



To paraphrase “Inventing the Abbotts,” the 1997 movie starring Liv Tyler, “If the Kennebunks hadn’t had the Campbells, they would have had to invent them.”

Heirs to the Palm Beach clothing fortune, the Campbells epitomized swank—a wealth, grace, and Gatsby-like lifestyle never seen before and never since.

From left: Constance, William, mother Mildred, and Barbara Campbell of Fairfields, the estate now known as the Franciscan Monastery, Kennebunk.

Inventing The Campbells

Story By Colin Sargent

THE YEAR was 1936, and the town of Kennebunk was abuzz with rumors that the Jim Campbell family, heirs to the Palm Beach clothing fortune and owners of the Goodall Sanford and Goodall Worsted mills in Sanford, Maine, had just bought the old Rogers Estate—an English country mansion known to readers today as the Franciscan Mon-



astery in Kennebunk, tucked like a jewel into 150 acres of gardens, walking paths, and wooded splendor along the edge of the Kennebunk River.

Everybody knew the Rogers family—you know, *Rogers Steel and Silver, out of Buffalo*—who’d built the house in 1900, but who were these exceptionally well turned out people gliding between the Beach and the River Club with thoroughbreds, great danes,

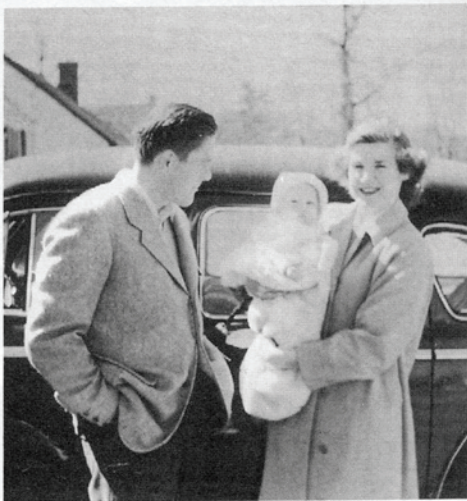
chauffeurs, and limousines? Far from being Depression-down, the Campbells were obviously “bucks up.” And, more to the point, **who were the lovely Campbell girls?**

The Campbell girls, Constance, born in 1921, and Barbara (1924-1994), would prove equal to their billing. So luminous were they that, growing up, more even than future President George Bush they would transform pre-war Kennebunk Beach and Kennebunkport with their presence—perhaps even define it.

Their younger brother, William N. Campbell, Jr., of Lake Angelus, Michigan, born in 1926, remembers those early years well.

“My father, Col. William N. Campbell, Sr., (1893-1947)—his friends called him Jim—bought the place in 1936 for \$150,000. Back then I was a cadet at Valley Forge Military Academy in Wayne, Pennsylvania, so my best memories are of summers on the river.”

This is certainly understandable, since Goodall Sanford documents provided by Sanford historian Harland Eastman show that “young Billy” wasn’t allowed to slack-off at school. Letters from former Maine Gov. Louis Brann, a personal friend of

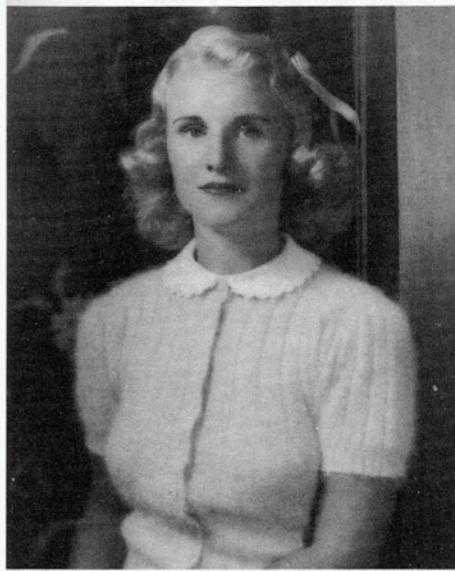


Barbara (“Babs”) Campbell was one of the finest golfers in New England. She is pictured above, with her husband, Bud Griswold, and son in 1948.

