

## Members of Distinction

*For over 100 years, The Norfolk Country Club has attracted more than its share of accomplished writers, artists, professionals, financiers, business people, etc. This is the first in an extended series of periodic profiles of past members who have distinguished themselves in the wider world while enjoying, as we continue to today, the seasonal gratifications and contentments of our secluded 'Club in the Country'.*

### Senator Frederic Walcott (1869-1949)

#### Businessman, Humanitarian, Statesman, Conservationist



In 1912, when Frederic Collin Walcott became a charter member of the newly-formed Norfolk Country Club, he was 43 years old and already a successful businessman and Wall Street banker. He was also half owner, with his Yale classmate and lifelong friend, Starling Winston Childs, of hundreds of acres of Norfolk land they envisioned as a flourishing, forested wildlife habitat and game preserve. By any measure Walcott's life at this time was one of achievement and attainment. Little must he have known how world events would precipitate an unexpected change in his life's trajectory.

Walcott was born in 1869 to a privileged and wealthy family in New York Mills, NY, near Utica, about 3 hours from Norfolk. His great-great grandfather, Benjamin Stuart Walcott, moved from Cumberland, Rhode Island in 1809 to establish the first cotton mills in New York State. Walcott's connection to Norfolk was forged by his mother, Emeline Alice Welch, the daughter of William

Wickham Welch, one of five Norfolk Welch's who went to Yale and became prominent physicians.



**Figure 2.** Standing on the porch of William Wickham Welch's home and office, from left to right: Frederic Walcott, his brother-in-law; William Henry Welch; Emily Sedwick Welch, his stepmother; William Wickham Welch, his father; and Emeline Walcott, his sister. Seated are the Walcott children. Reprinted with permission from the Norfolk Historical Museum.

**Frederic Walcott (seated, center) With Family On  
Dr. William Wickham Welch's Norfolk Porch, circa 1889**

Walcott received a 'thoroughly classical' education at Lawrenceville (NJ) School and Phillips (Exeter) Academy in Andover, MA before matriculating at Yale where, along with Starling Childs, he was a member of Skull and Bones and Psi Epsilon Fraternity. After graduating from Yale in 1891, Walcott went, with a cousin, on a world tour for a year, the beginning of a lifelong passion for traveling to exotic, far-flung destinations. Upon his return he settled down to learn every aspect of the manufacture of cotton cloth from the bottom up and by 1905 he succeeded his father as president of the Walcott/Campbell Spinning Company.



**Walcott/Campbell Mill - New York Mills, NY**

On Valentine's Day, 1899 at St. Bartholomew's Church in New York, he married Frances Dana Archbold, the daughter of John D. Rockefeller's partner at Standard Oil, John Dustin Archbold. On their honeymoon in Yokohama, Japan, Frances contracted a fever and died just four months after their marriage.

In 1907, Walcott's college friend, Starling Childs, an attorney at the international investment bank, William Bonbright & Co. in New York encouraged him to get into the banking business. Walcott disengaged himself from the family textile business and moved to New York, where his relationship with Childs and General Electric founder, Charles Albert Coffin, secured him an appointment to help rescue the Knickerbocker Trust, a large, influential banking concern which had recently failed. Following the successful reorganization of the Knickerbocker Trust, Walcott was named vice president in 1908. Subsequently, he left the Knickerbocker Trust in 1911 to become vice president at Bonbright & Co.; and in 1907 he married Mary Hussey Guthrie, scion, of a prominent family from Pittsburgh, PA, where Starling Childs happened to have been born and brought up.



**'Loans Of Liberation 1918' - Subscribe!' - Bonbright & Co. WWI Promotional Poster**

Walcott and Childs were longtime members of the Boone and Crockett Club, the oldest wildlife conservation group in the nation founded in 1887 by Teddy Roosevelt. Ardent conservationists, they began looking to acquire unspoiled land in the Adirondacks to protect and preserve from development. Due to his Norfolk ties through his mother, Walcott persuaded Childs to consider buying land in Norfolk which had been deforested for charcoal-making, an enterprise that was no longer viable. Childs was impressed with the possibilities of Norfolk's rugged terrain which in some respects resembled the Adirondacks while being much more accessible from New York.



**BOONE AND CROCKETT CLUB**  
*Fair Chase and Conservation*  
SINCE 1887

Starting in 1909, Walcott and Childs bought large tracts of abandoned land at bargain prices and, before long, they were the proud owners of over 6000 acres in Norfolk and Falls Village. Optimistically, they named their holdings Great Mountain Forest, and set about creating their imagined woodland paradise, planting an abundance of indigenous seedlings and saplings and stocking the woods and ponds with wildlife from Canada. In 1932, Edward 'Ted' Childs, son of Starling Childs and a recent graduate of Yale Forest School bought his father's interests in GMF and for six decades continued to build and grow the conservation/educational forestry model conceived by Walcott and Childs. Fully forested and teeming with wildlife GMF is recognized today as a preeminent living laboratory for the study of land conservation and forest management under the conscientious stewardship of Elisabeth and Ted Childs's children.



