

EARL MARTIN MAXHAM

FEBRUARY 12, 1895-MARCH 21, 1971

By DAVID MAXHAM

Earl Maxham was born in the Shady Rill community of Middlesex, Vermont on February 12, 1895, the second child of Myron and Mary Maxham. Myron and Mary's children were Mabel, Earl, Donald, and Esther, and together with Mary's parents, Harvey and Samantha Martin, lived on the family farm on Wood Road in Shady Rill. The side hill farm had a small house, barns and sheds and the land had steeply sloping pastures and fields, difficult to cultivate. The family

existed mostly on what could be produced from the ten cows in the way of milk and meat, and the vegetables they could grow. The house was heated with wood.



Myron and Marys' West Hill Home in c. 1900

In 1899, Myron and Mary purchased a larger farm with a roomier house located on West Hill Road in neighboring Worcester, where the three generations continued to live together. The summer months were devoted to gardens and farming. During the long

winter months, Earl did farm chores, cut wood and attended the one room Minister Brook school. The family members all worked on the farm. Worcester and the Maxham family were a good fit. Myron was the school master at the Minister Brook school. Mary refined her self-taught nursing skills and became the local midwife.

Earl began school in 1901 and attended eight grades at the Minister Brook school, where one of his classmates was George Richardson's grandmother, Kate. Following grade school, Earl worked on the family farm. He purchased a team of oxen for use on the farm as well as for hire on neighboring farms.



Minister Brook School

These large, powerful animals performed heavy farm work, especially moving large stones. He learned trapping skills to make better use of the slow winter farm schedule. His trap line extended for many miles and he visited his traps daily on snow shoes. His first winter's muskrats, fox, and mink pelts netted him \$18.00. The pelt returns went into dental work. The trapping experience ultimately led to Earl's forty-two years of operating his Worcester mink ranch.



Earl at Graduation from Vail Institute

The management and difficult financing of the family farm fell on Earl's shoulders at an early age. He made the farm viable as he gained experience in the pitfalls of operating a small business. During the the early 20th century, Earl, like many others in town, worked on the town roads to help pay the Worcester property taxes. Years later, family members had many memories which they expressed with sad, colorful, and often amusing stories as they looked back on these hard times.

As Earl approached twenty years of age, he realized his need for more education. He applied to and was accepted at Vail Agriculture School in Lyndonville, Vermont. The curriculum dealt with the most current management practices of dairy farming at that time. He lived on campus at Vail for the two years he studied there. To pay his way, he tended to the furnaces in the campus dormitories.

His first job after graduation was that of a traveling milk tester for the Granite City Creamery. He traveled mid-day by horse and buggy between dairy farms, staying one night at each farm and testing the day's milk both, evening and morning, for fat levels. The higher the fat percentage in the milk, the more the creamery paid the farmer for his milk.

Following several years as a milk tester, Earl accepted the position of general manager at the Morrisson farm, a large investor owned farm in Barre, Vermont. The six years he managed this farm helped Earl further develop his business management skills. While living in Barre he met his future wife Blanche Corliss and they were married November 11, 1925.

Earl was elected president and Blanche became the office manager of The Granite City Co-op in Barre. The Co-op was a large, farmer-owned milk, cream, and farm products buyer from central Vermont member farmers. The Co-op operated a farm supply division, selling operating needs to their their members. Their management positions required diplomacy, responsibility, and hard work. Earl and Blanche left the Granite City Creamery when they purchase a retail shoe store in Barre which they called The Maxham Shoe Company.

The Maxham Shoe Company operated successfully until the onset of the Great Depression, when so many business went bankrupt. As the depression deepened in the early 30's, the shoe store went bankrupt too. Earl observed that he could adjust to a low sales volume but he could not exist with no sales at all. Earl and Blanche experienced many challenges in the period from 1925 to 1940 as they navigated the trials of the Great Depression.

Maxham Fur Farm was formed in 1926. Resilient as always, Earl purchased the Bolio barber shop and poolroom property on Route 12, opposite the turn onto Minister Brook Road. Mink cages were set up in back of the house and the start up mink ranch was underway, managed by Earl's brother, Donald.

