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The Darling Estate_ Part I (1940s-1960s)

Randy Lackovic

University of Maine - Main, randy.lackovic@umit.maine.edu

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Ira Calef Darling Jr. was born on January 1st, 1884 in Chicago. He was of a prominent family from Pawtucket, Rhode Island. His grandfather Lucius Bowles Darling (1827-1896) had founded a state-of-the-industry rendering operation and fertilizer company in Pawtucket, the L.B. Darling & Co. In 1881 Mr. L.B. Darling’s two sons, Ira C. Sr. and Lucius B. Jr. became members of the family firm. The business had so increased by this time that a branch house was established at Chicago under the name of Ira C. Darling & Co.* This course was taken to facilitate the purchase of cattle and other supplies. Ira C. Darling Jr.’s father Ira Calef Darling Sr. died in Pawtucket on July 21, 1891 at the age of 35, and that branch house in Chicago was subsequently incorporated under the name of Darling & Co.

In 1886 Ira C. Darling Jr.’s grandfather, L.B. Darling Sr. was elected Lieutenant governor of the State of Rhode Island. Governor Darling died in his Pawtucket home in 1896.¹ His funeral was attended by former governors and a former U.S. senator. The Pawtucket Evening Post said in part: “Not only the city of Pawtucket, but the entire State of Rhode Island has suffered an irreparable loss . . . He was a kind-hearted gentleman . . . He has done much for Pawtucket and Pawtucket sincerely mourns his loss.” At the time of his death Lucius Darling was president of the L. B. Darling Fertilizer Company; of the Pacific National Bank; of the Pawtucket Gas Company; and of the Swan Point Cemetery Company. He was also a trustee in the Pawtucket Institution for Savings, a director of the Pawtucket Mutual Fire Insurance Company, and a director of Darling & Co. of Chicago.

Ira C. Darling Jr. spent his childhood and youth in Chicago. He was six years old when his father died, and he was twelve years old when his grandfather died. In 1903 the Darling family sold their interest in Darling & Co. Ira C. Darling Jr. then worked as a young man for Swift & Company at the Union Stock Yards in 1903 for ten dollars per week. Ira C. Darling Jr. (1884-1969) married Agatha Louise Birkhoff (1885-1959) 2 Oct 1906 in Chicago. The young couple arrived in Liverpool, England, aboard the Celtic, on the 13th of Oct, 1906, First Class.

Ira and Agatha had three daughters.

Elizabeth Darling was born in 1908. She married a William E. Burgoyne.

Dorothy Darling (1911-1985) was born December 21. She married first George Vernon Holloman (1902-1946). He was in the military and was killed in an airplane crash en route from Shanghai, China to Manilla.² Dorothy and George had a son, George Vernon Holloman Jr. (1934-2006). Dorothy married again to Leo Gallo (1910-1956), and in 1961 she married again to Gordon H. Williamson, a banking executive.


In March 1909 Mr. Darling started his own business, the Ira C. Darling Company, an insurance enterprise. In 1916 he consolidated his company with William Bartholomay to create the Bartholomay Darling Company. He also served as the Director and Vice President of the Diamond T Motor Company. During World War I, Mr. Darling served on several war boards and councils.

The 1920 census finds the Darling family living on the Essex Rd. in New Trier, Illinois. Also residing in the household is 38 year old nurse Margaret Webb, 24 year old chauffeur Elwood Moore, and a 24 year old servant Victoria Moore.

Ira C. Darling was well travelled. He travelled abroad to conduct business. In 1929 45 year old Ira Darling and 44 year old Agatha Darling travelled to New York City from Villefranche, France aboard the S.S. Conte Grande. 24 Sept. 1936
Ira arrived in Quebec from Southampton, England aboard the Empress Britain. He continued his business activities until his retirement in 1939 when he bought the Woodman estate.

Picture 1: A print of a passport photo of Ira Darling in 1924 at the age of 40. He is described as being 5’8” tall, and having dark brown eyes, brown hair, an oval face and a ruddy complexion. The purpose of the passport was for 3 months of commercial business and travel in Europe.
The S.S. Conte Grande.

Picture 2: The S.S. Conte Grande.

