

Carroll History Journal

Historical Society of Carroll County, Maryland

A MAN FOR ALL SEASONS: ROBERT JOSHUA GILL

BY JAMES E. LIGHTNER

Most people in Carroll County under the age of 40 know the name Gill because they graduated from high school in the Gill Center at McDaniel College (formerly known as Western Maryland College). Or, they attended state wrestling tournaments or other athletic events in the large arena. Older countians know the name because they attended county and state athletic contests in the College's Gill Gymnasium. Others, of course, attended the College as students and knew the name as one of many given to major buildings on campus. However, few could tell you for whom that large athletic complex was named, and even fewer would know that Robert Joshua Gill (1889-1983) had deep roots in Carroll County and had a remarkable 94-year life filled with adventure, risk, service, intellectual activity, generosity, humor, and intense loyalty to his friends and especially to his *alma mater*, Western Maryland College (often referred to as WMC). Gill was very much a leader in diverse fields and was a significant Marylander: college gridiron captain, corporate lawyer, real estate developer, decorated soldier in two world wars, participant in the Nuremburg trials, baseball team owner, and world-class stamp collector. This was Robert J. Gill.

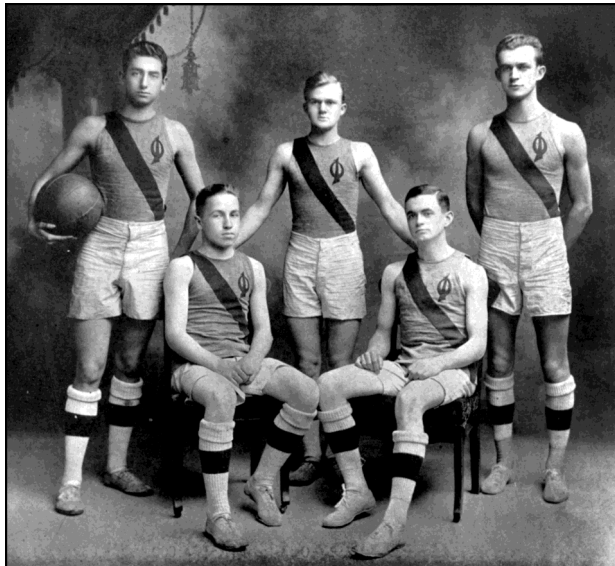
The son of a minister of the Methodist Protestant Church, Gill was born in Baltimore in a parsonage



on Harford Road on June 22, 1889. Because his father, Rev. John Montgomery Gill, transferred pastorates regularly, Robert attended public schools in Chestertown, Md., and Washington, D.C. His mother Emma (Yingling) Gill died in Chestertown when he was seven, and Dr. Gill later remarried in 1910. The family had strong ties to WMC back to its founding, so it is not surprising that, in 1903, the boy entered the College's preparatory school in Westminster at 14, moved into the College in 1906, and graduated as the class valedictorian in 1910 with a Bachelor of Arts degree *summa cum laude*, with concentrations

in history and elocution.

At this time the 43-year-old College had about 240 students, a faculty of ten, and an endowment of about \$75,000. Annual tuition, room, and board costs were \$225. Gill's graduating class numbered 28, although 66 had matriculated in 1906. While a student he was literary editor of the *WMC Monthly*, played football (team captain in 1909), baseball, and basketball, and helped publish his class yearbook. That yearbook reported that he was the tallest, the most popular, and the senior who had done the most for the college. He was described as "one of the most level-headed fellows in the college and . . . a natural leader among the fellows . . . [He] has excelled both



Above left: WMC Senior Basketball Team, 1910. Robert Gill stands at the far right. Above right: 1909 WMC Football Team. R.J. Gill, team captain, is seated in the center. Unless otherwise noted, all images are courtesy of the McDaniel College archives.

in athletics and studies.” This academic prowess was noted (perhaps with some envy) in these words: “He is almost a freak in studies, for he was always sick in bed on hard days and the other days he was excused because he was feeling bad, but in the finals he always came out first.”

Lest one think that this “preacher’s kid” was a shrinking violet, several stories are told of his stretching the strict rules of the early College. In February 1906, while still a preparatory student, he was given 25 demerits for violation of the rule prohibiting any fraternization with the opposite sex. And in the winter of 1907, when he was a freshman, the faculty gave him an indefinite suspension for disrespect and insubordination during an evening inspection by a roaming teacher. Gill did, however, return a few weeks later to participate in spring sports.

