



Huyler Clark Held
1925 - 2012

FOUNDER OF THE HUYLER C. HELD MEMORIAL FUND, WHICH
SUPPORTS CULTURAL INSTITUTIONS IN NEW YORK CITY

THE NEW YORK
COMMUNITY TRUST



Huyler Clark Held was an old-fashioned gentleman, with the Ivy League inflection and courtly manner of someone from another era. The quintessential New York bachelor, he was a member of 12 social clubs, sat on the boards of 10 charitable organizations, and directed the grantmaking of several philanthropic funds. He kept two appointment books—a desk calendar for his thriving law practice and a pocket agenda to keep track of his numerous social and charitable engagements.

A prominent trusts and estates lawyer, Held was an old-style family attorney, a trusted advisor, and friend to his clients. He had a sharp wit, a wicked sense of humor, and a kind and generous spirit. He could also be stubborn, forceful, and an exacting board member who was known to ask the tough questions. “Huyler liked to be in charge, and he was usually sure that he was right. ‘I think you will find’ was a favorite phrase,” says Sheila Biddle, a longtime close friend. His occasionally crusty manner, however, was softened by a barely perceptible twinkle in his eyes.

Held had many good friends and interests, and he took great pleasure in all of them. He enjoyed the cultural and social whirl of his life in Manhattan, but he also loved the outdoors and was an enthusiastic hiker, gardener, and fisherman. He was particularly devoted to Long

Island, where he grew up and later spent most weekends, and he celebrated its virtues throughout his life. He had a keen interest in historic preservation and early American antiques. He also cared deeply about the charities he served and the beneficiaries of his own philanthropy. Described by friends and colleagues as a “great people person,” Held was comfortable in any environment, whether he was socializing with wealthy donors at a formal dinner or chatting with community gardeners in the South Bronx.

Held enjoyed every phase of his life and was fully engaged in all his endeavors. But he also liked to reminisce about the past, beginning with his happy childhood. Born on April 13, 1925 and raised in Great Neck, Long Island, Huyler was the cherished only child of John Seys Held, a successful lawyer, and Winabeth Clark Held. His father was an astute collector of early American antiques, with a particular focus on Long Island decorative arts. John Held wrote some of the first articles on this subject for *Antiques Magazine*, and he served as president of the Society for the Preservation of Long Island Antiquities (SPLIA), a position his son would assume several decades later. As a child, Huyler liked to accompany his father on weekend jaunts to antique shops and on more out of the way treasure hunts. Driving through Long Island and New England, John Held was known to veer off the main road if he spotted an old farm that might have interesting pieces.

The name Huyler was a surname in his father’s family, which had a long-ago connection to the Huyler Candy Company, once considered the preeminent purveyor of high-end chocolates and other sweets. Founded in New York City in 1874 by Held’s great-grandfather, John Seys Huyler, the company eventually opened shops

and restaurants across the country. There was a famous Huyler's candy store that sold salt water taffy on the boardwalk in Atlantic City. Although the family's ownership ended in 1925, the company remained active until the 1950s.

Held attended Lawrenceville School in New Jersey and entered Princeton University in 1943. That same year, he enlisted in the United States Navy Reserve. He returned to Princeton and graduated in 1948, but remained officially a member of the class of 1947. After attending Columbia Law School, Held worked at several different firms in Manhattan before joining McLaughlin & Stern in 1998, where he was a senior partner specializing in trusts and estates law. Held loved every school he attended. Many of his classmates became lifelong friends and, in some cases, his law clients. He was a particularly dedicated alumnus of Princeton University, serving as president of his alumni class and attending every reunion.

Held was devoted to his mother, who is remembered as a lovely and gracious woman. His father died of a heart attack in 1952, when Huyler was 27 and just out of law school. Two

Held (second from left) with his former Princeton University sailing teammates at a reunion.



years later, his mother married Allen Woodworth, a widowed family friend and retired corporate executive. The couple lived in a beautiful 200-year-old house called Dumpling Hill, in Huntington, Long Island. Meticulously restored by Woodworth, the house was perched on a hill overlooking barns with sheep and chickens, and filled with American antiques. Woodworth shared the Helds' interest in historic buildings and antique collecting—Huyler told an interviewer that his father and Woodworth had been “congenial antique buddies”—and he also served a term as president of SPLIA.

