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The Darling Estate _ Part III (1940s-1960s)

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The Darling Estate: Part III (1940s-1960s)

In January, 1953 68 year old Ira Darling and 67 year old Agatha Darling travelled to Hawaii aboard the S.S. Lurline from Los Angeles.



Preceding Page: Picture 1: 1953. Ira Darling is in the white shirt & hat standing next to the rear of the wagon. The man beside Ira is Ben Hagar. The boy on the mound of hay is Ronald Pendleton of New Harbor—formally of Bristol Mills as a kid. The man on the tractor is Randall Rice. To the left of the picture is the Cow Barn.

The recollections of RON PENDLETON*1

[Ron worked for a couple summers at the Darling Estate, Walpole, ME., in the early to mid 1950s]*3

When it came time for haying, it was just Ron, Bennie, and Randall. Ron was usually on top of the wagon packing the hay down.¹⁰

Bennie Hagar was the groundskeeper. He would drive Ira around in Mr. Darling's '53 Woody station wagon. He was the land man. Randall Rice maintained the boat. Randall Rice would often take Ira Darling on the boat to Boothbay for lunch.

Ron weeded the garden. He also mowed the lawn. The garden was between the farmhouse and the barn, and started right up on the side of the farmhouse. It was quite wide. They had cucumbers, tomatoes, everything.

When it came time to shear the sheep, the sheep were always in the pasture [mowed field]. They would bring the sheep across the road--big woolly sheep--and into the cattle barn [basement]. There were three guys; the same ones every year. And they'd shear all the sheep under the barn. When they got done shearing them, the now 'skinny and scrawny' sheep would be taken back across the road to the pasture.

There were approximately 40 or 50 sheep. They stayed in the Mowed Field. The sheep didn't go near the river. Once in a while one of the sheep would find a hole in the fence and it would get out. And if one got out, they knew other sheep had gotten out, because they always followed each other. Ron loved to chase the sheep. Usually he and Bennie would get behind them, or on the side of them, and they would herd them along. The sheep stayed out in the field night and day during the summer.¹⁰

Ira Darling had his office on the eastern end of the Farmhouse. He could be very stern, and at first Ron was terrified of him. You were expected to carry out his orders. He'd give his orders to Benny and Randall. They knew exactly what he wanted and when he wanted it done. Ron looked forward to a day when Randall might say to Mr. Darling, "I need Ron to go down to the boat and polish the brass," thus affording Ron a break from his routine. When it warranted it, Ron would make the boat shiny. Ron always hoped to get a boat ride, but never did.

There were no horses and cows when Ron worked here.

They would eat their lunch in the Plume of Feathers. Randall used to carve figurines of birds, people, and things like that.

Every year Ira Darling would complain to Randall and Bennie about his taxes.*8 He said, "They'll regret charging me." Every year he would go to the town and ask for a rebate on his taxes. He would say they're going to regret this, because in the long run they are going to lose.

Ron's first paycheck. He was about 14. He wanted an Explorer Scout uniform badly, and he hitchhiked all the way to Rockland to buy one with his first paycheck.

Ron remembers that back then there were fields on both sides of the Clarks Cove Road; there were a lot less trees back then. In South Bristol everyone had a farm; there were all sorts of farms in South Bristol.

During the time Ron worked here he doesn't recall ever seeing any one in Ira Darling's family. Ron worked here from June to September for two years.

The second year Ron worked here, if Ira gave him order, he'd run it by Randall and Bennie to see how, when, or what needed to be done, or if it needed to be done.¹⁰

End of the recollections of RON PENDLETON*4



Picture 2: Approaching the Wentworth Point Pier. This photo and the following photos are estimated to be taken in the 1940s. (Courtesy of Wendy Daniher)



Picture 3: (Courtesy of Wendy Daniher).



Picture 4: (Courtesy of Wendy Daniher)



Picture 5: (Courtesy of Wendy Daniher).



Picture 6: Cabin of the Agatha. Randall Rice is captaining the boat.*² (Courtesy of Wendy Daniher).



