

Barbara Spofford Morgan (1887-1971)

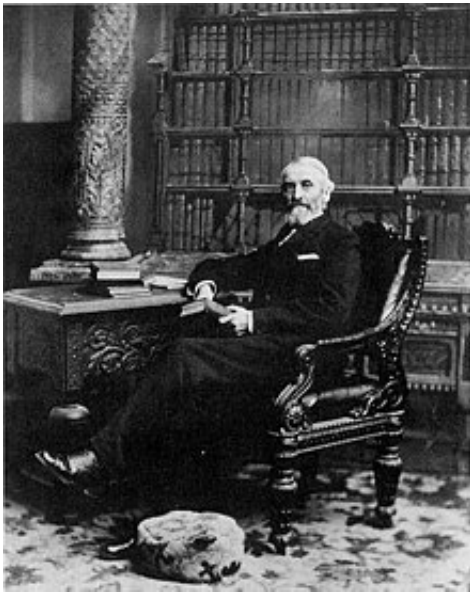
Educator, Mental Testing Pioneer, Author



Barbara Spofford Morgan - 1940s

The modern history of the United States **Library of Congress** began on December 31, 1864 when **President Abraham Lincoln** appointed **Ainsworth Rand Spofford** (Barbara Spofford Morgan's beloved grandfather), to be the country's sixth *Librarian of Congress*. Spofford, a well-regarded journalist and prolific writer (15 of his books are available on Amazon) from Cincinnati by way of New Hampshire, proceeded to transform what had been a modest reference library for use only by Congressmen into what has become a revered national institution - the largest library in the world.

By the time Ainsworth Spofford retired in 1897 after serving under ten presidents as head of the Library of Congress, he had overseen the expansion of the library's foundational 6,487 volumes, originally acquired in 1814 from Thomas Jefferson's library at Monticello, to a formidable collection of 800,000 books. It was Jefferson's ideal of *Universality* that engendered the Library of Congress's expansive, comprehensive acquisition policies that exist to this day. Three decades of Spofford's vision and persistence crystallized when the magnificent *Beaux-Arts*, **Thomas Jefferson Building** (inspired by *The Paris Opera House* (1875) opened in 1897. The heart of the Library of Congress, the Jefferson Building features **The Main Reading Room**, said to be the world's most beautiful study and research space. Today the Library of Congress houses nearly 40 million books stretching over 838 miles of bookshelves situated in three multi-generational buildings.



Ainsworth Rand Spofford (1825-1908)



**Thomas Jefferson Building, Library of Congress
Smithmeyer, Pelz and Casey - 1897**

Ainsworth Spofford's son, **Charles Ainsworth Spofford** (1853-1921), graduated from Cornell University in 1875 and began his successful business career as personal assistant to **Henry Villard**, the hard-nosed financier (think, the **Villard Houses** on Madison Avenue in New York) who made a fortune building railroads in the Pacific Northwest. Due to his association with Villard, Spofford would later become a director of the Northern Pacific Railroad, the Milwaukee Street Railway and the Crocker Wheeler Electric Motor Company. Prescient when he met inventor **Thomas Edison**, Spofford was instrumental in financially organizing the *New York Edison Company* which has since morphed into the New York energy behemoth, **Con Ed**. Testament to the tumultuous financial arena, featuring every stripe of pugnacious, rough and tumble financier and businessman in which Spofford was immersed in the economic and industrial boom of the late 1800s, is the following heading from the May 27, 1894 edition of *The New York Times*. This complex legal matter concerning millions of dollars apparently was apparently never adjudicated.

PROBING NORTHERN PACIFIC

**AN ORDER OF ARREST ISSUED FOR
CHARLES A. SPOFFORD.**

**The Former Private Secretary of
Henry Villard Declines to Obey the
Order of the United States Court—
His Counsel Will Appeal—The In-
quiry Adjourned by Master in
Ceancery Alfred L. Cary to June 4, in
Milwaukee—Witnesses Yesterday.**

In the early 1900s, Spofford was hired by several American investment companies, as their lead representative, to manage the conversion of London's Underground Railway power system from steam to electricity.



