

ETHEL (BILLIE) WILSON GAMMON



Ethel “Billie” Wilson Gammon is a Mother, Grandmother, Teacher, Humanitarian, and the innovative Founder of the Washburn-Norlands Living History Center. A community minded citizen and activist, Billie’s background has included teaching Sunday School, being a Girl Scout leader and a youth leader of high school students, organizing the first senior citizens’ group in the community and a reading club at the North Livermore Library.

Billie’s most enduring endeavor has involved the Norlands, historic home of the famous Washburn family. Billie became interested in the Norlands library in 1954, and that interest became a lifelong passion to pursue her visions of the Living History Center that the Washburn farm has become.

Billie became the volunteer Executive Director of the Norlands Living History Center, negotiating the establishment of a Foundation and the transfer of ownership from the members of the Washburn family to the Foundation in 1973. With some help from other volunteers, Billie has worked intently to preserve the mansion of 23 rooms, the large barn, church, library, schoolhouse, office building, two carriage sheds and about 450 acres of land. Extensive fund-raising efforts have been essential, and Billie has devoted much time and skill to this endeavor, working to secure grants and private donations over many years.

Always a teacher, Billie has never stopped developing educational programs at Norlands. Young women from Maine and other states have come as interns for periods of six months or a year, and have lived, learned, studied, and worked to earn college credits. Many girls attending the learning center have gone on to become history majors, to teach or to work in museums because of Billie’s influence.

Billie organized “Live-Ins” which are held Friday to Monday periodically throughout the year. Women, girls, teachers, and even families may attend, having the unique experience of living, learning and working as was done in the 1800s. This program attracts people from many parts of the country.

Maine children also benefit from the Living History Center with whole classes of schoolchildren arriving by bus to spend a day in this historic atmosphere where people who lived and worked on the Washburn farm a hundred years ago come to life in contemporary times in the roles played by current volunteers. Billie values this kind of “role playing” as an effective and memorable teaching procedure for people of all ages.

Among the many honors Billie has received are the Achievement Citation Award (AAUW of Maine, 1976), Outstanding Woman of the Year (Livermore/Livermore Falls Historical Society, 1976), Distinguished Achievement Award (University of Maine Farmington, 1976), Distinguished Alumni Award (University of Maine Machias, 1979), Honorary Membership (Delta Kappa Gamma, 1980), Jefferson Award (1983), Maine Historic Preservation Award (1983), Woman of the Year (Business and Professional Women, 1988), Appreciation Award (North East Regional Conference on the Social Studies, 1991), and “Recognition of 34 years as Director of Norlands” from the Maine Senate and House of Representatives (1988).

The Norlands Living History Museum has become a valuable reality for the people of Maine because of Billie Gammon’s foresight and determination in the pursuit of her vision for it. Beyond her tireless efforts to make this dream come true, Billie’s smile and her enthusiasm are contagious and have endeared her to everyone who has become a friend of Norland’s. Billie’s life is a testimonial of what an innovative and determined woman can accomplish.

1997 Photograph

Inducted March 1997

Source = <https://www.uma.edu/about/community/mwhof/>