Held spent most weekends at Dumpling Hill, and he became a beloved addition to the Woodworth family. He developed particularly close ties to Woodworth's daughter Joanne and her two children, Russell and Linda Landon. His step niece and nephew recall Held's playful and calming presence when they were young. “Huyler had a devilish sense of humor, and he brought that energy and spirit into our family,” says Linda Landon. At the same time, he had a steadying influence. “Our family had its share of dramas, and Huyler had a natural way of easing stress and discord,” Landon notes. “He restored harmony. When things got difficult, he's the one who would mediate and bring everyone together.”

After Allen Woodworth died in 1982, Held continued to spend weekends at Dumpling Hill until his mother's death in 1995. Soon after, he bought a historic house nearby in Oyster Bay. Like his apartment on the Upper East Side of Manhattan, Held's country home was decorated with American antique furniture, porcelain, and pewter, and filled with photos of friends and family. He took great pleasure working in his garden on weekends, and always kept an eye out for new plants that might add to its luster. At the

same time, he maintained a busy social schedule in Oyster Bay, and was deeply involved with the Society for the Preservation of Long Island Antiquities, where he was a trustee for more than 50 years.

In his professional life, the often-distinct roles of lawyer, friend, trusted confidante, and charitable advisor were intertwined. Held was more than a legal counsel to clients. Many considered him a part of their family—in some cases for several generations—and consulted him on day-to-day matters. “Huyler loved the role of advisor,” says Ted Wickersham, a friend and colleague at McLaughlin & Stern. “He was very close to his clients and he took very good care of them. For some he was the central person in their lives.”

Clients also sought his guidance on making charitable gifts, and Held helped set up 17 different funds in The New York Community Trust. The first of these funds was established in 1965. Held had been the lawyer for the anthropologist and poet Oscar Williams and his wife, painter Gene Derwood. As executor of Williams’ will, he created a fund that reflected the couple’s desire to help struggling artists and poets who were at the beginning of their careers or who had attained some success but had fallen on hard times.

While Held never married, he enjoyed a lively social life. He loved to dance, and as a young man he was a regular at the Stork Club and other nightspots. In later years, he spent many evenings at his private clubs. In his entry for the 25th anniversary book of his Princeton class, Held noted: “I have never been married, probably because the absolutely perfect golden girl has not come along and more probably



Held fishing and hiking in Canada with Charles B. Forcey and their guide in the 1960s.

because I have not wanted to give up the variety of people and places I enjoy so much. Thus far, I have never been lonely.”

For years, Held spent a few weeks each summer at a dude ranch in Jackson Hole, Wyoming. He frequently visited the Ausable Club in the Adirondacks, where he enjoyed fishing and taking long walks. One summer he attended the two-week Attingham Summer School in England. Participants in this prestigious program study historic country houses and attend lectures by eminent curators and scholars. On several occasions, Held took summer classes in literature at Oxford University. After joining the board of the New York Botanical Garden, he traveled with trustee groups to visit the gardens of Venice, Tuscany, and Japan, and he was part of an eco-tour to Ecuador. While Held enjoyed travel, he was also passionate—and very knowledgeable—about New York City. He cherished the memories evoked by particular locations. A taxi ride with Held usually became a narrated tour, where he would explain the architectural history of different buildings and point out places where friends and family once lived.

Held was an outspoken advocate for the nonprofit groups he served and he took

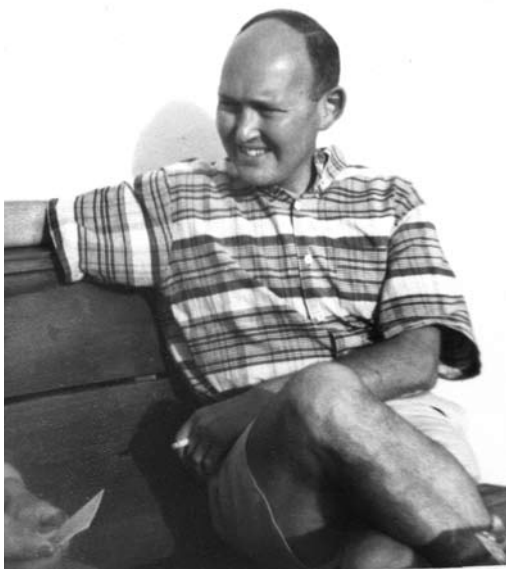
great pride in their progress. As a board member he usually assumed leadership positions, and worked hard to ensure the long-term survival of the organizations.

He was particularly involved with Fountain House, a day center that provides a sense of community and a range of programs—employment, housing, education, and wellness—for people living with mental illness. An esteemed trustee for 50 years, and a past president of the board, Held had a significant impact. He helped manage a capital campaign that raised funds to construct the five-story building where Fountain House is now based, and he was part of the team that made sure it was a beautiful space. “Huyler was very much committed to creating a lovely environment for people with mental illness, who don’t ordinarily have that in their lives, or who often are treated in places that from his perspective didn’t really show respect,” says Kenneth Dudek, president of Fountain House.