On Christmas Day 1884, Charles Ainsworth Spofford married **Ellen Marcella Boardman** (1846-1942) from South Hero, Vermont, an island in Lake Champlain; and on July 15, 1887 their only child, **Barbara Spofford**, was born in New York City. The family lived near Central Park but, because Barbara was a sickly child with breathing difficulties, the Spoffords began summering in Norfolk to expose Barbara to the pure air and related health benefits of life in the country. In the 1890s, they hired architect, **Ehrick Rossiter**, who attended Cornell University with Charles Spofford, to design a suitable 'cottage' on a knoll with a view of Haystack Mountain. The Tudor Revival estate they called **The Alders** is familiar to all today in its present iteration: **The Manor House Inn** on Maple Avenue.



***The Alders* - Ehrick Kensett Rossiter (1854-1941) architect - 1898**

Rossiter was a gifted, eclectic architect, who designed schools, libraries, churches, and other public buildings, but he is best known for his signature, grand country homes. In Washington, CT alone, Rossiter designed 25 shingle-style, estate homes or "summer cottages" (17 of which are extant), including his own home, **The Rocks**, which he began building in 1882 and finished 20 years later.

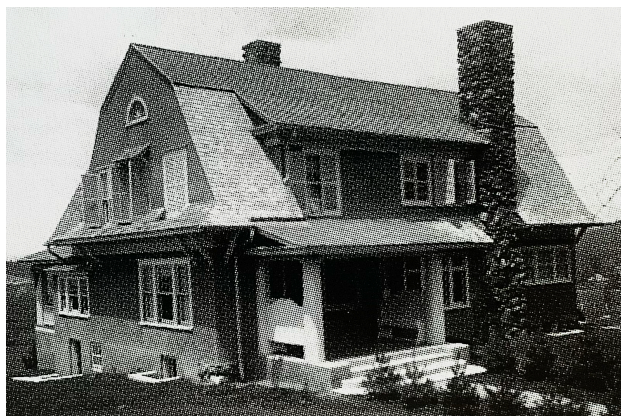


***The Rocks* - Washington, CT - Ehrick Rossiter, 1902**



In addition to *The Alders*, Rossiter was involved in the design or redesign of 16 buildings in Norfolk, including ***The Music Shed*** (1906), ***Haystack Mountain Tower*** (1929) ***Center School*** (1913) and a scattering of country houses, including ***The Terraces*** on West Side Road, now owned by NCC member **George Cronin**, ***Greycote*** (1906) on Litchfield Road owned by NCC members **Madonna Sullivan** and **Greg Kolakowski** and ***Huttlein*** (1907), next door to ***Greycote*** on Litchfield Road.

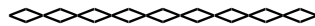
***Greycote* - Litchfield Road, 1906**



Rossiter also reimagined and redesigned the colonial home of the NCC's first president **E.H. (Edward Huntington) Fallows** on Maple Avenue, adding the Mount Vernon portico, Palladian windows and third floor sleeping porches. Fallows' house was adjacent to the NCC's original clubhouse, the **Eldridge Gymnasium** (today, Norfolk's town hall) and overlooked the NCC's tennis courts. Regrettably, the Fallows house is no longer standing.



E.H. Fallows House, Maple Avenue - c. 1914



A Close Encounter With the King and Queen of England

Barbara Spofford attended ***Miss Spence's School*** in Manhattan before enrolling at ***Wycombe Abbey*** in England when her father, Charles, was working on a business commission for the United States government. When Ellen and Charles Spofford were presented to **Queen Victoria** at the turn of the century, Barbara was too young to attend; but in 1905, at the age of 18, Barbara was "Presented at Court" to **King Edward II** and **Queen Alexandra** - at the time, the ultimate prerequisite for debutantes eager to 'come out' in British society.



Queen Alexandra (in her coronation robes)
Samuel Luke Fildes - 1902

Spofford also attended **Darmstadt University** in Germany before entering **Bryn Mawr College** in Pennsylvania where she specialized in physiology and psychology. After graduation in 1909, Spofford embarked on a world tour with her mother (some say to heal a broken heart) which included educational visits to India and Japan.



Barbara Spofford - Bryn Mawr, Class of 1909

Just out of college in 1910, Spofford at the age of 23 became director of the psychological clinic of ***The Neurological Institute of New York***, the first hospital and research center in the western hemisphere devoted solely to neurological disorders. In 1911, Spofford was featured in a full-page article in *The New York Times* titled “*Teaching Backward Children Their ABC’s by Dancing - where ordinary methods fail, Miss Barbara Spofford resorts to a novel plan of her own to instill the alphabet into youthful minds*”.



