



**A History¹ of the Property Known as the “CABUS” on the North
Branch of the AuSable River, Grayling, MI U.S.A.**

(AKA 168 Catabish Trail, Grayling, MI 49738)

**Prepared for: The Present Owners; Mr. Brian Crabtree, Mrs.
Marietta Crabtree, and Family**

By William Granville Scharffe, Ph.D.

June 2019

Dedicated to The Memory of:

William Edward Scharffe October 29, 1909 – October 31, 1975

Marion Kittie Granville Scharffe March 6, 1908 – October 13, 1988

¹ The author is taking this history from memory of events occurring up to 67 years ago. Some dates are “best estimates”, there being no written record of the events.

It All Started Because My Dad Wanted to Buy a Boat!

Our home town was, and remains today, Saginaw, Michigan, USA, just south of Bay City, MI and, therefore, Saginaw Bay. Saginaw Bay means “boating” and several of my parents’ friends had cabin cruisers for their summer enjoyment. I can remember a number of trips on those boats where my father, William E. Scharffe, a U.S. Coast Guard Reserve veteran, would cherish to opportunity to drive the boat for a period of time on each trip. We belonged to the Saginaw Bay Yacht Club even though we had no boat! It was my Dad’s dream to own a cabin cruiser.

My Mother, Marion K. “Boots” (a nickname acquired when she was in high school because her family business was “Granville’s Boots and Shoes” in Saginaw) Scharffe, however, was not so enamored, having seen the amount of money, time, and trouble that such a “hobby” involved. She “put her foot down” rarely in our house, but in the matter of buying a boat she was a rather firm “no!”

In 1949, Dad, creative soul that he was, and a gifted draftsman and general contractor (A.W. Scharffe and Son, Inc. 44 years in Saginaw) with access to skilled tradesmen, heard of an auction being held in the City of Detroit of de-commissioned Detroit City buses.



In August of 1941, a fleet of 300 27-passenger Ford Rear-Engine Transit Buses (#2301-2600 — Model 19-B) were delivered to the DSR—in addition to the 500 already received in late 1939. In total, the DSR had 2,181 of the Ford buses. The last of these "black-bottom" Ford Rear-Engine Transits were retired in 1951. The vehicles were 32’ in length with an 8’ interior width. They had a “fabric top” presumably to reduce weight and lessen cost of production.

[Photo courtesy of the Stan Sycko photo collection]

Dad attended the auction, was a successful bidder for one of the “better” old buses, bought it on the spot, and drove it back to Saginaw that afternoon. As time permitted, he put his construction crew to work to turn that old bus into a “cabin cruiser” on wheels. The interior design was roughly modeled on designs from the Raymond Products Corporation in Saginaw,

the manufacturers of “Travelo” mobile homes. By the fall of 1949, Dad had his “boat” but it was what he termed a “Land Cruiser”.

It was quite a vehicle for its day and very similar in many ways to the grand “motor homes” seen on the highways today. It slept up to 5 – up to three in the bedroom in the rear with a double bed that included storage beneath and a counter top that could accommodate a sleeping bag, built in “dresser” drawers, and a closet for hanging clothes, and two up front on what normally served as “couch seating” immediately behind and across from the driver’s seat. There was a dining table over the left, rear wheel well that could seat up to 5 people across from the “galley” which consisted of a sink, four burner propane stove, custom built cabinetry, and a true “ice box” that would hold a 25 lb. block of ice. Under one of the front seats, a 40 gallon water tank connected to a “pump” faucet on the sink, to provide fresh water. Heat was from a 10,000 BTU upright propane heater located in the center of the bus just outside of the back bedroom entrance. The front display panels were labeled “Private Coach” so people would not think a real “bus” was coming their way! Just above the driver’s seat, a sign read: *“This vehicle is operated from the left, front driver’s seat only. Anyone objecting to the manner in which it is operated is invited to note the mistletoe attached to the driver’s coattail!”*



At the time, there was no way to equip the vehicle with a bathroom. Technology for disposal of “carried” waste had not yet evolved (boats simply drained into the water they were in

– yuck!) Gas stations, restaurants, and the like served as stopping places for such needs and, in a true emergency, a “minnow pail” was available - though seldom used. On longer trips, we would stay one night in a “motel” or hotel so shower facilities would be available.



