

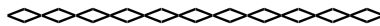
## PHILIP EVERETT CURTISS III (1885-1964)

Novelist, Short Story Writer, Newspaper Reporter, Politician, Judge



**Philip Curtiss, Age 30 - Norfolk, CT - 1915**

**Promising Young Author at Ease at the Family Homestead on Mountain Road**



### ***Cupid Draws Back His Bow...***

A little over a year after the striking photograph above appeared in the April, 1915 edition of *American Magazine* promoting the serialization of his new novel, *Between Two Worlds*, Philip Curtiss received a phone call from an old acquaintance. Mrs. Jean Baldwin, a Norfolk woman of considerable standing whom Curtiss called 'an incurable hostess', was detained in New York. She asked Curtiss if he would be kind enough to fetch a young woman at the train station and take her to the Baldwin's Norfolk 'bungalow' where she was to be Mrs. Baldwin's guest for a few weeks of rest and relaxation in the country. She implored Curtiss to be "as nice as possible to her", to which Curtiss gallantly replied that he would do his best.

### ***And Lets His Arrow Go\****

\*With apologies to the late, great **Sam Cooke...**



***Cupid Standing on a Dolphin* - Girolamo Scarselli - Etching, c. 1670  
Baltimore Museum of Art**

Indeed, Curtiss outdid himself. Just four days after their serendipitous meeting at the train station on that spring Monday evening 107 years ago, Philip Curtiss and Mrs. Baldwin's mystery guest were married on June 16, 1916 in Hartford, CT. The very next day *The Hartford Courant* editors considered the surprise wedding newsworthy enough to breathlessly feature it on their front page:

Hartford Author Has  
Four-Day Romance



CAPTAIN PHILIP E. CURTISS.

**PHILIP E. CURTISS,  
AUTHOR, MARRIED**

Four-Day Romance in Nor-  
folk, to Hartford by  
Auto, and Marriage.

WIFE PLAYED WITH  
MISS SANDERSON.

She Was Miss Knust, Known  
to Stage as Phyllis  
Maude, Sister of  
Valli Valli.

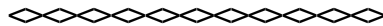


**A Romance Most Rapid**

According to *The Courant*, the marriage was “the culmination of as rapid a romance as any Captain Curtiss has ever written”. The ceremony was held at 2:30 in the afternoon at Hartford’s Asylum Hill Congregational Church with only Philip Curtiss’s parents serving as witnesses. Continued *The Courant*, “even the bridegroom’s closest friends had no knowledge that Captain Curtiss, who is well known as a writer of stories in which Cupid does not play an altogether insignificant part, had in mind playing a leading role in a love drama himself. He was considered a charter member of the bachelor’s club and to be wedded to his art, which has proved a congenial consort.”



**Asylum Hill Congregational Church, Hartford, CT  
Patrick Keely, 1865**



### **The English Actress**

Who could this enigmatic enchantress have been, who so readily captured the heart of such a staid, bookish New England bachelor? The blushing bride turned out to be **Maude Ida Frederica Knust**, an English stage actress better known in theatrical circles as **Phyllis Maude** or **Ida Valli**. Maude was one of three well-known actress sisters born in Berlin, Germany who, on their mother's side, were descended from an old, established English family. The sisters were educated in Paris and spent most of their lives in England, each achieving their own measure of success on the stages of London - in particular, the oldest sister **Valli Valli**, whose beauty and level of stardom outweighed that of her two younger sisters.

Maude had been in the United States for 18 months performing in a various plays until fate came calling at the train station on that June evening in Norfolk. Ten days before the soon-to-be

love struck couple met, Maude finished a six-month run of **Sybil**, a 3-act musical, at the **Liberty Theater** on 42nd St. in Manhattan, starring in the lead role as *Sybil Renaud, Opera Singer*.



**Maude Ida Knust Valli (1892-1965), age 19**  
**National Portrait Gallery, London**  
**Photographed at Bassano Studios, London - 1911**

Concluded the *Hartford Courant*. "The marriage became known in Norfolk yesterday afternoon and from the 'breeze' it created, it is sure to be the sensation of the summer season".

### **Honeymoon in Waterbury**

Shortly after the wedding ceremony, the capricious couple left by motorcar for Waterbury, CT, 30 miles away, and checked into the **Elton Hotel** to begin what would prove to be a most felicitous 48-year marriage. At the Elton, writer Philip Curtiss was in good literary company. **F. Scott Fitzgerald** once stayed there, as would **James Thurber** when he wrote *The Secret Life of Walter Mitty* in 1939.