As associate editor of the yearbook (*The Aloha*) in 1910, he is credited with a clever practical joke, which has become part of the College’s lore. The last page of the yearbook, apparently slipped into the manuscript on its way to the printers, contained a seemingly innocuous poem entitled “Vale.” The first letters of each line, however, formed an acrostic that spelled out, reading down: “DOC LEWIS IS A HORSE’S ASS.” Soon after the yearbooks were printed and distributed, giggling erupted all over campus and the offense was discovered by the faculty and especially Doctor Lewis, the college president. The editors (including Gill) were forced to

sign an apology, although they admitted no wrongdoing. Nevertheless, the aggrieved Dr. Lewis suspended publication of yearbooks for the next six years! An amusing incident followed that edict:

Vale

Dear heart your college days are past,
Out yonder burns the world’s hot blast.
Can you survive its testing flame,
Like those who’ve won themselves a name?

E’er o’er us many years have sped,
Who knows where we’ll by Fate be led?
In diverse ways will come the test.
Stand firm and you’ll not be distressed.

In days of dark and bitter strife
Stand by your colors for your life
And let no struggle for the goal
Harden your heart nor sear your soul.

Once down you’ll find it hard to rise,
Ruin is dressed in tempter’s guise.
Stand to your guns and let them be
Enough to keep your conscience free.

Supply your wants, it is enough
Altho’ you ’d like your purse to stuff.
Sit down and read this over twice,
Since every word is good advice.

When the class of 1916 proposed to publish a yearbook, the faculty reserved the right to approve every bit of written copy, especially the poetry. After the faculty had carefully analyzed everything, Vice President William McDaniel called the art editor, Philip Myers, into his office and told him, “We can’t find anything wrong, or hidden in your verses. Will you give us your word of honor that you have not concealed something that we have not been able to discover?” Myers later reported, “It was a moment of real triumph as with light heart I granted them this boon.”



Robert J. Gill, age 21. Senior picture in the 1910 WMC Yearbook.

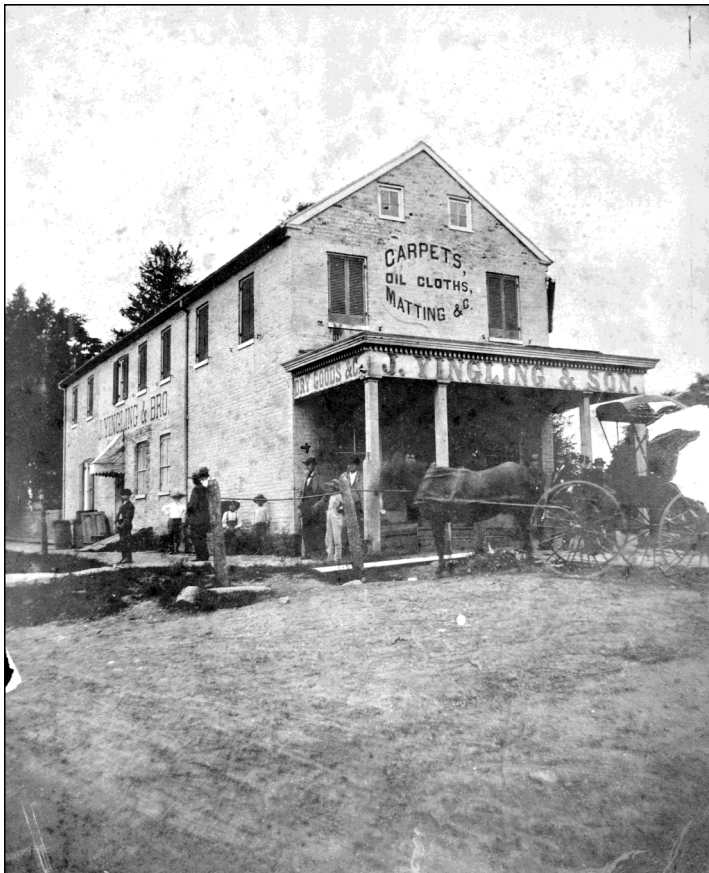
The Carroll County Connections

While it is true that Robert J. Gill lived in Carroll County for only seven years while he was enrolled at WMC and its preparatory school, his roots in the county ran deep in his mother’s ancestry. Emma (Yingling) Gill’s great-great-great grandfather Christian Juengling (1690-1758) left Bavaria and