Interior view of the bus from the driver's seat back. (The propane heater had not yet been installed.)



William E. Scharffe in the driver's seat – view from the back bedroom.

As a family of 3 (I being the only offspring), and often with guests aboard, we travelled the State of Michigan on weekends to a number of destinations including sporting events at Michigan State University and in Detroit, Hartwick Pines State Park, Bay City State Park, sites in the western side of the state, etc. On my 12th birthday, my Dad loaded me and 6 of my friends on the bus for a trip to the local roller rink. What a hoot that was!

On one trip to the Soo Locks, we were carried across the straits of Mackinaw on the “car ferry”. People were leaving their cars to ask to see the interior of the vehicle! We were a curiosity to be sure, such a curiosity that eventually the Cleveland Plain Dealer newspaper got wind of the “Private Coach” and did a feature article in March of 1950.

The bus was used by our construction company as housing for our crew on out-of-town jobs on occasion, but, for the most part, the bus was used to carry my dad and his friends on many hunting and trout fishing trips to, mostly, the upper part of the lower peninsula of Michigan. My Dad was an excellent wing shot and consummate trout fisherman with an enviable roll cast. The North Branch of the AuSable was his favorite water anywhere from the town of Lovells to Mac’s Island – where the North Branch flows into the main stream.

Crawford County and the environs were favorite destinations. Several of our friends had places on the North Branch of the AuSable such as “Andy’s Skunk Hollow” (Andrew Ellis of Saginaw), the Garber family from Saginaw, and Carrie and Alex Reid and Dr. Walter Averill whose places still stand on either side of the road at the end of Morley Road next to the public access.

One favorite stopping point was “Scott’s Lodge” on the North Branch.



Built by Austin & Ruth Scott, with help from the sons of Ed and Bessie Kellogg (Kellogg’s Bridge) the Scott’s established their lodge on the North Branch in 1930. There were

four outlying rental cabins, one downstream and 3 upstream, all privately owned now. Austin Scott and friend Harold Johnson built an addition to the half-log lodge in about 1950. At that time, the Scotts lived in the back half of the Lodge, and rented out the two front bedrooms closest to the river.

Meals were available at the Lodge, cooked by Ruth Scott. Ruth took pride in her cooking and presentation. Regardless of her guests' appearances, there had to be tablecloths, a complete set of silverware at the diner's place and service had to be from the left. But no waders in the dining room! The Scott's hosted hundreds of guest at their serene and delightful lodge, many of them returning annually until the Scott's could host them no longer.

Larry & Marjie Warner bought the Lodge from Ruth Scott in 1981. The Warners say they are blessed to have found Scott's Lodge, and have tried to maintain the flavor of the original Lodge while making improvements through the years. In 2013, Larry & Marjie realized their dream of retiring to the river, and continue to share the Lodge with family and friends. (with thanks to the Lovell's Township resort tour information guide for the Scott's Lodge history).

It was on one of those visits in, I believe, 1953, that my dad was talking with Austin Scott and Dad mentioned he was looking to buy some property in the area on the North Branch. Austin, who was about to retire and go back home to his native state of Georgia, told my dad of a 49 acre plot with a quarter of a mile of riverfront not far downstream on the east side of the river just upstream from "Flashlight Bend" which he, Scott, had owned for several years and might be interested in selling. We looked at the property that weekend. Soon thereafter, the purchase was made and the property became ours.



Photo of my Mother, Marion K. "Boots" Scharffe at Scott's Lodge the weekend my Dad agreed to buy the property.

Since there was no cabin on the site, my dad decided he would take the bus up there and park it to use as a dwelling. With one of his workers following in a company pick-up truck, Dad

drove the bus to the property, drove it through the woods, and had to stop when the clutch burned out. That exact spot is where he built the “CABUS” – combination “cabin” and “bus”.