Held is credited with imposing a financial discipline that created a reserve fund for the building and he spearheaded an endowment campaign that raised \$17 million. He provided *pro bono* legal services and helped recruit other board members who also assumed a hands-on role, contributing their time and expertise. While he often played the role of curmudgeon at meetings, sitting—as one fellow board member fondly noted in a tribute—“with arms folded, peering out from lowered brows, intently looking for any hints of overspending,” it was a ritual that served an important purpose.

“Huyler’s image could be very deceiving,” says Dudek. “When I first met him he

Held in the
1960s.



seemed quite imposing and my first few years here I was totally intimidated by him. But I came to understand that it was all a facade. He was really the warmest, sweetest person and his interest was always in assuring the well-being of Fountain House.”

Held was a dedicated board member of numerous other organizations, including the Nature Conservancy, the Cathedral of St. John the Divine, the Preservation League of New York—which he co-founded—and Friends of the Upper East Side Historic District, among others.

When he began to experience health problems his last few years, Held would tell friends who faced problems of their own: “You have to rise to the challenge.” That determination was apparent throughout his life. His cousin Stewart Lahey still recalls a week-long bike trip through New England with his brother and Held when they were teenagers. Lahey and his brother had sleek new French bikes with gears, while Held had a more cumbersome American bike with big tires. “Huyler had a hard time keeping up with us,” Lahey says. “My brother and I would

get to the top of a hill and turn around and see poor Huyler in the distance pumping away. But he never gave up, he just kept at it and we had a great time.”

In later years Held was part of a Long Island walking club called “the Winter Wheezers.” The group would meet on Sunday afternoons at different locations to take long hikes, followed by tea. A member of the group recalls one occasion a few years before Held’s death when they were hiking on Shelter Island. They came to a creek that had been swollen by recent rains, and the only way to get across was to jump from stones to tree trunks to stones. The others crossed over, but Held felt it was too precarious. The group pressed on, assuming he had turned back. When they came to a clearing a while later and could see the water again, there was Held fording the stream in a bathing suit and carrying his clothes on his head, determined to rejoin the group.

That same spirit allowed Held to stay active and in charge of his life to the end. Friendly suggestions to alter some habits to accommodate his advancing years were inevitably rebuffed. For example, he continued to drive himself to and from Long Island every weekend, often after wining and dining at an evening event. But he also took steps to stay fit. He hired two personal trainers—a husband and wife team—to come to his home three mornings a week, and he did his best to follow a healthy eating plan. He kept up his hiking and welcomed any opportunity to hit the dance floor.

In his last few months, it was clear to friends that Held was not well. He had experienced heart problems in the past and suffered from arthritis. More recently, his doctor diagnosed extreme anemia. But Held never

complained and never missed a day of work. The Friday before he died, he put in a full day at the office and then attended a gala event at the Century Club. He sat near the dance floor, enjoying his favorite music from the 1940s and 50s, but for the first time he felt too weak to dance. The next day he drove to Long Island. That evening he was supposed to join friends at a dinner to celebrate his birthday. Held felt too ill to go out and canceled at the last minute. On Sunday, he asked the couple who cared for his Oyster Bay home to drive him back to the city. Although they urged him to go to the hospital, he insisted that they drop him off at his apartment. That night, April 16, 2012, three days after his 87th birthday, Huyler Held died peacefully in his home.

Held had stipulated that he wanted the last hymn at his funeral to be God Bless America. “He was an old-fashioned patriot,” says Sheila Biddle. “But I think this choice also reflected his love for the outdoors. What he most liked was the refrain “from the mountains, to the prairies, to the oceans white with foam.”

The Rhodebeck Trust, a private foundation, was established in 1987 by Mildred Teasdale Rhodebeck, a client of Huyler Held’s, to “alleviate the plight of disadvantaged people in the New York metropolitan area, including people who are homeless, hungry, elderly, or sick, and children.” The sole trustee, he stipulated that the Rhodebeck Trust be renamed the Richard and Mildred T. Rhodebeck Fund and become an unrestricted fund in The Trust, continuing the informed and engaged philanthropy that Held typified. Held also set up a fund in his will to support cultural institutions in New York City.

The New York Community Trust

is a community foundation, helping New Yorkers achieve their charitable goals and making grants that respond to the needs of our City.

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