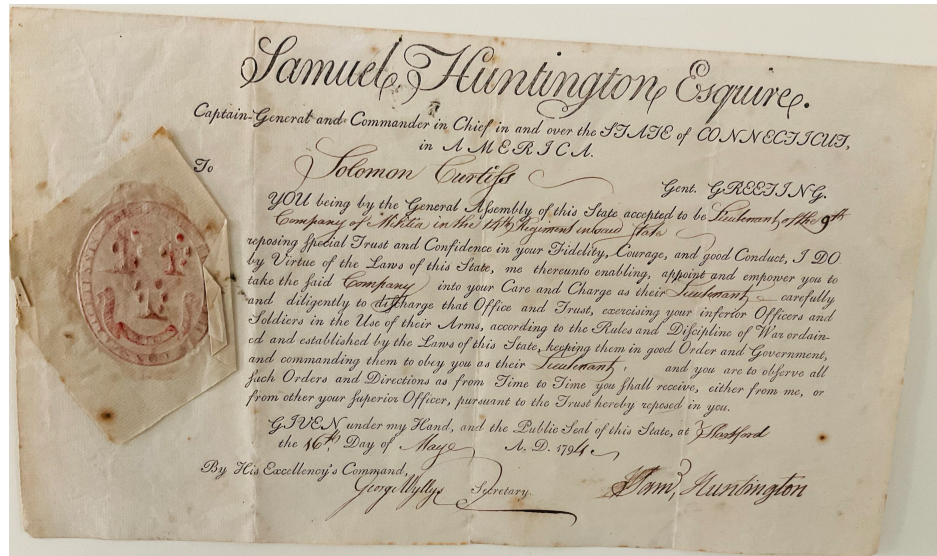
**The Elton Hotel, Waterbury, CT**  
**“The Most Attractive Hotel in New England”**  
**Wilfred E. Griggs, 1904**

On Sunday, two days after the wedding, Captain Curtiss was ordered back to his Connecticut National Guard regiment and deployed to the southern border of Arizona where, during the Mexican Revolution (1910-1920), **Pancho Villa** was making unwarranted forays onto American soil. Mused Philip Curtiss about his marriage upon his return from Arizona in October: “We were in the unique position of having been married for four months to someone whom we had seen for only a few days in our whole lives.” Before Curtiss boarded the train in Arizona bound for Connecticut, his fellow soldiers in the National Guard teasingly took out bets as to whether he would recognize his bride when he arrived at the train station back in Connecticut. That he did! Their impulsive wedding and the rekindling of their whirlwind romance months later, could well have been scripted in a novel (or performed in a play).

### **Six Curtiss Generations in Norfolk**

**Philip Everett Curtiss III** was born at home on Washington Street in Hartford, CT on April 10, 1885. His great-great-great grandfather, **Captain Zebulon Curtiss** bought land on the west side of Torrington, CT in 1739 and moved there with his family from Farmington, CT. Zebulon’s son, **Thomas Curtiss** (b. 1739 in Farmington) moved north to rugged Norfolk in 1763 only five years after the remote township was incorporated in 1758. Thomas carried on the name of his ancestor Thomas Curtis (note the single ‘s’), born in 1598 in England, who settled in Wethersfield, CT before 1640, where he became a doctor and ‘a man of reputation and considerable estate’.

Thomas Curtiss was a storied **Minuteman**, one of 24 Norfolk volunteers who answered the call to fight the British in the aftermath of the *Battles of Lexington and Concord* in April of 1775. Thomas later became a member of the Connecticut Militia only to die of smallpox in Stillwater, NY near Saratoga, leaving his wife Martha (Cowles) Curtiss with five children. Within a year of her husband's death, Martha remarried. In 1777 her son **Solomon**, age 14, one of her children by Thomas Curtiss, took her new husband's place in the Connecticut militia as an ensign and rose to be a lieutenant in the Continental Army after serving in Captain Abel Pettibone's company at Peekskill, NY



**Original Governor Samuel Huntington Document Commissioning Solomon Curtiss as a Lieutenant in the Connecticut Militia's 14th Regiment - May 16, 1794**  
(Courtesy of The Norfolk Historical Society)

