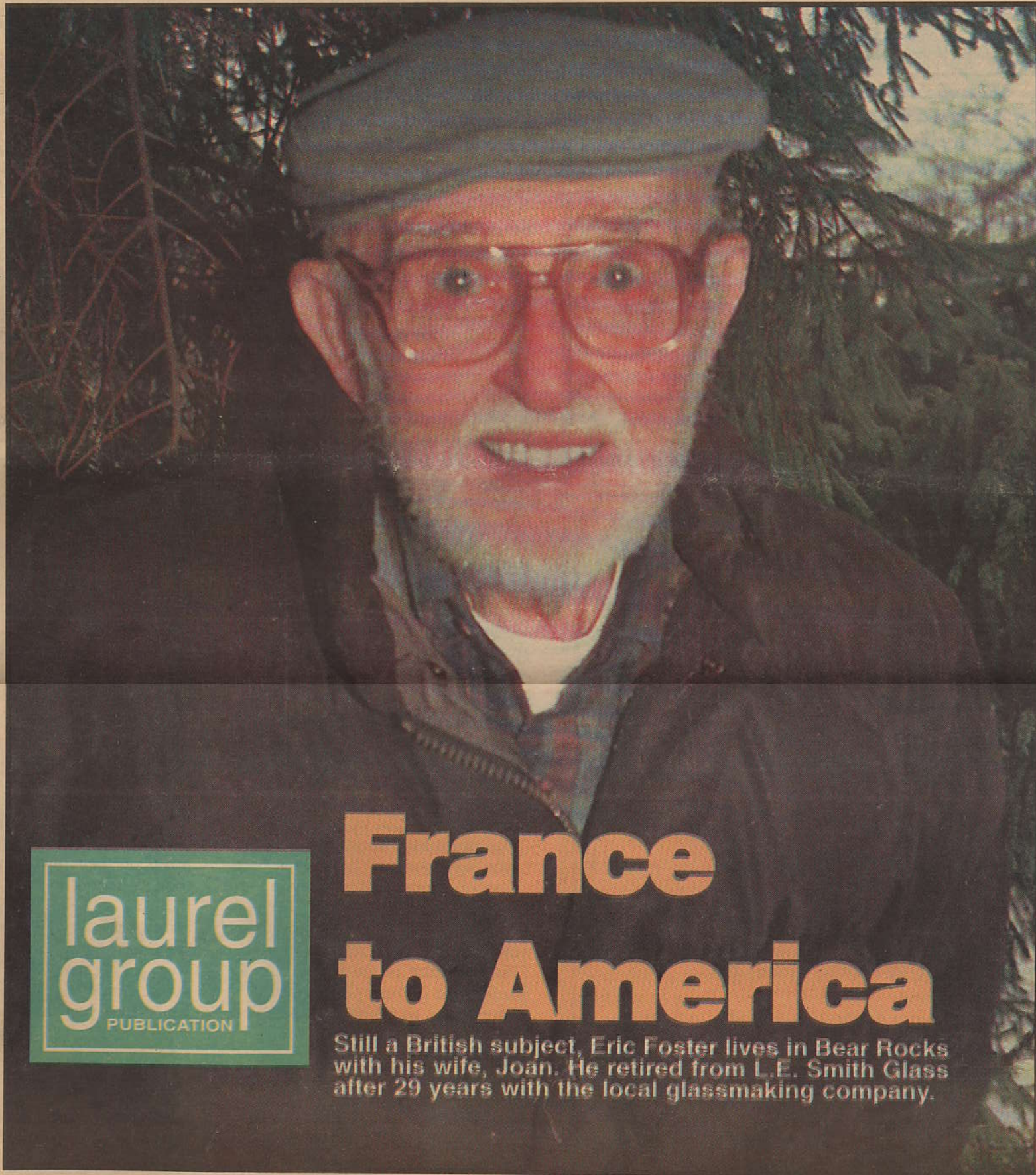


SENIOR LIFE

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France to America

Still a British subject, Eric Foster lives in Bear Rocks with his wife, Joan. He retired from L.E. Smith Glass after 29 years with the local glassmaking company.

A QUARTERLY RESOURCE FOR RETIRED AND SENIOR CITIZENS

From France to America

Retired Smith Glass employee recalls twists, turns of life

By Paul Brittain
Laurel Group Newspapers

Eric Foster admits that, by comparison, his life today is nearly boring compared to all that came before retirement. But at age 86, he prefers it that way, admitting, "I couldn't continue at the pace I was going."

Now living in Bear Rocks with his second wife, Joan, Foster recently retired from L.E. Smith Glass.

A British subject born in France, Foster has experienced his share of twists and turns while traveling the world, and eventually settling in the Mount Pleasant area.

