

Oral History of David Bischoff of Orford, New Hampshire

Interviews and transcription by Buddy Durham

June 14, 2024

Introduction: This recollection was gathered in a series of five interviews/conversations in September and October, 2023 as well as bits from earlier conversations as I have known David for about twenty-five years. It is with his review and verification. The transcription is reconstructed from many interview topics and interesting digressions.

We cover his early upbringing, family background including parents Ralph and Ibby, early life in Orford, career, neighbors and local properties. Substantial other East Orford topics include Mrs. Baer, Charlie Ladd, the notable personalities Miss Herrin and Miss Worthington, and more.

David's is a life of industry and service with great knowledge of the business of the Town of Orford, knowledge of local history, and devotion to the Town of Orford. As the Bischoff family has contributed much to the life of the Town of Orford, we hold them up, pay tribute and thank them.

David was born March 5, 1942 in Middletown, Connecticut to Ralph and Elizabeth Fauver Bischoff, the second of three, with sister Ann older and brother John younger. The family lived in Montrose, NY for a few years where David attended first grade and Ralph commuted by train to his administrative and faculty position at New York University School of Law in New York City.

The family moved to Westport, CT for better schools and David attended elementary and high school there, graduating in 1960. He attended Allegheny College but left after his first year as it did not suit him. He was hired by Time Life Co. in New York City in 1962 with the help of Orford neighbor Louis Gratz, head of Public Relations there. David worked in advertising production for one and a half years and it was there he met Lynn and married her in New York City. He served in the Connecticut National Guard from 1963-1969 reaching the rank of sergeant.

After marriage in 1964, he went back to college, first at a Junior College and later at the University of Connecticut, graduating in 1968. Lynn continued at the Old Saybrook, CT. Time Life office and supported the couple while David was a student. They divorced after two years of marriage and Lynn moved out west, married a man and they adopted two daughters. Lynn was

from a wealthy Palm Springs family with a paternal grandfather that owned Eastern Airlines and MGM. She grew up in Brookhaven, Long Island, New York.

Meanwhile after UConn, David worked in Boston in advertising for a textbook company (DCHearth), then briefly for a printer in Cambridge, MA. Soon he left and came to live in Orford. Prior, he and his family already had plenty of history in Orford.

Ralph Bischoff was born May 16, 1906, died in 1997, grew up in suburban Newton, MA where his grandfather owned Burkhardt Brewery. He was a Boy Scout, became a Scout leader and attended a jamboree in Poland. He graduated from Wesleyan University, 1927, received his PhD in Political Science and his LLD law degree from Harvard University. Ralph began his career teaching at his alma mater Wesleyan University in Middletown, CT, as a faculty member and Director of Admissions.

While there early in his career, he was climbing Mt. Chocorua in New Hampshire with a friend. They met and struck up conversation with two young women, also from Middletown, CT. How important that day hiking would turn out to be! Sometime later, at a Wesleyan social occasion, Ralph recognized Ibby as one of those young ladies, started a relationship with Ibby and they were married in 1937. What an influence their shared love for the out of doors would be on their lives!

They took a European honeymoon in 1938. All three of their children were born in CT.

Ralph shifted his career to New York University School of Law as a faculty member and senior administrator in 1947. "He loved his career". Ralph continued in such positions throughout much of his career and retired in 1972. In semi- retirement Ralph taught at the Vermont School of Law in South Royalton, VT, retiring completely at age 85. He enjoyed teaching law and was admired by his students. Also, I know that Ralph did a vast amount of pro bono legal work for people in East Orford and was appreciated. In their family life, David says Ralph was a prankster.

Elizabeth Fauver was born March 30, 1912, died January 14, 2010 and grew up in Middletown, Connecticut as her father, Edgar Fauver MD was the University physician and athletic director. He was also one of the founders of Camp Pemigewasset in Wentworth, New Hampshire near the eastern border of Orford.

