

Hoyt

## Alma Bonham

Alma Bonham, 96, of Montezuma died March 7, 2000 at Grinnell Regional Medical Center.

A graveside service was Sunday, March 12 at Masonic-IOOF Cemetery in Montezuma with the Rev. John Darlington of Grinnell and the Rev. Howard Lord of Montezuma presiding.

Mrs. Bonham was born Aug. 28, 1903 in Marshalltown, the daughter of Charles Alton and Lula M. (Boileau) Maiden. She attended school in Marshalltown and at the age of 13 went to work as a telephone operator and one year later was made a supervisor.

On Feb. 8, 1930, she married William Hoyt Bonham in Montezuma. Mr. Bonham, who moved to Montezuma in 1929, became a partner in Bechly & Company abstractors.

In 1940, Mrs. Bonham went to work at the office and remained very active in the business until just recently.

She loved working and never wanted to stop, however she found time to be involved in many things. She was a mem-

ber of United Methodist Church, Lafayette Chapter No. 232 O.E.S., D.A.R., Women's Study Club, the Poweshiek County Historical Society, the Mayflower Society, the Iowa Land Title Association and the American Title and Land Association.

She was preceded in death by her parents, her husband, Hoyt on Oct. 8, 1984; a brother, Raymond Maiden and a sister, Jane Uchytel.

She is survived by a nephew, whom the Bonhams raised as a son, Robert Day of Montezuma; two grandsons, Bradley Lee and Eugene Lee; nieces, Sandra Duff of Marshalltown and Shiela B. Brindle of Newton; a nephew, Michael Uchytel; a sister-in-law, Dorothy Bonham Hurt of El Paso, Texas; close friends, Alice Underwood of Montezuma and John and Carolyn Darlington of Grinnell; other relatives and many, many good friends.

In lieu of flowers, memorials may be made to United Methodist Church of Montezuma.

Watts Funeral Home was in charge of arrangements.

## Alma Bonham

Alma Bonham, 96, of Montezuma died March 7 at Grinnell Regional Medical Center.

A graveside service was conducted Sunday at the Masonic-IOOF Cemetery in Montezuma, with the Revs. John Darlington of Grinnell and Howard Lord of Montezuma officiating.

She was the daughter of Charles Alton and Lula M. Boileau Maiden and was born Aug. 28, 1903, in Marshalltown. She attended school in Marshalltown, then began work as a telephone operator, eventually being named a supervisor.

She was married to William Hoyt Bonham Feb. 8, 1930, in Montezuma. She worked with her husband, a partner in Bechly & Company Abstractors.

She was a member of the United Methodist Church, Order of Eastern Star, the DAR, the Women's Study Club, the Poweshiek County Historical Society, the Mayflower Society, the Iowa Land Title Association and the American Title and Land Association.

Surviving are Robert Day of Montezuma, a nephew whom the Bonhams raised as a son, and two grandsons. She was preceded in death by her parents; her husband; one brother, Raymond Maiden; and one sister, Jane Uchytel.

MR March 15, 2000

H-R March 16, 2000

# Good-bye, Miss Alma

## Prominent Montezuma business woman, civic leader Alma Bonham dies at 96

MR  
March 15,  
2000

By JEAN BUSTOS  
Staff writer

Alma Fern Maiden Bonham died at 5:30 a.m. Tuesday, March 7, 2000. Long-time residents say, at 96, she wasn't just the oldest business person in the county, she was its premier heartbeat and historian.

The widow of equally prominent Montezuma lawyer and abstractor, Hoyt Bonham who died in 1984, Mrs. Bonham belonged to the Daughters of the American Revolution since 1942. She was a 60-year member of Midway Grange and a past Worthy Matron of the Order of Eastern Star.

She was a pillar of Montezuma's United Methodist Church — formerly the Episcopal-Methodist Church. There she was treasurer for 17 years. And there, her husband served as head of the reconstruction committee after the building's destruction by fire decades ago.

When 84-year-old Hoyt died, 19 pallbearers escorted his coffin from the church to the Masonic-IOOF Cemetery where his wife was buried beside him Sunday afternoon, March 19 under gray afternoon skies.

She was also a longtime member and treasurer of the Iowa Society of Mayflower Descendants.

The society recently planted a tree in her honor in front of Montezuma's Carnegie public library.

("You know we were very lucky to get that library; it was the second-to-the-last

library in the country the Carnegies endowed," she said more than once.)

Her husband served on the library board for 40 years.

The little sapling was important to her for another reason, as well. Though she wasn't an outdoorsman, she loved trees and flowers, in particular lilacs and African violets. Two years ago, she drew *The Republican's* attention to the existence in town of an unusual species, a ginkgo tree, which has been spreading its branches in Montezuma since the 30s.

Since 1943 a member of the Montezuma Women's Study Club, Bonham was also a leader in the Poweshiek Historical and Genealogical Society, where she last served as chaplain.