Born Aug. 3, 1913 in Eastern France near Switzerland, he was the son of Reuben Sharp Foster and Marcelle Cazin Foster. He lived and studied in France into his teenage years while pursuing a career as a textile designer, attending art school in Leone.

His parents separated and eventually divorced as his father returned to his native England and his mother became a teacher. After working at the Bouverat studio in France, Eric decided to move to England to see his father.

The only problem? "I forgot that I didn't speak English."

Eventually resolving that issue, Eric remained in England, where he now had two stepsisters and a stepbrother.

He learned ballroom dancing under his uncle, Tom Foster, who was a British Association Teacher of Dancing. He also worked for his uncle, and this led to meeting a dance partner with whom he would appear in England's version of *Life* magazine, the *Picture Post*.

Ever popular at the time was England's "Lambeth Walk", and a British woman named Annette Mills was creating her own new dance called "Booms-A-Daisy."

Eric met her while she was playing the piano in a hotel lobby, and when the conversation revealed he was a dancer, she asked him to join her in performing her new dance.

Six months later, the couple appeared in the publication. The dance was meant as a pleasant diversion to the troubles of the times, with World War II impending.

A full page featuring Eric and Annette was published in the *Picture Post's* edition of July 1, 1939.

The whimsical choreography began, "...So Let's Start With Something Cheerful For A Change.

"The world is growing colder—and smaller. Soon we shan't be able to keep warm. Soon there won't be any place for us all to keep warm on. Planets are coming closer. One is sure to bump into us before long. Our nation is becoming weaker. Our people are dying out. Our physique is failing. Our brain is becoming smaller. So what? So—Hands, knees, and BOOMPS-A-DAISY!"

The dance partners remained in touch, even as Eric was back in France when the publication was released. World War II had arrived, and his life took a different direction.

Tragically, Annette Mills was injured while entertaining troops during the war. A truck in which she was a passenger was involved in an accident. Both her legs were broken and she never danced again, dying only a few years later.

Eric's life also changed courses because of the war. He joined the British Army and instructed tank drivers and taught at gunnery school. He transferred to the French Army in 1942 so that he could instruct the French in operating English-made weapons.

The young man who left France for England without any knowledge of the English language was now bilingual, and an asset for both armies. Though he excelled in the use of firearms, he doesn't own a rifle or handgun today.

"I hate them," he says. "I know the damage they can do."

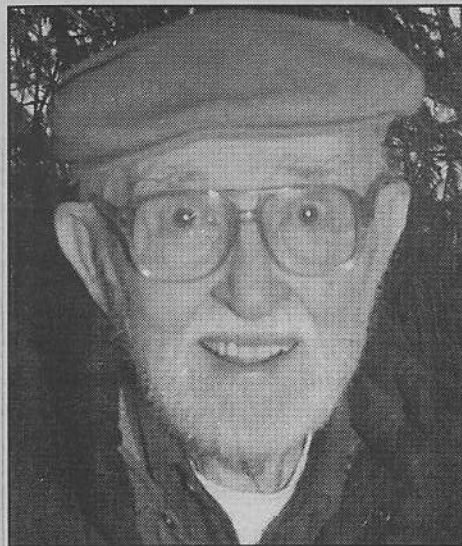
He was in Paris when the city was liberated, and calls it "a mess." He said, "There were civilians all over the place—people who had nothing to do with the war. They were so happy to be liberated, they decided to join us; asking us to kiss a child; people jumping on the tanks."

This state of confusion became more complicated when snipers began firing and innocent civilians were forced to jump on the ground for safety. Some were caught in crossfire.

Still, Eric has one humorous memory of the liberation of France.

The tank in which he was commander came about approaching the Arch of Triumph, where a German tank faced the arch in anticipation to ambush any such tank. "But I came from the left," he says, catching the Germans by surprise.

As the French tank prepared to fire, Eric says a gunman reached into the shells of lined-up artillery. In haste, he grabbed a smoke shell, which was fired and hit the tank with all the



Eric Foster

effect "of a fly hitting you on the head."

The French tank reloaded and fired again. Curiously, the gunman had hastily nabbed another smoke bomb. "Eventually, we hit them with an explosive," Eric says. He laughs as he says, "By now, they knew something was happening and they all escaped in the smoke."

In Paris, Eric met a woman who would change his life, including his making the United States his home.

A friend of Eric's had asked him if he could command a tank. "Of course you can," he was told. But the friend was killed by a sniper the next day when he stopped outside Paris to telephone his mother with the news.

Upon learning of his friend's untimely death, Eric collapsed in tears. A woman who came to experience the liberation and hoped to see Gen. Charles De Gaulle, stopped when she saw the young man crying at the roadside.

