

**Moments in Malta History**  
**By Teri Ulrich – Historian, Town of Malta**

*Carol Luther Mackay: The Woman Behind the Men of the Luther Forest*  
By Teri Ulrich

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Last April, I had the pleasure of spending the morning with Carol Luther Mackay at her lovely home in the woods off Cold Springs Road. I had known Carol in my childhood, but it had been almost forty years since I'd seen or talked to her, so the visit was nostalgic and sweet. The purpose of the talk was to do an oral history interview of the woman behind the men of Malta's historic Luther Forest.

Granddaughter of Tommy C. Luther (also called "Old Man Luther"), daughter of Tommy F. Luther, wife of Bill Mackay (who took over management of the forest with his father-in-law), and mother of present day owner Alec Mackay, Carol is a remarkable woman with a story of her own to tell.

But, first – a little background about Malta's historical gem, the Luther Forest, a living monument to Carol's grandfather, for whom the forest is named.....

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The story of the evolution of the Luther Forest began in 1898, when Thomas C. Luther (or "Tommy C.," as he came to be called), who was born in Ballston Spa in 1862, started a managed forestry program on 110 acres in eastern Malta. As founder and developer, he created one of the largest private pine forest plantations in the Northeast. The Luther Forest grew to 4,500 acres by the 1920's—and to almost 7,000 acres at its peak in the 1970's. Following Tommy C.'s death in 1937, son "Tommy F." took over and erected a bronze tablet in the forest to honor his father. Son-in-law Bill Mackay (Carol's husband) took the reins in the 1960's. Today, it is Tommy C.'s great-grandson Alec Mackay who manages the Luther Forest, along with its several related businesses. The preserve has been home to the Luther Forest residential development (1,700 homes are in Malta and another fifty are in Stillwater) and to many energy and technological companies, including the Hermes Rocket Test Site and Wright-Malta Corporation. Saratoga Technology and Energy Park now oversees a new generation of tech firms on site. In 2005, the Malta Town Board approved the Luther Forest as a site for nanotech

companies. In June 2006, the first nanotech firm to commit to the park vision, Advanced Micro Devices, Inc (AMD) of Sunnyvale, California announced plans for construction in Malta.

Tommy C. was often called “Old Man Luther” and was a well-respected and popular figure in the Malta and Saratoga Lake region. He was the owner and proprietor of the prestigious White Sulphur Springs Hotel on Saratoga Lake for fifty-three years, hosting generations of tourists as well as many famous celebrities of the early twentieth century—Lillian Russell, “Diamond Jim” Brady, Jack Dempsey, and wealthy financier Jay Gould among them. He operated steamboats on the lake—the largest of which was the elegant catamaran, “Lady of the Lake,” which could carry 2,000 passengers, and another, called “Steamboat Alice,” which he purchased at the Buffalo World’s Fair and transported from Lake Erie to Saratoga Lake. “Alice” was named after his wife, Alice Powell, who was also of Ballston Spa.

It was Tommy C.’s passion for the reclaiming of barren land that fostered his notoriety as a visionary who expanded lumbering operations into the planting and planned reforestation of trees. His efforts were widely revered, and he began his forestry management project long before the State of New York initiated any such programs. Mr. Luther was known to plant up to one million trees in a season. He took enormous pleasure and pride in creating a pristine forest that would draw the public’s attention to the importance of forestry and conservation in our region. As a man, “Old Man Luther” was a benevolent neighbor, friend, and family man and was well-liked by the men on his work crews.

The State of New York recognized Tommy C.’s extraordinary contribution to the state’s forestry program by erecting and manning a fire observation tower in his honor in the Luther Forest in 1921. An effort is underway to relocate this tower to the Wilton Wildlife Preserve.

At the time of the senior Luther’s death in 1937, Alice took over the forestry interests of her husband and passed management on to their, son, Thomas F. Luther, who oversaw operations until the mid-1960’s when ill health forced him to step down. His son-in-law, William Mackay (who married daughter Carol in 1949) then took the reins. It was Bill Mackay who originally created the Saratoga Water Service Company, today a highly regulated facility, to establish water lines for the Luther Forest residential development. He began to suffer in ill health in the late 1980’s, at which point son Alec rose to management of the growing Luther Forest interests.

Alec Mackay graduated from Glens Falls High School and the University of New Hampshire and has spent his adult life as a professional forester in the great tradition of his father, grandfather, and great-grandfather. He first took a job as a forester for his father in the Luther Forest in July of 1985. After two years as a field forester, Alec moved “into the office,” eventually assuming the chief leadership role upon the death of his father in 2002.

Alec's businesses at present are the Luther Forest Corporation and the Saratoga Water Services Corporation, with some involvement in the Saratoga Land Management Company (LUMAC), a small company with seven professional foresters. Alec also owns and operates the Saratoga Lake Golf Course; his wife, Anita, runs the pro shop and supervises the course, with three full-time employees and thirty-two seasonal workers.

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Proud matriarch of the Luther dynasty, Carol loves to talk about her family, her quilting, and her church activities. She is warm and grandmotherly, attractive and sharp, with a self-effacing demeanor that never hints at the fact that she is a woman with *two* college degrees – one from Cornell, and one from Syracuse University (where *she was the only woman in her class at the College of Forestry!*).

