In Memoriam  –  Eleanor Rothe Hammond

January 22, 1922 – April 30, 2016

Eleanor Cecile Rothe Hammond was born on January 22, 1922, in Brooklyn, New York, the only child of Alexander M. and Frieda Schusster Rothe. She passed away in Round Rock, Texas on April 30, 2016 at the age of 94, leaving a long life of love and contribution.

As a child, Eleanor spent many days on the beaches of New York with her parents, developing a lifelong love of the sun, water, and swimming. She swam every day she could, and even in her last days, you knew you would find her sitting out in the sun!

Eleanor grew up in the Brooklyn suburb of Lynbrook, New York and attended Albany State College in 1939. At the height of World War II in 1943, Eleanor left school briefly to earn more money for college and to marry her high school sweetheart, Lester Harford “Harvey” Hammond, Jr. Harvey had just graduated from Kings Point Merchant Marine Academy and was serving in the U.S. Maritime Service which took him to war zones in England, France, and Africa. Back at home, Eleanor finished her college studies, graduating from Albany State with a Bachelor’s degree in Education in 1944.

Harvey remained with the Merchant Marines as an engineering instructor for several years after the war ended. They were stationed in Pass Christian, Mississippi when their first son, Lester Harford III (“Les”), was born in 1945. They returned to New York for the birth of their second son, Robert Alexander (“Bob”) in 1947, and their third son, Richard Perry (“Dick”), in 1950.

Eleanor and Harvey moved briefly to Indianapolis, Indiana where their first daughter, Lora Ellen, was born in 1952. In the summer of 1952, Harford became a safety engineer with an insurance company that was headquartered in Dallas, Texas. So Eleanor and Harvey moved to Texas where they would live the remainder of their lives. They arrived in the then-small Dallas suburb of Garland, Texas in blistering heat and drought, moving into a tiny two-bedroom home with four children and no air-conditioning!

While busy raising four young children in the 1950’s, Eleanor felt called to contribute more widely to her world and community. She and Harvey subsequently became foster parents in 1957, especially of children with physical special needs. Among these children, twins Pat and Mike Jackson (now of Leesburg, Virginia), were eventually adopted by friends of the Hammonds, and they still refer to Eleanor as “Other Mother.”

Eleanor naturally was drawn to teach swimming and became the Garland “Learn to Swim” Water Safety Coordinator for the American Red Cross in 1957. She taught almost everyone who lived in Garland over the next ten years at the city’s only public pool, issuing thousands of certificate cards for swimming or life-saving. Later, Eleanor coordinated adult swim classes at Richland College in Dallas, and she received a 40-year service award from the Red Cross.

In the late 1950’s Eleanor found her life-long spiritual home with the Society of Friends. She took part in Quaker study tours, and she sojourned at the Pendle Hill Quaker study center in Pennsylvania. Eleanor paid close attention to national and world affairs throughout her life. She longed for world peace, and she gave regularly to further the work of Quaker peace groups and other organizations.
Eleanor also was an early advocate of civil rights, and in 1963 as president of the United Church Women of Garland, she led the group to pass a resolution calling for Garland churches to open their doors to all races. She also actively advocated for desegregation in Garland schools and participated in a movement to eliminate the practice of giving used textbooks to students at the segregated all-Black schools when the all-White schools received new ones.

Eleanor and Harvey’s fifth child and second daughter, Nancy Marie, was born in 1961. In the late 1960’s Eleanor returned to college to earn her Masters of Education degree from North Texas State University. She taught high school math and special education classes for the Forney, Texas ISD for several years afterward.

Harvey passed away in 1982, after which Eleanor became a bit of a nomad, moving every three to five years over the next 30 years looking for her next “adventure” and always seeking to be of service. Two memorable locations included ranch land outside of Elgin, Texas where she lived in an old trailer house while helping two friends in their early efforts to establish the now-successful Down Home Ranch – a place for persons with intellectual disabilities to live and work. The other location was on hill country land outside of Kerrville, Texas, where for five years, she and other Quakers experimented in sustainable housing. At age 78 she helped construct structures of straw bale and adobe, including her own one-room home that she dearly loved and dubbed “The Hermitage.”

Eleanor loved to crochet and knit as a way to be creative, keep her hands busy, and show her love for family and friends. Her granny square afghans are in hundreds of homes, often made in colors of significance to the recipient. She was famous for her crocheted “Kiss” boxes and stocking ornaments at Christmas time.

She especially loved being a grandma, caring for several young grandchildren while their parents worked. Well into her eighties, she would travel across Texas and the United States to attend the births, graduations, and weddings of all her many grandchildren.

Eleanor is survived by her five children, Les Hammond (Ann) of Atlanta, Georgia; Bob Hammond (Claudia) of Friendswood, Texas; Dick Hammond (Lura) of Ponder, Texas; Lora Hammond Weber (Jay) of Round Rock, Texas; and Nancy Hammond Adams (David) of Keller, Texas; and by 12 grandchildren and 11 great-grandchildren. She also is survived by a legion of friends and admirers all over the country as well as those at Touch of Home in Round Rock where she lived the last three years. The family is so grateful for the care the staff there showed her.

A memorial service for Eleanor is being planned for the first weekend in October, 2016 in Garland, Texas. Contributions in her honor may be made to the Friends Meeting of Austin (www.austinquakers.org) or to Down Home Ranch in Elgin, Texas (www.downhomeranch.org).