As a child her summers were at the camp with her family. Ibby described those summers in her own oral history included on the East Orford History Project website. In high school, she was an exchange student in Germany. She graduated from Oberlin College in 1933. Ibby received her master's degree in German from Middlebury College. She was fluent in German and taught high school in Connecticut for one -two years, raised Ann, David and John.

She served the Town of Orford as a Selectperson for nine years and served on the planning board. A devoted wife, mother and public servant. Her Oberlin friend Jean Young and Jean's husband Louis Gratz were influenced to buy an East Orford farm by the friendship with Ibbey (about 1957 for \$5000).

Buying Grey Shelter at 131 East Cemetery road in 1946 was a big change for the Bischoff family. Sold to them by Mrs. Ruth Baer, it was pine paneled and had no electricity. Included was an Aga/Swedish stove with two burners. The Bischoff's sheet rocked the house. It was the first house they ever owned and they expected to live there in retirement. Ibbey and the children would live there summers while Ralph, teaching in New York City, would commute to Orford on the weekends. The rest of each year they were in Ct. where the kids attended school.

David was 5 years old when the family first came to Orford in 1947, the year following purchase of Grey Shelter in 1946. David's first summer at Camp Pemi was 1949. Ibbey had lived summers as a child with her family at Pemi as she describes in her oral history. Grey Shelter got electricity in 1948, same as the Mack farm and neighbors Alice Herrin and Lucy Worthington.

The old name for East Cemetery Road was Davistown Schoolhouse Road. "I loved it here! I almost passed up a European vacation with the family to stay here". That family vacation to Europe for six months while Ralph, on sabbatical, lectured for the U.S. State Department. Ralph was quite fluent in German. We were in Germany for two months. "We saw everything, including big blocks of cement to block tanks at the Swedish border."

David attended Pemi for about five years, through 1953, then started working there age 15 or 16, first in the kitchen, later as a truck driver for camper trips. As a camper, he enjoyed following Charlie Ladd, an East Orford resident and the camp maintenance man. "I enjoyed camp". Subsequent teenage work was caddying at Lake Morey Golf Club with Quentin Mack for a few years. Quentin grew up at the Mack farm, close by Grey Shelter and had to walk over a mile to route 25A to catch the school bus. Often that was walking through unplowed snow. "We were best friends and enjoyed playing together summers and on my winter visits to his home. We made forts out of saplings. At Grey Shelter we had a little building called "the windmill", having an upstairs. The three of us could lay sleeping bags in it for brother John, Quentin and I. We ran an electric cord from the house to it for power. We had another building called "the lookout", having a rock terrace and a staircase going up. Half of that building had a

flat roof and half had a peaked roof. It also had stone steps going up from the house and an outside staircase going to a rooftop deck.

“As a child in East Orford in summers and on school vacations, I loved being in Orford.” I would come up by train to Fairlee from Connecticut and stay at the Mack farm on winter vacation. The farm had an outhouse, no running water and several wood stoves. A galvanized kitchen tub was used for bathing.

Once I pounded on a step of the lookout from which hung a white-faced hornet’s nest. I got badly stung, twenty stings. We had a path going through the woods and a field to the Mack farm. There were two barns at the Mack farm. Quentin was born in 1942, Brian Mack in 1958. It was just the Ralph Macks, Quentin’s family, there. The close friendship with Quentin ended about age 20 or 21 as we went in different directions.

We had a rowboat on Upper Baker Pond, from “Morris” Chase, painted up nicely but it had a lot of caulking. We climbed Mt. Cube a lot. There are many memories of the eccentric ladies across the road, most not fit for public comment. “But I can say when we were 14, Quentin and I carried Lucy Worthington in a chaise lounge around their property to tour the gardens”. An unusual stunt that would have been at her request.

Then there's the childhood memory with adult friend Gus Titus, we'd load a station wagon with rocks and drive onto Upper Baker Pond ice and then at high speed hit the brakes to wildly spin in circles ten times. Great fun!