Eric told Baroness Becky Kaminski, a woman of Jewish and Polish origin who married French Capt. George Kaminski, of the death of his friend. They became instant friends, and she invited Eric to her home the next evening.

Unfortunately, duty interrupted the visit, and he couldn't complete the visit. But his newfound acquaintance was pivotal in helping him to a change in careers through the involvement of an American named Andy Yolanski, and a new type of writing instrument.

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Having met Baroness Becky Kaminski in Paris during World War II, Eric Foster's life changed through an additional new acquaintance. An American serviceman from Chicago, by the name of Andy Yenotski showed

Eric a new invention that was beginning to take the world by storm.

It was the ball point pen, created to replace the familiar fountain pen that required dipping the pen point into ink wells. The ball point had the unique feature of containing its own ink source.

By getting into importing, exporting and sales of the pens with Andy, Eric was about to become a world traveler of sorts. Among those helping through connections was Baroness Kaminski.

Eric was to travel to India, South Africa, Egypt, Switzerland, Singapore, Borneo, and eventually to Chicago. He called his early career "a dream job", for all the places to which he traveled. He also married a French woman in the 1940s named Francoise, with whom they had two children, Mary Dominique and Philippe.

When Eric came to America to settle in, Francoise and the children went to France. The plan was for Eric to return to France to bring the family to America, but best laid plans don't always come true.

After a period of about six months, "I went back to pick them up," he said. "She refused to come, because she did not like Americans."

Eric returned to Chicago by himself, and the couple divorced. He did not see his children again until about a year ago, when he returned to Europe.

He said his daughter was quite receptive to seeing her father, but his son had some difficult feelings about the matter.

"My daughter was most charming, but the boy would not even talk to me... on the telephone only."

During his many associations with the glass industry, he has provided many creative designs. He enjoyed working with "glasswich", a design resembling a sandwich as it includes several layers of glass affixed atop one another. He also was involved in the design of sliding glass shower doors.

Eric met his present wife, Joan, while he was employed in Wheaton, N.J. It was a number of years before they became married, and she has a son from a previous marriage.

Eric and Joan have been married for 10 years and reside in the Bear Rocks area. She is employed in the office of the Norvelt clothing company.

From Chicago in 1958, Eric's affiliations changed many times. He began an affiliation with Wheaton Glass in New Jersey in 1965, a company in

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Dearborn, Mich. in 1969, and a few other firms. His longest affiliation came with L.E. Smith Glass in 1970, and continued there until the late 1990s.

Actually a designer by trade, Eric created many glass designs. An affiliate told him an ideal place for him to work would be at a place known as L.E. Smith Glass in Mount Pleasant. Eric said the factory was then owned by Tim Wible and his family.

"I was hired right away," Eric said. "Anything that had to be done, I did it." His travels didn't end either, as he went to many sites in the United States for various glass shows.

He enjoyed his many years in the Mount Pleasant area, but says things are the exact opposite of the hectic life he previously led. That in itself has been a blessing.

"I was so busy until I slowed down after coming to Mount Pleasant. I had to slow down... I couldn't con-

tinue at the pace I was going."

In addition to his long-time affiliation with Smith Glass, Eric has contributed his insights at meetings of the Mount Pleasant Historical Society.

Eric remains in contact with Baroness Kaminski, who is now 87 years of age. He recognizes the impact of their meeting many years ago, when a grieving soldier and a woman seeking Gen. Charles De Gaulle accidentally came upon each other.

Indirectly, that set in motion the series of events that eventually brought a young man of French and English descent to the western Pennsylvania community of Mount Pleasant.

Eric has been proud to call Mount Pleasant his home, and felt compelled to share his interesting life story with our many readers.

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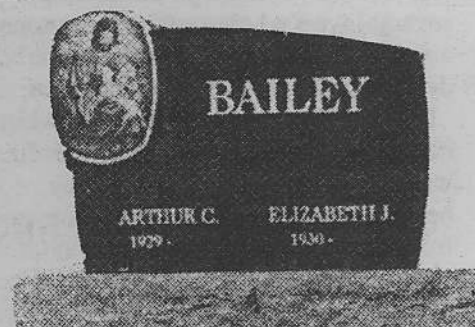
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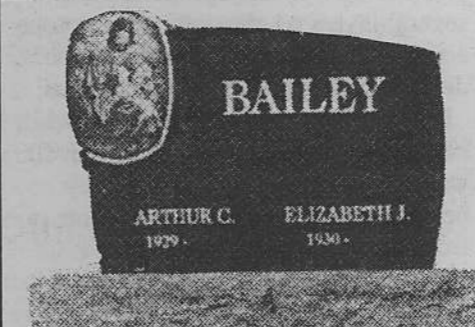
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