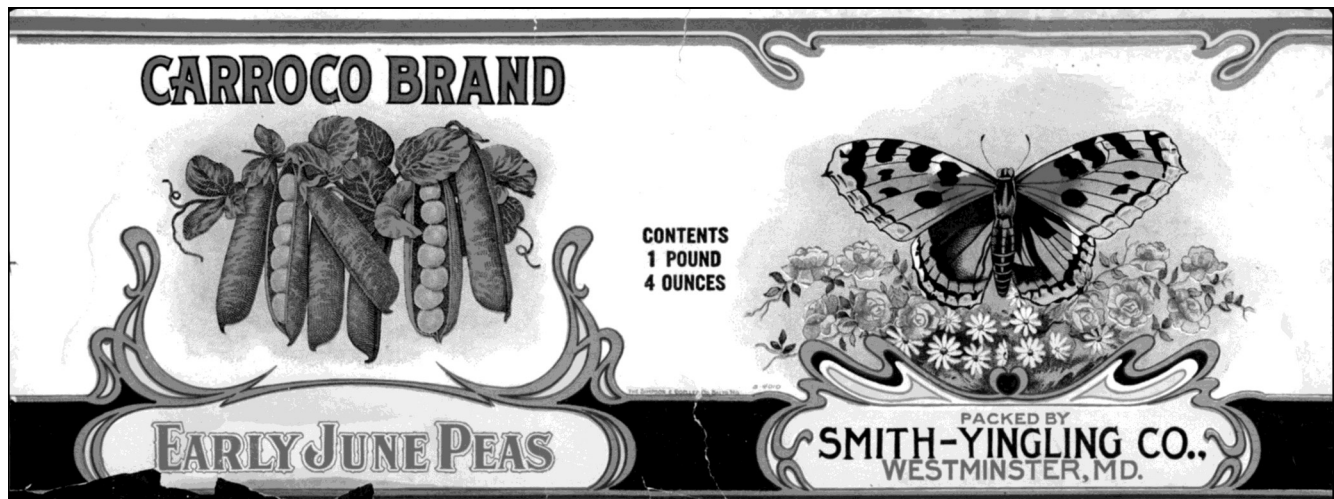
came, like many other Germans, to Pennsylvania in the early 1700s. Later that century, his grandson Johannes Juengling (1748-1816), who also called himself John Yingling, would join others of German ancestry and move to Maryland, taking up unoccupied land in what would later become Carroll County. John and his wife Margaret (1755-1829) had nine children, including Jacob Christian Yingling (1777-1846), who married Annie “Mary” Ebaugh (1787-1863) in 1806. Jacob purchased lots one through four of William Winchester’s original town (now Westminster), on the north side of what is now East Main Street at its intersection with Washington Road. He became a merchant and established a tannery, probably the town’s first industry.

His brick home, now known as the Blizzard House, still stands at 295 East Main Street.

Among the children of Jacob and Mary Yingling was Joshua (1812-1881) who would become Robert Gill’s grandfather. He grew up in Westminster and in 1836 married Margaret Shriver (1813-1880), third daughter of Isaac Shriver (1777-1856) and granddaughter of David Shriver, Sr. (1735-1826), of the prominent Shriver family of Union Mills in Carroll County. Immediately after his marriage, Joshua started a store at the corner of Main and Court Streets, and for a year was the proprietor of the Westminster Hotel across the street. In 1848 he bought out a store at “The Forks,” the intersection of West Main Street and Pennsylvania Avenue. He continued in this business until shortly before his death 32 years later. He also established Smith, Yingling and Co., fruit and vegetable canners, located on Railroad Avenue, and became one of the leading and most respected businessmen in Westminster. He was elected vice president of the First National Bank of Westminster and was a director of the Baltimore County Fire Insurance Company, the Westminster Gas Light Company, and the Western Maryland Railroad. He was a charter trustee of Western Maryland College and served on



Yingling General Store at “The Forks” in Westminster. Historical Society of Carroll County collection.