Another good childhood friend was Gary Randall who I met through Quentin. Gary came from a poor family in the nearby Atwell Hill area of Wentworth. He lived in Wentworth as an adult, was married twice. His mother was a Downing. "We had a hollow in a maple tree where we would stash a pint or fifth of liquor". I would stay over at his family's house and I remember waking up to snow on us after a night's sleep.

As a frequent supper guest, "his mom would make "goulosh" almost every night and the family could not get over how much I loved it. It was just pasta and tomato sauce or diced tomatoes, no meat". Gary had a good career for the Upper Valley Press and died in 2015.

Years later, after working in Boston, I moved to East Orford, living at Grey Shelter, and worked for Bill Baker selling Toyotas in White River Junction, VT. I had met Stephanie in Boston at DC Heath. Before we married, she was living in East Orford in what we knew as Peter Thomson's rental house and teaching school in Orfordville. We married in 1972 and stayed in "the old ladies house" at 132 East Cemetery Road. Later we moved to the Quinttown lot that brother John and I had purchased in 1968. That had been Billy Brown's property for decades

and Billy and his property and history became a major interest for David. He's the expert on those topics.

Stephanie liked Quinttown but found living in a trailer with only a generator for electricity and having no phone very difficult. That was a rugged life. "I should have known that would be too onerous for her." After one and a half or two years they divorced, remained friends and she moved on to Burlington VT.

David's next house was "the red house" at 53 Piermont Heights Road in East Orford. When bought from Joseph Saia, a Hanover restaurateur in 1978, it was in "wicked shape". David substantially renovated it, eventually to fine condition. In 1981, he called Lynn's mother, located Lynn, "she was glad to hear from me". We had remained friends. David visited Lynn in Bakersfield, California, got reacquainted and she moved back to Orford with her two adopted daughters Cynthia and Jennifer in 1981. "It was like we were never separated". Lynn loved life in Orford. They remarried in 1989, twenty-five years to the day of their first marriage. One of the daughters graduated from Oxbow High School and the other went back to California.

David and Lynn started renovating houses as a business, one being Ruth Czar's on Dame Hill Road. They sold that and bought a house to work on in Newbury, VT. Lynn had

taught school in Bakersfield for two years and for eighteen more years in Lyme, NH until they divorced a second time in 2000.

For many years David worked in Maintenance at Camp Pemigewasset, eventually as Head of Maintenance. Lynn and David were friends with Ed and Marjorie Green of Fairlee, VT. After Ed died In 2002, David and Marjorie became a couple and have remained together. “We have a perfect relationship”.

Throughout adult life he has worked in Orford doing construction and home repairs, including maintenance and repairs for the Glueks in East Orford. He also built a fine cabin on the Quinttown lot . Now for two decades he has worked with Marjorie in her home rental business, David doing the repairs and maintenance. Also doing fencing for his properties and other activity. Brother John visits him each year and until David turned 80, they always climbed Mt. Cube together. As part of his public service, he has researched many Orford properties and the regulations that pertain to them.

David served for nine years on the Orford school board. Among his most important services while an Orford Selectman for thirteen years was studying and lobbying against the “view tax” on New Hampshire homes. As lead Selectman, he felt that tax was very heavy and subjective. He was proud that during his service, the first half hour of the meetings was open to

the public. He earned a reputation for having people follow the Town and State regulations and was willing to take the heat that generated. He served on the planning board for nine years. He devoted much work to the Quinttown property which he and John eventually sold to the Upper Valley Land Trust for preservation. He also donated a valuable parcel along Upper Baker Pond Road for preservation. He researched Billy Brown's life and presented that special history at the Orford Social Library. See it on YouTube.

David's parents also contributed many years of service to the Town of Orford. Ralph, after retirement, provided many hours of pro bono legal services to East Orford families, including some very complicated and extensive property research.

In conclusion, "I was happy working in New York City and Boston but this is so much better. By comparison, I can't imagine living in the suburbs. I am so thankful that mother had a Pemi connection. Marjorie and I have the best arrangement.