William Sr.’s, to Col. Milton G. Baker, superintendent of the school, show that even the governor checked solicitously to ensure that “young Billy Campbell is in good health and fine spirits” and further show how large was the circle of Campbell influence. Early on, father Jim had become comfortable in the halls of power. As a young man, he’d worked for a Texas congressman in Washington, D.C., where he met Mildred through her father, Louis

B. Goodall, heir to the Goodall mills as well as a U.S. congressman from Maine.

And what halcyon days they were. Babs was home from Abbott prep school (the



Connie on her 16th birthday.

distaff Phillips-Andover), and Connie, home from the exclusive Miss May’s School in Boston at sweet sixteen (pictured above), was tooling around in her spanking new 1937 LaSalle convertible, which she’d received as a Christmas present.

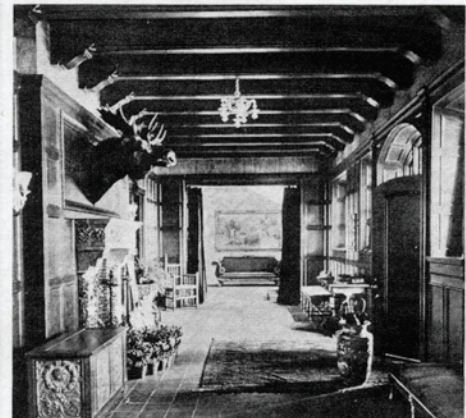
“It was the first Christmas we spent in the house,” Bill remembers. “It was a maroon 4-door LaSalle convertible.”

“Maroon with *red leather*. You’re not going to put that in, are you?” Connie laughs on the telephone from her Stonington, Connecticut, home. Imagine someone with twice the bounce and charm of a young June Allyson, and you get the idea.

“I loved my years at Fairfield’s,” she says. “I had my own little speedboat in the river, the *Zip*. Friends seemed to congregate at our boathouse (which still stands, a monument on the Kennebunk River, and where her 17-foot Cris-Craft was tied up). We’d have clam bakes there, and on Cape Porpoise. There was a three-hole golf course on our lawn, and kids came over for baseball, canoeing, picnics, and tennis on our clay courts.”

Designed by architect Edward Broadhead Green, Fairfield’s was a sprawling 6,306 feet of freeform Tudor opulence. With a 42 foot by 26 foot living room with paneled wainscoting, beams of quartered oak colored in Old English finish, and soaring plastered ceil-

ings, it was the perfect place to entertain guests including national golf champions Lawson Little, Gene Sarazen, Babe Didrickson, and Francis Ouimet, writer Kenneth and Anna Roberts (“Uncle Ken and Aunt Anna”), successful wool broker Hartley Lord (and what party did he not attend?), *Portland Newspapers* publisher Guy Gannett, *Boston Herald* sportswriter Bill Cunningham, and artist N.C. Wyeth, who, in addition to illustrating Roberts’s *Arundel*, painted a huge mural that hung over the Fairfield’s marble fireplace, imported from an Italian palace.



“The Wyeth painting used to be in the entrance hallway, what we called the ‘hall of the seagulls,’” Connie says. “It was all seagulls and it went the whole length of the mantelpiece. It was just done for that hallway, simply a blue background with beautiful seagulls. Growing up, we thought it was just a pretty painting. We didn’t know it was, you know, valuable. It went the whole length of that mantel, and that was a seven-foot mantelpiece.”

So if Connie had a maroon convertible, what color was Babs’s?

“Blue,” says her widower, Bud Griswold of Kennebunk Beach. “One of my dearest memories of my wife Barbara is that she drove a blue LaSalle convertible, which is sort of a junior Cadillac. The Campbells also had two family boats, one in Florida and one here, the *BarConBill*, for Barbara, Constance, and Bill, kept at the Kennebunk River Club. It was a 60-foot white yacht,” built by the Consolidated company, the same company that, a few years later, would make the B-24 Liberator bombers whose shadows darkened the Beach during World War II.