Can label for peas packaged by Smith-Yingling Co. Historical Society of Carroll County collection.

and

the College's executive committee for 14 years. Yingling also served as a county school commissioner from 1865 to 1868, was a charter member of the local Odd Fellows Lodge, was mayor of Westminster 1865-1866, and was very active in the Methodist Protestant Church and the Republican Party. He lived on West Main Street in a large house west of the railroad and just east of Bond Street. (Several of these Victorian houses built along Main Street were razed in the 20th century to make way for businesses.) He also owned a number of other properties in Westminster. His 1881 obituary noted that these many activities and "positions of honor and trust testify to his public spirit and to his business capacity and integrity."

Joshua and Margaret had seven children, three boys and four girls, including Annie R. (1852-1890) who was in the first graduating class at WMC in 1871, and who in 1889 contributed \$4,000 from her paternal inheritance to build a gymnasium, appropriately named for her, at the College. Unfortunately, a year later she died at 38 of the complications of consumption. Her sister, Emma (1856-1897), youngest child of Joshua and Margaret, became Robert Joshua Gill's mother.

Emma had enrolled in the Western Maryland Preparatory School at age 11 in 1867 (the year the College was founded) and attended until 1872. She probably met her future husband, John Montgomery Gill (1859-1937), through her sister Annie or their mutual friend, Mary Ward, daughter of college president J. T. Ward. John Gill was from Northumberland County, Va., the son of John M. and Mary (Hughes) Gill, attended the College of William

Mary for one year (1877-1878) and then enrolled in WMC from 1878-1882 in the theological course. He held pastorates until he was formally ordained into the Methodist Protestant ministry in 1885, the same year he married Emma. He then served pastorates in Baltimore, Chestertown, and Washington, D.C., and served from 1910 until 1915 on the church's Board of Home Missions in Seattle, Wa. In 1910, Western Maryland College conferred the honorary Doctor of Divinity degree on him, at the same commencement when his son received his A.B. degree. Dr. Gill served on the Board of Governors of the Westminster Theological Seminary (established in 1882) for 37 years, serving 27 years as the board's president. He was considered a great preacher, a man of strong convictions, and one who gave 54 years of faithful service to the Methodist Protestant Church and its conference. John and Emma had two sons,



The ladies of the first graduating class, 1871, at Western Maryland College. The woman on the right is Annie Yingling, R.J. Gill's aunt.



Seen through the Ward Memorial Arch is the Yingling Gymnasium, 1889, a gift to Western Maryland College from Annie Yingling (Class of 1871). Beyond the gymnasium stands the Old Main complex of original college buildings.

Gill received the Distinguished Service Cross and was twice awarded a Croix de Guerre with palms Legion d'Honneur from the French government. By war's end, the young officer had attracted the attention of the division commander, Gen. Douglas MacArthur, and Gill was made assistant chief of staff. He was promoted to major in September 1918 and became a Lieutenant Colonel in March 1919. Many years later, he noted: "I've been accused of being General MacArthur's pet, and I confess it was true. He gave me every promotion it was legal to give." Gill left the service following the war and returned to Baltimore and his private practice of corporate law.

John M., Jr. who died at 11 months in 1887, and Robert Joshua, born in 1889.

The Post-Westminster Days

After his days at Western Maryland, Robert Gill continued his education at the University of Virginia Law School, and while there he was elected to three honor societies, Phi Kappa Psi, Phi Delta Phi, and Phi Beta Kappa. He completed his legal studies in 1913, was admitted to the bar in 1914 in Baltimore, and became a member of the legal firm, Barroll and Gill (later, Gill, Walter, Murray, and Greene) until 1917.

Robert Gill had the unusual distinction of actively participating in two world wars. His military career began soon after he returned to Baltimore following law school, when he joined the Maryland National Guard as a private. When the United States entered World War I in 1917, he went overseas as a captain, commanding the 117th Trench Mortar Battery, a unit attached to the famous 42nd Rainbow Division.¹ The division fought in crucial battles including Chateau Thierry and Verdun, and suffered over 12,000 casualties.