Picture 7: The Agatha being hauled up the ramp into the Kelsey & Alley Boat Shop in South Bristol village. The boat shop was owned by Horace Kelsey and Will Alley. Horace Kelsey (1890-1961) then lived at the S Road, but he had grown up in the Willett House on McGuire Point. He was a 5th generation descendent of the first settlers of Wentworth Point, James and Elizabeth Wentworth; he was also a 5th generation descendant of William and Abigail Kelsey.



Picture 8: (Courtesy of Wendy Daniher).



Picture 9: (Courtesy of Wendy Daniher).

The recollections of KEITH LEEMAN^{*12}

[[Keith Leeman](#) was the caretaker of the Darling estate in Walpole from 1955 to 1965 when he became the caretaker for the University of Maine]

In 1954 the doctors told Ira Darling to take care of himself, and he got rid of the sheep and cows.

In 1955 Ira Darling hired Keith Leeman as caretaker, two weeks after Keith and Irene Leeman were married.¹ Keith maintained the grounds to Mr. Darling's impeccable standards, edging lawns, and gardens, mowing fields and growing vegetables.

A helper for Keith, Gary Pitcher, was also hired. Keith states there were lots of gardens back then that no longer exist. They spent most of their time working the grounds. Back then they kept a greenhouse at the back of the Horse Barn.

Keith Leeman recalled that sheep used to be kept under the cow barn, and the cows were kept in the cow barn.^{*5} There were also hen pens. He remembered the Darlings had 2 jumper horses. They also had dressage horses.

In the late 1950s Mr. Darling became interested in tree farming.¹ Mr. Darling joined a tree farm association which helped them learn how to manage trees.^{*6} Over the next several years, Keith planted trees - acres of Red Pine, Norway Pine, and Norway Spruce. Keith recalls there was a fungus problem and that some trees had to be replanted.

The recollections of GARY PITCHER⁹

Gary Pitcher was a teenager when he began working at the Darling Estate in the 1950s as a helper for Keith Leeman.* Gary did a lot of mowing with the hand mower. Ira Darling also had him mow back and forth around the rows of Norway Pine that had been planted at the shore. Gary recalls it took a lot of his time to mow down the grass around all those newly planted small pines at the shore with the farm's small Farmall cub tractor that had a sickle bar on it. Ira Darling took pleasure in keeping the grounds clean and looking good. Gary and Keith mowed the grounds of the Darling estate together. Mr. and Mrs. Darling had 2 big Boxers that followed Gary around while he worked.

Gary recalls there was an outfit that came and planted those trees; they did it mechanically. They towed a trailer behind a tractor, and a guy sat back there, and it created a furrow, and they would put the trees in as they went along.