The early days of mink ranching produced many hazards and unknowns. Earl purchased his first breeding stock from a trapper in Roberville, PQ., which required most of his cash. He traveled to



1940's Minister Brook Mink Ranch #1



Myron Maxham store c.1937

Earl and Blanche had a year of transition in 1935. They moved from Barre, to Worcester, living in the second floor apartment in Mark and Anna Ladd's home. On November 14th, 1935 son David was born. Earl was quoted as saying that he returned to Worcester because he would rather be a large frog in a small pond than stay in Barre as a small frog in a large pond. Priscilla, their daughter, was born January 18, 1940.



Mary Maxham Earl's Mother

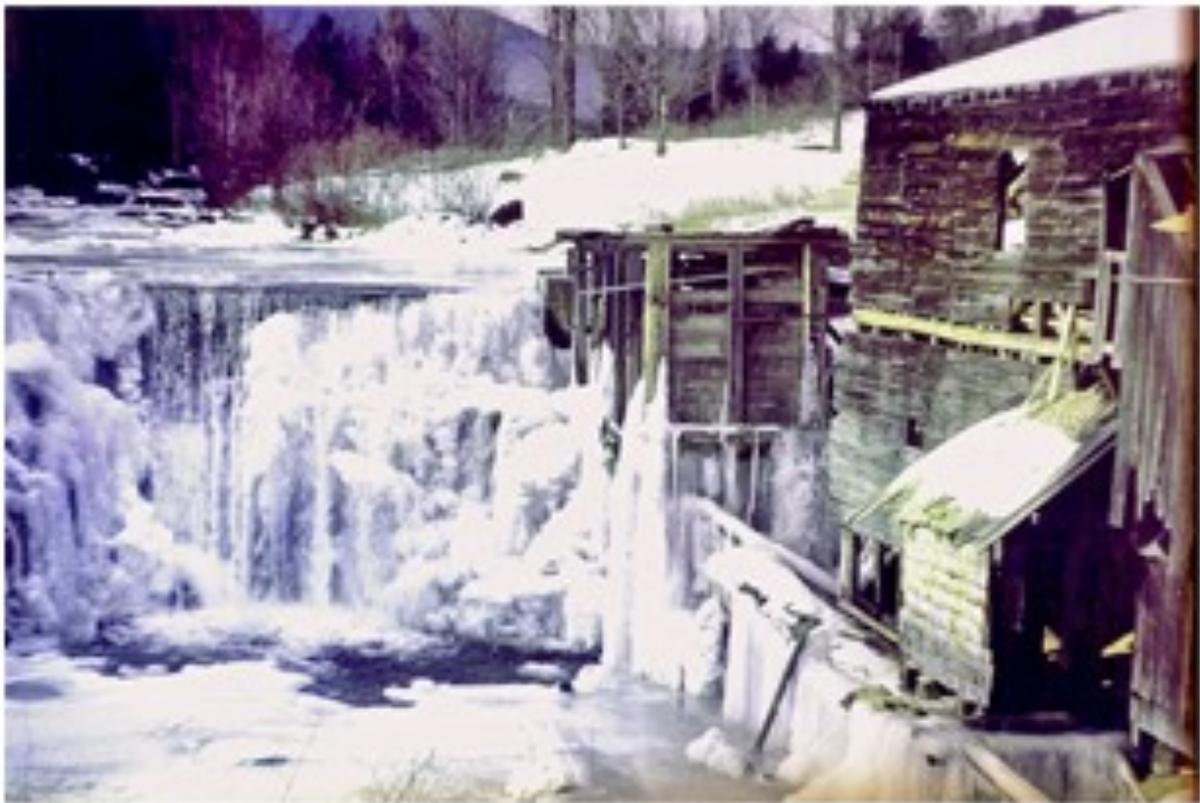
3 Chevrolet coupe. He returned to the appointment with the USDA veterinarian, transportation. At the U.S. Customs office he fumes. Once again, he had to start over, 2. This was one of the first of many two years in the mink business.

