



Reba Q. Lerch
1888-1969

Memorialized by the
Reba Q. Lerch Fund in
THE NEW YORK COMMUNITY TRUST
415 Madison Avenue
New York, New York 10017

In 1969, the Will of Frank H. Lerch established the Reba Q. Lerch Fund in memory of his late wife, to be administered by The New York Community Trust for charitable purposes.

Though a summer shower dampened the crowd at the shipyard and sprinkled droplets on the armful of roses she clutched, Reba Q. Lerch ignored the light rain. Proudly she swung the bottle of champagne as she christened the new Standard Oil tanker.

The date was July 18, 1942, seven months after Pearl Harbor. The place was Sparrows Point, Maryland, where the Bethlehem-Sparrows Point Shipyard — operating around the clock at maximum capacity — was producing some of the ships so vital to the country's war effort. The S.S. Esso Harrisburg, the tanker that slid down the ways that day, had been built in just four months from the day the keel was laid.

It was a rare public moment for Mrs. Lerch, who was a very private person. She felt sure there were others present to whom the honor should have gone and who might not have been so uneasy with it. But her husband Frank was then president of a Standard Oil subsidiary. Partly out of patriotism and partly out of loyalty to her husband, she believed that she could not refuse.

Born in Oxford, New Jersey, on March 20, 1888, Reba was the daughter of Anna and Irving Quick. When Reba was three years old the family moved to Scranton, Pennsylvania, where her father opened a hardware store and where her younger sister, Florence, was born.

Reba attended grade school and Central High School in Scranton. She was a serious, quick-minded student, and her parents wanted her to continue her education. She went on to Bloomsburg State Normal School, a two-year college which prepared her to teach mathematics. During the summer after her graduation in 1909, Reba took a trip to Easton, Pennsyl-



vania, to visit her grandmother. While she was there, she was introduced to a young chemist, Frank H. Lerch, Jr. He had spent all his life in Easton, where he lived with three unmarried aunts who had raised him after the death of his parents. He had recently graduated with a Bachelor of Science degree from Lafayette College in the same town, and now he had gone to work for the Empire Steel and Iron Company in nearby Catsauqua.

Frank and Reba soon discovered that he was just a week younger than she, for his birth date was March 27, 1888. And they found they had enough other things in common to establish the beginning of a friendship.

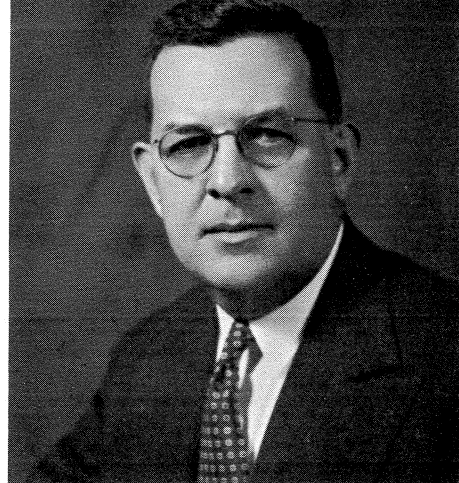
Frank made frequent trips to Scranton, where Reba was teaching second grade, and as several years passed the friendship ripened into romance. Then, in 1914, Frank moved to New York, where he took a job with the T. A. Gillespie Company, a general contracting firm. Now he and Reba saw each other less frequently, but the prolonged absences only drew them closer. After a year of lonely separation, they made plans to marry. Their wedding on October 7, 1915, when both were twenty-seven years old, brought an end to Reba's teaching career and the beginning of a long and companionable marriage.

For several years the Lerches lived in Flushing, then a pleasant country town in the New York borough of Queens, and Frank made the long trip daily to his job in Manhattan. At the end of World War I, Frank left the contracting business for a government job, and for two years he worked on the settlement of war contract claims with the U.S. Army Ordnance Department in New York. That assignment finished, he joined Ford, Bacon and Davis, Inc., a New York engineering firm.

Although Frank's educational background was in chemistry, his greatest abilities proved to be in engineering and management, and those were the directions in which his career developed. He was a quiet, unassuming man. His abilities and outlook took him in 1927 to the Interstate Natural Gas Company of Louisiana, a subsidiary of Standard Oil of New Jersey, as resident manager. Frank and Reba left their home in Flushing and moved to Monroe, in the northern part of Louisiana. They stayed there for seven years. The Great Depression came to weigh heavily on the country, but Frank's industry was vital and his job a crucial one. As a result, Frank and Reba were spared the hardships suffered by so many during those difficult years.

Then, in 1934, Frank was made co-ordinating head of all the natural gas interests of Standard Oil of New Jersey, an advancement that brought the Lerches back to New York. Frank and Reba returned to Queens, settling this time in Jackson Heights. They moved into a pleasant apartment in one of the gracious new buildings that were beginning to bring a taste of city amenities to the quiet suburban community.