On July 14, 1918, Gill's men withstood a heavy artillery barrage and then turned back a German tank and infantry attack at Chalons. For these actions Captain

During the next 23 years, Gill was active in Baltimore legal affairs in his firm, Gill, Greene, and Waters, and in real estate ventures. In 1923 he was a major developer of the Stoneleigh suburban housing project in northern Baltimore. Gill was particularly interested in constructing a pool, part of the Stoneleigh Club, which was formally opened in August 1925 and became a favorite recreation spot for the area. In 1929 he was elected president of the Baltimore Stadium Association that promoted sports activities. Gill was always a very loyal alumnus of Western Maryland College and in 1925 was elected

to the board of trustees, a post he held until his death. He immediately continued his interest in athletics by encouraging Richard C. Harlow, then football coach at Colgate, to come to WMC. It is also reported that Gill brought the College's football team to Stoneleigh to train in the spring of 1925 by helping to dig the pool!

On November 11, 1927, the Western Maryland Terror played an all-Army team (composed of players from a number of regional Army bases) in a football game in Baltimore Stadium before 23,000 screaming spectators. The



Robert J. Gill in his World War I uniform.

Armistice Day game had been created through the friendship of Gill and General MacArthur, who, of course, thought the Army team would win handily. But Army lost 48-0, and MacArthur, perhaps a bit grudgingly, presented the engraved sterling silver trophy to the Terror team captain. The MacArthur cup, the first of its kind to be won by a WMC team, is now on display in the Klitzberg Pavilion of the Gill Center.



Gill Gymnasium, Western Maryland College, built in 1939. It was named for the College benefactor, Robert J. Gill.

During Coach Harlow's nine years (1926-1935) at the College, his teams often went undefeated, playing what would now be considered Division I teams.

Indeed, in 1934 the team was even invited to play in a game in Florida on January 1, 1935, against the University of Miami. The following year this event was formally called the Orange Bowl. The team did not go to Florida to play that game, not because of financial considerations (for Gill would have willingly financed the trip as he had other athletic endeavors at the College including helping to subsidize Harlow's salary), but rather so that its best player, Bill Shepherd, could play in the East-West Game in San Francisco where he played 59 of 60 minutes and achieved MVP status even though his team lost! (Another player on that team was Gerald R. Ford). Soon thereafter Harlow announced his resignation to become the head coach at Harvard. Gill said of Harlow: "Dick Harlow, like MacArthur, was a great leader. But Harlow was great in one thing – football. . . . But MacArthur? Well, he was the best all-round man I ever *heard of*."

Robert Gill also spearheaded the fund-raising campaign to build a new athletic facility at WMC, which opened in 1939 and was named for him. He had contributed generously to the project, following in the footsteps of his aunt Annie Yingling who had funded the building of the first College gymnasium the year he was born. Yingling Gymnasium was touted as the largest in the state in 1889, and Gill Gymnasium was also once considered the largest in Maryland and served as the site of many state basketball tournaments for a number of years.²

In 1942 Gill returned to active army duty. His first assignment was directing the Army Specialized Training Programs (one of which was based at Western Maryland College from July 1943 to March

1944) for the Third Service Command in Baltimore before he was assigned to Europe in 1944. Upon the German surrender in 1945, he was named chief of the Prisoner-of-War Division, in charge of the 38 POW camps in France and Germany that held 2,852,000 prisoners. Just before he was to be mustered out following the war, Supreme Court Justice Robert Jackson, the chief prosecutor for the United States at the Nuremberg trials, tapped Gill to become his executive officer. Gill supervised and organized the trials, arranged for the innovative simultaneous translations needed to make the trials run smoothly and efficiently, and dealt with the subsequent imprisonment of the Nazi war criminals.

For his service in World War II and at Nuremberg, Gill received the Bronze Star, the Legion of Merit, the Distinguished Service Medal from the United States, and, among medals from other nations, the Third Order of the White Lion from Czechoslovakia. He was also promoted to the rank of brigadier general on the recommendation of Justice Jackson and nomination of President Harry S. Truman. Jackson cited Gill's outstanding performance in the position of executive officer, which, he said, contributed "in vital measure to the success of the trials at Nürnberg." It was because of this personal relationship that Gill was able to persuade Jackson to come to the college in December 1946 to speak and receive an honorary degree. It was also because of all he had done in his varied career that Gill himself was awarded an honorary Doctor of Laws degree at the 1947 commencement.