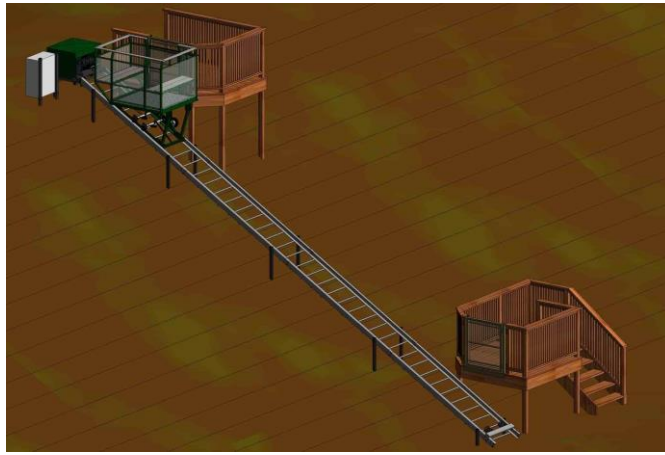
Photo of the bus taken on Cherry Creek Road on its last “trip” to the property.

For the first two years, we would travel north to spend a weekend on the bus. It was a true “camping” experience since there was no running water – we carried bottled water since retrieving water from the river was too involved – and we had to carry a block of ice for the “ice box”, but my Dad did have an electrical line installed so we did have power. He built a “biffy” (AKA out house) a few yards from the bus. Definitely a “scary” trip at night! There were usually more mosquitoes than could be tolerated, so he bought a “fogger” to fend them off.

We still had a good time, but it soon became evident that the “high banks” made it very difficult to get to the river. One would really have to walk down the road to the Breakey Camp Flashlight Bend ²Footbridge or to Hazen Miller’s³ place to be able to get into the stream. Since neither he nor my Mom could fathom climbing down and up a long flight of stairs to get down to and back from the river, the idea of the “elevator” was hatched by my Dad. Doing some research on how people in San Francisco managed to get up and down the many hills in that city, he found what he was looking for, consulted with an architect/engineer and the elevator was designed along the lines of similar installations in San Francisco.

² “Flashlight Bend”, owned then by Dr. Robert Breakey of Lansing, MI, was given that name NOT because of the bend in the river, but because on one occasion, a guest had become drunk, unruly, and physically abusive toward his fellow fishermen. To quell the disturbance, one of the men grabbed a rather large flashlight and hit the abuser over the head with it, ending the matter, but, also, imparting a distinct bend to the flashlight. To the best of my knowledge, that flashlight remains in a frame on the wall of the Breakey Camp to this day.

³ Hazen Miller, author of the book “The Old AuSable” was well known to all of us along the river. The map in the front of his book shows many of the places mentioned in this work. We knew him rather well as he was writing the book. He was quick to share stories of the river.



©The “Hill Hiker” Elevator Company of San Francisco design.

Since he was contemplating an elevator leading down to a dock on the river, Dad decided the bus could no longer really serve our housing needs so he announced one day to my Mom that he and his crew were going up to the bus to “add a screened in porch” to the vehicle and put in an elevator. That “screened porch” turned out to be a living room with Bay Port Stone fireplace with a “heat-o-lator” for warmth, a full kitchen replete with a 4 burner range top stove, built in oven, fridge, and dishwasher, a three piece bathroom with a shower, hot water heater, and a well to provide the water. The bus, itself, remained, but was put up on steel girders and encased in wood. A “bell stand” was added using a bell from an old locomotive. Notice the position of the bell. Why it was changed to face sideways today is unknown! Every time we arrived at the “CABUS”, we would ring the bell three times so our neighbors would know we had arrived.

When my mother first visited the place after it was ready, she was thrilled, but also very upset because, for one thing, the kitchen was much nicer than the one at home! The one at home didn’t even HAVE a dishwasher!

The result was a remodeling of our home in Saginaw to include a greatly expanded kitchen, bigger master bedroom, new “family room”, and two and a half car garage! As my Dad often said, later, “it was well worth it!”



The “CABUS” following the initial remodeling in 1955.



“Boots” Scharffe by the fire just after the initial remodeling.



Construction of the dock and the railroad in the spring of 1955.



Sand for the “road bed” of the railroad came from a pit excavated just north of the CABUS next to the “meadow” area. That pit would later be used to contain the “carcass” of the bus after it was removed due to damage over the winter to the fabric roof circa 1959.



William E. Scharffe on the elevator in front with his best buddy, Edward Walz, “photo bombing” him in the background!



