



Elsie Winnifred Downey

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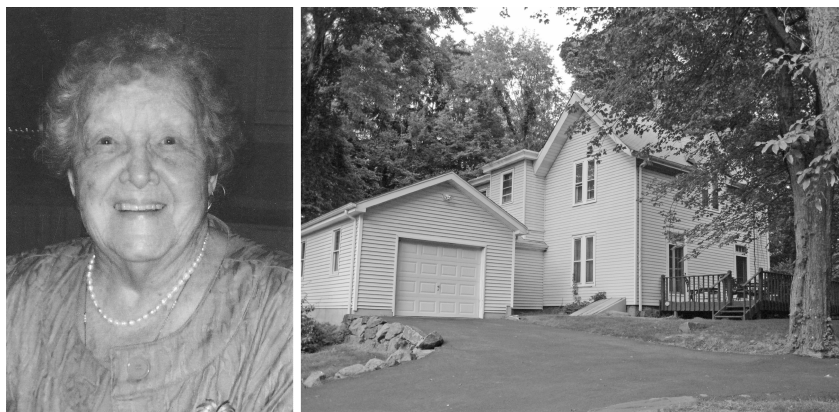
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In Memoriam

Elsie Winnifred Downey

1926–2014



Elsie Downey and her home

On February 1, 2014, a matron saint of dendrochronology, Mrs. Elsie Downey, passed away. Elsie was neither a dendrochronologist specifically nor even a scientist generally. Elsie's association with dendrochronology was in the form of providing room and board for 30 years to many dendrochronologists working or visiting the Tree-Ring Laboratory of the Lamont-Doherty Earth Observatory.

Elsie resided in a large house in northeastern New Jersey, close to Lamont-Doherty. By the early 1980s, Elsie's children had grown and moved away, leaving her with many empty rooms that she opened up for short-term rent to Lamonters. From the Tree-Ring Laboratory, Paul Sheppard moved in and wound up staying for 4+ years. Soon after that, Ed Cook moved in and stayed for 25+ years. Several other Lamonters of the Tree-Ring Laboratory rented a room at Elsie's for various lengths of time, often for years.

Additionally, many visitors to the Tree-Ring Laboratory spent a night or two at Elsie's as part of their visit to collaborate with dendrochronologists

of Lamont. We hesitate to try listing all the visitors who ever stayed at Elsie's, as we'd surely inadvertently leave someone out. We estimate that at least 50 dendrochronologists worldwide stayed for a night or two at Elsie's down through her decades of tree-ring hospitality.

Living long term and/or staying briefly at Elsie's house was more than just securing room and board. Rather, it was like living in your own home. Elsie provided a congenial atmosphere in which all were welcome to exist as family, not merely as renters. Evening meals were cooked communally and eaten together, and breakfast invariably started with Elsie's strong coffee and fresh-baked pastries. Recreational activities were open to all, and household chores were similarly shared. Elsie took interest both in the work being done by her dendrochronologists and in their personal lives. She was a good friend to her tree-ring renters and, in many instances, their families, too. Ed was known to refer to Elsie as his surrogate mother, sometimes stern, but always loving. Elsie's loving, respectful, and down-to-Earth

home helped us stay grounded in life beyond our science.

Elsie leaves behind four children, all successful in their own lives, many grandchildren, all of whom were a central focus of her life, and countless friends. Elsie also leaves behind a legacy of service to dendrochronology and companionship

with a great many tree-ring people. She will be missed.

—Contributed by *Paul R. Sheppard*
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