I had to put my mind through a few mental gyrations during my interview with Carol because before I came to know of her famous family legacy in Malta, she was just “one of the moms” in my neighborhood in Glens Falls, where both our families lived in the 1960's and '70s'. Carol and my mother were the typists for the Sanford Street School's “PTA Patter.” Alec was in my third grade class. The Mackays at that time lived on Glen Street (they later moved around the corner on Grant Avenue), and my walking route to school in the morning and afternoon and to- and from- lunchtime meant that I met up with Alec on the way. Longtime United States Congressman Jerry Solomon's son, Danny, was our age and would also walk with us, catching up with me first, by Bowman Avenue (my street), as he walked down Glen Street from North Road. All through elementary, junior high, and senior high school I never knew about the Mackay-Luther Forest connection.....Not until I moved to Malta in 1990 and kept hearing about “the Mackays” did I realize that these were the Mackays of my days as little girl in Glens Falls. What a world. Nowadays I run into Alec often – usually at Dunkin' Donuts very early in the morning –as he is ready to start his day at the office on Stonebreak Road, and we catch up quickly about his four kids or my three boys, or Glens Falls news.

My April morning with Alec's mom was one I'll cherish always. Seated comfortably in a rocking chair, she started at the beginning and told me about her life. She was born on January 24, 1927 in Saratoga Springs to Jean (Scheffer) and Thomas F. Luther. She was an only child and attended School #4 in Saratoga, later on graduating from Saratoga Springs High School. She was accepted to Cornell University, where she studied Home Economics, later finishing with a degree in Agriculture. She would return to college a short time after graduating to further her education, at her father's suggestion, gaining acceptance to the College of Forestry at Syracuse University.

Carol said she had an extremely happy childhood, often “going into the forest” with her father, Tommy F. She remembered her grandfather, Tommy C., as being great fun, always teasing, and being a big fan of the ladies. She recalled visiting with him at a big table behind the office of the White Sulphur Springs Hotel, where her mother and aunt also worked.

By Carol's own admission, she was "spoiled" -- being the only child and only grandchild. Despite having the family hotel on Saratoga Lake, her parents sent her to summer camp—first to Efnor Lake (near Corinth) and then to Maine.

She said that her mother, Jean, was wonderful. She and Carol's father had originally met at the Hotel, where Jean's family would come from their home in Mechanicville to vacation. She was a beautiful singer, and Tommy F. called her "my Jenny Lind."

Carol's father had served in World War I and also served in World War II, where he was stationed in London during the bombing. His wartime assignment involved the handling of lumber and building materials for the military. He was billeted with a family in London that Carol and her mother kept in touch with throughout the duration. Tommy F. was overseas for about three years, during which time Jean and Carol carried on in Saratoga Springs, and "Auntie Peg" (Tommy F.'s sister) took charge of the Hotel.

As a child, Carol was not told too much about the history of the Luther Forest, she said. As she's gotten older, though, she has accumulated many files of newspaper clippings and prized photographs of her father and grandfather and their work in "the forest."

She met her husband Bill Mackay at forestry school in Syracuse; as mentioned above, she was the only girl in her class. "We were both dirt foresters from way back," she said. "We sat next to each other, as the seating was alphabetical: Luther – then Mackay." Romance blossomed and marriage followed.

With Bill's career in lumber and forestry, the Mackay family lived first in Mississippi, then in Vermont, then in Connecticut, finally settling in Glens Falls, New York when Bill went to work for his father-in-law in Malta. Carol said she loved living in Glens Falls. All her children graduated from Glens Falls High School, and she enjoyed being involved in school and church activities, the Glens Falls Operetta Club, and the Lake George Opera. In 1980, she and Bill moved to the house on Cold Springs Road in Malta.

Carol's parents were thrilled about her marriage to Bill Mackay, as they saw him as someone who had talent and the interest to be involved in "the family business." Carol said that Bill was a wonderful husband; he handled the business and the "manly things around the house," leaving her to raise their four children (Nancy, Barbie, David, and Alec) and care for their home.

She said that, at first, her father had a hard time delegating to his son-in-law, and Bill spent some time picking up trash on the roads in Luther Forest. Soon, however, Bill was entrusted with the responsibility of "mapping (surveying) the compartments." He had his own ideas, Carol said, about plans for the Luther Forest but was able to work and compromise productively with Tommy F.

By about 1970, Tommy F. Luther and Bill Mackay were concerned that the forest was not making enough money to support itself, and they decided that selling land for a large

residential development was the pragmatic thing to do. Carol said that the Town of Malta had different ideas and that things were difficult for a few years, but the Luther Forest development did come to fruition.

Son Alec was living and working in New Hampshire in the early 1980's when his father became ill. He moved back to New York to work in the family business, starting at the bottom and working his way up. Carol said she remembers Bill talking with Alec about whether the Luther Forest would continue on in the family with one of *his* children, all of whom are college-age now.

Carol said that she feels her father and grandfather would approve of the practical measures that both Bill and Alec have used to manage the Luther Forest over the past forty years. She admitted that, at first, she was “against” the tech park but that Alec has helped her understand “why it is a good thing,” so she feels her husband, father, and grandfather would be supportive of the actions that Alec is taking in the current environment.

At age eighty, Carol still loves living “in the forest.” Bill passed away in 2002, and now she devotes her time to her family, her passion for quilting, and the Stillwater Methodist Church. She holds the scrapbooks, photos, and memorabilia of the family men—four generations of them – who created, managed, and transformed Malta's Luther Forest. She carries the legacy in her heart, watching with pride and wonder to see if the torch may pass to a fifth generation.