In the 1930's, Myron and Mary traded the farm on West Hill for the small store in Worcester village. Earl purchased the store in 1946, at the same time he bought the Doty store.

The pre- World War II period included the purchased of approximately three thousand acres of abandoned farm land and second growth timber land in Worcester. The timber lands became the source of logs for the mill. The abandoned fields were planted with nearly four hundred thousand seedling trees. Earl lived to see much of his dream of a tree farm come into existence. The real estate purchases included many farms, fields, woodlots and an obsolete non-operating milk creamery. The properties were mostly located on Minister Brook Road and

West Hill Road in Worcester. Several of these properties were developed into mink ranches. The old creamery was referred to as “The Plant”. Following modifications, it was transformed into a mink food processing and freezer storage facility. This complex is now owned by John Morse.

Earl continued expanding the mink ranch. He constructed pens, cages, and sheds at several properties on Minister Brook Road. Next, he started a mink food and ranch hardware sales company, Maxham Supply Company. The new company supplied mink food and mink ranch hardware needs to mink ranches throughout Vermont, northern New York, and Quebec, Canada. The mid 1930's to the start of WWII were good years in the mink industry. The mink related companies began to generate profits and Earl began to diversify to more business enterprises, with vision and optimism, all Worcester based activities.



Early Spring At The Chandler Saw Mill

In the late 1930's Earl purchased the Roy Chandler saw mill on Minister Brook Road. This mill was powered by the waters of Minister Brook. He soon discovered that the water power was insufficient to operate the mill. He added a 100 hp Ford stationary gas engine which provided power to the mill during periods of low water flow. The mill was a fascinating example of rural ingenuity. It was constructed as a post and beam structure on the edge of Minister Brook. There was a failing log dam beside the mill. Earl's first upgrade to the property was to replace the log dam with a cement dam, which was difficult because the brook flow never stopped, and he only had access to a small cement mixer. He constructed the cement dam and most of it still standing.

The mill had two levels: the lower level housed a large water wheel and the Ford power plant, plus, connecting belts and pulleys to deliver the necessary energy to the mills saws, planer and log winch. The upper level consisted of the area with a 4' diameter, circular saw, that sawed the logs into boards and planks. The log saw system was manned by the sawyer who made a decision as to how each log was to be cut. The main floor also contained a winch system that pulled the logs from the outside log pile, into the mill and to the log saw. There was a thickness planner and several smaller saws. Finally, there was a narrow gauge elevated track system with a lumber cart to take the boards away from the mill for stacking and curing. This cart was pushed along by two mill workers to one of the stacking spots 15 feet below the track.

The second floor stationery equipment was operated from the first floor power supply with the use of many fast moving pulleys and flat belts. When the mill was in full operation, with a high volume of water power, the overhead belts and pulleys would be rapidly spinning and the building would vibrate as if it was centered in an earth quake. An 8 year old like me was sure the end of the world was at hand. (OSHA would not have approved of the saw mill and would have closed it down in a flash).

The mink ranch food supply business, Maxham Supply Company, had a fleet of trucks with insulated bodies. These trucks hauled fresh fish racks from Boston, MA to Worcester, VT. The fish racks were then ground, boxed, frozen, and delivered to many of the 225 Vermont mink ranches. The supply business also sold frozen meat and chicken by-products, dry mink food ingredients, and mink ranch hardware. The Boston bound fish trucks would deliver lumber from the saw mill to the Boston lumber markets, prior to picking up the fish racks at Boston's Fish Pier. There were frequent summertime issues of odors with the trucks and their loads as they traveled around New England.



Four Maxham Trucks late 1930's

In the late 1930's Earl installed a large, noisy, one cylinder diesel engine in the plant. This engine provided power, by the use of more overhead shafts, pulleys, and flat belts, to the mink food processing equipment and a large electric

generator. The electricity powered the plant's electric needs and supplied electricity to the Donald Maxham home and to Maxham mink farms further west on Minister Brook Road. The electrification of the plant and its environs required the construction of over two mile of poles and lines. (never named Maxham Power Co.)

