

Elizabethtown College 125th Anniversary
National Historic Preservation Trust This Place Matters Campaign & Campus Historic Building Survey
Based on the National Parks Service Historic American Building Survey
2024 Summer Creative Arts and Research Program SCARP
Ava Barton Class of 2027
Jean-Paul Benowitz, Director of Prestigious Scholarships and Fellowships and Public Heritage Studies



Walter Annenberg (1908-2002)

In the beginning of Walter Annenberg's career, his main motivating force was to recover his family's financial well-being and restore its reputation. It was this that motivated him in his business and philanthropic endeavors. At age fifteen, Walter enrolled in the Peddie School in Hightstown, New Jersey. Walter spent much of his senior year trading stocks and experienced great success with it. "Upon graduating in 1927, Walter committed one of his first acts of philanthropy by donating \$17,000 to Peddie for a new track – money he had earned trading stocks on the market.¹" Following his time at Peddie School he enrolled in the University of Pennsylvania's Wharton School of Finance. He soon after dropped out and spent his energies trading in the stock market.

In 1939, a federal grand jury indicted Walter's father, Moses, for "evading income taxes on \$3,258,810 between 1932 and 1936...Moses pled guilty to one count of tax evasion. He consented to pay a fine of \$9.5 million over seven years. After serving nearly two years of a three-year sentence, Moses Annenberg was released for medical reasons. Ill with a brain tumor, he died on July 20, 1942.²"

Walter Annenberg inherited much of the family estate following his father's passing to his sister's dismay. But the family's debt amounted to approximately \$5.5 million, and their assets totaled \$2.7 million. On June 26, 1938, Walter married his first wife, Bernice Veronica "Ronny" Dunkleman. Together they had a daughter and a son; Wallis Huberta, and Roger. Walter and Ronny divorced in 1950, and shortly thereafter Walter married Leanore "Lee" Rosenstiel. The two were married on September 29, 1951, and remained together in a "happy, mutually fulfilling

¹ Catherine M Burns, "Walter Annenberg," Immigrant Entrepreneurship, accessed June 28, 2024.
<https://www.immigrantentrepreneurship.org/entries/walter-annenberg/>.

² Ibid

marriage" until their death. Leanore Rosenstiel was born in New York City on February 20, 1918. She was raised in Los Angeles by her uncle Harry Cohn, a founder of Columbia Pictures.³

One of Walter's first major independent successes was *Seventeen* Magazine. He tapped into a market that had previously been ignored: teenage girls. All 400,000 of its initial September 1944 prints were sold-out. The revenues from *Seventeen* allowed Walter to enter into the television market. In 1945, Walter purchased the Philadelphia radio station, WFIL for \$190,000. He backed various programs including educational television shows.⁴

Perhaps his best-known success was in the ideation and execution of *TV Guide* which debuted on April 3-9, 1953. The first issue sold 1.5 million copies. The magazine had television program listings and television-related news. "It received more advertising revenue than any other magazine at that time and was the highest circulated magazine in the history of publishing. It peaked in 1978 at twenty-one million copies purchased per week."⁵

"Sunnylands" was the Annenberg's estate in Rancho Mirage, California. It was completed in 1966 and was used to entertain presidents, monarchs, and stars. The Reagans attended the Sunnylands New Year's Eve parties 18 times between 1974 and 1993. The home featured 22 guest rooms within the 20,000 square foot main house. Within the home was Walter's collection of over 50 Impressionist and Post-Impressionist paintings. Following his death, Walter donated his collection to the Metropolitan Museum of Art. The home was known for its meticulously cultivated grandeur with a household staff of 20 and 30 full-time gardeners. "Lee Annenberg, who served as Reagan's chief of protocol for a year, was nothing if not a perfectionist. "She put colored jelly beans in each of the guest bedrooms to match the decor," says her daughter Elizabeth Kabler, the founder of New York Center for Living, which helps young people overcome addictions. "On the driving range, they used to pile the balls up in a pyramid. But Walter had that sensibility, too. There's an aesthetic to Sunnylands, a sense of beauty. It's a magical kingdom."⁶

"1993 saw a large gift from Walter Annenberg, who donated a million dollars to Elizabethtown College in honor of Phares Hertzog, who taught Annenberg in high school. The money was placed in two endowed funds, one for scholarships and the other for faculty development. The college wanted to name the new annex to the Baugher Student Center in Annenberg's honor, but at first he asked the college not to use his name, since he was already



³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Bob Colacello, Todd Eberle, "Inside Sunnylands, the Haute-Moderne Annenberg Haunt of Ronald Reagan and Prince Charles," *Vanity Fair*, March 6, 2012. <https://www.vanityfair.com/style/2012/04/sunnylands-ronald-reagan-prince-charles-annenberg>.

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inundated with requests from other colleges for contributions and dedications. Nevertheless, he eventually relented, and the annex became the Annenberg Center, opening on February 14, 1993.⁷”

Walter and his wife Leonore were buried on their Sunnyland Estate Grounds in Rancho Mirage, Riverside County, California. Pictured below is their resting place overlooking the purple Californian Mountains.



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⁷ Chet Williamson, *Uniting Work and Spirit* (Elizabethtown, PA, Elizabethtown College Press, 2001), 313.; Jean-Paul Benowitz, and Peter J DePuydt, *Elizabethtown College*. (Charleston, South Carolina: Arcadia Publishing, 2014), 22.

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