

# Edith Morton Chase

1890 - 1972

*"Topsmead - a state of natural beauty."*

- Edith Morton Chase

One of the least known, but most generous philanthropists in Connecticut is Edith Morton Chase, benefactress of Topsmead, the lovely Cotswold cottage and estate in the Litchfield Hills.

Edith Morton Chase was born on April 3, 1891 to Alice Morton Chase and Henry Sabin Chase, who, in 1896, took over the leadership of the Waterbury Manufacturing Company, later known as Chase Brass and Copper Company. The first patent of the company which was to become a world leader in the brass industry was for an umbrella tip.

The Chase family was one of the most prominent in the city and was involved in numerous activities that have had a lasting impact on Waterbury, starting with the three sons of Augustus Sabin Chase (1828-1896). Henry Sabin Chase's brother, Frederick Starkweather Chase, took over his brother's role as president of the Chase family holdings until 1942. Frederick's wife, Elsie Rowland Chase, was a talented artist whose work can be seen at the Mattatuck Museum. Rowland Park on West Main Street is named for Elsie's family. The third brother, Irving Hall Chase, was president and treasurer of the Waterbury Clock Company which later became Timex.

H.S. Chase's second eldest daughter, Edith, who was readily recognizable walking with her poodle in downtown Waterbury, was a 1910 graduate of Miss Porter's School in Farmington. In 1917 she received from her father the gift of the first plot of land that would later become Topsmead (Old English - top of the meadow) in the Litchfield Hills. The initial plot consisted of 16 acres on Jefferson Hill in Litchfield, where she built a rustic cabin. Between 1923 and 1925 it was replaced by a more substantial home, the present Cotswold (England) cottage that stands today on 511 acres of meadow and farmland known as Topsmead State Forest. The English style Tudor cottage was designed by Richard Henry Dana, Jr., a well-known architect of the time. The interior oak woodwork is used for wall beams and floors, contrasting with the stucco walls that reflect the outside. The exterior cypress beams, decorated with lead downspouts, support a slate roof. As in most Cotswold cottages, the exterior gardens and landscaping become part of the house itself. Surrounding the house are well-pruned holly, juniper and lilac. Apple trees line the walled drive and formal gardens at each end of the house. Fine English-style craftsmanship, an eye for detail, and understated wealth are evident throughout the interior of the house, which by today's standards, reflects a certain austerity. The cottage is simply furnished with 17th and 18th century English country antiques. Edith Chase shared her country home with her two life-long companions, Mary and Lucy Burrall, her neighbors on Church Street in Waterbury.

Throughout her adult life Edith Chase was a clever business-woman. She had wisdom and foresight in managing the holdings that she inherited from her father while setting aside a financial system for philanthropic commitments. Her ledger



books display annual sustainability for the Chase Dispensary amongst other charitable interests. In 1927 she increased her real estate holdings through the acquisition of the Buell Farm, renamed Topsmead Farm, adjacent to her Tudor cottage. The farm produced food used on the estate. Beef cattle, poultry, sheep, and pigs were part of the working farm, along with vegetable and flower gardens.

Edith Chase served many years on the board of the Connecticut Forest and Park Association and left her entire country estate now known as Topsmead State Forest to the citizens of the State of Connecticut. Additionally, for the pleasure and use of the people of Connecticut, she left an endowment to be used specifically for maintaining and operating the buildings and grounds as they were upon her death so that Topsmead would "be kept in a state of natural beauty."

She died on June 6, 1972.