“I met my lovely wife while she was still at the Beaver Country Day School.” She went on to finishing school, as they called it, at Abbott, and to Swarthmore College, “probably majoring in men. We married



The monastery as it is today. The grounds are open to the public, and its river walk is one of the best places to enjoy the beauty of Fairfield's gardens and the Kennebunk River.

September 15, 1945, at St. Anne's Church in Kennebunkport, after I finished Dartmouth and became a captain in the Marine Corps.

"Barbara was an extraordinary woman athlete. Some people are born that way. Just luck. She was one of the best golfers in New England, shooting in the low 80s and winning the Webhannet lady championship seven years in a row. She used to play tennis with George Bush and her mother at the River Club, and she skied at Sunday River and a couple of places in Vermont and New Hampshire. She also was a great horsewoman, and she kept a chestnut gelding at Fairfield's named Timothy in a stable at the end of the driveway."

"Babs was the solid rock, beautiful herself but kind of a wallflower," says Hartley Lord of Kennebunk Beach. "Connie was the ball of fire, pretty as hell, the heartbreaker. My brother Frank and Connie courted for many years. They were the ideal couple. Frank was handsome and Connie was a princess. When we went to River Club dances, they were tee-totalers and had their own table. Old scoundrel Hartley did enjoy a drink at a different table.

"Connie was very much of an extrovert, and Babs being the younger sister was kind of in her shadow. Babs always felt she was the ugly duckling, which was unfortunate, because she was so attractive. Connie was the cutest thing you ever saw.

When she was 15, she looked 17. Of course she was a gorgeous girl. Frank and Connie were engaged. The engagement was announced at Fairfield's. Uncle Jim came down the stairs and made the announcement, as I recall. Everything was just hip hip hooray. A little time passed, and my wife Bunnie and I became engaged. We told them we'll plan our wedding after you have yours, but something came up. I don't know what. Frank called up and said, 'Plan your wedding when you get ready.' I don't think he ever fell in love with anyone else again. But to tell you the truth, I think Connie's had a heck of a better time with wonderful, cosmopolitan Dr. Jim Worcester (Yale, 1943) in Connecticut than she would have had living with Frank Lord in lonely Kennebunk all these years. We were very fortunate in our youth, because we had a large group of good people to go around with that included the Campbells and the Leake family. If we did a little necking, we thought we had a hell of a time.

"Once, when I was down in Nashville, I looked up the two Leake girls who were down there for the winter. Their dad, Fred Leake, said, 'Hartley, I want you to take a bottle of cherry brandy to Kenneth Roberts. He's staying up at Fairfield's for the winter.' I took it up to Maine, but he wasn't there just then, so I left him the bottle, along with a note. In time I got a funny letter from Ken Roberts, complimenting me on my restraint."

"Kenneth Roberts was one of Jim Campbell's closest friends," agrees Bud Griswold, "and when the war came he let Roberts (who otherwise would have stayed at his "half-baked palace" in Italy) stay alone at Fairfield's for the winters of 1942, 1943, and 1944."

This was when Roberts was at the peak of his powers and deep in his first draft of *Lydia Bailey*.

"He must have done some good work then—that's when he hit it big, with *Northwest Passage*. Jim and Ken were very close friends, drinking buddies." Whiskey was their poison: "Old Grand Dad—or Scotch whiskey—DeWar's White Label, Johnny Walker Black Label."

