

Chris Clyne's obituary for Steve Damon, June 6, 2009

Stephen Francis Damon, age 87, died of heart failure in Portland, Maine on May 30, 2009. Born in Malden, Massachusetts on April 5, 1922, he was the fourth child of Harry Franklin Damon and Frances Shove.

Before moving permanently to New Hampshire in 1938, Steve's family spent summers at the family farm along Cleveland Hill Road in Tamworth. Steve graduated from Kimball Union Academy in 1940, attended Bowdoin College, the Wentworth Institute, and Northeastern University. He enlisted in the U.S. Navy in 1943 and served as a radio technician in the Philippines and Okinawa during World War II and until his discharge in 1946.

After the service, he worked as an engineer for Raytheon in Waltham, Massachusetts. He returned to Tamworth with his young family in 1952 and worked as a house-builder for the next 30 years. He worked at different times with both Bob Eastwick and Ralph Ames. They built and renovated many Tamworth and Sandwich homes, as well as a small factory in Madison. Sometime during those years, he made piano cases at his shop on old Route 25 in Ossipee. He built his own home on Cleveland Hill Road, not far from the family farm.

An avid follower of current events and politics, Steve held strong opinions and relished lively discussion. He served as a Tamworth Selectman, on the Tamworth School Board, and as a Trustee of the Trust Funds. While Selectman, he was involved in the town's 200th anniversary celebration in 1966, and he completed the self-assigned project of taking a black & white snapshot of every house in town, for the tax records.

In 1970, Steve married Virginia "Ginny" Works White of Intervale, who, at the time, was the Tamworth Town Nurse. With Ginny, other family members, and friends, Steve made several trips to Africa and Central and South America. Some of the early trips were timed to view and photograph total solar eclipses.

In 1975, in a field near his home, he built a two-story domed observatory 12 feet in diameter with an outdoor viewing deck. The next year, he completed work on a homemade telescope, at the time the largest in New Hampshire. Steve eventually built three telescopes, mostly from salvaged materials, following instructions in books from the State Library. The largest telescope required a special mirror, which Steve painstakingly ground and polished from a piece of obsidian. He and Ginny donated the observatory to Kimball Union Academy in 1982. The alumni magazine described his gift to the school as a testimony to his curiosity and ingenuity.

Two of Steve's photography projects became invaluable collections now held at Cook Memorial Library. *Who's Who in Tamworth*, which he started in the early 1990s, is 37 volumes of more than 3500 black & white photos of Tamworth residents. Steve took the photos and printed them in his dark room. In recent years, he switched to a digital camera and continued to chronicle and add to the collection.

Steve described his other project, fourteen Scrapbooks, as a miscellaneous collection of stuff. Each book holds photos, genealogies, newspaper clippings, ephemera, and records of natural occurrences – all related to Tamworth. In collaboration with his neighbor and fellow historian Joan Casarotto, he shot or copied photographs and labeled them with captions, sometimes adding personal commentary. His introduction to the second scrapbook encourages people to continue to add to the collection, as it's "important to get our town's history down in black and white before it is lost."

He created another book in 2004; it was based on a 1948 book published by the Tamworth Women's Club that lists the 127 Tamworth World War II veterans. Steve decided to locate and "photograph them as they look today." He found nineteen veterans still living and compiled *Tamworth in World War II and Sixty Years Later*.

During 39 years together, Ginny and Steve had dozens of cats. He fed and photographed the moths, spiders, birds, skunks, foxes, raccoons, deer, bears, and moose that wandered into his fauna-friendly yard. A dedicated phenologist, each spring he was often the first in town to spot returning red-winged blackbirds, indigo buntings, and orioles. He made footstools from tree stumps; birdhouses; and ingenious shelves, drawers and cabinets to hold books and seashells, his sand collection, and Ginny's precious fan collection. He loved classical music, opera, the song Rooster Pooster and ballet. He enjoyed movies, both classic and contemporary, and was a great reader of science, philosophy, mysteries, biography, and classics. Around town, he wore a signature outfit: a tattersall shirt with eyeglasses in the front pocket, khakis, a long-billed cap, and inexpensive sneakers. He kept a daily routine, distributing newspapers to neighbors and bones to local dogs, always with a cheery greeting.

Steve Damon is survived by his wife Virginia; his daughter, Wendy Damon of Tamworth, and her husband Peter Case; his son Christopher Stephen Damon of Virginia; his sister Patricia Niswander of Concord, New Hampshire, and her husband Don; his step-daughter Suzanne Ganem of Connecticut; grandchildren Sarah Damon of Virginia and Christina Damon of New York; and step-grandchildren Christian Ganem of North Conway, Steven Ganem of Massachusetts, and Alexandra Ganem of Connecticut; as well as many nieces and nephews and several great-grandchildren.

He was predeceased by his oldest child, Cynthia, in 1968; his brothers Harry Franklin ("Bus") Damon, Jr. of Grand Rapids, Michigan and Herbert Shove Damon of New London, New Hampshire; and his sister Katharine (Kay) Reed of North Conway.

Photographer, author, inventor, collector, neighbor, historian, raconteur, comedian, explorer – a gathering to remember the life of Steve Damon is planned for the summer. Memorial contributions may be made to Cook Memorial Library, 93 Main Street, Tamworth, NH 03886 or to the Tamworth Community Nurse Association at PO Box 352, Tamworth, NH, or to a charity of the donor's choice.