On August 13, 1783, two weeks before the signing of the *Treaty of Paris* officially ended the Revolutionary War, Solomon married **Huldah Aiken** who was born in 1763 and raised in the **Henry Aiken, Jr. House** (1762) which still stands above the bend on Sunset Ridge in Norfolk and is now owned by NCC member, **Justin Vagliano**. Curiously enough, just six months after the wedding, their first child, Anna, was born on February 24, 1794. In the spring of that year, Huldah and Thomas bought the dower rights to land owned by the widow of Ebenezer Field at the base of Canaan Mountain, just down the road from Huldah's childhood home. After clearing the land, Solomon began building the classic center chimney house which still stands with unassuming dignity on the northeast corner of Mountain Road and Sunset Ridge 'exactly one wagon wheel mile from the meeting house' and where 'a pleasant valley tunneled toward the village'. This wonderfully intact colonial house was recently purchased and meticulously restored by NCC members, **Alison Brown** and **John Nathanson**.



**The Solomon Curtiss House, 1794 - Mountain Road, Norfolk, CT**

In 1793, Solomon Curtiss became Norfolk's town constable following in his father Thomas's footsteps who was Norfolk's first town constable in 1775. Three years later, Solomon died suddenly at the age of 33 leaving Huldah with her new house and six children to raise. Huldah never remarried but her children helped her turn the Curtiss homestead into the sustainable, 400-acre working farm it would become for the next 100 years - until the family began taking in boarders when Norfolk flourished as a destination for 'summer people' in the the late 18 and early 1900s.

One of Huldah and Solomon's sons, Thomas Curtiss married Maria Electa Pettibone in 1813 (the year he was appointed town constable, carrying on the family tradition). Their son, the first in the family to be named Philip Everett Curtiss, was born in on the farm in 1824. He married Sarah Salome Camp and they named one of their sons, born in 1853, Philip Everett Curtiss, junior, who was the father of Philip Everett Curtiss III, the subject of this Profile. (*whew!*)



## Philip Everett Curtiss II (aka Everett Philip Curtiss) (1853-1946)

**Philip Everett Curtiss II** took the initiative of transposing his first and middle names to **Everett Philip** so as not to be confused with his father. The differentiation was emblematic of a man who seems to have been an outlier who wanted no part of spending the rest of his life on the family farm.

After Everett Philip Curtiss graduated from **The Norfolk Academy** which was then housed in what is now **The Norfolk Historical Society** on the Village Green, he became a teacher at a one-room schoolhouse near Wangum Lake, Norfolk's water reservoir. At the time there was a significant colony of Norfolk residents living in the area, many of whom were African-Americans.

In 1880, Everett Philip married **Olive Collins Welch** (whom he'd met at the Norfolk Academy), the daughter of **John Hopestill Welch**, the youngest of **Dr. Benjamin Welch's** five sons, all born in Norfolk - each of whom became prominent physicians in their own right. John Hopestill Welch was the brother of Dr. William Wickham Welch whose son **William Henry Welch** was one of the four founding professors of *The Johns Hopkins Hospital* in Baltimore. Known as the *Dean of American Medicine*, Dr. Welch appeared on the cover of *Time Magazine* on April 14, 1930. After his mother had become ill, William grew up with his cousin Olive in her parents house in Hartford. Philip Curtiss III was William Henry Welch's 1st cousin, once removed.



**'The Four Doctors' - John Singer Sargent, 1906**  
**William Henry Welch, Philip Curtiss III's First Cousin, Seated at Left**

After their wedding in Hartford, Olive and Everett Philip moved to Plainfield, NJ where they opened a hardware store and in 1882 had their first child, a daughter named Elizabeth. A few years later, they moved to Hartford where their son Philip Everett III was born in 1885. Everett Philip became a partner in a successful knitting factory called **Hotchkiss and Curtiss** which manufactured mittens, gloves and scarves. Years before, Olive's father, Dr. John Hopestill Welch had moved the family from Norfolk to Hartford to become medical director for *The Mutual Benefit Life Insurance Company*. In Norfolk, he was a founder of the Norfolk and New Brunswick Hosiery Company which may explain how Everett Philip got involved in the knitting business. John Hopestill Welch's family lived across the street from Mark Twain's house which is now a museum on Farmington Avenue. Olive was a frequent visitor at the Twain house and had many literary friends, perhaps foreshadowing her son's proclivity for writing and the arts.

**'Hartford, The Richest City in America' - Scribner's Magazine, 1876**



**City Seal, Hartford, Connecticut**  
**'After Clouds, Sunshine'**

When Philip Everett Curtiss III was coming of age in Hartford in the late 19th century, Hartford's fortunes were at their zenith. It was heralded as 'the insurance capital of the world' - a thriving city with scores of beautifully ornate municipal buildings, museums, office buildings, department stores, etc. Today, due to white flight, highway construction and urban renewal, this once great city is a shadow of itself. There are still over one hundred insurance companies in Hartford but its glory days as a powerful American city are long gone.