**Barbara Spofford Employing Her Innovative Teaching Methods with a ‘Backward’ Boy
New York Times photograph, April 23, 1911**



On Tuesday afternoon, February 20, 1912, Barbara Spofford married **Shepard Ashman Morgan** (1884-1968) in her parents’ apartment at 155 East 58th Street in Manhattan. Barbara, who thought that “everything west of the Hudson River was Indian territory” had accepted an invitation to a dance in Rochester, NY where, serendipitously, she met Shepard Morgan and fell in love.

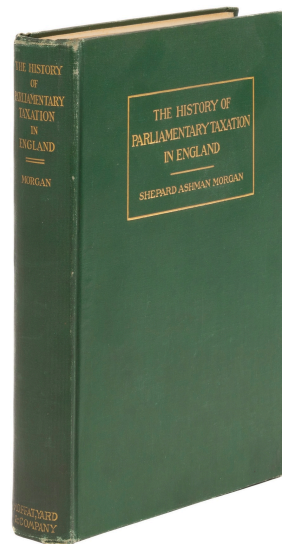


Barbara Spofford and Shepard Morgan Wedding Photographs, 1912

Shepard Morgan graduated from **Williams College** in 1906, taught political science in Williamstown for a few years and was a newspaper reporter for *The New York Sun* before making a career change to finance. On a fast track, Morgan rose rapidly and became deputy comptroller for the City of New York in 1913.

Morgan spent the rest of his career in government, business and finance: executive at The Federal Reserve Bank of New York; finance director of the Office for Reparation Payments in Berlin after World War I; director of research and analysis for the Office of Strategic Services; Chairman of the National Bureau of Economics Research; finance advisor to the American High Commissioner in Germany after World War II; and for a year in the mid-1950s, he was Regents' professor at the school of business administration at the University of California, Berkeley. Morgan was the author two books: the daunting tome, *The History of Parliamentary Taxation in England* (1911) and *Reminiscences of Shepard Ashman Morgan* (1950).

Shepard Morgan's Weighty Book



In 1914, Barbara Spofford Morgan published her seminal book, ***The Backward Child: A Study of the Psychology and Treatment of Backwardness - A Practical Manual for Teachers and Students***. The book featured a series of tests for analyzing a child's abstract mental processes - sensation, memory, attention, etc. Simplified, practicable exercises were illustrated and prescribed, targeting those mental functions in which the child was weak or insufficient.

From 1916 to 1918, Spofford Morgan lectured on mental testing at New York University, and for several years, she had a private mental testing practice in Manhattan. In 1928, when her husband Shepard became finance director of the Office for Reparation Payments in Berlin, Barbara, now 41, enrolled at **Freiderich Wilhelm University** where she earned a Doctor of Philosophy (PhD), the first American woman in Europe to do so. Her doctoral thesis was titled: *The Individual in American Education*.

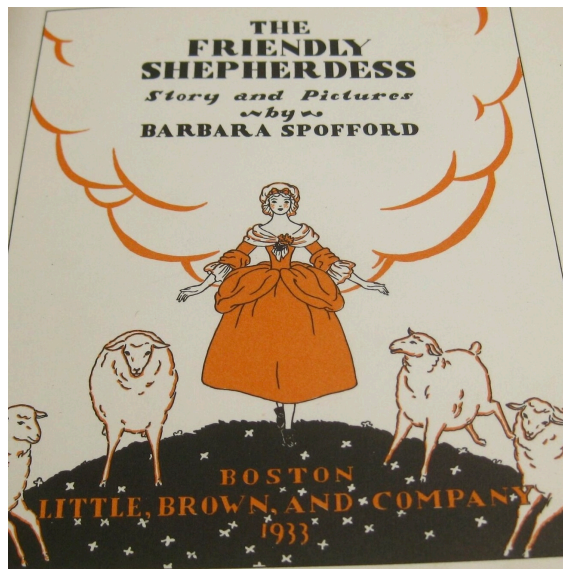
A life-long activist, Spofford Morgan wrote impassioned articles for several newspapers and magazines. Having witnessed the rise of Hitler when she was living and studying in Germany, Spofford Morgan wrote an article titled '**Swastika**' in the February, 1935 issue of *The Atlantic Magazine*. In the article, Spofford Morgan castigates Hitler's National Socialist Party and pointedly analyzes the pre-WWII German character:

"National Socialism is not only a protest against the Treaty of Versailles, and not only an uprising of the middle class; and it cannot be disposed of by calling it barbarous, dictatorial or militaristic. It is all those things and a great deal more. It is a revolt against the ideal of democracy; not merely its practices, but the very assumptions upon which the democratic state operates. The Nazis reject equality and put hierarchy in its place; they reject the ideal of a society run by scientific methods for the ideal of an organic society in which personality will play a greater part than formulae; and consistently with this, they war against the intellect in favor of the creative spirit."

