

# The ROBINSON-BROADHURST STORY



S.C. Robinson Memorial in front of The RBF Building

## **ROBINSON-BROADHURST FOUNDATION, INC.**

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The Robinson Kitchen Table ...  
Where decades of civic benevolence first saw the light of day, one recipient at a time.

## *Robinson-Broadhurst Reflections*



### **Stamford, New York**

Nestled in the northern Catskills of New York, Stamford (at least on the map) is little more than a hamlet. With summer picnics on the village green and a tradition of springtime parades that stretches well beyond living memory, it's a small, rather quaint town that hasn't rushed to change through the decades.

Even now people flock to Main Street to watch the school marching bands, the floats designed and constructed by local community groups and of course the Stamford Volunteer Fire Department's latest display.

For many years the most avid of these parade watchers were Avery Robinson and his wife, Winnie. No surprise, actually, as they lived at 46 Main Street, smack dab in the middle of the festivities. All they had to do was place a few chairs on the front lawn, sit back and watch the procession roll by.

Sometime in the early 1970s there was one memorable Memorial Day Parade, however, that was especially significant for Avery because he was looking forward to seeing the brand new fire truck he'd purchased for the town. Now, Avery was known to have his wild side, but he was also a traditionalist, which was why he recoiled in horror when the glistening new machine finally appeared.



Winnie and Avery attending a function at Scotch Valley

Yes, it was beautiful, unblemished and replete with the most modern equipment available. It was also a vivid lime green. This was an era when the color of safety vehicles was being modified to improve their visibility.

But fire trucks are supposed to be red, everyone knows that! So Avery made a proposal; if the town would repaint the truck, at his expense, he would dig even deeper and present the fire department with another check.

According to Lad McKenzie, the current president of The Robinson-Broadhurst Foundation, Inc., this was typical of his old friend and neighbor. When Lad became Master of the Masonic Lodge in the nearby town of Hobart, Avery noted the Lodge's dilapidated condition and offered Lad five BLANK checks to re-do the site. The only stipulation was that renovations should be done during Lad's tenure as Master with more checks available as needed.

The checks were used, the results were striking and all was well. Well, nearly so. Some time later Lad received a call from Avery that was also endearingly typical; Avery's accountant needed documentation of the money spent and would Lad please drop off the receipts as soon as possible. No doubt about it, when it came to his community, Avery Robinson was incredibly relaxed about his money.



Scotch Valley, as it was

## Scotch Valley

On another occasion several local businessmen wanted to join in a new venture that would benefit both the community and the surrounding region. The proposition was right up Avery's alley. Fred Murphy owned some land with a nice sized hill that could be purchased to create a ski resort.

Stan Czarniack, an accomplished skier, would be happy to design the runs; while a pleasant lodge that included a year-round restaurant and bowling alley would be a perfect fit at its base. And so arose the Scotch Valley Resort, developed to promote tourism, afford winter recreation and provide employment for local residents.

Unfortunately after just a few seasons it was clear that Scotch Valley could not sustain itself. So Avery stepped in as its main investor. He knew he wouldn't make any money from the venture (and he certainly didn't) but the community benefited greatly for years. Schools throughout the region developed alpine programs for their students and competitive ski teams won championships, even at the state level.



Betty Krull and Avery, July 1968

Meanwhile the local populace enjoyed the activities Scotch Valley provided and, yes, many found employment there. Area businesses also benefited from an increase in economic activity. Avery took Stamford from a faded summer resort community, colloquially marketed as the Queen of the Catskills, and turned it into a popular winter destination.

However, behind the scenes Avery's bookkeeper, Betty Krull, tried for years to get Scotch Valley in the black, and succeeded only once. But turning a profit wasn't important to Avery.

He just wanted to enjoy his ski resort. He also got a kick out of remaining anonymous.

So much so that Betty worked for him for three months before she knew who he was.

As a matter of fact, one afternoon in the Scotch Valley parking lot, Avery came to the rescue of an unsuspecting patron who actually tipped him for his assistance!

