornell University in 1908, where he majored in mechanical engineering. Fred left school early, however, due to illness and did not finish his degree.

Fred briefly worked at Goodyear before joining the Ohio National Guard, where he served with the 134th Field Artillery Regiment, 37 Division, Battery B. In 1915, his unit was mobilized as part of a larger troop movement to settle unrest along the Mexican border. It was here that he met Henrietta McBrayer Buckler of El Paso, Texas. The couple was married in the Music Room at Stan Hywet on October 11, 1917. Shortly thereafter, Fred received a commission as a lieutenant in the U.S. Army and was sent to France. He served only one year and stayed behind the front lines for the duration of his service before being honorably discharged after becoming ill.

Fred and Henrietta had three children: John Frederick, Jr., born on September 8, 1918; Mary, born on September 20, 1920; and Dorothy, born on March 7, 1922. All three of the children were born in the Infirmary Room on the fourth floor of Stan Hywet Hall. Fred and Henrietta lived in the Manor House for the first six years of their marriage before moving to the Gate Lodge in 1923 when it was no longer used as a service building. The couple formally separated in 1935: Fred moved back to the Manor House and Henrietta remained in the Gate Lodge. The couple never divorced.

Like her mother-in-law Gertrude and sister-in-law Irene, Henrietta was introduced to the Oxford Group, a spiritual movement, in January 1933 when Dr. Frank Buchman visited Akron for ten days and introduced the group's principles to the community. Henrietta became a devoted follower of the group's tenets, and through local meetings, met Dr. Bob and his wife Anne. On Mother's Day 1935, Henrietta invited Dr. Bob, who was struggling with alcoholism, to her home at the Gate Lodge to meet a fellow Oxford member and alcoholic Bill W. This conversation is considered the start of Alcoholics Anonymous. While not an alcoholic herself, Henrietta remained active in the organization throughout her lifetime and earned a place in the Ohio Women's Hall of Fame for her pivotal role in the formation of the organization.

Fred changed jobs several times in the early days of his career. He was the manager of the New Castle Rubber Plant in Pennsylvania. Then he briefly ran an auto dealership in Akron, before forming the Tandem Wheel Company in 1929. The company failed in the early years of the Great Depression, and by 1933, Fred had joined the sales department of the Seiberling Rubber Company where he remained for the rest of his career. During World War II, Fred operated a branch office in Washington, D.C. of the Seiberling Rubber Company where he worked to negotiate government contracts for the rubber company.

Fred always enjoyed the outdoors and often spent time fishing, hunting and camping. He also developed a talent for sculpture, creating several clay busts of his children and his siblings' children. Fred passed away on July 15, 1962 from prostate cancer. Henrietta died in 1979.

Fred and Henrietta's son, John Frederick Seiberling, Jr. enlisted in the U.S. Army during World War II. He was stationed in England and awarded the Legion of Merit for his participation in planning the D-Day invasion. In 1970, John was elected to the U.S. House of Representatives, representing the Ohio 14th District. He served eight terms and during his tenure was responsible for the creation of the Cuyahoga Valley National Recreation Area (now Cuyahoga Valley National Park), the first urban park managed by the National Park Service.