"I remember those winters," says Bill Campbell. "We were in Miami Beach, and Uncle Ken offered to babysit my mother's great dane, Bruce. When we got back the next summer, we found a small album of photos Roberts had taken showing Bruce peeing on a tree and other

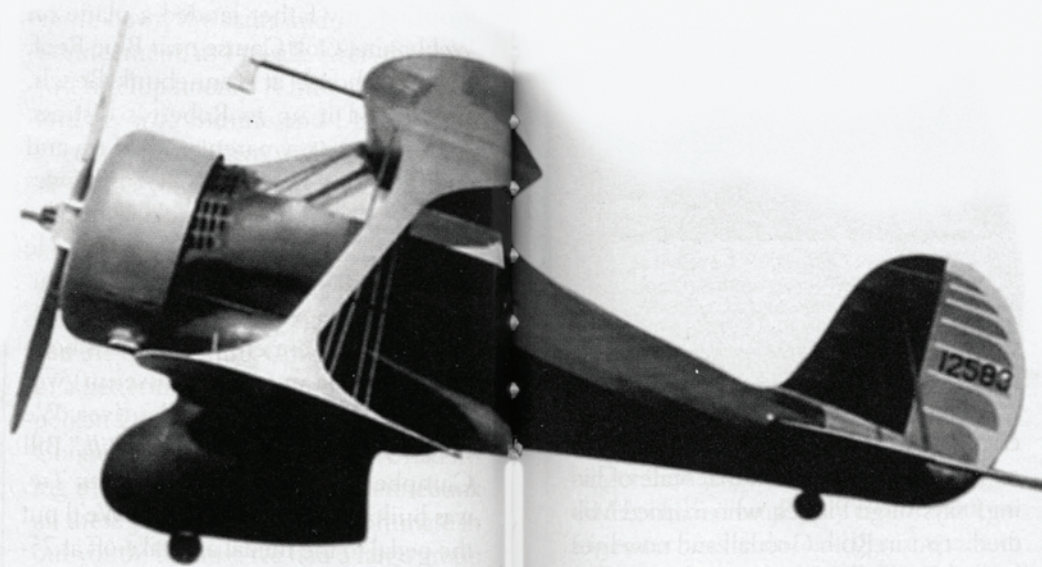
things. He had that kind of offbeat sense of humor, you know. In his book *For Authors Only*, Roberts refers to my father playing practical jokes on him. Early one morning, my father landed a plane on Webhannet Golf Course near Blue Roof, Roberts's house at Kennebunk Beach, and revved it up to Roberts's distress. Another time my parents called up and said they were from the *New York Times* and interviewed him as if he'd won a certain prize. Roberts could be grouchy. He always liked warm beer, like the English.

"We knew novelist Booth Tarkington, too, through Kenneth Roberts. His boat-house (now a maritime museum) was right across from ours on the river. We used to race him in the *BarConBill*," Bill Campbell says. "His boat, the *Zan Tre*, was built by Consolidated, too. We'd put the pedal to the medal and take off at 25-28 knots.

"My father also adored any kind of aircraft and kept aeroplanes at Sanford Airport. One of them was a 1933 Beechcraft Biplane with a swept-back wing, reputed to be the fastest cabin plane in the world. Howard Hughes came out to Sanford to buy it from my dad. While they negotiated, I climbed up to the top of the hangar at Sanford Airport to sit and watch the plane take off.

"My dad said, 'Hell, he wouldn't even let me check him out in it. He said, 'No, I can fly this thing,'" and Hughes just took off."

Bill also remembers being part of the first airmail flight in Maine. In fact, *he* was the parcel that was mailed. "In the middle 1930s," he says, "when air mail was inaugurated in Kennebunkport, my father was flying a Stinson Reliant at the time, so he got into his plane with Wes McCarry from Westwood, Massachusetts, and loaded me aboard, wearing a sandwich board promoting air mail and covered with about \$100 in stamps. I was mailed from Gooch's Beach in Kennebunk Beach to Henry Benoit in Portland, whose department store sold our Palm Beach clothes (including signature Palm Beach jackets like the one sported by Humphrey Bogart as Rick in *Casablanca*.) We took off on the beach, headed toward the Narragansett Hotel. As we approached the hotel, we weren't rising fast enough. We were headed for the second floor and about to hit when my father hit the flaps and we ballooned over the



This photo, courtesy of Owls Head Transportation Museum, depicts the very 1934 A-17F Beechcraft Staggerwing that Howard Hughes came up to Maine to buy from Jim Campbell. Powered by a 690-horsepower Wright Cyclone engine, it could reach speeds of 250 mph and was reputed to be the fastest cabin aircraft in the world.

top. He really was a great flyer.

