

# THE NORTH YARMOUTH GAZETTE

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We say goodbye to *Unique*  
URSULA

Ursula Millicent Howe Baier passed away peacefully on February 4, 2020. She was 90 years old. Her many friends and family would agree that her life was full, packed with accomplishments, and ... was historic!

It's safe to say that were it not for Ursula and other founding mothers of North Yarmouth Historical Society we would not have the depth of knowledge about our town's past and the archival documentation that is the foundation of the organization. Were it not for her passion to join with others to preserve Skyline Farm, that beautiful property might not exist today as a unique community resource. And her participation in Greater Portland Landmarks in the early days helped assure that organization's continued success and outreach.

Ursula's passion for history and preservation was not native-Maine born; her beautiful English accent gave that away as soon as she started to speak! She was born on July 15, 1929 in Keswick, a town in England's Lakes District, the daughter of Margaret Burgess and Harold Howe, the head-



Ursula's love of carriages and horses started early! She is at far left, a Keswick youngster.



Ursula with cup of chowder in hand at the Old Town House during a 2013 Soup & Cider celebration.

master of a local elementary school. From all accounts Ursula had an idyllic country upbringing. But England during WWII could also be frightening. In a 2001 interview with Greely High School students Claire Wheeler, Stephanie McCabe, and Matt Popov, she vividly recalled hearing bombs hitting the docks forty miles away. During the crisis the family took in evacuees from cities further south, and reusing, recycling, and saving became a way of life and a lifelong habit.

After the war Ursula attended St. Anne's College at Oxford University and the London School of Economics. In 1957, she came to America and met Lee Stanley Baier. They married in 1959 and settled in New Hampshire, where Ursula "apprenticed" in archival work at the New Hampshire Historical Society.

The Baier family—Ursula, Lee, Simon, and Matt—arrived in North Yarmouth in 1966 and to the 1773 Martin Ring house at 108 Walnut Hill Road—"Baiershire." (Cont'd, p. 3)



Ho, boy. Look familiar, old house owners? Ursula in the midst of a later renovation at "Baiershire."

Ursula's fascination with architecture really took flight. The family restored the house and Ursula constructed its place in local history, following the research trail to wherever it led: from the history of the Royal River to the architectural history of Maine's private and public buildings, to the fine details of hinges and latches to the forges where they were created, and far beyond.

She joined forces with Nellie Smith Leighton and others to form North Yarmouth Historical Society in 1974 and for many years afterward spent endless hours organizing and researching, stepping back only when she began to throw her energy behind the new Skyline Farm in 1999. Yet she was always available and interested in all things historical in North Yarmouth. Her knowledge was layers deep—centuries, actually. In her later years when she lived at Ledgewood Assisted Living on Route 88 in Cumberland she sometimes she wasn't quite sure where that could be, but if you told her it was on King's Highway (as 88 was called in the 1700s) ... she knew exactly where she was.

Eminent scholar, visionary, friend. Ursula was all three, and we became a better community for it. *A million thanks!* ☪



Ursula, Joyce Gervais, and Sue Gerry, members of the NYHS Archives team, 1998. Photo by Joyce Gilbert, another member of the crew.

## Mom, Remembered

by Matt Baier

**M**y mother was warm, generous, intelligent, charming, and—oh yes, she had a wonderful sense of humor.

There were many things that Ursula Millicent Howe could thank her wonderful parents for, but her name was not one of them. And her three older sisters didn't help. They called her Grub. Their letters to Mom, up until the end, always began "Dearest Grub, ..."

Mom always spoke fondly of her growing up years. She loved all animals. Horses were her favorite, but she had a special affinity for cats. When she was a little girl she'd dress them up in doll clothes. She also befriended chickens who she'd cuddle like cats and ... place them on her head, like a hat.

She wasn't trying to be funny. She just did things a little differently, to everyone's delight. This lasted for the rest of her life. She was absolutely unique, in deed AND word.

