



## Obituary: The Rev. Royal F. Shepard Jr.



*The Rev. Royal F. Shepard Jr.*

The Rev. Royal F. Shepard Jr., 91, died on Tuesday, April 9, 2019 at Mountainside Medical Center in Montclair, the same hospital where he was born.

Mr. Shepard was a United Church of Christ (Congregationalist) minister, author and served for several years as Montclair Township historian.

He was born in 1927 to Royal F. Shepard and Adelaide K. Denk. Known as “Roy” or “Shep” to his friends, he

grew up mostly in Montclair and New York City, but also lived for a time in Hopewell Junction, N.Y., in the Catskills. Here he attended a one-room school, immersed himself in books and nature study, and roamed through the woods and fields with his cousin Charlie. He later attended Trinity School in Manhattan and graduated from Montclair High School.

As a teen, he became deeply interested in religion, joining the Society of Friends (Quakers). At age 16, he met Georgianna "Jana" Burch at a friend's home in Manhattan. They were married in 1949, shortly after he graduated from Haverford College, where he studied philosophy.

His college studies were interrupted for a period when he traveled to Mexico with the American Friends Service Committee, helping to build a well for a rural school serving indigenous people. After graduating from Haverford, he earned a master's degree from Columbia University Teachers College and taught high school English for a year. He then enrolled in Union Theological Seminary, becoming an ordained minister in 1954.

Mr. Shepard served as United Church of Christ minister at churches in Neligh, Neb., Watertown, Wis., Sacramento, Calif., Duluth, Minn., and Wayne. He was also interim/exchange minister for churches in upstate New York, Michigan, and Bath, England. While in Sacramento, he earned a doctorate of theology at the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley.

A gifted writer and orator, he was widely appreciated for his sermons where he mused over diverse themes from Yankees games to the works of Reinhold Niebuhr. An admirer of the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., he frequently advocated from the pulpit for the civil rights movement and joined marches in Sacramento in the 1960s. In 1980, he traveled to Cuba with a group of clergymen as part of an effort to secure freedom of religion. Mr. Shepard's sermons are available from the website of the Pilgrim Congregational Church of Duluth at [pilgrimduluth.org/history](http://pilgrimduluth.org/history).

In 1992, he and Jana retired to his hometown, Montclair, and he became the township historian. They also enjoyed their summer cottage in the Berkshires and later, an apartment at Crane's Mill in West Caldwell.

His published works include "Seeking the Mind of Christ," a daily devotional, and the novel "The Latest Epistle of Jim," which won the 1995 Mid-List Press Award. But he reached his stride with his poetry, winning several awards and publishing in journals such as Poetry, Poem and Nimrod. His last published poetry collection, "Veery Song," won the Comstock Review Award in 2013. The work is a loving reminiscence of his wife Jana, from their first meeting as teens to her slow decline in a dementia unit.

Mr. Shepard is survived by his children, Alice Roth and her husband, Donald of Lenox, Mass.; Melanie Shepard and her husband, Alan Netland of Duluth, Minn.; Roy Shepard of St. Louis, Mo., and Elizabeth Shepard of Montclair; six grandchildren; and one great-grandson.

A memorial celebration will be held at 2 p.m. Saturday, April 27, at Crane's Mill in Hinman Hall at 459 Passaic Ave., West Caldwell.

In lieu of flowers, memorial donations may be made to the Alzheimer's Association at [act.alz.org](http://act.alz.org) or the Montclair History Center at [montclairhistory.org](http://montclairhistory.org).