

## History of the Dairy Mart / Dairy Malt

By Jim Scott, June 2016

If you've ever stopped by John's Drive-In in Kitty Hawk, on the Outer Banks of North Carolina, you've visited a historic site. It's historic for my family, anyway. It was originally a Dairy Mart ice cream shop built and operated by my Uncle Gene Webb and his wife Jane Webb. This is the story of the disaster that occurred there in 1956.

Information and photos have been provided by Gene and Jane's children, Valerie Pedersen and Sherry Wallace, as well as my sisters Ann Lankey, Mary Lynn Scott, and Deborah Biddle, and my mother Ruth Scott.

My father, Robert J. Scott, met Gene Webb when they were both serving with the U.S. Army in Europe during World War II.



Gene Webb (at lower left) in Austria, May 4, 1945  
(Photo sent home by Robert Scott)



Robert Scott among buzz bomb damage, Liege, Belgium, December 17, 1944  
(Photo sent home by Robert Scott)

After the war, Gene married my father's sister, Jane, and became my uncle. They moved to Illinois and had their first daughter, Valerie. Then Gene was recalled into the Army for the Korean war. When he had done his duty once again, he and Jane dreamed of opening an ice cream business and living in the Outer Banks of North Carolina, an area they loved.

They bought four lots: one ocean-front lot and three across the road. (Today the road is known as State Rt. 12, also known as N. Virginia Dare Trail. The location of the ice cream shop is about half-way between White Ave. and Hurdle St.) The house was built on the ocean side, using concrete block with a stucco finish.



The completed house



The house as seen from the ocean side

The ice cream shop was built across the street from the house. During construction, 1953-1954, the Webbs lived in an Airstream trailer.



The Dairy Mart under construction



The completed Dairy Mart

The ice cream shop opened for business in 1954 as part of the Dairy Mart franchise. After the first summer the Webbs realized they could not make a living selling ice cream during a tourist season of just three to four months. So they moved to Raleigh so Gene could get a winter job, and so Valerie could start school. Their second daughter, Sherry, was born later in 1954.



The Scott family visiting the Webbs at the beach house  
From left to right: Ruth, with Deborah on her lap; Ann; Robert; Valerie; Jim

For the 1955 season, Gene withdrew from the Dairy Mart franchise, went independent, and changed the business name to Dairy Malt - different by one letter. The sign featured a giant milkshake painted by Jane.



The Dairy Malt with customers



The Dairy Malt (from an unidentified FaceBook post)

During the winter off-season after that second summer in the ice cream business, disaster struck. From January 8-12, 1956, a nor'easter hit the east coast, with storm surges as high as four feet at some locations. A nor'easter is "a macro-scale cyclone occurring along the upper East Coast of the United States and Atlantic Canada"<sup>1</sup>. It's so named because, as the offshore air mass rotates counter-clockwise, the strongest winds onshore blow in from the northeast. The 1956 storm was extraordinary in terms of the range of atmospheric pressures that occurred; it might have been the storm of the century if it were not for mitigating atmospheric conditions.<sup>2</sup>

Sad to say, the storm washed away the house on January 9, 1956. The Webbs had not been able to get flood insurance for this area, and in fact some said the location of the house had been historically an inlet area, where the sea kept trying to reclaim the land. Be that as it may, they had put their young lives and money into this venture, and they lost it all. They sold the Dairy Malt business and the lot the house had been on, very cheaply. (They kept the other two back lots but never did anything with them until they were sold in the 1980s.)



The house on January 9 (left), and on January 10 (right)

In the aftermath of the storm, perhaps the only meaningful remnant found was Valerie's "pillow dog." Our grandmother, Mamie Scott (Jane and Robert's mother) made these dog-shaped pillows for all of her grandchildren. (In my family, they were referred to as "dog babies.") Valerie's bedroom, on the ocean side of the house, was the first, along with the living room, to fall into the ocean. Her pillow dog was on her

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<sup>1</sup> Wikipedia, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nor%27easter>

<sup>2</sup> "Mean Five-Day Pressure Pattern of the Great Atlantic Coast Storm, March 1962," by Arthur J. Cooperman and Hans E. Rosendal, in *Monthly Weather Review*, March 1963 issue; compares the 1962 storm to the one in 1956.

bed, and was washed away. Someone found it, with one of its button eyes missing, and returned to her. Jane wrote a children's story at the end of her life retelling this story.



A typical "pillow dog" or "dog baby" (Jim's)

For years the Webb family would visit the Outer Banks, and Jane would comb through the area where her house had stood and find bits of stucco with a certain color on it and say, "Oh, that was the bathroom," or "That's a bit of the living room." She had painted an undersea mural in the bathroom and done a lot of the interior painting, so she would have recognized the remaining bits of her handiwork.

The Webbs moved to Amelia, Virginia, to a seed corn farm. Gene had grown up on a farm, and had an agriculture degree from the University of Illinois. He began working as an agronomist for the Agency for International Development (AID) of the U. S. Department of State. In January 1959 the family was sent to Tarai State Farm in India, the first of several foreign posts with AID, where Gene worked on site with the local farmers to improve the yield and preservation of their crops. Later posts were in Nigeria and Tunisia.





Jane and Gene Webb, 1962 in India

The former Dairy Mart / Dairy Malt still exists today, at 3716 N. Virginia Dare Trail, Kitty Hawk, NC 27949. Since 1977, it has been known as John's Drive-In<sup>3</sup>, originally owned and operated by the late John Tice Sr., his wife, Pat Tice, and their son, John Tice, Jr. For the last 11 years, it has been owned and run by John Tice, Jr.



John's Drive-In, January 2016 (Google Street View, © 2016 Google)

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.johnsdrivein.com>



John's Drive-In, open for business



Customers waiting to order at John's Drive-In