Mom's friend Lynn Young once described chickens to Ursula as dumb. "Oh, no, Lynn dear," replied Mom. "They're just delightfully limited."

In 1957 Ursula emigrated to "The States" and in 1959 she met Lee Baier.

They immediately hit it off. In fact, just two weeks later, Lee proposed to Ursula. Well ... sort of. As Mom described it, Dad said something like "I don't suppose you'd want to get married, would you? No, no—I didn't think so." To which Mom replied "Yes, actually. I would."

In those days, perhaps she was worried that she was no spring chicken, at age 28. Whatever the reason, it was an excellent choice, one for which my brother Simon and I are particularly grateful!

When we moved from New Hampshire to Maine, Mom and Dad quickly made friends. One very good friend was Bishop Harold Hopkins (Rev. Hopkins at the time), who founded St. Bart's Episcopal Church with Mom and Dad in 1976. At Dad's memorial service, "Hoppy" recalled first meeting Lee and Ursula. "Even at a distance," he said, "I could tell she was English." I never asked him exactly what he meant, but I'm guessing it probably meant wearing a hat, elbows out, walking smartly, several paces ahead of Dad. *(Cont'd next page)*



Ursula, Simon, and Matt Baier in their family sleigh pulled by Princess the donkey. Photo at Gladys Hamilton's home on Route 115 during the winter of 1969-1970.



The Baier family—Lee, Ursula, Simon, Susan, and Matt around the table at 108 Walnut Hill Road, North Yarmouth. Years of careful restoration work by the Baiers returned their 18th century home to its original glory.

Mom didn't make any attempt to Americanize her accent. When asked if she could get away with things with that accent, she responded "Oh yes, I can get away with murder!"

One of Mom's greatest joys was putting a child on a horse's back for the first time, and Simon and I were no exceptions. In fact, I can thank Mom for my wife Susan. When we met, Susan kind of liked me, but when I told her that "I practically grew up on four legs"—well, that sealed the deal.

One Halloween many years ago, Mom suggested that Simon and I dress up as Native Americans and go door-to-door with the horses. She made us costumes out of burlap sacks from Ames Feed Store. We probably complained about how scratchy they were but, looking back, it was pretty cool to go trick-or-treating on horseback.

And Mom made each Christmas very memorable. When they lived in New Hampshire, she made a tradition of setting up a live nativity scene. In Maine, the tradition continued, with a real donkey and sheep, but with stuffed Mary, Joseph, and baby Jesus figures. Back in New Hampshire, however, Mom told me the Christ-child had originally been played by ... yours truly.

Fetching our Christmas tree was like a stepping into a Norman Rockwell painting. We would pile into a horse-drawn sleigh and take off to the woods to cut down a tree, which we would drag home on a toboggan.

For Christmas 2017, Simon and I got Mom a lot of warm winter clothes including a hat, mittens, a soft scarf, and big thick socks. She was delighted, and decided right then and there to put them on, all at once, indoors. And she was inspired to dance—something that's hard to describe, but it involved a great deal of toe pointing. Simon said it was the type of dance that should be done to the tune of a lute.

Mom's sense of humor lasted right up to her final week.

One night while I was visiting, Mom found herself in extreme pain. Her caretaker Angela called an ambulance to take her to the ER.

But then suddenly, miraculously, the pain passed and Mom made an amazing recovery. She felt so much better that she started singing—for two and a half hours past her usual bedtime. I might have joined in, but I didn't know the words. She was making them up!

Despite Mom's joyful recovery, Angela was still concerned and kept checking in. Wondering if Mom was dehydrated, she asked "Ursula, have you had anything to drink?" Mom paused her happy song, to say (wink, wink), "Oh, one might WELL ask!"

Mom impacted others positively with the gifts she was given. I intend to honor her memory by positively impacting others with the gifts I have been given.

Her joyful spirit lives on in everyone she has touched here and afar. ☪