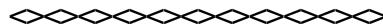
Philip Everett Curtiss III grew up in comfortable surroundings on Washington Street in Hartford which then was called 'Governors Row' not only because **Governor Morgan Gardner Bulkeley** lived in a mansion on the street, but because it was then an enclave of grand houses owned by Hartford's upper crust. Over the years, the neighborhood and all its superb houses were demolished and replaced by a strip of car dealerships.

In 1902 Curtiss graduated from **Hartford Public High School** (founded in 1638), the second oldest secondary school in the United States after **Boston Latin School** (1635). In Philip Curtiss's time Hartford Public was considered to be one of the premier college preparatory

schools in the country. Its significance and preeminence can be ascertained in the post card shown below of its formidable main campus building designed in 1883 by **George Keller**, architect of **The Norfolk Library** (1888). This impressive building which was representative and reflective of the importance of secondary education in that era, was torn down in the 1960s to make way for Interstate 84.



**Hartford Public High School - George Keller, 1883**



### **Trinity College, Hartford**

Evidently not wanting to stray too far from home (he lived with his parents until he was 30) Curtiss, after graduating from Hartford Public in 1902, enrolled at **Trinity College**. Back then, before all the highways were built through downtown Hartford, Curtiss could walk to Trinity's campus on Gallows Hill in about ten minutes.

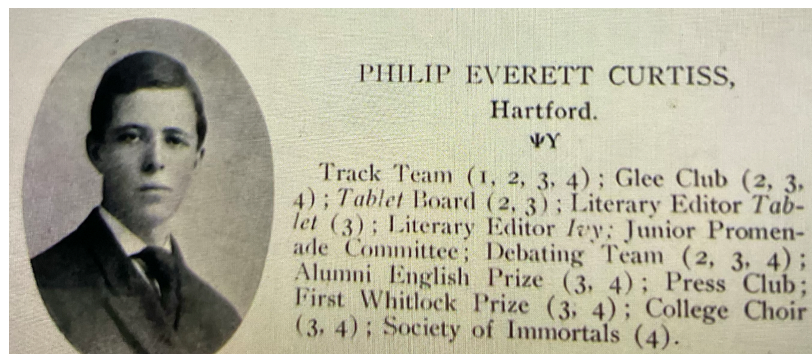
Founded in 1823 and originally named Washington College, Trinity is after Yale University (1701), the second oldest college in Connecticut and today is a highly highly regarded, selective liberal arts college, as evidenced by at least two NCC members who graduated from Trinity: **Lucy Mookerjee** and **Mark Leavitt**.



***The Long Walk, Trinity College***  
**William Burgess and Francis Hatch Kimball, architects - completed 1883**

Philip Curtiss was a member of *Psi Epsilon* at Trinity and graduated near the top of his class in 1906. He wrote the senior class play and was awarded the prestigious *Mary A. Terry Fellowship* entitling him to spend a year in Europe where he studied at **The University of Madrid** (founded in 1293) in Spain and at **The Sorbonne** (founded in 1257) in Paris. He also spent considerable time touring North Africa where he came down with typhoid fever, prompting his mother Olive to board an ocean liner to travel to the bedside of her only son.

**Philip Everett Curtiss, Trinity College Yearbook - 1906**



## **Newspaperman, Soldier, Press Agent - Man About Town**

At Trinity, Curtiss was literary editor of the school newspaper, *The Tablet* and the 1906 yearbook, *The Ivy*. When he returned from studying in Europe he was hired as a reporter for *The Hartford Courant*. After a year at *The Courant* he worked as a police and superior court reporter for the *Hartford Times*, which proved to be a stimulating, rewarding post-graduate education. Curtiss found himself immersed in every colorful and seamy aspect of modern city life in Hartford in the early years of the 20th century. According to Curtiss, he, “got to see behind the curtain of everything from prize fights to grand opera; went to art exhibits to criticize paintings and to vaudeville dressing rooms to interview comedians, acrobats and show girls; he saw prisoners hanged and covered more than 200 divorce cases in Hartford’s higher courts”.

While making his name in the newspaper business, Curtiss was hired as a press agent for *The Grand Circuit*, the ‘Big Wheel of Harness Racing’, a sport that was wildly popular in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Thus began, for Curtiss “a love of show business in every form”.