A year after Reba Lerch helped launch the S.S. Esso Harrisburg for her husband's company, Frank made another important step forward. He directed the organization and development of the Consolidated Natural Gas System, a merger of Standard Oil of New Jersey's natural gas interests, which then became a separate entity. And he was named the first presi-



dent of Consolidated Natural Gas Company, the parent company of the System. In this position, he successfully guided the System through its first years of independent operation and then, after the end of World War II, through a period of extraordinary growth and expansion. During those years, natural gas production increased prodigiously. It rose from 3.9 trillion cubic feet in 1945 to 6.8 trillion cubic feet in 1950 — nearly double — and continued to climb. Frank Lerch was one of those responsible for creating a network of natural gas pipelines, some of them 2,000 miles long, to keep pace with increasing production and increasing demand. In 1953, two years before his mandatory retirement at the age of 65, Frank Lerch was named Chairman of the Board of Directors. But when retirement time came, a dynamic leader like Frank found it hard to call an end to his career, and for two more years he served the company as a consultant.

Through all those years of hard work, steady advancement, and ultimate success, Reba Lerch was at her husband's side. She was an astute business woman with a good head for figures. She handled her own investments, and Frank often relied on her for help with his business problems. She sometimes spoke of going back to teaching, or even into business, but her health prevented it.

Even as a child, Reba had never enjoyed ro-



bust health and had suffered from allergies. She lost two babies soon after their births, a disappointment for both husband and wife that took a further physical toll on Reba herself. But, although she was always somewhat frail and the onslaught of arthritis brought a new and continual discomfort as she grew older, she was a woman who gave constantly of herself. Her husband was her primary concern; her church was a major interest. It was noted by those who worked with her that she always tried to do more than her strength would allow. The Lerches were active members of the Community Methodist Church of Jackson Heights, where Reba was deeply committed to the work of the Women's Circle, sewing for hospitals and knitting for babies of the poor. During World War II, Reba took an active role in the Red Cross and was vice president of the Jackson Heights chapter.

Throughout her life, Reba remained a dedicated student. She loved to read and to study, and now and then through the years she tried her hand at writing. Flowers were one of her great joys, and although an apartment village seemed an unlikely place, she led a large group of neighbors who gardened in the commonly-owned plots between the buildings, and she soon found herself president of the garden club.

The Lerches' apartment bloomed abundantly with flowers in season, and she often remembered her friends with fresh bouquets.

Frank's positions as a management executive gave the Lerches many opportunities to travel. Despite her pain, Reba usually accompanied her husband on his business trips. To spare Reba as much discomfort as possible, their travels were accomplished in luxury, by private car and driver. When the direction was somewhere west, they often managed to voyage to Hawaii en route. For a while they made regular trips to Florida. Then they discovered that they liked Europe better. But the land of greatest fascination, they learned at last, was Africa, and there they returned more than once.

Frank's favorite hobby was photography. He indulged this love on their wide and frequent travels, and at home one room of their apartment was given over to his extensive collection of colored slides — mostly of animals and flowers captured by his camera in exotic places. Golf was a second interest, and annually in late summer they made a trip to Manchester, Vermont. There, in the quaintness of a lovely New England town, they stayed at the venerable Equinox House. Frank enjoyed getting out on the golf course, and Reba found relief from her allergies.

They both loved children. As they traveled, Reba always found time to shop for small gifts. Then, back at home, she was ready with "surprise packages" for the young visitors who came to their apartment.

Although they could have afforded a more elegant home, the Lerches preferred to stay in their simple Jackson Heights apartment. There they were comfortably at home for more than thirty years, entertaining the many old friends and neighbors who warmly returned the affectionate hospitality of the serious Frank and the quiet, responsive Reba. They were as unostentatious in their kindness and service to others as they were in their own simple way of life. Though they educated more than one deserving

child, for instance, they never spoke of their good works. Whatever their friends knew of such quiet helpfulness, they learned indirectly — never from the Lerches themselves.

During their later years, the health of both Frank and Reba failed to such an extent that they could no longer exercise their love of travel. Then, on April 2, 1969, after being in and out of the hospital a number of times, Reba Quick Lerch died at the age of 81. Frank was brokenhearted without his companion of nearly 54 years. Reba was constantly on his mind. He spent bittersweet hours recalling the many things they had done together, the places they had visited, the interests they had shared. One of their deepest mutual concerns, born of the pain of their own losses, was the welfare of children. He loved the very young as much as she, and in his loneliness and grief he came upon one more thing they could do together.

Frank Lerch wanted to honor the memory of his wife and to carry on the work he knew she cared about. He was a successful businessman who carefully nurtured his life savings. Now he found himself in the position of many Americans who have been able to translate such savings into worthwhile philanthropic work. So, in his Will, he created the Reba Q. Lerch Fund to be administered by The New York Community Trust and "to be devoted to work with and for crippled children."

That summer, he returned to Vermont alone. He was there for only a few days. On August 7, 1969, only four months after the death of his wife, Frank H. Lerch also died. He, too, was 81.



The New York Community Trust is a publicly-supported community foundation which provides centralized management for many charitable funds. New York's major banks serve as trustees. Trustee for the Reba Q. Lerch Fund is Manufacturers Hanover Trust.