As a Selectman, I knew 95% of the homeowners." "I'm happy with everything I've done". Reflecting on his life, David remembers his dad's "what if" questions. "What if my folks weren't outdoors types.....!"

David Bischoff Oral History-Supplemental East Orford History Topics and Notes:

Mrs. Ruth Baer:

Mrs. Baer first lived at 132 East Cemetery Road, in the house known as the Thomas Savage House, named after the builder and first owner. The property was purchased in 1912 by

William S. Baer, MD, an esteemed pediatric orthopedic surgeon at Johns Hopkins Hospital in Baltimore, Maryland and given to his wife Ruth A. Baer, the following year. It was her summer home, he seldom visited.

She would travel by train with many Chow dogs she bred, raised and showed. David thinks there were about five elaborate kennels, across the road at #131 later known as Grey Shelter. The sign at her home was "Pleasant Valley Farms".

Mrs. Baer renovated the house and barn. The barn had a large fireplace and was set up to show movies. She had beautiful gardens and hired many local people including some from Baltimore to live here and work for her. Harry Daisy was brought to be the kennel master. Mrs. Baer sent Charlie Ladd for apple cultivation training and he was in charge of the extensive apple orchard she started. Grey Shelter was originally intended to be a packing house for the orchard.

At that time, the driveway at #132 forked immediately from the road with one branch leading down to Upper Baker Pond, from the north side of the house. Mrs. Baer left East Orford in the early 1930's after her husband died and she married a colonel who wanted to live in Florida in retirement.

"The Doll's House" had been built on the Grey Shelter lot, nearer to the road and close to the kennels as housing for the kennel master. Connie and Gus Titus lived in it in the mid-1950's when they were first married and Connie told Buddy that it was built over a frog pond and the

newlyweds would commonly hear frogs croaking from below the floor. Later the house was moved south on East Cemetery Road and has been the home of Christie Manning for many years.

“The Old Maids”:

Lucy Worthington and Alice Herrin from Baltimore bought the house at 132 East Cemetery Road after Mrs. Baer died. They were eccentric people. Alice, frail, was from a very wealthy family, detailed elsewhere in the East Orford History Collection. Lucy was hired to care for her and lived with Alice in East Orford and Baltimore. They lived here as mostly summer residents from the early 1940's -1971, when the Bischoff's bought the thirteen-acre property and house and moved in.

The ladies built a World War II Defense Shelter in the former Davistown school house and later sold that property to Gerald Pease. They were whimsical in some decision making, e.g., boarding up the house to leave for the winter, then deciding to stay on for another week. They'd paint the house different colors, green and white for the summer and winter seasons. They'd hoard provisions during WWII, including flour in the clothes washer. They'd act very suspicious of food offered or served by neighbors.

Buddy remembers Gerald Pease's story of working for the ladies as a uniformed chauffeur. Driving down the highway in their Cadillac, they said about a passing car "I want that car" and had Gerald follow and buy it.

They would need urgent help and call across the road to Gus and Connie Titus at the Dolls House and have them come over to lift one of them out of the bathtub. But when neighbors needed help, such as some firewood, they were not helpful.

Some of the neighbors working for them were Norman and Walter Downing, as caretakers. Marian Hook, Myrtle Daisy, Gerald Pease. Marion helped take care of Lucy when she was ill.

Larry Huntington and Gerald Pease went to Baltimore to pick up the ladies by car. Alice had a station wagon, Lucy a Cadillac. They put a bench at the start of the driveway to "watch what was going on".

David carried a tray with four bowls of dessert, offered a bowl and one the ladies said "no, I'll take this one" suggesting a suspicion of poison. David tells of one of the ladies having he and Quentin carry her on a chaise lounge through the several gardens on the property.

They were in East Orford for a few winters during WWII with kerosene heaters and five fireplaces. They took very good care of the property. The current barn was the horse barn and there were several other barns.