In 1910, Curtiss enlisted in the Connecticut National Guard and was stationed at the Arizona border at the beginning of the Mexican Revolution. By the time he mustered out not long after his marriage to Maude in 1916, he had achieved the rank of Captain.



**Captain Philip Curtiss - Connecticut National Guard, c. 1915**

## Literary Life in the Country

When Philip Curtiss married Maude Ida Valli in June of 1916, he was already a published novelist and short story writer. The year before, Harper & Brothers published his first novel, *The Ladder, the Story of a Casual Man*; and, after its serialization in *American Magazine*, Harper released his second novel, *Between Two Worlds* in 1916. He was living a fulfilling, successful life in the thick of things in Hartford, but his dream had always been to devote his life to writing fiction full time, not 'on the side'. After paying all his debts in Hartford he had \$100 in his pocket when he moved permanently to Norfolk. In a later magazine essay called *Never Settle Down for a Soft Soap*, he wrote, "at almost 30 and out of comparative affluence, I sentenced myself to poverty - and I got it. Then came the period of struggle from hand to mouth which I should have had long before."

Conveniently, Curtiss's father had recently inherited the Curtiss family homestead in Norfolk and moved there from Hartford to retire with his wife Olive, who had become an invalid due to a sleighing accident. The elder Curtiss fixed up the adjoining 19th century 'farmhand's house' called the 'Sunset Ridge House' to accommodate his wife's weakening condition and offered the main house, *The Solomon Curtiss House*, to his son. It was an opportune time for Philip to take his leap of faith and move to the family homestead on Mountain Road where he could pursue his dream of writing fiction full time.

When Curtiss visited his Norfolk relatives as a boy in the late 1800s, the Curtiss Farm still had 5 barns, 3 hen houses, a sheep barn, an ice house, 30 head of belted oxen and a flock of over 100 sheep which they pastured on what are now the fairways and greens of the Norfolk Country Club.



**Curtiss Family at the Solomon Curtiss Homestead - 1891**  
**Philip Everett Curtiss III, foreground - age 6**

But when Philip moved in around 1915, the days of its being a working farm were over and they were no longer taking in summer boarders, the 'cash crop from the cities'. His father sold off a big parcel of the land across the street and Philip gradually modernized the old farmhouse, starting with an indoor bathroom in 1916 followed by the installation of central heating in 1920.

Philip Curtiss was living in Norfolk, the life he always dreamed of, devoting his career to writing fiction and raising with his wife (everyone called her Maudie) their two daughters, both of whom were homeschooled because Philip Curtiss believed they could learn all they needed from reading books.

Their first daughter, **Joan Valli Curtiss** (1917-1981) was a photographer and reporter for the *Lakeville Journal* who lived with her parents until they died a year apart in the mid-1960s. Around the time her parents died Joan, at age 48, married **William Hurd** (1912-1986), a graduate of Williams College and Columbia Law School who was said to have a 'lock' on Doolittle Lake real estate. An avid golfer, Bill Hurd was playing alongside **Larry Hannafin** when Larry set the NCC course record in 1974 with a 7-under par 65.

The Curtiss's younger daughter **Ann Curtiss** (1919-2014), at the age of 17 married Herbert (Pete) Scoville a senior at Yale, who went on to become deputy director of the CIA. Ann was a precocious artist who studied with well-known painter, art critic and teacher, **Guy Pène DuBois** and exhibited one of her early paintings when she was 15 years old at the prestigious art exhibit, **Varnishing Day**, held at the Norfolk Country Club in 1935. Ann Curtiss Scoville had a successful career as a figurative painter and as a sculptor of large, welded steel figures. She died at her baronial 1927 'French Normandy Castle' in Taconic, CT in 2014.



**Winter Fun on the Farm  
Maudie, Philip, Joan and Ann Curtiss - 1920s**



## **A Ten-Year Creative Flurry**

In a burst of creative energy lasting a decade, Philip Curtiss wrote and published six novels and well over 100 short stories and essays in popular magazines of the era. He wrote his first novel, *The Ladder, the Story of a Casual Man*, while he was still living in Hartford and part-timing in Norfolk. Published by *Harper & Brothers* in 1914 when Curtiss was 29, *The Ladder* is a typical coming-of-age first novel which examines the deep-seated disparities between country living and city life. The following passage is a youthful paean to the Norfolk landscape Curtiss loved. It could have been written from no other vantage point than the Curtiss farm on Mountain Road:

*“ From an artistic point of view the landscape which I had to survey was a highly commendable one. A deep circle of mild blue hills reached clear around the knoll on which stood our farm, while farther away and above them rose the lighter blue of the mountains, a blue so faint that on clear days the mountains could hardly be distinguished from clouds and on misty days they couldn’t be seen at all. To the west the immediate hills were covered with woods... but to the east lay meadows and pastures surrounding the little village of Babel [Norfolk], beyond which the hills rose again, this time divided by straggling stone walls into a checkerboard of fields, plowed and unplowed, each one of which reflected a different color as it mounted up to the skyline, although the time of year had not yet arrived when the fields of rye would show a richer green than the fields of grass, the fields of grass a brighter shade than the fields of wheat, and all three a fresher tone than the dull brown of the upland pastures.”*

In due, prolific course, Curtiss published:

***The Ladder, the Story of a Casual Man - 1915***

***Between Two Worlds - 1916***

***Crater’s Gold - 1919***

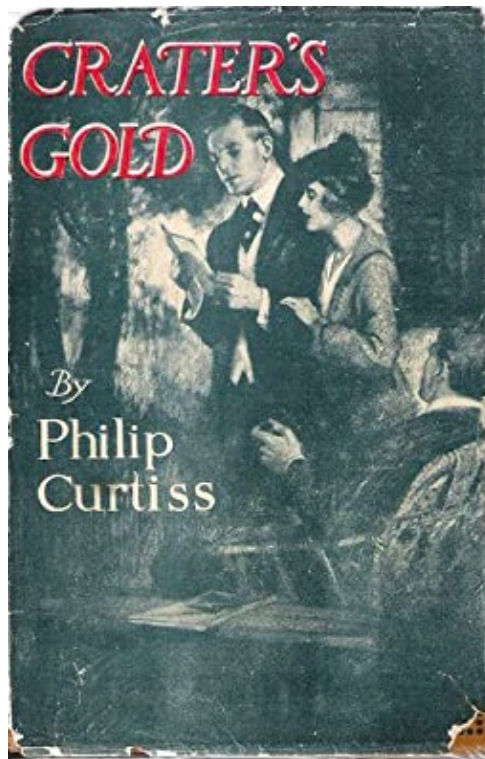
***Wanted, a Fool - 1920***

***Mummers in Mufti - 1922***

***The Mysterious Mr. Pickering (U.K. edition of Wanted, a Fool) - 1921***

***The Gay Conspirators - 1924***





**Crater's Gold Book Jacket - 1919**

All of Curtiss's novels were well-received and favorably reviewed. His first book, *The Ladder*, was chosen by *The New York World* newspaper in 1915 as one of the two best novels of the year: "one of the most mature, graceful, charmingly written stories I have ever seen authored as the first book of a new novelist. Like *The Turmoil* (Booth Tarkington), it is the study of contemporaneous American life, handled naturally and without the forcing of false situations".

Curtiss never wrote a book without large helpings of romance. A 'whimsically humorous' writer, he was described in *Who's Who Among North America Authors* (1929) as an author "of general character writing, novels of village life, and light comedies or burlesques in mystery style". Intertwined in all his romances were his major themes: show business, social distinctions and the ever-intriguing contrasts between rural and urban life. [*All of Curtiss's novels are available at The Norfolk Library and from Amazon; and they are downloadable on any smartphone.*]

From the beginning, Curtiss had much success getting his short stories published in important magazines such as *Harper's Monthly*, *The Atlantic*, *The Saturday Evening Post*, etc. Curtiss's stories and essays were thoughtfully rendered, laden with his arch observations on people and society in the early 20th Century. He also had a knack for attention-grabbing titles such as: *The Crocodile's Half-sister*, *The Holy Roman Emperor of the Bronx*, *The Postmaster General of Mindanao*, *The Boncombe of the Bridge Table*, *Music the Last Resort of the Stupid*, *the Fancy Skater of Melonmerange*, *The Survival of the Cutest*, *Princes and Plumbers*, *The Waving Palm* and *The Blue Lagoon*, *The Twilight of the Businesswoman*, *The Mucker Pose*, etc.

Curtiss describes *The Mucker Pose* (Harper's Monthly, 1921) as "that curious state of mind which induces well-bred, intelligent people to disclaim superciliously any refinement, education or natural good taste which heredity or opportunity may have given them, and to set themselves deliberately to worship the coarse or commonplace. The mucker pose is the antonym of the

'highbrow' pose. It is the 'I-am-a-plain-blunt-man' sort of boast when used by a person who really is neither plain nor blunt." Click [here](#) to read the article.

