

Luthera Hilt (Burton) Dawson, 100

THOMASTON – Luthera Hilt Burton Dawson passed away peacefully on June 27, 2011, at The Homestead in Cushing, surrounded by family and friends. She had celebrated her 100th birthday three weeks before.

Luthera Hilt Burton was born in Utica, New York, on June 6, 1911 to Austin Leroy Burton and Hattie Cyrena Maxcy Burton. She was raised, along with her twin brother Leroy, on a saltwater farm on the St. Georges river in Cushing, Maine. The Burton Farm – in the family since 1736 – was sold in 1925. The twins attended the University of Maine at Orono, where Luthera earned bachelor's and master's degrees in English literature. She was a member of Phi Beta Kappa. Graduating into the Great Depression, she followed jobs to Massachusetts, then to Ohio, and finally to Washington DC. There she married William Dawson. Widowed, she raised their two sons while working for the federal government and taking an active role in the town of Capital Heights, Maryland, where they lived. She was town treasurer and was also instrumental in establishing library bookmobile service there. Once her sons had been launched, Luthera retired to Thomaston where she took up the Maine-centered life for which she had always yearned.

She bought the brick house on Wadsworth Street in Thomaston that had been built in 1800 as the Hastings Tavern. For decades, school children visited her historic home and enjoyed homemade cookies and stories of her seafaring family and her Revolutionary War ancestor, Benjamin Burton.

She celebrated Maine in two books, *Saltwater Farm* and *In the Slow Lane* (which was published together with *Saltwater Farm* under the title *Beside the St. George's: Maine Forgotten Ways*). Her third book, *Life Begins at \$1440*, is a witty account of her years as a young career woman in Washington DC before and during the Second World War.

Some of Luthera's short pieces were published in the anthology *Salt & Pines: Tales from Bygone Maine*. She participated in the team that prepared the Cilley family letters for press. She transcribed hundreds of handwritten letters that were then edited and published by the Thomaston Historical Society under the title *A Breach of Privilege – Cilley Family Letters 1820-1867*.

She has lectured on Maine speech and appeared on Maine Public Television in a multi-part feature called Luthera's Lingo. Ever devoted to the beauties of language, she was a reading tutor for children and for inmates at the Thomaston Prison.

Luthera's enthusiastic and effective work in the Thomaston Historical Society, the Thomaston Federated Church, the Thomaston and Cushing libraries, and Montpelier (the General Henry Knox Museum) was recognized by the state when she was presented with the Maine's 100 Award in 2002. The town of Thomaston named her Grand Marshal of the Fourth of July Parade in 2006.

Luthera's twin brother Leroy died in 1982. She is survived by her son Roger Dawson and his wife Sandra; her son Keith Dawson and his wife Katharyn; three grandchildren; and eight great-grandchildren.

A memorial service will be held on Saturday July 16 at 11:00 am at the Federated Church in Thomaston; a reception will follow. Burial will be private. In lieu of flowers, donations may be made to the Helen Studley Memorial Scholarship Fund at the Federated Church, Thomaston.