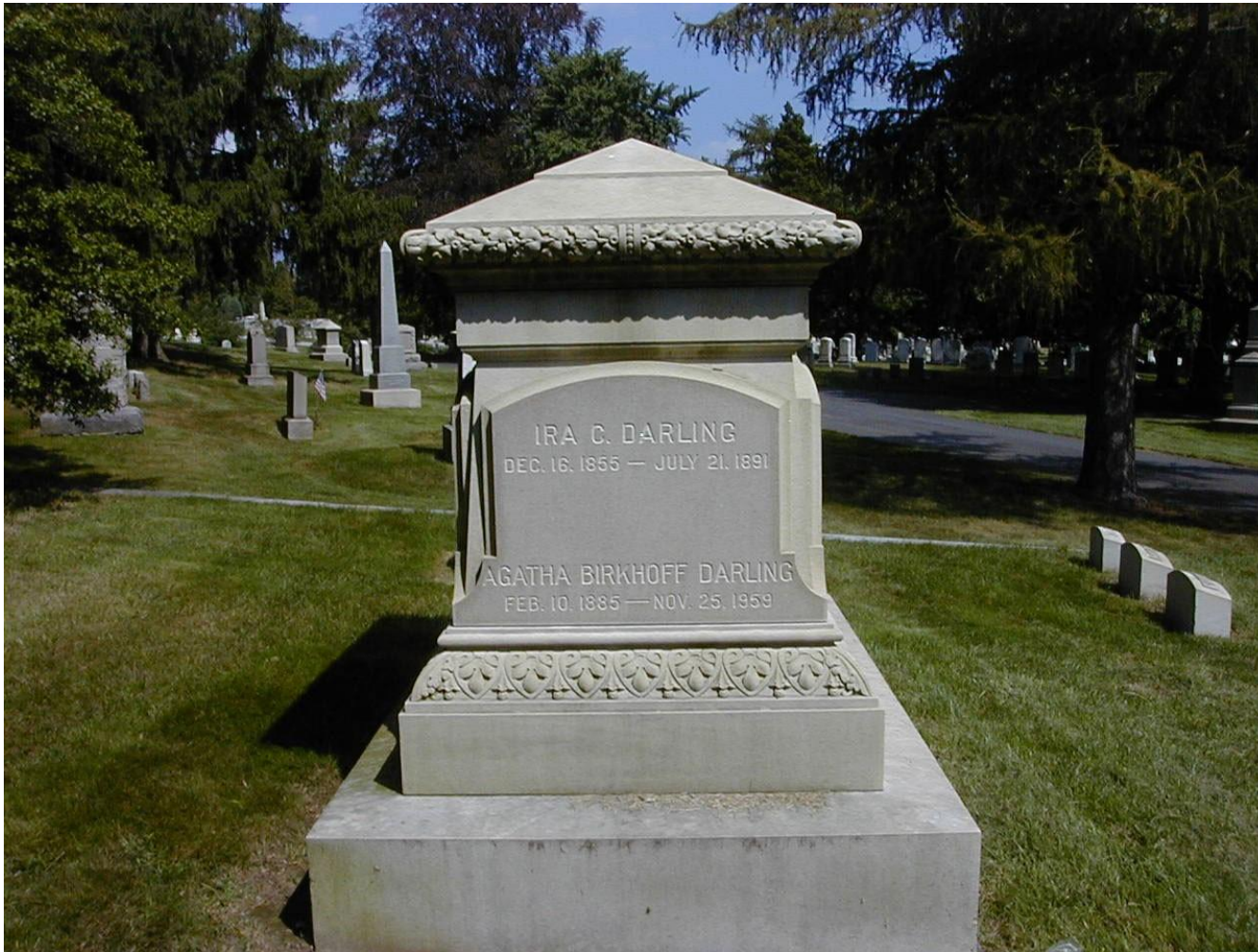
Gary Pitcher recalls there used to be a hedge behind the main house. Ira Darling wanted the hedge trimmed, but it was too tall to get up onto it with a ladder. So Keith Leeman came up with an idea. He and Gary rigged up a lawnmower on a couple of poles. Gary walked down one side of the hedge while Keith walked down the other side, holding the lawnmower aloft and mowing the top of that hedge off. Mr. Darling was delighted.

In the winter time Gary would work with Keith on the weekends. Ben Hagar was now an older gentleman; he kept the stove fire going in the shop during the winter time, and he would do a few things like repair stuff and fix things in the house if needed. Keith and Gary would go to the shop to warm up. Gary and Keith would clean the dead trees along the road to the shore. They would burn the brush. They would cut down the unhealthy pine trees with chainsaws, bucksaws, and axes into lengths of four feet, and these would go to the mill to be turned into pulpwood. They would come with a big truck to take the pulpwood to the mill. Gary Pitcher enjoyed working with Keith at Wentworth Point.⁹

The Darlings would come in the spring from Illinois to stay at the farm for the summer. When the Darlings stayed here in Walpole Gary's grandmother, Hattie Sproul, would come to stay at the farm. She would stay in an apartment in the main house. Hattie did the housekeeping, and there was another lady from Nobleboro who came and stayed at the apartment, and she did the cooking. They would live on the farm until the Darlings returned to Illinois later in the year.

Gary says that Mr. and Mrs. Darling were very good to his family.

Gary recalls Ira Darling telling him, "When I die I am going to fly back over this place as an eagle and see if things are going alright."⁹



Agatha Birkhoff Darling died 25 November 1959 in Greenwich, Connecticut. She is buried at the Swan Point Cemetery in Providence, Rhode Island, and shares a gravestone with her father-in-law Ira C. Darling Sr.*⁹

On the 9th of May, 1960, Ira C. Darling remarried to widower Clara [sic] S. Ball nee Shane in Cook County in Illinois.^{5,*} In 1964 Mr. Darling's doctors recommended he and his wife Clare cease their activities at Wentworth Point, and no longer travel to Walpole, Maine. They bought a home in Kenilworth, Ill., and never again visited their beloved estate.