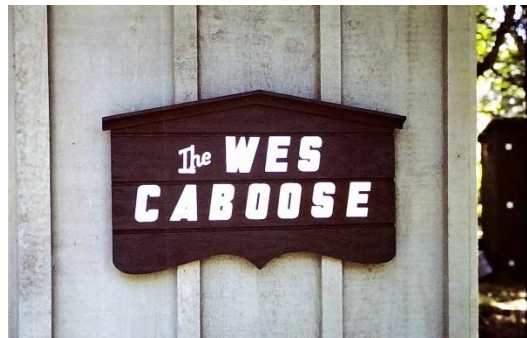
View of the elevator. Notice the chain falls on the dock at the end of the rail. These were used to off load the AuSable River Boat that we owned into or out of the river. The little “railing” at the back of the car was installed so the river boat could be level when transported down to the river. The device was powered by a 2 ½ horsepower overhead door motor and equipped with

safety features to prevent it from free-falling down the hill in the event of a cable failure. The rails of hollow, steel pipe contained the electrical lines that went from top to bottom.

When the fabric roof of the bus succumbed to the ravages of a particularly harsh winter, it became evident that the bus had served its usefulness and had to be demolished and removed. This decision was not without an emotional twinge since the bus had certainly provided a wealth of good memories and fun excursions. The result, however, was the addition of a master bedroom where the bus formerly resided, with a two-piece bath. Also, a guest bedroom was added at the back designed to sleep up to 4 and the living room was expanded to provide an alcove for dining with sliding doors to the porch deck. The “CABUS” now no longer had a bus, per se, but the name stuck.



Longer distance view of the CABUS in later years after the garage and guest house was added in about 1961. The sket launcher is in the foreground to the right of the bench. My Dad gave the new structure the name of the WES CABOOSE since it was an addition to the original structure. Just on the right of the picture below, you can see the outline of a structure with a slanted roof. That was the “Biffy” – the outhouse that remained in place in the event of it being needed when there was no running water.





The “WES CABOOSE” garage and guest house.



My 1959 Jaguar XK-150 that Dad bought for me to drive during my senior year at Michigan State University. The car was a joy to drive on the winding roads in the vicinity of the “CABUS.”



The yard space between the “Caboose” and the main cabin. Note the birdfeeder! Dad had two of them built – one for the CABUS and one for home. The one for home is still in use at our house in Saginaw.

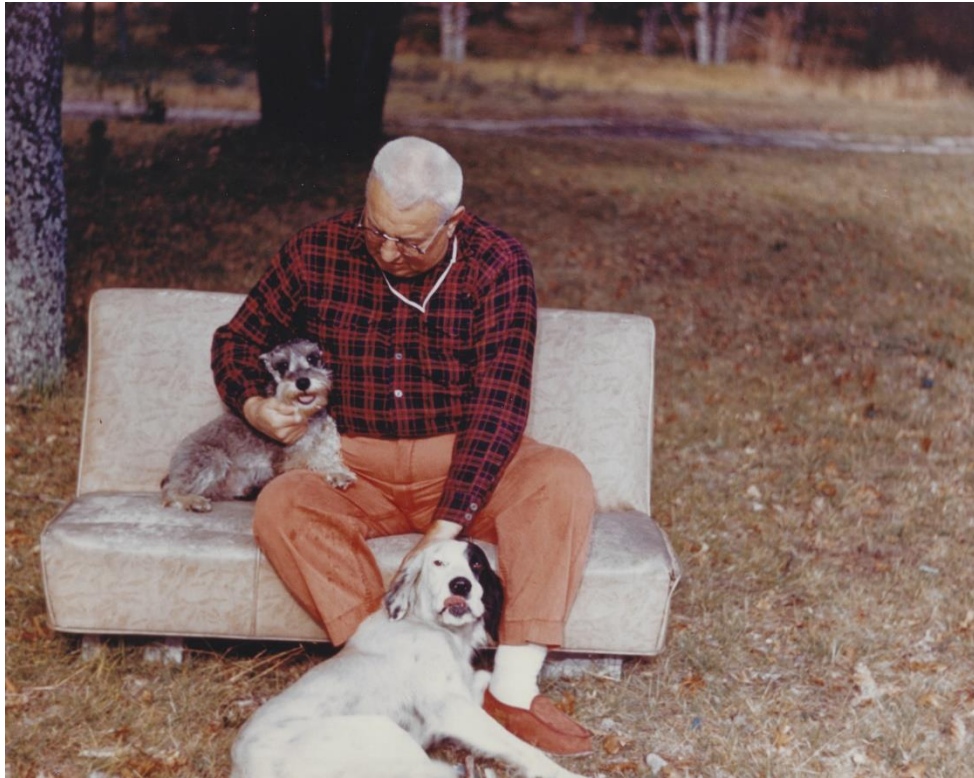
Entertainment at the “CABUS”