Charlie Ladd:

As a youngster, David Bischoff loved to visit with Charlie Ladd and he recalls a lot. "We'd talk a lot". Charlie was in charge of Mrs. Baer's apple orchards of some 1200-1500 trees. They harvested 5,000 bushels in their best year.

Grey Shelter, at 131 East Cemetery Road, was originally built as the packing house and another building left of the cemetery was a tractor shed. Numerous other local men worked in the orchards as needed.

Charlie came to Orford from Piermont, NH. Mrs. Baer sent him to be trained to manage the orchards. He probably also did handyman work for her. In the 1930's while working for Mrs. Baer, he had a horrible accident. While driving a tractor, his pant leg got caught in the PTO of the tractor, breaking his leg and requiring months of hospitalization at Dartmouth. He "never fully recovered" and Mrs. Baer would not employ him after that.

Subsequently, Charlie worked as a maintenance man at Camp Pemi for decades. That he was beloved is documented in the in the book "The First 100 years of Camp Pemigewassett".

He was loved and appreciated there for his service and personality. He maintained the buildings, did roofing, cleared snow off the roofs and much more.

As a hunter, Charlie would follow tracks and did not approve of modern practices like deer stands and baits. Charlie liked to fish for suckers at night in Brackett Brook. He and his brother Oscar had a wood lot on Piermont Heights Road, on the right just below the town line. Later, a fellow worker at Pemi (Wes Ackley) bought that land.

Charlie and his family had lived at 132 East Cemetery Road when Bowen owned it. Charlie convinced Florence to marry him when she was involved with another man in Baltimore. The sign on his porch read "Ye Old Apple House" as he had converted half of an apple shed into his home on the south side of Route 25A, across from the East Cemetery Road intersection. The other half of the shed was moved down the hill as a garage at Oscar Ladd's.

Charlie and Florence's daughter Ruth taught school in Hanover, loved Orford and retired in Orford. She and her husband had lived in Lebanon and raised three daughters. Ruth's article about her father is elsewhere in the East Orford History Collection. David's tribute to Ruth Brown is in

www.eastorfordhistoryproject.com in the Memoirs section.

Charlie adored Florence and wrote poignantly about her and her struggle with cancer. She died in 1948. Charlie's obituary is in the obituary section of the East Orford History

Collection and website. Showing his simple tastes, he requested that a sprig of balsam be placed on his coffin.

Notes on other topics from David's oral history:

John Bischoff: Born 1945, John has kept up his family's connection to Camp Pemi. In his youth he was a camper and trip counselor. After high school, he worked as a laborer for six years, including on construction of I-91 in Vermont, then returned to the University of Vermont for his bachelor's degree, then law school at the University of Arkansas. Friends persuaded him to move to Minnesota where he served as a public defender for twenty years, then worked privately in real estate renovation.

The Gale Farm: Located near the eastern base of Mt. Cube and just west of the Pease farm, the Bezanson's may have owned it in the 1950's. This was a small farm earlier known as the Huckin's Farm according to Charlie Ladd. Leighton Perry lived and worked on the property and had a sawmill on the north side of Route 25A and lived and worked on the property. He sawed a lot of pine boards

and stored them in the orchard a Grey Shelter. David used that lumber in building his red house on Piermont Heights Road.

The Mack Farm: Built by Charles Savage. After their father Fred Mack died, Ralph Mack bought out Maurice Chase's share of the farm. Ralph met Helen in Springfield, Vermont. Helen's father, Louis McKensie, worked for the Goodyear Rubber Company which made soles for shoes. Ralph and Helen were Quentin Mack's parents. Stuart Corpieri was Evelyn Mack's son and Connie Chase was the daughter of Maurice and Irene Mack Chase. Helen Mack did laundry for Moosilauke or Merriwood.

