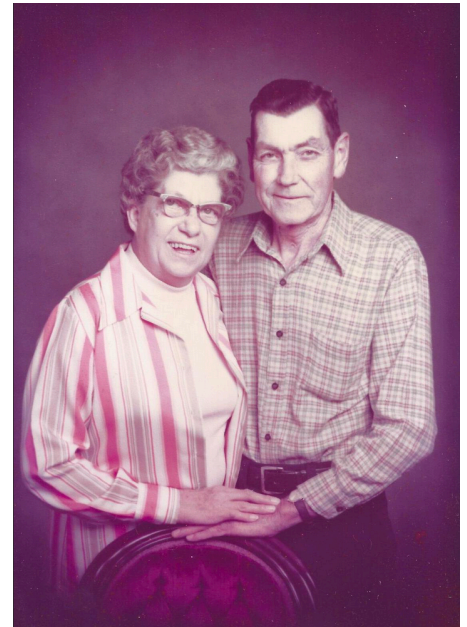


## KPHS: Silas Burgess carved out a piece of Upper Merion history

By Russell Rubert, King of Prussia Historical Society  
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Silas Thomas Burgess was a 20th century modern day suburban outdoorsman. A man who fished, hunted and traveled to our forests and fields for both work and relaxation. But he was more than that; he was also a man intimately involved in caring for trees and greenery.

Silas Burgess was born December 28, 1914 in Berwyn, Pa. His parents were Robert and Annie Goldsmith Burgess. After his marriage to his wife Helen, nicknamed "Pete," the young pair lived for eight years with the elder Burgess family in Gladwyne. In 1951 the couple moved to King of Prussia and settled into a house on lower Hillview road in the new Brandywine Village development. Price tag \$8500. There they made a home with their only child, daughter Sally.



No grizzled bearded mountain man, Burgess was a thin sturdy clean-shaven fellow. Silas Burgess worked for Lower Merion Township for some 48 years as a "tree surgeon." He worked his way up from climbing, caring for and cutting trees to the last 10 as full-fledged arborist. For 22 years he served on Upper Merion's Shade Tree and Beautification Commission.

A believer in making wise use of green and woodlands, Silas Burgess rescued a piece of walnut to fashion a mantle for the den fireplace he built in his home by incorporating the natural wave of the wood into the design. On one occasion he and a neighbor shared their backyards to build a large vegetable garden that traversed both their properties.

He was a man with both the knowledge of the Latin names of all his green patients as well as the physical expertise of climbing and cutting to treat them. In the later phase of his career he was less satisfied with the official administrative side of his chosen profession, missing the hands on action.

As an arborist in Lower Merion and Shade Tree Commissioner in Upper Merion he would often look for the opportunity to advise both public and private owners and developers on the protection and care of their trees from natural predators and invasive insects and disease.

Once Silas, or “Uncle Bud” as he was known to his relations was with a friend on a bridge at French Creek. Both had their fishing poles by their side. Some distance away and below the pair spied a rather large and frisky trout in the stream coming up for bugs. The friend challenged Burgess to try and cast his line to reach and catch the distant fish. And Silas did! With the trout hooked on the line the friend asked Burgess how his was going to safely retrieve the fish since it was so far away. Burgess replied “I caught it; you go down and get it!”

With the help of daughter Sally he planted a pin oak in the front yard of his Upper Merion home. It was her important duty to hold it straight as he filled in the dirt. To this day it stands straight and tall towering some 40 feet.

In 1985 a plot adjacent to the Upper Merion Cultural Center on Moore road was named the S T. Burgess Arboretum in his honor. For many years a carved wooden sign graced the premises bearing his name. Silas Burgess died January 20, 1991 at the age of 76 after a lifetime associated with the woodlands and green things of the Earth.

Sadly, today the ST Burgess Arboretum is no more. Only the posts of the sign remain, the site itself has fallen into disuse and is greatly overgrown. The white oak planted there in his memory has been forgotten. But his spirit of conservation, encouraging trees and beautiful greenery in the township has not been forgotten. The good work and ideals he cherished and championed live on in the continuing work of the Upper Merion Shade Tree and Beautification Commission. Perhaps one day the arboretum may be revived and the name of Silas Burgess will once again welcome children looking for leaves for their school projects and provide a healthy and vibrant home to trees and greenery of many and varied species.

[https://www.mainlinemedianews.com/kingofprussiacourier/kphs-silas-burgess-carved-out-a-piece-of-upper-merion-history/article\\_68ed6e5c-1799-11eb-bbb4-9be5d6976e12.html](https://www.mainlinemedianews.com/kingofprussiacourier/kphs-silas-burgess-carved-out-a-piece-of-upper-merion-history/article_68ed6e5c-1799-11eb-bbb4-9be5d6976e12.html)