Picture 3: The picture on the next page is captioned *Looking Out of Living Room Window [Farmhouse, Upper Campus, DMC].* In the background you can see Lowes Cove. Beyond that you can see the farmhouse and barn that are on the road to the Willette House at McGuire Point, and beyond that you can see Clarks Cove and the Damariscotta River. In the right foreground is the market garden with vegetables. Ira Darling’s granddaughter Wendy Daniher says that among other things grown in the garden, there were strawberries and carrots. She said the deer used to come and eat the strawberries. Judging by what Wendy told me over the phone and by the context of other donated material I guesstimate this picture was taken during the mid-1940s [c.1945-1947]. During WWII Ira had the field planted with potatoes to help with food supplies during the war.³ (Courtesy of Wendy Daniher)
Picture 4: The front yard, and steps up to the front porch of the farmhouse. (Courtesy of Wendy Daniher)
Picture 5: The Plume of Feathers. (Courtesy of Wendy Daniher)
Picture 6: March 1941. Mervin Rice. Horse Barn is to the left. (Courtesy of Linda Healy)
Mervin Rice & Meteor. January 21, 1941. Mervin would use Meteor in the winter time to haul wood. They’d go over to the big hill [Clarks Cove Rd.] to get wood. One day the sled ran over the horse on the steep hill, but luckily the horse was alright. Meteor’s stall was the first stall on the right when you go into the barn. He was the favorite horse.
Picture 8: Mervin Rice. Summer, 1941. The Tractor Barn is in the background.
Picture 9: Mervin Rice haying at the Darling Estate. Summer, 1941. (Courtesy of Linda Healy)
Picture 10: Mervin Rice. Haying. Darling Estate. 1941. Walpole, ME.
Picture 11: 1941.
Picture 12: L to R: Randall Rice, Merrill Rice, and Mervin Rice (atop the hay wagon). #1
Chester’s father Mervin Rice worked here in the 1940s whenever help was needed at Wentworth Point, so as a kid growing up Chester often hung out here at the Darling estate. Randall Rice was the full time caretaker. He and his wife lived in the Caretaker’s House (Leeman House).

Ira Darling drove his wooden station wagon around here. Mr. Darling always wore a little hat on his head. Ira Darling was only here in the summer time. He didn’t stay here in the winter time. He came here in the spring time and left in the fall.

Randall Rice would spend his whole winter carving birds in the Plume of Feathers. They were beautiful. He would carve sea birds and chickadees; he did all kinds of carvings. By spring time that room would be full. There would be hundreds of carved birds. He must have sold them or something, because they would be all gone after a while. They had a wood stove in there. Mervin and Chester would come to visit in the winter; it was very warm inside.

Back then this place was mostly fields. The fields were immaculate; they took care of them really well. Chester remembers there were always lots of flowers around here. Ira always had lots of flower gardens and they were really pretty in the summer time.

In the winter Mervin would come and plow the road. He had this old snow plow made out of [?] Sometimes he plowed with a tractor, sometimes he plowed with a horse. The plow didn’t work well so they would have to plow numerous times. Chester remembers wearing an army helmet and looking down through a recess to see what if the plow was working properly and he got his head stuck in the recess. He believes he was about 10 years old then.

Chester wasn’t sure if Meteor was ridden. He thinks there were three horses in the barn back then.

As you come into driveway at the Darling estate there was a big flag pole by the well. Every day when Ira Darling was here he would raise the American flag.

In the winter time the sheep would stay on the first floor of the Cow Barn. In the spring time this was a favorite place for the kids (Chester’s family) to come visit because the lambs would be born.

End of CHESTER RICE recollections
Notes

There were three 2nd edition history bulletins about the Darling Estate in Walpole, ME. They have been reorganized and put into book chapter form. This is a final edition; it was issued in 2017.

* Special thanks to Wendy Daniher for sharing her memories and pictures of the Darling family, and Jane Ostheimer (Wendy's sister). A phone interview was conducted with Wendy (who was residing in Australia) in January, 2014, after she had sent the DMC Librarian pictures.

*1 Randall Clinton Rice (1899-1962) married Eunice Charlotte Gamage, 20 September 1918. The 1920 census finds the young couple and their baby, Leroy Randall Rice (1919-1966), are lodgers at 716 Washington Street in Bath; Randall is employed as a holder-on at the shipyard. However, they are also listed as residing in South Bristol in 1920. 1930 finds Randall and Eunice living on the Christmas Cove Rd with Leroy and their 9 year old daughter Mae N Rice. Randall is now a cook in the boat industry.

Mervin Rice (1915-2006) is Randall’s nephew, the son of Randall’s older brother Parker W. Rice (1889-1981). Merrill Rice (1925-2012) is Mervin Rice’s younger brother.

*2 Massachusetts-born Gustavus Franklin Swift, a meatpacker and butcher by trade came to Chicago in 1875 to become a cattle dealer as well as a butcher. However, the practice of shipping hogs and cattle to the East resulted in a considerable loss of weight, and profits, and was soon superseded by packing the meat in Chicago. Swift pioneered the use of refrigerated rail cars, making western beef popular in the East and across the sea, while making himself extremely wealthy. Although an experienced butcher, Swift was not as well versed in the rendering business. To benefit from a state-of-the industry rendering operation he turned to Rhode Island-based L.B. Darling & Company.

*3 Special thanks to South Bristol town selectman Chester Rice for sharing his family memories and knowledge of the local history.

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

*5 Chester Rice was born in 1937.

Source

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