In 1988, she was parade marshal of the Montezuma Fourth of July celebration. And several years ago, "Bonham Trail" was established on the southeast edge of Montezuma, near Sunnyview Square, a retirement complex which her husband helped build. Growing alongside down trail are 27 plant species indigenous to Iowa.

The day before she was buried, the local chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution paid tribute to her, deciding she would be most honored by conducting — not canceling — the meeting.

"I've never missed a DAR meeting yet and I don't intend to now," she said some two years ago when she first entered Montezuma Nursing and Rehabilitation

Center.

She didn't miss the meeting then; friend Gordon Alexander saw to it. But a poignant note Saturday was that Bonham was scheduled to present the group's next program April 8, *Memories of Our Montezuma DAR daughters*.

Born to Charles A. and Lula Maiden in Winfield Aug. 26, 1903, Alma was the eldest of two sisters, Olga and Jane and their brother, Raymond. Her mother, the former Lula Boleaux, was from Washington, Iowa. Her father, Charles A. Maiden, was a Winfield resident.

Mrs. Bonham's friend for some 50 years, Alice Underwood, recalled how Bonham had fun once at a lawyer's expense with her father's last name.

"Alma was on jury duty," Underwood said. "During the selection, one of the lawyers asked her what her maiden name was. She told him and he said, 'Yes, but what was your MAIDEN name?' And she told him again and he asked her again and this went on for some time until the court reporter finally said, 'Tom, her maiden name IS Maiden.'"

In May 1903, the Maiden family moved to Marshalltown where Bonham's father worked for a grain elevator and her mother, for a doctor. She attended Marshalltown Community Schools.

When school was out, the family spent many a summer day visiting grandparents in Winfield and Washington. According to friends and local biographers, it was a close and happy family.



*Republican photo*

**Bonham smiles to the crowd as parade marshal at the 1998 Montezuma Fourth of July celebration.**

In a 1998 *Republican* interview by Catherine Wilson, Bonham said her parents loved a house full of music and youth.

"Mother would make a lunch and Dad would take up the rug and we could dance if we wanted to," she told Wilson.

Wilson also wrote Bonham had a spe-

cial tie with her maternal grandmother.

"After everyone went to bed, we loved to sit and talk or read a book," she said.

Bonham's life as a working woman jump-started when she went to work at 13 for the Marshall Telephone Company.

**ALMA**

Continued on Page 10

# Respected community member dies

Alma Bonham  
March 15, 2000

**ALMA**  
Continued from Page 1

Local legend has it she was a supervisor within two months.

After high school, she worked for the Iowa Railway and Light Company in Marshalltown.

On Feb. 8, 1930 she married Hoyt Bonham in the Presbyterian Manse in Montezuma. Rev. W.F. Vanderlip performed not a double-ring, but a double ceremony for Alma Maiden and the young abstractor for the firm of Bechly & Scovel. Beside them were the soon-



**Alma and Hoyt Bonham posed for this photo at their 50th wedding anniversary.**

to-be Mr. and Mrs. H.R. Weissenburger of Marshalltown.

According to records, the couples were witnesses for each other. Friends say the Bonhams and Weissenburgers, now deceased, got together annually for anniversaries. A 1930 newspaper announcement had it that the ladies were high school classmates.

After their marriage, the Bonhams first rented an apartment in the home of Dr. J.L. Taylor. The house still stands near Brownells Inc.

They bought their first home in 1942 at 503 South Third in Montezuma.

Hoyt Bonham had moved to Montezuma in 1929 and apprenticed under Judge Frank Bechly before passing the bar. His career, however, lay not in law but in the business of land transactions. Underwood said. And in 1942, Bonham asked his wife to join the business, Bechly & Co. Abstractors.

When World War II ended, the abstracting firm — which had operated from the Ed McNeil law office — looked for a move. Melvin Arendt's Peoples Savings Bank, then on the northeast corner of Main and Fourth, wanted more space.

And so Peoples Bank went west a few blocks and the old bank vault came to house abstracts for every square inch of Poweshiek County. Alma Bonham never left the business.

After her first convalescence at the rehabilitation center, she returned to work. When illness claimed her again, she could still be found in her room at the nursing home, pen in hand, notary stamp nearby, scads of club minutes and abstracts strewn across her bed.

A descendant of a married couple who made the 1620 Mayflower voyage, her blood-lines were blue and her love of country was fierce. But her nose was never in the air. She loved her friends - "the most important thing in life," scripture, children, history, growing things, gift-giving and holiday dinners. After her husband's death, she and Underwood joined Mr. and Mrs. Dick and Doris Bowers for Christmases.

And for more than 50 years in the corner office where she toiled under an avalanche of paper, she was a tireless worker whose documents were immaculate. Those who knew her best say for that



**Alma Bonham**  
Aug. 28, 1903 - March 7, 2000

and many other reasons, one day a young woman may point to Alma Bonham as proudly as Bonham did across four centuries to John and Priscilla Alden.