Swastika (excerpt)

- Barbara Spofford Morgan, *The Atlantic Magazine* - 1935

Two decades after publishing her first book, Spofford Morgan released a children's book, *The Friendly Sheperdess* (1933) - which she wrote and illustrated. As can be seen by the book's cover, Spofford Morgan was a skilled illustrator; and like most women of a certain social station in her era, she was an accomplished pianist.

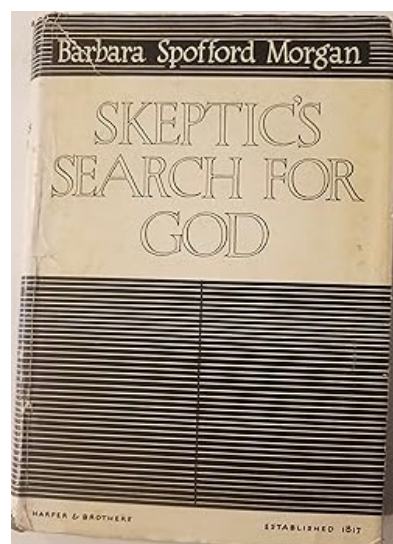


In 1935 Spofford Morgan published *Individuality in a Collective World*, a serious meditation and reflection on how individualism was being co-opted by modernist collective thinking in the 1930s. The book was well received:

“In this penetrating, and occasionally profound, analysis of the the relation of the individual to society, the author seeks to find a way of preserving individuality amid the mechanization, standardization and collectivization of modern life. The collectivism of which she speaks is... here among us now showing itself not only in theoretical writings but in the decay of representative government, in disintegration of families and the transient nature of American life.”

- Reinhold Niebuhr
American Journal of Sociology

In 1947 Spofford Morgan wrote her last book, a deeply-felt treatise on religion called *Skeptic's Search for God* - (reissued in 1949 as *Man's Restless Search*). Clearly thought out and written, the book addressed the mid-century, post-war ramifications of the individual's intellectual, mystical and moral relationship to God.



“The writer is a liberal in theology, and her philosophy appears to be a blend of Plato and Bergson. She makes many penetrating comments on naturalism and pragmatism. Her book is essentially a personal statement, written with a good deal of charm and pungency. It is well worth reading.”

- John M. Moore, *Theologian*

Among Spofford Morgan’s many civic leadership roles were: governor of the *Women’s Municipal League*, field worker for the *North American Civic League for Immigrants* and representative for the *Randalls Island Hospital for Mental Defectives*.

Serenity at Grassland

Barbara Spofford was 11-years old when *The Alders* was completed in 1898. It would seem that growing up in such a fairy tale setting would be ideal, but apparently Barbara was never happy living at The Alders. Perhaps she was put off by the dark wood paneling and large, mysterious rooms that were typical in the Victorian era. Barbara’s mother Ellen, whom the family called ‘Chotah’, was a strict, larger-than-life presence, a former school teacher who previously taught reading to black children. She kept a herd of cows at The Alders and would regularly send 5-gallon cans of unpasteurized milk to her family in New York. Over the years she bought a considerable amount of land on Mountain Road, because it was beautifully situated on the outskirts of town and because it was a good investment. During the Depression, a widow living on Mountain Road was struggling and could not afford the upkeep of her 1898 farmhouse located on a hill with an apple orchard, surrounded by acres of woods and lush meadows. Chotah bought the house, took over the expenses, named it **Grassland** and let the widow live there until she died.

When Chota passed away in 1942 at the age of 96, she left Grassland to her granddaughter Noel who soon thereafter transferred it to her parents, Barbara and Shepard who expanded the original farmhouse, adding substantial rooms for entertaining. On part of their property, now owned by NCC member **Linda Garretson**, Barbara built a cottage she called *La Casita*, where she would retreat to write, read and find peace in the quiet of Norfolk’s woods. For the last several years, Grassland has been the weekend and summer home of NCC members, **Kathy** and **Curtis Robb**, who have been attentive stewards of their historic house and property and steadfast keepers of the Spofford/Morgan legacy.