During his extended stay in Europe, Gill became interested in collecting stamps, and like everything



Justice Robert Jackson listens to testimony at the Nuremberg Trials, 1946.
Behind him, over his right shoulder, is Col. Robert J. Gill, Executive Officer for the trials.

he undertook, he did it well, thoroughly, and exhaustively. He won a silver award at the first stamp show he ever attended and two gold medals at an international show in New York in 1956. He once put together a group of stamps issued by France between 1849 and 1880 that was described as the finest collection of classical French stamps ever assembled. At his death the entire collection was willed to WMC and sold for over a million dollars. Gill served on the board of trustees of the Philatelic Foundation and was an authority on classic philatelic rarities. He was also a world-class bridge player and served as president and chairman of the board of the American Contract Bridge League.

The life-long bachelor once said, ironically, that he never had the courage to get married, even though he was described as a “lion among the ladies” in college. Long after his playing days were over, Gill remained a sports fan. Shortly after the Orioles franchise was moved to Baltimore from St. Louis, he joined the board of directors and was selected its secretary. He remained on the board until the team was sold to Edward Bennett Williams.

Gill remained active in sports and business affairs into his late 80s. In 1953 he brokered the sale of the adjacent Westminster Theological Seminary property to WMC, several years before the seminary moved to Washington, taking the name Wesley Theological

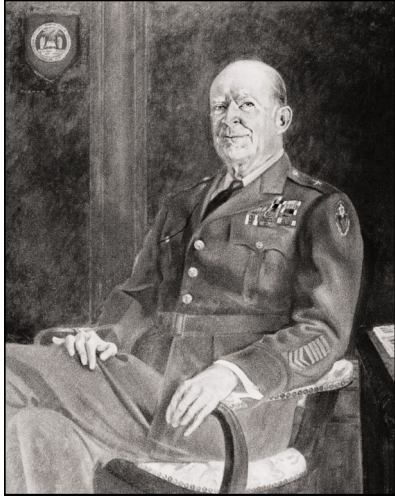
Seminary. At age 88, as Gill was recovering from intestinal surgery at Union Memorial Hospital, he was visited by a friend and trustee who brought him a football. It was the game ball from the previous Saturday’s annual contest with rival Johns Hopkins that the Western Maryland Terror had won 21-13. The entire football team, their coach, and the college president had signed the ball. In an interview with Baltimore *Evening Sun* reporter Bill Tanton (November 24, 1977), Gill said: “My football days are far behind me, but getting that game ball was one of the nicest things that ever happened to me.” He also remembered the Western Maryland – Hopkins game 68 years before, when WMC led at halftime, two touchdowns to one. During the second half, team captain Gill broke his collarbone but continued to play until it became too painful. “In those days, when you came out of a game, you stayed out. Hopkins scored three touchdowns in the second half and beat us 18-16. That was the catastrophe of my youth.”

Western Maryland College was the first love of Bob Gill, the tall, stately gentleman known for his quick wit and warm smile. In 1963 he was elected chair of the college’s Board of Trustees, a post he held for five years. A frequent visitor to Westminster and the College campus, he was named Alumnus of the Year in 1969. In the early 1980s WMC planned to expand its athletic facilities again, and in October 1984, it opened the Robert Joshua Gill Physical Education Learning Center (now known simply as the Gill Center) where Gill’s portrait now hangs in the lobby. Its namesake, however, was not present. He had died a year earlier on his 94th birthday, June 22, 1983, at his apartment in Baltimore.

Two days later, after a funeral held in Baker Chapel, Gill was laid to rest with military honors in the Yingling family plot in the Westminster Cemetery, alongside his parents, John and Emma, aunt Annie, and his grandparents, Joshua and Margaret. Elsewhere in the cemetery were two more generations of Yinglings (Jacob and John) who predated the forming of Carroll County. Robert Joshua Gill—A Man for All Seasons: Mr. Western Maryland College, The Corporate Lawyer, The General, The Benefactor—had returned to the home of his roots.

Endnotes:

1. The 42nd Division was created in August 1917 and was the first U.S. combat division sent to France. It was comprised of volunteers from National Guard Units from 26 States and the District of Columbia. The nickname “Rainbow Division” referred to the geographic diversity of men grouped into one division as reflected by



Portrait of General Robert J. Gill, alumnus, board chair, and generous College benefactor. The portrait hangs in the lobby of the Gill Center, McDaniel College.

Chief of Staff Maj. Douglas MacArthur that they “would stretch over the whole country like a rainbow.”

2. Robert J. Gill is no relation to Kenneth R. Gill, namesake of the stadium which opened in 2012.

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