Betty is the first to note that he was "one smart cookie," who did wonders in fixing up the community, but she also chuckles about her ongoing struggle with his nonchalance in financial matters. In fact he had a habit of removing money from the cash box and not recording it. It was a never-ending battle to get him to leave an IOU so she could keep the books straight.



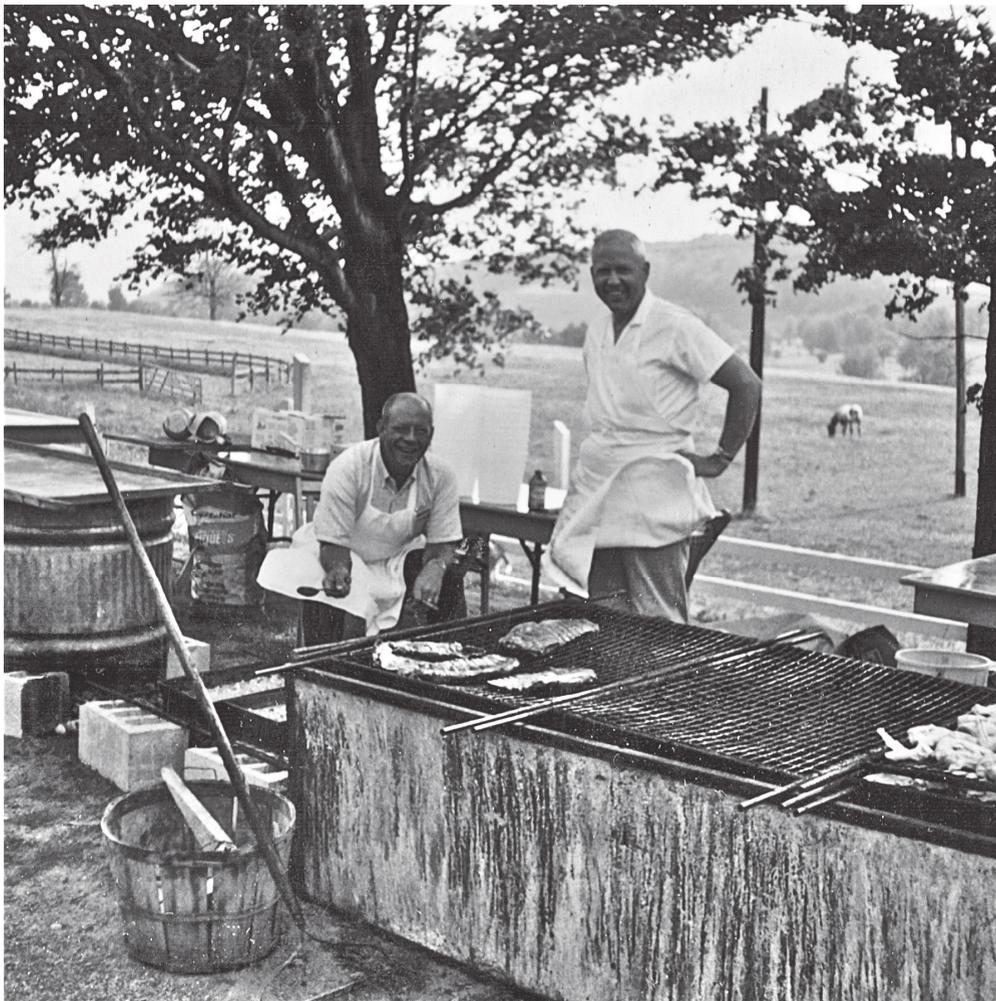
Winnie attends another party, this one at the Stamford Golf Course

The Robinsons loved helping others. They were known to pay hospital bills for those who were down on their luck and were regularly on hand to offer assistance to local youngsters as needed.

Despite their ties to other communities they called Stamford home and their financial support was essential to the Stamford Golf Club where Avery served on the board and was a past president. He was also a member of the Stamford American Legion, the First Presbyterian Church in Stamford, the Stamford Chapter of Rotary International and, of course, the Stamford Volunteer Fire Department, which boasted the finest in fire-engine-red equipment.