Grassland, Mountain Road - 1898

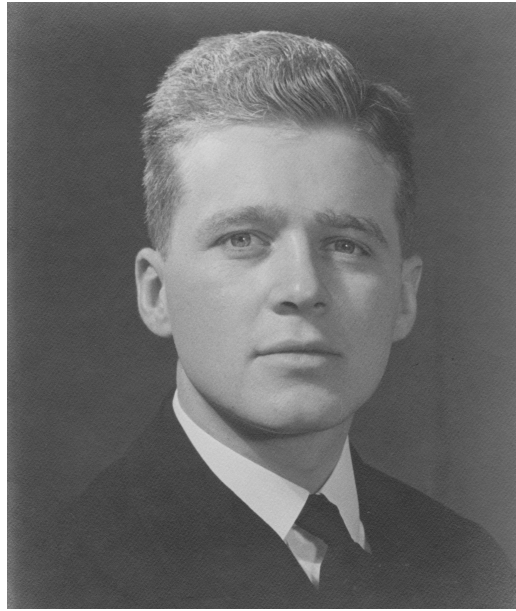


Fortunate Son

*“While New York City will always be the cultural center of my life,
Norfolk comes as close as anything to being my spiritual center.”*

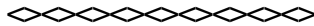
John Spofford Morgan

Barbara and Shepard Morgan had three children: daughters Diana (b. 1913) and Noel (b. 1915); and a son **John Spofford Morgan** (b. 1917). Of the three, John, who was very close to his mother, always maintained his deep emotional and physical ties to Norfolk. He built a rustic cabin on *Spofford Pond*, just up Mountain Road from his parents; and religiously made the trip from his beautiful apartment on West 10th St. in Manhattan every other weekend until he died in 2015 just shy of his 98th birthday.



Mister Handsome
John Spofford Morgan (1917-2015)

John Morgan received much of his early schooling (and his great love of music - Wagner, in particular) in Germany when his father was working in Berlin in the 1920s. John's father wanted his son to go to his alma mater Williams, but John's love of music impelled him to enroll at **Harvard University** because of its close proximity to **Serge Koussevitzky's Boston Symphony Orchestra**. Though he had no talent for composing music or playing instruments, John nevertheless majored in Music at Harvard. A classmate at Harvard was a day student from Newton, MA by the name of **Leonard Bernstein**, who was pianist for the Harvard Glee Club. John Morgan was a proud 4-year member of the glee club and kept in touch with his friend 'Lenny' for several years.



A Day of Infamy - December 7, 1941

Because he and most of his 1939 classmates at Harvard were certain that the United States would soon be entering the war in Europe, John Morgan attempted to join the Air Force, but failed the physical. In the summer of 1940, he met a Harvard classmate at Tanglewood who talked him into joining the Navy where he did pass the physical and went on to become an Intelligence Officer on the *USS Hulbert*. On December 7, 1941, *The Hulbert* was docked at Pearl Harbor when the Japanese launched an all out 'surprise' attack. John's ship was the first

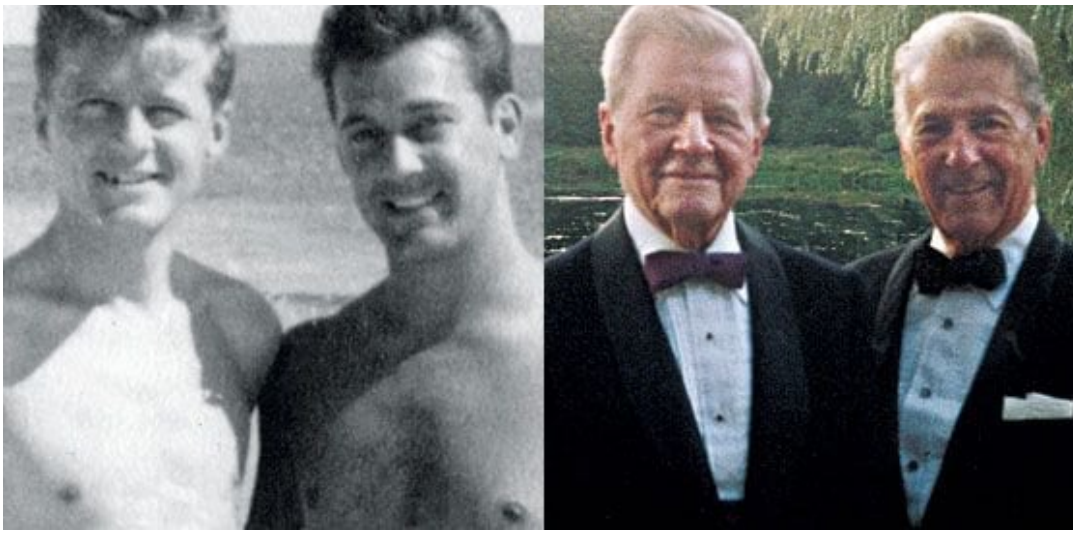
to open fire and shot down two Japanese torpedo planes. The crew of the *Hulbert* helped in the rescue effort and, despite being consistently under attack, was able to escape without any casualties, while all around them over 2400 sailors and civilians were killed by the Japanese.