Earl's interest in wild animals was demonstrated in the late thirties. While visiting a mink rancher in northern Quebec, he purchased a small black bear cub and brought it back to

Worcester. The bear was named Chee and was kept on a leash near Earl's mother, Mary's, IGA store, located just north of town on Route 12 next to Minister Brook. The bear cub had many visitors and admirers who would feed it. The small bear soon became a large aggressive bear, finally biting Earl's 10 year old niece Lucille, who lived next door. This incident ended the bear's welcome. Chee was sold to a distant buyer and so ended the "Maxham Zoo".

Worcester's first telephone service began with limited hours each day. The telephone central office was in Mrs. Mulligan's house (now Brent White's house on Route 12). The switch board closed when she went to bed for the night. Late night callers had to know her sleeping routine. The next phase of service was a connection to Montpelier and the beginning of modern long distance service

The long distance telephone service arrived about the same time the Maxham enterprises began to grow. Early telephone calls were expensive and the longer the distance called the more time required to complete the call and the poorer the quality of the transmission. Eight party lines were in use in Worcester until after WWII. Earl was able to deal with the inconveniences of the telephone system, because the service was constantly improving. Western Union telegrams were useful.

Earl and Blanche's second child, Priscilla, was born January 18, 1940. She lived in Worcester until High School graduation in 1957. She was interested in whatever activity "Pop" was developing at the time and enjoyed many car rides with him. In her early days, before car seat or seat belts, Cilla would stand on the seat next to him as he zoomed around town. She became a Methodist Minister serving in Pennsylvania and Delaware. She and her husband had two children: Cheryl and Christopher. Priscilla died of kidney cancer December 24, 2006.

In the early forties Earl had several bridal paths cut through his wooded lands. These trails allowed him to ride his elegant Morgan horse, Golden Bell and explore his much loved back country. As Golden Bell became more headstrong he was sold to a younger owner.

Earl purchased the town blacksmith shop when Ralph Richardson retired. The shop was located on the west side of Route 12 two lots south of the Church. It had memorable odors and was a great place for a young boy to sit and watch the clever workmanship of Mr. Richardson, a talented metal craftsman. However, Earl never operated the black smith shop.

With the advent of WWII, Earl responded to nation's needs for edible food products while mink ranch activities were reduced. He built a long wooden structure on the plant property and raised pigs in it for a number of years. The building was constructed with low ends, non salable boards and 2X4's plus odds and ends of lumber he had accumulated over many years. The building later housed his wood-working shop. In recent years it was converted to a mini-storage. The Maxham buildings had revolving uses. My office of many years was built with lumber from a hay storage shed.

He also modernized and expanded an old dairy farm on West Hill. He built a new dairy barn, a new hay barn, purchased two used silos and assembled them at the farm. He added a Delco electric generator which was used to keep 30 or 40 batteries charged and provide DC electricity for the barn and house. This was a difficult way to produce electricity and when the REA power

became available to the farm, he was quick to connect to it. He built a new sugar house with a large wood shed. Vermont farmers enjoy producing Maple syrup each spring; the sale of the syrup provided cash to pay the taxes.

The cattle consisted of an excellent herd of milking short horns. This breed gave large amounts



West Hill Farm as Painted by Joe Fowler

of milk and, when slaughtered, produced fine meat. His first West Hill farm manger was his niece Ethelyn's husband, Preston "Stub" Martin. Following Stub, the next farm manger was niece Madelyn's husband, Gordon Kimball. Earl was a gentleman farmer; farming was in his genes and he was proud of his farm.

Earl served as Worcester Air Warden during World War II war. He organized several practice air raids in town. Worcester's WWII contribution to the war effort was the large percentage of its young men that were sent into harms way.



Stub Martin With Shorthorn Bull Sent To S.America

Worcester voters elected Earl to the Vermont House of Representatives in Montpelier for the 1943 and 1945 terms. After War II he was elected to many terms as a Worcester Selectman. The town office roles resulted in an invitation for him to travel to Worcester, MA to represent Worcester, VT in the Worcester, MA centennial celebration. The Massachusetts event include mayors from Worcester, England and Worcester, S. Africa. This honor was much enjoyed by Earl.