"My mother Mildred was full of fun, too. She loved to play both her Steinway concert grand in one corner of the living room and her Hammond organ, which stood in the other."

His parents were good sports. "Sometimes they had to be," Bill says. "I remember one time Warren Paine, a tennis instructor at the River Club and a beau of Barbara's or Connie's, was down at the house, playing golf. We were sitting in the living room when we heard a tinkle of glass and here was a golf ball reposing on the front hall, up on the main stairway. We looked out the door and saw Warren at the far end of the lawn. 'What did you use?' my father shouted.

"'A four iron,' Warren said sheepishly.

"'Well, that's a good shot.' It was close to 180 yards, through the leaded glass windows, 20 feet in the air and still rising halfway up the landing."

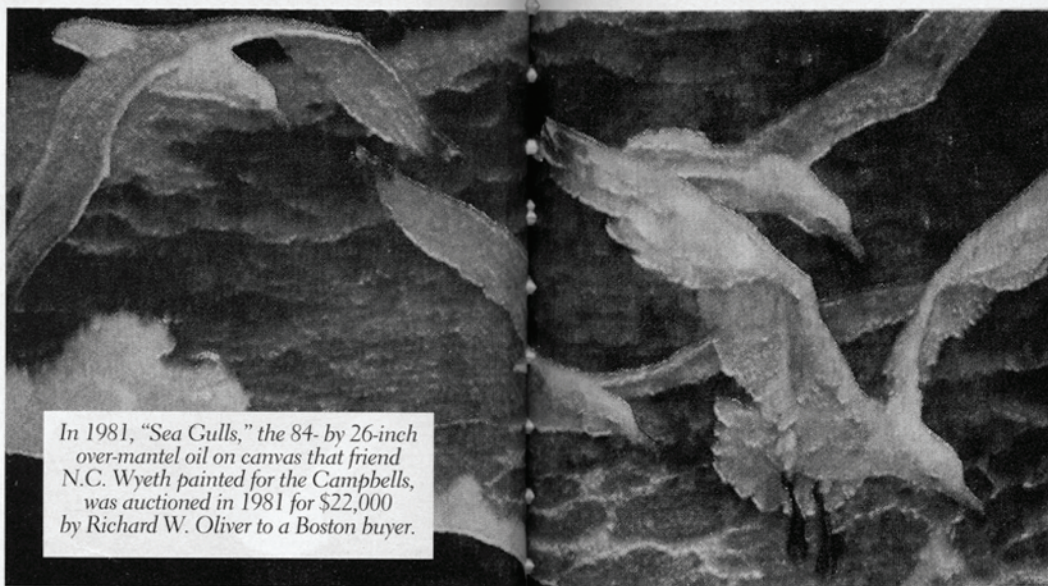
Perhaps it was the clambakes, though, that epitomized the Campbell style. "Every summer, Dad would get some barrels and have them filled up with lobsters, clams, seaweed, corn, the whole nine yards. Then, he'd have the barrels trucked over to Goodall Sanford, where they'd run

a steam pipe through them." The seafood was then rushed to the boathouse, where it was loaded on the *BarConBill*, which would then take sometimes more than 40 friends over to Trott or Stage Island in Cape Porpoise."

After Bill went to Valley Forge Military Academy, he went to Governor Dummer Academy and then joined the Navy in 1944 at 18 as a weather station aerographer's mate at Opa Locka Naval Air Station in Miami. He went on to Bowdoin College. "I met my wife Barbara at a fraternity brother's wedding at Bowdoin. She was a bridesmaid."

