MacDarby Farm

February 22, 1932, was a Monday. George Washington’s birthday. Hooker, forty-two, was enjoying his morning coffee,warming himself by the wood stoveand gazing out of his window at Goose Pond. The window had a nice vantage point, the old MacDarby homestead being perched on a gentle rise just above the Pond’s dam. The Pond was, of course, frozen that day and the sky was clear. That morning, he saw a strange, black column of smoke rising from the far end of Goose Pond.

Joseph “Hooker” Moore was born in 1890 in Saugerties, NY to John and Elizabeth MacDarby Moore. Four years later, the family would establish their Goose Pond dairy farm, which was to remain = Hooker’s home for most of his life. Their spacious ten-room farmhouse, probably the first on Lower Goose, would stand watch over the lake for the next 100 years. Elizabeth, it would appear, was a force of nature ands never seemed to take her husband’s name – she went by Mrs. MacDarby. Their farm was always known as the MacDarby Farm. And today there’s a nearby McDarby Road (misspelled, I’ll point out) but not any Moore Lane.

A group of people standing in front of a house

Description automatically generated

A house with a large lawn

Description automatically generated with medium confidence

The twice President of the United States, Grover Cleveland, # loved to fish. Hooker would recall how, on a fine summer day in 1899, the former president (who was then visiting R.W. Gilder in Tyringham) came up the hill to Goose Pond to try fishing after having first tried his luck down at Hop Brook . If he caught anything, it wasn’t recorded in any presidential archive. Cleveland was not alone and visited with the Madge and Haywood Cavarly, who were, at the time, camping on Pinepoint. It is understood that after fishing, they enjoyed some hard cider at the MacDarby’s, even spending the night in their spare bedroom next to Hooker’s.

Hooker would later work at the Mountain Mill, down the street, as a steam engineer. Here he earned himself the nickname “Babe Ruth of steam-shovel operators”. For fifteen years, when he wasn’t busy excavating at major construction sites, he ran the Pond’s only boat livery for fifteenyears. The Moore Boat Livery, located at the spot occupied now by the public boat ramp, would provide you with one of his green, flat-bottom rowboats for fiftycents/day. By 1958 he had thirty boats available for rent as well as some nearby picnic tables (also for rent).

A person standing on a boat

Description automatically generatedA paper with text and words

Description automatically generated with medium confidence

CAPTION: This ad lists “Bob” Moore which would have been Hooker’s son. It would appear that Robert Moore continued the Livery service after Hooker’s passing in 1963.

Men holding a string of corn

Description automatically generated

So, on that frozen morning, Hooker understood just how strange it was to see a plume of black smoke rising on the far side of Goose (or I think more likely Upper Goose) Pond. It was natural, that Hooker felt inclined to investigate it and provide whatever assistance he might. Whether bringing his fourteen-year-old son Robert along for the ride was for the sake of his son’s sense of adventure or to provide another pair of helping hands isn’t clear. He also made the fateful decision to bring along his two dogs.

Hooker, Robert, and the two dogs piled into Hooker’s car and, there not being any roads to Upper Goose, proceeded to drive over the pond’s ice to find the fire. They never made it that far.

Near the far end of Lower Goose, in the middle of the lake, with forty feet between the ice and the bottom, and just opposite the old Henry Smith cabin on the south shore, the car crashed through thin ice and dropped into the icy water below. Hooker managed to push Robert out of the car, along with one of the dogs, before the car submerged. Robert was dragged out of the icy water to safety by nearby ice fishermen, who had formed a rescue chain. The car sank, front first, to the bottom, taking Hooker and his other dog down with it. Trapped inside the car, with only a small air pocket near the roof, Hooker could not break the front window. He climbed into the back seat and was able to open a rear window and emerge from the car (along with his second dog), swimming up through forty feet of freezing water to the surface. Hooker was dragged to safety by the same ice fishermen who had rescued his son. Both dogs drowned. Hooker and Robert ran across the frozen lake to get home and warm up.

Hooker and Robert were treated for exposure by Dr. George Wickham. However, Hooker developed blood poisoning from an infection on his right arm, was hospitalized at St. Luke’s Hospital in Pittsfield, and underwent surgery by Dr. John A. Sullivan. Penicillin hadn’t been discovered at the time, so Dr. Sullivan must have been an ace surgeon because Hooker recovered. What Hooker regretted most from the whole incident was that he had lost his treasured Elk’s Lodge button, which had been torn from his vest during the sinking.

History tells us that there weren’t any lakeside cabins anywhere near Hooker’s direction of travel, which had burned down in 1932. I suspect the smoke Hooker was chasing that day was rising from a robust campfire at the Mohhekennuck Club on Upper Goose, which was known to host deer hunters during the winter months. If so, the last thing these hunters would have likely wanted was for Hooker to show up in his car and put out their roaring campfire.