World War II ended when Earl was 50 years old with the birth of a new collection of Maxham commercial ventures on the horizon.



Earl, Mayor Sullivan Worc Ma & Mayor Edwards Worc England

Earl purchased the Abbott and Doty General Store in 1946 and closed his mother's nearby IGA store. He then merged the two stores into a modern self service, cash IGA grocery store. His first improvement was the replacement of the old horse tie up with a new one. This store featured a new cash register, new sandwich meat slicer, and a modern coffee grinder, all powered by electricity. Other changes he introduced was the elimination of seating around

the stove for old guys in town. There would be no more commentary about the women shoppers as they departed the store and closed the door behind them. The further addition of running water and a flush toilet completed stage one of the upgrade. No more floating flies in the water holding the ice cream scoops. Modern retail had arrived in Worcester, Vermont!



Earl Doty, Roy Chandler, and Aleck Bollo at The Abbott and Doty Store

The store purchase was followed by the purchase of a run down apartment house south of the store. One apartment was converted into an office which was managed by Blanche. The other two apartments were renovated and rented.

Earl soon realized Worcester village needed a better supply of potable water. There was not sufficient water for his modernized store and apartment house. In 1945-1946 many of the village houses, the school, and town hall were struggling by with dry toilets. There was need

for a village water system The village water system was born and named Maxham Water System.

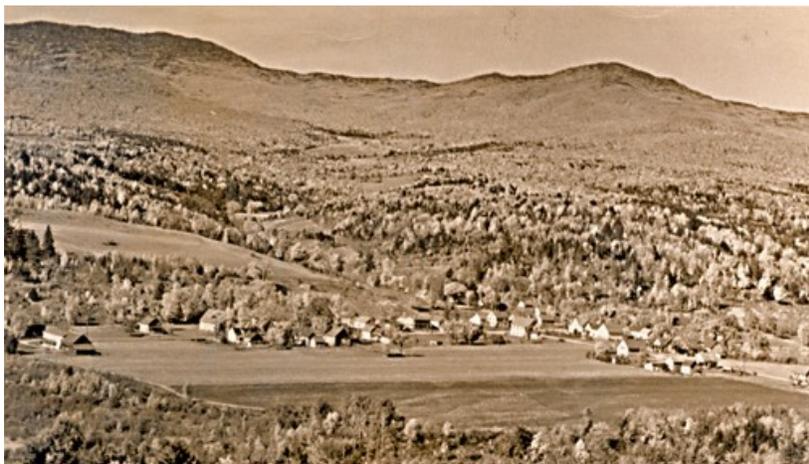
Earl's family lived in a house on Route 12 south of the village. The house was in the middle of a small hill entering Worcester from the south (now the Jim Dawson home). The property had a

total of ten acres of land located on both sides of Route 12. On the east side of Route 12, Earl located a shallow spring with a large flow of water. He built a cement reservoir near the spring and piped the water from the spring to the new reservoir. The next step was the installation of a pipe to the house cellar and the installation of a large water pump in a near by pump house. The final phase of the project was to dig ditches and install 2" mains through out the village. The digging took place before there was a backhoe available, and was done by hand with shovels. The only available ditch diggers were inmates from the Washington County Jail. Mr Creasy, the local Methodist pastor, realized he had more work to do as he took his daily walk around town and listened to the language of the "jail bird" ditch diggers.

At no time did Earl seek or receive any engineering advice on this project, and due to cash flow issues, he purchased used galvanized pipe. The ditching and pipe installation was observed by all of the village home owners. More of these owners asked to be connected to the water system and so more connections were made than originally estimated, leaving the water system under capacity before water ever flowed through the pipes. The pipes were too small and the water supply was not adequate. In the late 1960's an artesian well was drilled on the site of the spring and this solved the water capacity issue but not the undersized pipe problem. Earl operated the water system until his death in 1971 and Blanche continued operating it until the system was taken over by the Worcester Fire District #1 and needed improvements made..