"My sisters were no strangers to Bowdoin, either," he says. "They used to go to Bowdoin house parties when they were 14 and 16, driven by our chauffeur Bill Dwyer, whose brother was in the Brooklin Police."

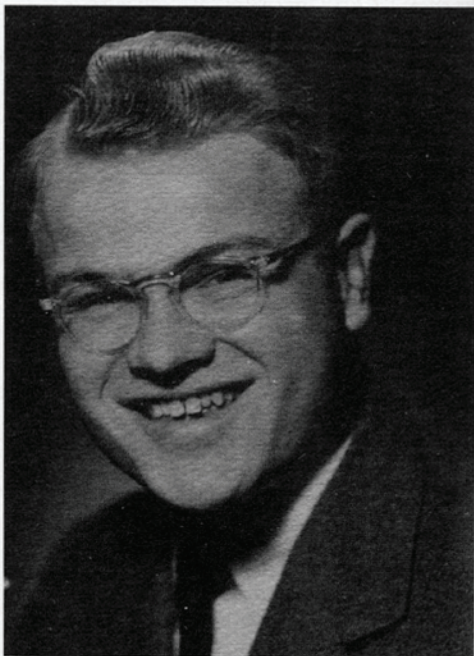
Yes, that's the same Bill Dwyer who went on to a distinguished career as a real estate agent in the Kennebunks. In fact, after Jim Campbell died in 1947, it was Bill Dwyer who was asked to arrange to sell the entire Fairfields estate. "By then, the property taxes were \$3,000 a year. In 1947 that was no small amount of



In 1981, "Sea Gulls," the 84- by 26-inch over-mantel oil on canvas that friend N.C. Wyeth painted for the Campbells, was auctioned in 1981 for \$22,000 by Richard W. Oliver to a Boston buyer.

change."

"No one could sustain that scale of living," says Virgil Pitstick, who married Mildred's cousin Ruth Goodall and now lives in the Goodall Mansion in Sanford. A widower now, Virgil calls Fairfields "a



Bill Campbell, circa 1946.

fairyland, with a whole staff of help" at its peak and fondly remembers spending his honeymoon there.

"Mrs. Campbell was so cute and sweet. 'I don't know if you like twin beds or double beds,' she said shyly, looking down in the pince-nez glasses she always wore, "'so I had two bedrooms made up.' We had the whole place to ourselves, but we stayed right over the main entrance. It was so huge it was a little scary. When we came in at night after dark, Ruth would make me go in ahead of her and turn a light on and come back and get her before she'd advance to the next room. Mildred had also said, 'I've got you all set up for

breakfast.' We found that the kitchen was bigger than most hotels, and there in the center of this completely cleaned-out refrigerator was a dozen eggs, a quart of milk, and a pound of bacon. They looked so lonely we almost ran out of the place!"

"We ended up selling the house for the same price we paid for it," says Bill. "The Lithuanian monks paid \$100,000 down and \$5,000 a year with no interest for the next 10 years." The land on the other side of Beach Street was sold to developers, including the one who built the houses on Fairfield Drive. "I was the one who turned the keys over to Father Justin Vaskey, on September 20, 1947. They bought the house basically furnished, along with the land on the river side of Route 9. Years later, I heard Bill Dwyer tell the story of how a new priest admitted to the order came into the library in the east wing, where there was still an oil painting of my beautiful mother. Bill Dwyer said he saw the initiate gazing up at it as if he were genuflecting to a portrait of the Virgin Mary."

In all these years, Connie has never returned to the mansion, "because it would make me too sad." When you were young, where did you go when you were sad? she is asked. She pauses a moment. "You know what? I don't think I ever was sad at Fairfields. What's to be sad about? We had a wonderful childhood there."

There are rumors that since the Cold War is over and Lithuania is free, the Franciscan monks are considering selling Fairfields, and so a new chapter will be written about this estate on the Kennebunk River. Whatever the future holds for Fairfields, it can never again be the fairy tale that was the life of the Campbells.