



## Robert Joseph Gill M.D.

June 22, 1921 - July 25, 2017

Robert Joseph Gill, MD, died on Wednesday evening, July 25th, 2017, at the age of 96 at his home on Spruce Street, across the street from Old Pennsylvania Hospital, founded by Benjamin Franklin and the first hospital in the nation, where Doctor Gill had practiced medicine for 50 years. Dr Gill was born in Philadelphia on June 22, 1921, the son of Joseph Fretz Gill and Mary M. Gill (nee Mills). He graduated from West Philadelphia High School in 1940 and from Lehigh University, graduating with his class in 1944 while simultaneously having served in the United States Army during World War II. The military and nation needed physicians during and following the War, and Dr Gill was accepted after graduation from Lehigh into the Medical School of the University of Rochester, NY, graduating with his MD degree in 1948. Thereafter he returned to Philadelphia to begin his work at Pennsylvania Hospital, first as a Resident Intern in 1948 and then as a Resident Physician in Internal Medicine. About to embark on his private medical practice, Dr Gill was recalled to the military in 1953 to serve in the United States Army Medical Corps with the rank of Captain, as staff physician at Walter Reed Army Hospital and later at Fort Belvoir, Va., returning to his family in Philadelphia in 1956, where the family had moved to allow his eldest son to begin school. One son recalled father coming home from Virginia on weekend leave with presents of chocolate bars for the little boys in the large patch pockets of his officer's uniform. From 1956 to December 31st, 1999 Dr Gill practiced medicine as a staff physician at Pennsylvania Hospital, where he served a term as head of the Department of Hypertension and Vascular Disease, together with his private practice in Internal Medicine in offices across the street.

Living in the East Falls section of Philadelphia, Dr Gill moved both his family and his practice one half of a block down Spruce Street when his office landlord – the hospital – decided to reclaim his office at 801 Spruce Street for building expansion. Dr Gill bought a large house from the Philadelphia Redevelopment Authority just down the block for his office suite and residence. The historic house, known as the Evans-Biddle-Kitchen House, had last been used by the American Catholic Historical Society Library. Originally built in the 1790's by merchant Whitten Evans, who kept both an elephant named Columbus and a huge tortoise in the back garden which local children were permitted to ride, the house is

best known as the city house of financier Nicholas Biddle, President of the Second Bank of the United States on Chestnut Street, which today houses the portrait gallery of Independence National Historical Park. As a young physician at the hospital with a baby son, Dr & Mrs Gill would walk the neighborhood near 8th & Spruce, and Mrs Gill told her eldest son years later that Dr Gill would stop and say that he would like to live in that big house someday when his practice took root. Dr Gill was very interested in history, American history, building histories, and especially the history of his home and office. He was particularly proud that he was the second doctor to live in the residence, the first having been Dr. James Kitchen, a 19th century Doctor of Homeopathy. When working in his lovely garden behind the house, Dr Gill would often unearth discarded medicine bottles and jars believed to have been left over from Dr Kitchen's medical preparations. Dr Gill was committed to the Washington Square west neighborhood where he lived and worked. His interest in the neighborhood, history, and books, began when he was a teenager, just graduated from West Philadelphia High School. He spent the more than half year between January graduation and attending Lehigh University in September working for the Curtis Publishing Company on 6th St, across from Independence Hall and Park. He had the opportunity to walk the neighborhood and become acquainted with the library at the Athenaeum of Philadelphia, the other publishing houses surrounding Washington Square, the historic architecture of Pennsylvania Hospital on 8th Street, the antiques shops on Pine Street, and as a runner for editors and writers at the Curtis Company with the bookish denizens who lived and worked in the neighborhood. He also attended weekday worship services at historic Christ Church on 2nd Street, a place where he would later be an active parishioner.

Dr Gill was married to the former Thelma Octavia Eisenhard of Walnutport, Pa. She was a nurse at St. Luke's Hospital, Bethlehem, Pa, at the time Dr Gill was at Lehigh. They met first at a party and later while he was a patient in the hospital with a badly broken leg, which gave him the college nick-name of "Gimpy". They were married in July of 1944 and moved almost immediately to Rochester, NY, where Dr Gill began his medical studies. Thelma, or Telly as she was known to almost everyone, was the love of Dr Gill's life, and after her death from cancer in 1983, he never remarried. Together they had five children, Cynthia Cooper Gill, who pre-deceased both of her parents as a small child, Bruce Cooper Gill (Jill), Garth David Gill (Susan), Graham Blair Gill (Susan), and Letitia Gill Gembala (Joseph). Dr Gill is also survived by his five grandchildren.

A man of many interests beyond medicine, Dr Gill served on numerous boards and was a member of many clubs and fraternal organizations and charities in Philadelphia. He was a forty-year member of the Vestry of Old Christ Church Philadelphia, 2nd and Market Sts, and is believed to be the second-longest office holder there from, 1956 until 1996, and a

board member of the Old Christ Church Preservation Trust from 1965 until 1996. He also served on the Board of the Athenaeum of Philadelphia on Washington Square from 1966-2009, and he served as a board member and officer of the Genealogical Society of Philadelphia. He was a Fellow of both The College of Physicians of Philadelphia and the American College of Physicians, and he was an Adjunct Professor of Medicine at the University of Pennsylvania. Dr Gill was particularly proud of his involvement and terms as President of the Society of Sons of St George of Philadelphia. He was also a member of the Union League, the Sons of the Revolution, The Pennsylvania Society of Sons of the Revolution, the Colonial Society, the British Officers Club, the St Andrews Society, and the Fretz Family Association, among others. He was also a board member of organizations about which he spoke little or quietly, including the Spring Garden Soup Society which provided meals for homeless men and the Physicians Aid Society of the Delaware Valley. Dr Gill loved to travel and to learn. Though inactive in recent years, he read incessantly and kept his mind sharp until just a few days before he died. He also often said that he wished a little bit that he had retired earlier than 80 years old so that he could have travelled more. He travelled extensively and often through the British Isles, but he also explored Canada by rail from one end to the other, spent time in Germany, Austria, and Switzerland, and he visited South Africa, Australia, New Zealand, and many states right here at home in the United States.

His Funeral Service will be held on Sat. July 29th. at 11 AM in Christ Church, 20 N American St, Phila., PA 19106. Burial will be private.

In lieu of flowers, contributions may be made in his name to either Christ Church "All Saint's Fund" or Lehigh University.

# Cemetery

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Burial will be private.

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# Events

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**JUL  
29**

**Funeral Service**

11:00AM

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Christ Church

20 North American Street, Philadelphia, PA, US

# Comments

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“ I was saddened to learn of the passing of Dr. Robert Gill. We were fellow members of the Union League. Dr. Gill was a member of the Civil War Round Table and also of American Legion Post 405.

I remember Dr. Gill for his passion for history and his wry sense of humor. We often exchanged thoughts in discussions about historical themes.

We honor Dr. Gill for his humanitarian work as a renowned Physician, and also for his distinguished service in WWII and the US Army Medical Corps.

Dr. Gill will be missed by all his friends at the Union League.

We send our deepest sympathy to his family and friends, and know that he has traveled to his heavenly reward.

May he rest in eternal peace, and honored status as a US Veteran

Wishes for comfort in this time of trial.

Andy Waskie, Ph.D.

Legion Post 405; Union League of Philadelphia

**Andy Waskie** - August 25, 2017 at 01:05 PM