The current Matyka house on East Cemetery Road was built by the Macks as a basic cabin. Gardner Hayes, of Carlisle, PA and Upper Baker Pond Road, bought the cabin and used it as a getaway from camp noise. On Upper Baker he was next to Camp Merriwood. Later Quentin Mack owned the cabin his family had built years earlier. Subsequent owners of the Mack Farm were the Gratz's and the Gluek's.

The Gratz's: Jean Young Gratz was Ibbey Bischoff's roommate at Oberlin College. Ibbey suggested that Jean and her husband Louie look at the Mack farm when they were house hunting. They bought it in about 1957 for \$5K as a summer home. Their winter home was in Scarsdale, NY and when Louie retired they renovated the farmhouse with a bathroom and more modern kitchen. They sent their son Paul to Pemi as a camper. He became a Methodist minister. There were also two daughters. Louie was the Head of Public Relations at Time-Life Inc. in Manhattan and he helped David get his job there. David knew them as weekenders. They eventually moved to California and sold the farm to the Gluek's.

The Gluek's: Al and Ellen Gluek. David worked for them and built a little cabin on the brook/pond behind the house. The property remains in the Glueck family.

The Tomlinson house: First known as the Sargeant place, later by the Monroe name. Professor Monroe taught history at Columbia University. It was also owned or rented by Monroe sisters. Henry Ryan MacGinnis stayed there before buying part of the lot from Monroe to build his own house just downhill. Later owned by the McMorrough family whose adult son Ben lived there and worked as a hiking counselor at Sunset Ranch Camp in the mid-1950's. In the later 1950's and 1960's, David says "the racoons were in there". Subsequently purchased by the Tomlinson's.

David's friend, Fred Shipman of Piermont, NH may know more about the Monroe and Linden places, Clark Lane and East Piermont.

Josiah Lowell's property: More recently known as the Linden place, across the town line with Piermont on Piermont Heights Road. Charlie Ladd said the Lowell's were part of the East Orford community.

Equity Publishing: founded and operated by Mel Thomson, employed 40-45 people from Orford and other local towns, published law books. The building on Archertown Road and Route 10 is now owned by the Lyme Green Co., leased by NRCS, an office in the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

Alson Brown family: Of Wentworth, at Atwell Hill and Lower Baker Pond neighborhoods. The Alson Brown house is at Route 25A and Cape Moonshine Road. Ibbey Bischoff mentions a Columbia University Chemistry professor Doughty who owned the white house on Rt. 25A across the road from Lower Baker Pond. Professor Doughty's daughter Wilhelmina married Alson Brown. Julia Brown Rand was their daughter. Their son, Steve Rand, is an owner of Rand's Hardware in Plymouth, NH. David says "Steph and I were close with Steve Rand and his wife Lynne". They were about David's age and lived in Alson's house after Alson died. Alson's father was (probably) the person who started the Brown's mill operation at Lower Baker

Pond. That was the largest mill in the area and employed many. Alson's brother, Oscar, lived in the grey house east of Alson's on Rt. 25A.

The George Trussel mill: Charlie Ladd said up to two million board feet of lumber was stored here, on what is now Sunset Ranch property, and on the ice at Upper Baker Pond.

Roberto and Edith Alonso: Lived on Dame Hill Road. Roberto was born in Cuba and worked at Equity Publishing as a translator of law books. Edith was German or Austrian. They met in Spain.

"She was one of (David's) favorite people". One or more of their three daughters had David's ex-wife Stevie as an Orfordville school teacher.

Bill Green's family first visited Orford on a visit with Mrs. Ruth Baer. Bill was well known as a wild animal hunter, trainer and collector. His son Peter slept in their home with a mountain lion.

The Daniel Chase Cemetery: Is within feet of the Hurd cellar hole, north and northeast of Upper Baker Pond. Not far from Cape Moonshine Road.

Other brief notes:

Years ago, summer people left their doors unlocked. Most of the local homes that were abandoned were left in the 1880's and 1890's. Upper Baker Pond is two feet deeper now than 80-100 years ago due to the dam construction east of Lower Baker Pond.