

# Kief farm barn collapses

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**BAR HARBOR** — The barn of a Civil War-era farmhouse collapsed here last week, likely due to heavy snow. The farm was owned and operated for many years by the Kief family, who were dairy farmers.

The barn was connected to the rest of the farmhouse, but the wall that connects the two is still standing. The collapse did not affect the rest of the house, according to the current property owner. The house could be razed later this year.

John Thomas built the farmhouse in 1856 with his enlistment money from the military. His wife, Myra Thomas, was the mother of the Kief family matriarch, Tullia.

Four Foot Farm LLC, headed by Jay McNally of Bar Harbor, has owned the property at 1162 Route 3 since 2008, when it was purchased for \$275,000 from Christopher Gallagher, who married into the Kief family.



IMAGE COURTESY OF JOHN CLARK

*Percy Kief poses with his son Lawrence in front of a Chevrolet delivery truck in 1931.*

The Kief and Gallagher families merged at the 1939 wedding of Flora Kief and Gallagher, then of Buffalo, N.Y.

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ISLANDER PHOTO BY SAMUEL SHEPHERD

*A heavy snowstorm brought down the barn of a historic farmhouse built before the Civil War.*

Flora Kief, one of Percy Kief's two daughters, worked at The Criterion Theatre, according to *The Bar Harbor Times* archives. She reportedly met and was courted by Gallagher during her time as a ticket attendant.

John Clark of Bar Harbor, who collects antique milk bottles and studies local history, said Percy Kief peddled dairy produced at the farmhouse and at the King Farm near Northeast Creek under the name "Pine Tree Milk," reportedly named after the lone pine tree on the property.

Pine Tree Milk was part of an island dairy co-op called "Mount Desert Island Dairies." Documents show Percy Kief and one of his three sons, John, owning one-eighth of the shares in the co-op, purchased for \$2,500.

MDI Dairies bottles feature the profile of a Native American wearing a headdress. Advertisements for the Pine Tree Milk promised to give babies "strong bones and teeth, rosy cheeks and a little roly-poly body."

*The Bar Harbor Times* discussed the growth of the Kief farm in a June 1931 report about the installation a state-of-the-art pasteurization plant.

"Percy H. Kief has installed a new Pleaudier Pasteurization plant of 100-gallon capacity at his farm, preparatory to giving his customers the best service

possible," the story reads.

Also that year, Percy Kief purchased a Chevrolet truck to deliver milk, which the *Times* said made the farm "entirely modern." He expected record business with the innovations.

Percy Kief died in 1962 after a long illness. Tullia Kief, his widow, tended to the farm until her death in 1980. Suzette Noyes, a cousin of the Kief family, said she visited Tullia Kief at the farm during the summer.

"She was tough as nails," Noyes said. "They were farmers raising kids back then. You had to make ends meet, and that woman could do it."

Noyes, a blueberry farmer from Franklin, said she was heartbroken when she heard the barn collapsed.

"That was like the nucleus for the whole family," she said. "It was a part of all of us."

Kathy Kief, granddaughter of Percy and Tullia Kief, said her grandmother had a parrot named "Polly" that terrorized visitors. She recalled that an oil delivery man was alarmed to hear a voice claiming there was a fire in the house only to find Tullia Kief sitting calmly

with the parrot. She also said the parrot knew hymns because her grandmother wanted to erase swear words it had learned from prior owners.

Another grandchild of Tullia Kief, Don Gallagher, told the *Islander* that his grandmother had a pet spider monkey.

Kathy Kief, a lifelong Bar Harbor resident, said her grandparents were the root of their family's high work ethic.

"He was a worker, and he gave to whoever needed," she said. "When the Fire of '47 happened, he took in the people's cows and got people from all over to milk them."

The future of the farmhouse looks grim. McNally said that

the building was in poor condition when he acquired it.

"The house had also been empty and unheated for several years, so there was a lot of mold inside," McNally said Monday. "I've had a number of contractors look at what it would take to restore or renovate it, but it wasn't salvageable."

"I did some work to shore up the structure, but without extensive structural work, this could only be temporary," McNally added. "My guess is that it will need to come down now that the barn is gone, but I'll need to have a look once the snow is gone."