**Ensign John Morgan
All Decked Out
During WW II**



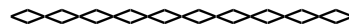
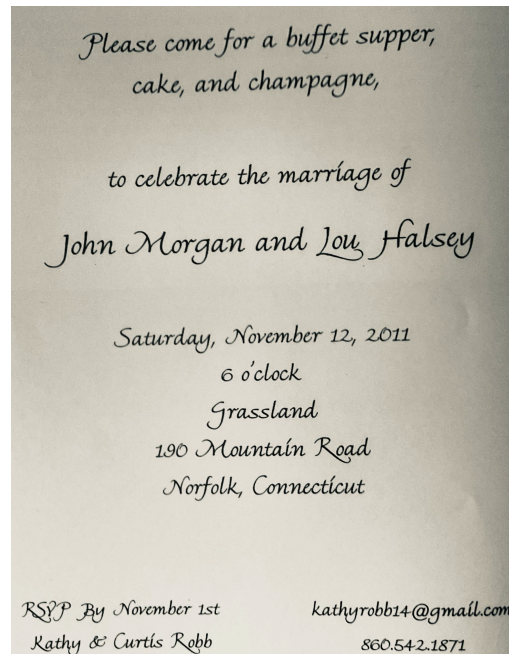
After four years at war aboard ship, John Morgan, took advantage of the G.I. Bill to study for a Masters Degree in International Affairs at **Columbia University**. When Columbia's library closed at 10pm, Morgan would occasionally take the subway downtown to ***The New Verdi***, a gay bar on West 72nd St. It was during the days when gay bars were verboten, when being caught in a gay bar could get you thrown in prison.

On May 27, 1947, a man named Louis Halsey, a hairdresser at the Westbury Hotel and dance instructor at Arthur Murray Studios, walked into The New Verdi, took one look at John Morgan and it was love at first sight. John Morgan was not so sure it was love at first sight, but it was the beginning of an almost 70-year love affair.



**John Morgan and Louis Halsey
Beirut Lebanon, 1952; and 54 years later in 2006**

The longtime romance culminated on November 11, 2011, when they were married in front of three witnesses at their apartment in Greenwich Village, shortly after gay marriage became legal in New York. On their wedding day, John Morgan was 94 and Lou Halsey was 88. The next evening, Kathy and Curtis Robb hosted an elegant reception for the newlyweds at their home, *Grassland*, in Norfolk, which for so many years had been the homestead of the Spofford/Morgan family.



Barbara Spofford Morgan died in Canaan, CT in 1971 at age 84 and is buried in **Center Cemetery** in Norfolk next to her husband, Shepard who died in 1968 (also at the age of 84). Close by their son John, who died at the age of 97 in 2015, is buried in a red cape that belonged to his mother, next to his husband Louis Halsey, who died the year before in 2014 at the age of 91.



**Morgan Family Burial Site
Center Cemetery - Norfolk, CT**

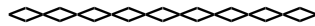
The End

by Mícheál Cummings Kelly
Club Historian
July 8, 2024

Acknowledgements

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- NCC members, **Kathy** and **Curtis Robb**, John Morgan's dear friends who shared their many experiences with John and related his family stories for this Profile.
- NCC member, **Linda Garretson**, whose idea it was to take on this Profile of Barbara Spofford. Many of the stories and anecdotes above were garnered from a comprehensive interview Linda conducted with John Morgan a few years before he died.
- **Laura Laylin Nichols**, of ***Pig Pen Pottery*** in Virginia, Barbara Morgan's granddaughter who had many in-depth conversations with her uncle John Morgan, which resulted in a delightful booklet filled with wonderful photographs and stories of the Spofford/Morgan family.
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- Club Manager, **Peter Destler** who, in a short time has taken a keen interest in the history of the NCC and diligently takes care of the details that go into getting these Profiles ready for publication.



Up Next: *Doctor Lucius Duncan Bulkley*