Purchased through an historical grant from the Robinson-Broadhurst Foundation and now cared for by the Worcester Historical Society, Avery and Anna's father, Byron once attended this one-room schoolhouse.



The Robinsons held many parties at The Ponderosa in Worcester, New York. Brooks House of Bar-B-Q's (Oneonta, New York) catered this one in August 1968. Art Hartman (left) and Griff Brooks (right) are tending the grill.

## Worcester, New York

In addition to their house on Main Street in Stamford, Avery and Winnie owned a farm in nearby Worcester that was affectionately called The Ponderosa, where Black Angus cattle, horses and various farm animals roamed and strutted, including a peacock.

Built near the site of the first Robinson dwelling in town (a log cabin), The Ponderosa was a haven for relaxation and in the best Robinson tradition it was a place of employment for the local caretakers. It was also a favorite party place.

Sometimes the festivities would extend into the local Time Out Tavern, where Avery was known to pin a \$100 bill on the bar's mirror to buy drinks for the house until the money was gone.

Actually Avery's ties to Worcester extended back for generations. On Main Street you'll find a brass plaque affixed to a huge boulder in front of the Weiting Building, which now houses the community library and theater. It was erected by the Daughters of the American Revolution to honor Worcester settlers who had served in the fight for independence, and the Robinson name is prominently listed.

For many years Avery's relative, James Robinson, would host community picnics on his front lawn in Worcester. After his death James' home was sold and the new owners, a husband and wife, worked tirelessly to renovate the old house, ripping up many boards that had rotted over time with plans to use them as firewood.

One cold evening they did just that and much to their amazement the image of a man's face, and a very sad face at that, appeared in the flames! Later, when shown a picture of James Robinson, the wife confirmed that his was the face they had observed after throwing those boards into the fire.

Despite his best intentions and the family's long history there, Avery didn't always meet with success in Worcester. There was an old one-room schoolhouse that he wanted the town to buy and renovate. He had tried to purchase it himself but the owner, another relative, who was envious of Avery's good fortune, refused to sell it to him.

The structure was adjacent to The Ponderosa, which had been in the (extended) Robinson family for many years; as a matter of fact it was the school Avery's father, Byron, had attended. When The Ponderosa had made its way onto the auction block Avery snapped it up, but the old schoolhouse remained out of his reach.

Winnie, in particular was angry and frustrated with the town for not being of more help. Unfortunately, when New York State's one-room schools were consolidated, the land beneath them was reverted back to the original owners.

It was only after Avery's death, and that of the stubborn owner, that Winnie was able to purchase the little schoolhouse through an historical grant of \$2,000 from the Robinson-Broadhurst Foundation. It's now owned and cared for by the Worcester Historical Society.



The Robinson family: Byron and his wife Eliza Belle with Avery and Anna June.

## Winchendon

Avery and (his sister) Anna's father, Byron Robinson, moved to the (central) Massachusetts town of Winchendon and married Eliza Belle Young. Winchendon was her hometown and that's where Anna was born in 1901, followed by Avery in 1906.

There was a solid middle class upbringing, both graduated from the local high school, and while Avery left to attend Norwich University (Class of 1930), Anna would remain in the Winchendon area for most of her entire life.



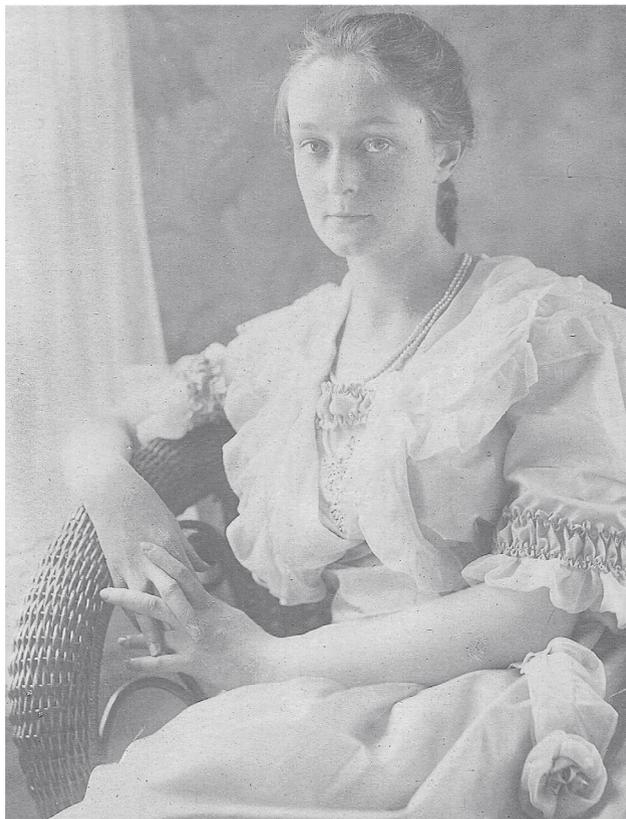
A very young Avery goes for a walk with his mother, Eliza Belle.