In our many years there, we had certain memorable adventures like: “Discovering” the Redwood Steak House in Lewiston (we were amongst the first 15 patrons there), enjoying Saturday night entertainment at Talley’s Bar in Lewiston, having a cold beer at Ma Deeter’s place in Luzerne after a day on the river, playing golf on the private, 9-hole golf course owned by the Otto family in Lewiston (site of the current Garland Resort), enjoying a float on the river in the AuSable river boat, etc.

We had wonderful neighbors too across the river. Directly across from our dock was “Copeland’s Brush and Rod” – owned by the Lowery family (Mrs. Lowery was Mr. Copeland’s daughter) the place being so named because her father was both an avid trout fisherman and an accomplished artistic painter. Just upstream was “Lotomba” owned by the Wellers of Bay City. “Lotomba” came from a combination of their children’s’ names; Lois, Tom, and Barbara. Barbara was married to James McClennan of Saginaw and they were dear friends of ours for many years both on and off the river. Then there was the Breakey Camp, “Flashlight Bend”, where we learned to play the drinking game “Ga Rarsh” on the big table in the middle of the living area, and were entertained every Labor Day with the annual “competitive float” of homemade “craft” that were set into the river at Lotomba, with the successful craft to pass the finish line under the footbridge being awarded some homemade trophy. It was VERY competitive with participants cheering on their boats from both sides of the river! Beer flowed.

Some Final Thoughts

This is one of my favorite photos of my Dad at the CABUS. He is seated on a bench that was made out of the seat from the bus that was directly behind the driver's seat – it was virtually the only “remnant” of the bus itself. The Schnauzer on the bench is his beloved “Smokey” while the dog at his feet was one of his three hunting dogs, “Popeye” an English setter. We had two others, Mike, an Irish setter – our oldest and my Dad's favorite dog, and Freckles, a spotted English setter.





In those days, brown and brook trout were truly plentiful in the North Branch. This is a photo of my Dad's catch on Father's Day in, I believe, 1959. He, for some reason, always had success in the river on Father's Day! (The fly rod seen in the photo was a Dickerson bamboo, custom built rod.)



Even though not at the CABUS, this remains my favorite photo of the time of my Mother, "Boots" Scharffe. She loved to take walks to find the Trillium plants on just the other side of the

access road and the violets down by the river bank on the north side of the dock by the railroad, and delight in the many and wide variety of birds that visited the large bird feeder.

Epilogue

William Edward Scharffe passed away on October 31, 1975 some 6 years after the CABUS was sold and following his retirement from the contracting industry in 1971. His cremains were cast into the North Branch at one his favorite stretches of river at Kellogg's Bridge.

Marion K. "Boots" Scharffe died in 1988 at the age of 80. Her final words before lapsing into her last sleep were, "I'm going to the cabin!" Her cremains, also, were joined with the North Branch as per her wishes.

I wish to thank the Crabtree family for asking about the history of the place called the "CABUS" and, especially, for giving me and my daughter a tour of the present, beautiful permanent structure on the site. The prior owner had no such interest in the history of the property, so the request to provide this work was both meaningful and appreciated.

It was a true joy to dig out the old 35mm slides and convert them to a .jpeg format. Every photo brought back a memory and, often, a tear to the eye as I say a final "good bye" to the "CABUS" and extend every good wish to the Crabtree family for every possible happiness there for years and years to come!

William G. Scharffe, Ph.D.

June 6, 2019.

God grant that I may fish
Until my dying day.
And when it comes to my last cast,
I then most humbly pray,
When in the Lord's safe landing net,
I'm peacefully asleep,
That in His Mercy I be judged as
Big enough to keep.
----- D.E. Milton