NCC golfers will no doubt relate to Curtiss's diverting story, *The Elixir of Lies*, which pointedly describes the exasperation and mental anguish which so often accompanies playing golf - the hardest game there is (just ask basketball legend, **Michael Jordan**).

### ***The Elixir of Lies* (Page 1) - Scribner's Magazine, October, 1925**



With forced deliberation he measured his distance, addressed his ball.—Page 375.

## The Elixir of Lies

BY PHILIP CURTISS

ILLUSTRATIONS BY J. H. FIFE



THE annual tournament of the Heath Hills Golf Club reached its high point about eleven o'clock in the morning. At that hour, on qualifying day, the first tee, roped off like a prize ring, was surrounded, three and four deep, by waiting contestants. The secretary, important as a train-starter, sat at a table under a huge white score-sheet, while the terrace above was filled with a banked mass of gayly dressed spectators.

It was exactly the kind of crowd which a dour philosopher might have described as typical of "pleasure-mad America,"

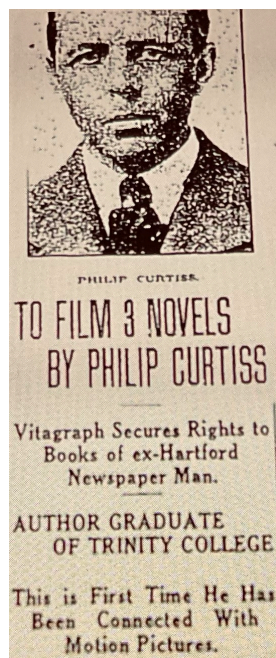
but there was one member who was certainly not pleasure-mad. Standing well back among the contestants, his sleeves rolled up and his clubs at his feet, Walter Sanders was awaiting events with about the same emotions that he might have felt in the anteroom of an old-fashioned dentist. Without hope, without heart, he asked but one thing—that he and his partner, Bob Reising, might be allowed to start their match with the least possible amount of attention, be duly qualified for the fourth, or lowest, division, and then be permitted to sink into harmless oblivion for the rest of the week.

Yes, tournament play was a tragic thing to poor Walter Sanders. He was

Curtiss himself (who realized in college that he was no athlete - though he ran track for four years), came late to golf but embraced its baffling intricacies once he took up the game. On October 12, 1924, he had a hole-in-one on the 186-yard 6th hole at the ***The Norfolk Downs***. His playing partners that day were **Florence Hinkle Witherspoon**, lead soprano at the Metropolitan Opera and **Ashton O. Oldham**, Bishop of Albany (who summered for many years at *Gould House* (1915), NCC member **Coleen Hellerman's Alfredo Taylor** house on Golf Drive).

## Judge Curtiss, Citizen of Norfolk

For undetermined reasons, Curtiss stopped writing novels after the publication of **The Gay Conspirators** in 1924. He was only 39 years old and, though he rarely went to New York, was firmly ensconced in the art and literary worlds of his day, having personal relationships with noted authors such as **Sinclair Lewis, Booth Tarkington, Julian Street, Ernest Pyle, George Barr McCutcheon**, etc. Perhaps he soured on the business of writing after three of his novels (*Between Two Worlds, Wanted, a Fool and Crater's Gold*) were bought by **Vitagraph Studios**, a major player in the silent film era. Movies of the Curtiss novels were to be shot by Harry 'Pop' Sherman who directed over 50 **Hopalong Cassidy** films, but the films were never made.



Curtiss did continue to write and publish short stories and essays in magazines for the next decade; and for several years he was local music correspondent for the *Hartford Courant* writing captivating, in-depth articles on the then world-renowned *Norfolk Music Festival*. In compelling narratives, he covered major musical events at *The Music Shed* such as the debut of **Jean Sibelius's** tone poem, *Oceanides* in 1914 and the heralded appearances of brilliant Russian composer/pianist **Sergei Rachmaninoff**.

To make ends meet, Curtiss periodically took temporary jobs in advertising and public relations in Hartford. He was also on the board of organizations such as the Hartford Manufacturer's Association but mostly, he turned his attentions to living a full life in Norfolk. He was secretary of the Norfolk Country Club and was considered to be one of the most sought-after speakers and congenial masters' of ceremony at many local club and civic organization celebrations.