In 1965 Ira Darling donated the Wentworth Point estate to the University of Maine.

Ira Darling passed away August, 1969 at the age of 85. Clare Darling passed away March, 1978 at the age of 97.

Picture 10: Gravestone of Agatha Darling and her father-in-law Ira C. Darling. Providence, RI.

Notes

There were three 2nd edition history bulletins about the Darling Estate. They have been reorganized and put into book chapter form; there are now 4 chapters instead of three bulletins. This is a final edition; it was issued in 2017.

Any source not cited derives from the DMC Archives, [Darling Marine Center Library](#), Walpole, Maine.

*¹ Special thanks to Ron Pendleton for sharing his memories of working on the Darling estate and the local history.

*² Identified by Ron Pendleton in 2017.

*³ Ronald E. Pendleton was born in 1939.

*⁴ Special thanks to Elsie Morse for arranging and conducting the oral history interview with Ron Pendleton in August, 2017.

*⁵ This contradicts Ira Darling's granddaughter Wendy Daniher, who said there were no cows here when she was here in the 1940s. It contradicts Chester Rice whose father Mervin Rice worked here in the 1940s, who said there were no cows here when he was here in the 1940s. Chester said the sheep were kept on the first floor of the Cow Barn during the winter. The noted sentence also contradicts Ron Pendleton who worked here in 1953. He said there were no cows here then. However, the former owners, the Woodman family, did have Ayrshire cows, along with pigs and sheep. In October 1929, the Boston Globe announced Elijah Woodman would celebrate his 92nd birthday by driving a herd of 12 cattle from his home in South Bristol to the Lincoln County Fair in Damariscotta.²

*⁶ In a 1999 news article Keith says Ira Darling turned to tree farming in the late fifties.¹ In a 2007 phone interview Keith said Ira tried tree farming in 1955.³

*⁷ Special thanks to Keith Leeman for sharing his recollections in 2007.

*⁸ In 1954 Ira Darling was a resident taxpayer in South Bristol, and not a non-resident taxpayer.⁴ He paid a poll tax, a real estate tax, and a personal estate tax in 1954 which totaled \$417.78. Only the Bristol Yacht Club and a Thomas & Gertrude Wales payed a higher tax that year for resident taxpayers.

*⁹ Ira C. Darling Jr.'s grandfather had been a president of the Swan Point Cemetery Company.

*¹⁰ 25 year old Roberta Clare Shane married 25 year old Sydney Young Ball 18 April, 1906 in Chicago, the same year Ira C. Darling and Agatha Birkhoff married.⁸ Sydney Young Ball was president of the [Ball Watch Company](#) at the time of his death in 1943.⁶ The company developed precision railroad watches, and was started by his father Webb. Hence the phrase, "On the ball."⁷

*¹¹ Special thanks to Gary Pitcher for sharing his memories of working on the Darling estate and the local history.

*¹² Special thanks to Keith Leeman for the phone interview.

Source

Information not cited comes from the DMC Archives, Louise Dean Library, Darling Marine Center, Walpole, ME.

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2. AT 92 TO DRIVE CATTLE EIGHT MILES. The Boston Globe. Thursday, October 3, 1929.
3. Keith Leeman Phone Interview. 10/26/2007. DMC Archives. Darling Marine Center Library.
4. South Bristol Town Report. 1954.
5. **Source Information:** Ancestry.com. *Cook County, Illinois Marriage Index, 1930-1960* [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations Inc, 2008.
Original data: Cook County Clerk, comp. *Cook County Clerk Genealogy Records*. Cook County Clerk's Office, Chicago, IL: Cook County Clerk, 2008.
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10. Ron Pendleton Interview. DMC Archives/Land, Buildings, People/ Local History 1. Louise Dean Library, Walpole, Maine. University of Maine. 8 Aug 2017.