A week after Hooker’s car sank, an East Lee garageman named Arthur Dewkett attempted a salvage operation to retrieve it from the lakebed using “a rigging of blocks and tackles and huge poles” (Berkshire County Eagle, 2/29/32). Dewkett, apparently undeterred by any fear of thin ice, successfully erected his rig around the ice hole and somehow attached his large grappling hooks to the submerged car. He must have been quite excited as he raised the car fifteen feet above the bottom, but his excitement quickly evaported when the hooks gave way. Dewkett subsequently made some improvements to his rig, with the intention of making a second salvage attempt, but it appears that thin ice and high winds may have prohibited any further efforts.

A collection of black and white signs

Description automatically generated

These days, we tend to think of the United States Navy as confining its activities to the deep blue oceans. While this certainly seems to be the typical case, there appear to be exceptions or at least maybe one exception. There was a United States Navy operation on Goose Pond and, judging from the photographs of this operation, it may have occurred in the 1930s. Since these photographs were in the possession of Hooker’s descendants, it is feasable that photographs were likely taken by Hooker himself. If this was the case, it is equally logical that they relate to this lost car. Though now official military record exists about the nature of the operation, the photos show a U.S. Navy truck and Hooker himself near his dock, a dozen or so uniformed sailors, some uniformed officers, an improvised raft towed by small motorboats, a diver in a dive suit with an air hose ready to leap from the raft into Goose Pond, and equipment on the raft that appeared to be what one would expect for an underwater salvage operation.

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A truck parked on a road near a body of water

Description automatically generated

A group of men standing on a dock

Description automatically generated

A group of men standing on a boat

Description automatically generated

A careful study of the background topography, in these photographs, confirms that the Navy dive operation itself took place near the center of Lower Goose, in about forty feet of water, and directly offshore where the old Henry Smith cabin was located. This is precisely where Hooker’s car was reported to have sunken. Perhaps Hooker managed to convince the United States Navy that it was in the national security interests of the United States of America to get his car out of Goose Pond.

A boat on the water

Description automatically generated with medium confidence

CAPTION: The topography behind the navy diver (left) matches the topography of the Hooker car sinking (right).

It isn’t known if the Navy did salvage the car, but I would have expected that a successful salvage would have been memorialized with some prize photographs, and alas there were none of those in the stacks of photographs that exist. It is also logical to assume that had the Navy recovered the long-lost car it would have made the local press in some form or other. As it stands, there is no evidence of this happening. The U.S. Navy appears not to have any publicly available records of this operation in its historical archives. Maybe it was classified as a Top Secret operation (which would make some sense if you think about it).

\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*INSERT CONTENT OF (PENDING) SCUBA/SONAR EXPLORATION\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*

The MacDarby Estate had 175 acres, and 3500 feet of lake frontage, along the north shore of Goose Pond, extending slightly across the town line into Lee. In 1958, the entire estate was sold to the Goose Lake Development Company, which intended to subdivide it into residential lots. Hooker, who was, by then, retired to Florida, and decided that same year to purchase back the five lakefront acres containing his old farmhouse, move back into the house, and re-open his boat livery for a few more years. The rest of the land was subdivided and became the Lakeside Drive neighbourhood that stretches today from the dam to the Lee town line.

After Hooker’s passing, in 1963, his son Robert (who inherited, among other things, the nickname Hooker) lived on the old MacDarby-Moore property in a small trailer for several years, and outside his trailer hung a sign which read “Hooker”. Hooker Jr. had been a fighter pilot in the Army Air Corps during World War Two, completing sixty-fivemissions and 870 combat hours.

Today,there is a public boat ramp running through the old MacDarby-Moore property. In 1957, the Berkshire County Commissioners passed legislation granting themselves the authority to provide a right of way for public access to Goose Pond. In 1958, the county obtained an easement through the Moore property and opened the public boat ramp. After the ramp opened Hooker continued to rent his boats to those who didn’t bring their own. I would be surprised if his rate was still only fiftycents a day.

The MacDarby-Moore homestead, and its 4.8 acres, were later purchased by Virginia “Ginger” and George Van Zandt of Lee. George and Ginger lovingly converted the old farmhouse into a lakeside restaurant they called the G&G Restaurant. The G&G opened in 1972 and operated for about ten years with a simple menu. There was music and dancing on Wednesday nights. I recall eating at the restaurant in the early 1970s and found it quite cozy and delicious. We didn’t dance, so I’m guessing it wasn’t on a Wednesday.

The MacDarby homestead was subsequently demolished, but the stories of the MacDarby Farm, Hooker Moore, and the G&G are still being told around Goose Pond dinner tables.

A newspaper article of a person and person

Description automatically generated

A menu of a restaurant

Description automatically generated