## GMF Logo

In 1914, World War I broke out in Europe. Though the United States stayed neutral until 1917, Americans were very much aware, through news reports, of the atrocities being committed by the Germans. In 1915, Bonbright & Co. sent Walcott to Europe to negotiate much-needed war loans from the United States to France and Italy. In moving letters home to his wife and two sons in New York, Walcott described in graphic detail every aspect of his trip. In a heart wrenching treatise called 'The Prussian System' which begins with the haunting words, '*This I Have Seen.*', Walcott describes, in harrowing specifics, the horrors of the German occupation of France, Belgium and Poland he was witnessing first hand.

While in Rome, meeting with Italian officials before heading home on December 6, 1915, Walcott "received a sudden awakening" in the form of a cable from John D. Rockefeller, asking him to represent The Rockefeller Foundation and report on the war refugee situation in German-held Belgium. The Rockefeller Foundation was prepared to donate generously to feed and clothe the Belgians but they wanted Walcott to observe the situation up close to determine just how much money and supplies they should send.

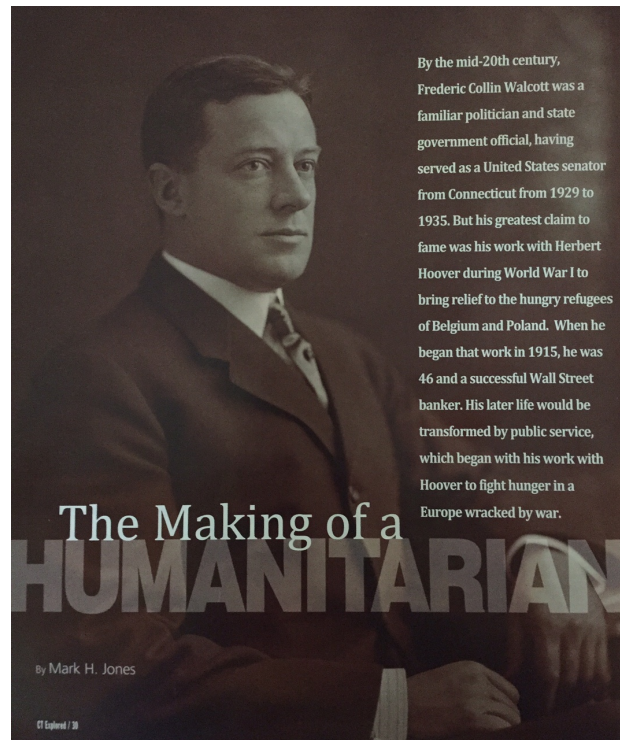


**Herbert Hoover Caricature**

Walcott was also asked by the Rockefeller Foundation to meet and evaluate 40-year old Herbert Hoover, one of wealthiest and most successful mining engineers in the world; and future President of the United States, who had organized the Commission for Relief in Belgium in 1914. Sharing a desire to perform public service and to help suffering refugees, the two Americans hit it off immediately becoming lifelong friends and political allies. After the United States declared war on Germany in April, 1917 Walcott resigned from all his positions in banking and utilities to serve without pay as Hoover's aide in the newly created United States Food Administration. In 1919 President Woodrow Wilson sent Walcott to the Paris Peace



Conference to testify as an expert witness on the European refugee crisis. Walcott was 50 years old and his life's work had shifted dramatically from capitalist pursuits to the more satisfying realms of public service. For his humanitarian work in World War I, Walcott was made a chevalier of the French Legion of Honor and decorated with the Officer's Cross by Poland.



## In His Prime

After the war, Walcott devoted more of his time to conservation and preservation of the environment. He gave lectures and published papers on game preserves and was president of the Connecticut Board of Fisheries and Game and of the American Wildlife Foundation. An avid hunter and fisherman, he was also a skilled amateur ornithologist who collected and meticulously preserved birds eggs and nests. He left his extensive ornithological collection to the Millbrook (NY) School from which his son and grandson graduated. The impressive collection is available for viewing at the school by appointment.

Walcott's warm relationship with his friend and fishing companion, Herbert Hoover, endured and led to Walcott getting involved in politics and being elected CT State Representative in 1924. In 1928, on the coattails Herbert Hoover, the new President of the United States, Walcott was elected Republican U.S. Senator from Connecticut. Walcott lost his bid for reelection in 1934 as did Hoover, who was blamed for coddling Wall Street bankers which perpetrated the catastrophic Great Depression.

For the duration of his life, Walcott continued his involvement in promoting the public good. He was Commissioner of Welfare for the state of CT from 1935-39 and on the advisory committee of the Human Welfare Group of Yale from 1920-1948. From 1941-1949 he was a regent of the Smithsonian Institute. He was a trustee of Trinity College, Connecticut College and the all African/American Bethune-Cookman University in Florida, as well as being on the directorial boards of several beneficent institutions and organizations.

Walcott also became an accomplished amateur photographer and watercolorist while spending more of his time at his beautiful 1910 home, Tristram Hall overlooking Tobey Pond, nestled in his beloved Great Mountain Forest just minutes away from The Norfolk Country Club where he was an enthusiastic, socially active member for 37 years.

Walcott died on April 27, 1949 at the age of 80 in Stamford, CT and is interred at Center Cemetery in Norfolk.

*Michael Kelly*

*NCC History Project*

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*Special thanks to Sandy Walcott, former NCC member  
and granddaughter of Frederic Walcott*

*Thanks also to Mark. H. Jones, former CT State Archivist*