Earl loved Worcester; By the time he was 50 everything in the town interested him. He had, at one time or another, walked over many of the 36 square miles contained within the town's borders. He purchased a WWII surplus 4 wheel drive jeep and bumped about over the town's back lands. He wanted to see more of Worcester. His thoughts turned to getting views of the town from the air.

In Earl's early 50's he took flying lessons and became a private pilot. The next move was to develop a airstrip, purchase an airplane and, of course, start a new business venture. The airstrip was the combination of two parcels of continuous land to form an 1800 foot airstrip, It was located on Route 12 across from the Worcester cemetery. The two parcels were connected.



Worcester, Vermont shot from airplane 1946

Earl's D-4 Cat bulldozer did the earth moving. A land grader and operator was hired to level the future grass sod runway. The final requirement was the construction and painting (orange with wide black stripes) of the runway identifier markers.

There were two buildings associated with the new airstrip: A "T" hangar was built to house the 65 HP yellow and red two seat Aeronca Champ.

The hangar construction plan came from a magazine article. The hangar was constructed from boards and timbers sawed at his

saw mill, using logs that had been harvested from his wood lots. The second building was an aging chicken coop dragged, on site by a farm tractor. The chicken coop was jacked up, painted, and a large plate glass window was installed on the side facing the airstrip. Linoleum was spread on the floor and the administration building without running water was ready for its unstable desk and a few used chairs.



Worcester Cemetery and air strip under construction 1946

Out side the administration building entrance door an aviation gas tank was buried and a gas pump was set up. Beyond the pump on the grass, six dirt anchors with ropes were set in the ground. These anchors served as tie downs for visiting airplanes. Earl later acquired a second airplane. It was an alminum clad Cessna model 140 with a 120 HP motor. The final step, after hiring airport manager/certified flight instructor, John Culver, was getting the necessary approvals to operate a flight school. The students included local WWII veterans, from neighboring communities, who learned to fly under the GI Bill of Rights program. The flight school was in operation for a several years.

In the 1950's, Earl purchased a large number of woodworking machines from Danville Green Lumber Company. They consisted of a 22" bed board planner, and a large collection of industrial saws. He produced toy cross bows, snow scooters, and wooden cutting boards, none of which were widely marketed. The toy cross bows, however, were capable of breaking windows.



Earl with 1946 Cessna

In 1955 his long time manager, Arthur Perry retired. Life was never the same for Earl after that as Arthur had been at his side for 25 years providing wisdom, support, and hard work. Art had health issues and the long daily commute from his home in Barre was taking a toll on him.

Earl's last major business enterprise was not in Worcester. He found his way to Newfoundland where he purchased a 33% interest in a whaling/fishing and processing operation called Arctic Fisheries Products Ltd. He was involved in the management as president of this company for

several years. He also purchased whale meat and fish by- products for Maxham Supply Company. Trinity Mink Ranch Ltd. was a second Newfoundland enterprise in which Earl had a 50% interest ownership. He sent mink to Newfoundland from Vermont and together he and his

partner operated the mink farm,nearby, but independent from Arctic Fisheries Ltd. The Newfoundland mink farm was operated for 12 years.

In 1960 Earl retired from an active business schedule His retirement was spent between Vermont and Florida He spent time consulting on the operating business with me and he spent times trimming trees in his Christmas tree plantation. He devoted much time to his four grand children, Arthur, James, Cheri, and Christopher.



Earl moose hunting in Newfoundland

David and Joan Maxham are the parents of Arthur and James. David and Joan were divorced in 1984. David is now married to Maida Maxham. Priscilla and Fred Wooters are the parents of Cheri and Christopher. Fred and Priscilla were divorced in 1990 and Priscilla died in 2006.

Earl died in Melbourne, Florida on March 21, 1971. He was 76.

Blanche died in Fort Myers, Florida on April 29, 2009. She was 106.



Blanche, Earl, Cilla , Donald c.Early 1950's