*Philip Curtiss awards the prizes at the end of the Labor Day Tournament*

### **Philip Curtiss Presides at Norfolk Downs Awards Ceremony - c. 1925**

In 1940, Curtiss ran successfully for state representative and served in the Connecticut State Legislature from 1941 to 1947 - but he lost his bid for lieutenant governor in 1946. From 1940 to 1955, he was a highly-respected presence in Norfolk in his role as trial justice. Affectionately known as **Judge Curtiss** (though he wasn't a lawyer), he held court at Norfolk's Town Hall adjudicating cases of drunk driving, 'jack light' hunting, breaking and entering, juvenile delinquency, etc., meting out fines and sentences with sage, benevolent justice to recalcitrant local citizens.

Maudie was a successful real estate agent who was elected to head the Norfolk Tax Review Board; and both Curtiss's were very involved in local charities, often chairing cancer and heart fund drives.

They were longtime, dedicated and jolly members of the Norfolk Country Club. In 1917, after all the furniture was stolen from the new NCC Clubhouse, Maudie created a variety show to raise money to replace all the furniture. And over the years, Maudie directed and performed in several hilarious plays and musicals staged annually in the Clubhouse by NCC members.



**Maudie and Phil Curtiss Live It Up at The Norfolk CC - early 1960s**

Maudie and Phil Curtiss died a year apart, he in 1964 (age 79) and she in 1965 (age 73). They are buried in a Curtiss family plot in Norfolk's Center Cemetery beneath a large, flat stepping stone inscribed with their names that for generations was a welcoming presence outside the back door entry of The Solomon Curtiss House.



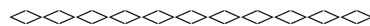
**The Curtiss Family Obelisk - Center Cemetery, Norfolk, CT**

Except for five members who live on Golf Drive (and they know who they are), all NCC members must drive past **The Solomon Curtiss House** on their way to and from the Club. Each such passing offers an opportunity to observe and contemplate the simple beauty of this 18th century Norfolk landmark; and to take a moment to reflect upon the 200-plus years of Norfolk history and the generations of the Curtiss family which it so nobly represents.

**The End**

by Micheál Cummings Kelly  
Club Historian  
June 3, 2023

up next: **Ann Curtiss Scoville**



### **Dedication**

This 10th edition of *Members to Remember* is dedicated to NCC member, **Bill Brown**, who died unexpectedly in Turks & Caicos last November. Bill began his career in advertising in the Mad Men era and founded his own successful boutique ad agency, **Mezzina/Brown** in New York. In Norfolk Bill and his wife, **Jennie**, bought and became worthy stewards of two grand *Alfredo Taylor* houses on Litchfield Road: **Moss Hill** and **The Bungalow**. Bill was also actively involved in bringing life to downtown Norfolk, implementing his advertising and communication skills as a board member of the Economic Development Committee. Bill was a loyal supporter of these NCC Profiles, always one of the first to send an e-mail of encouragement and thanks when they were posted. So long, Bill. It was a pleasure knowing you. You will be missed.

## Acknowledgements

A sincere, special thank you to **Molly Scoville Fitzmaurice**, Philip Curtiss's (and Maudie's) granddaughter, who graciously and generously provided photographs, documents, magazines, family stories, etc. that were integral to putting this Profile together.

*Many thanks also to:*

- NCC member, **Barry Webber**, Executive Director of **The Norfolk Historical Society**, who was (and always is) ready to help dig into the NHS archives for relevant documents, photographs and information.

- NCC member, **Sónia Batten**, who graciously volunteered her time and expertise to help solve technical issues that were confounding the production of this Profile.

- **Ann Havemeyer, Ph.D.**, Director of *The Norfolk Library*, who had the wherewithal and patience to solve a particularly vexatious technical conundrum.

- **Richard Byrne**, Philip Curtiss's grandnephew, who grew up in the 'farmhand's' house next to the Solomon Curtiss House. Sexton of Norfolk's *Center Cemetery*, Richard gave a tour of the multi-generational Curtiss family plots while sharing engaging anecdotes and stories about his Curtiss ancestors.

- and hats off to to new Club Manager **Peter Destler**, who has hit the ground running and who, with can-do NCC member **Amy Vorenberg**, enthusiastically took on the time-consuming, tricky task of posting this Profile in a timely manner. They had the wisdom and wherewithal to recruit NCC member **Barbara "Babs" Perkins**, whose expertise with and command of the often esoteric particulars of uploading and posting these Profiles to nearly 400 NCC member-recipients, has been beyond compare.

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