Known as Anna June, and having received some business training, she worked for Baxter Whitney, inventor of the first successful wood thickness planer, whose factory and office was in the middle of town. She also worked for a Mr. Davis, who sold insurance.

Anna was good with numbers and, with a solid Robinson work ethic, continued to work even after receiving her inheritance. As one gossip put it, “What’s Mrs. IBM doing, walking to work over at Davis?”

Anna married Ray Broadhurst (her first marriage, at the age of 50, and his second) in 1951 and they remained husband and wife until his death in 1966. Although his work required him to travel, when Ray was home he’d do the cooking, not one of Anna’s preferred tasks.

She did like to eat though, and was a regular at most of the town’s restaurants as well as those in Fitzwilliam, New Hampshire where the couple owned a camp. Ray loved the outdoors so much that the camp became their legal residence, a declaration that also enabled them to benefit from New Hampshire’s liberal income tax and estate tax laws.



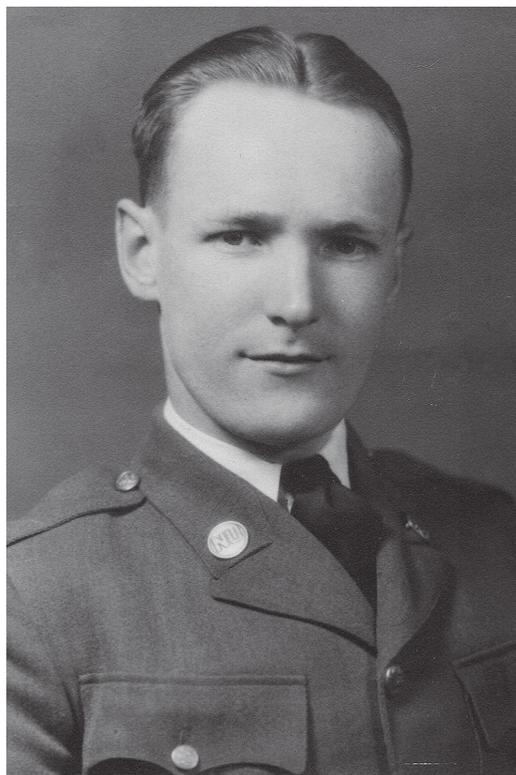
Anna as a young woman

By most accounts Anna was soft spoken and even-keeled. Always wearing her hair in a chignon in public, she preferred simple dresses and in inclement weather chose a well-worn raincoat with a zip-out lining. You might say she was practical. However, on those occasions when she visited her brother and sister-in-law in Stamford she would allow herself a few new outfits, for the trip.

Whereas Anna was generally serene, Avery was not, and she knew her brother to be high-spirited and sometimes devilish. But typical of most sibling relationships they loved each other despite their differences.

That's not to say that Anna wasn't socially minded. She had a large circle of girl friends. Nor was she averse to getting together for cocktails. One night one of her neighbors received a call from a concerned friend, asking that an eye be kept out for Anna's safe return. Despite her normally composed demeanor, she had imbibed a bit too much.

To say that Anna was careful with her money would be an understatement. She always clipped grocery coupons and was known to drive to adjoining towns if that's where the bargain was, as was the case with a grocery store that ran a promotion for tableware. The manager saw an older woman trying to calculate how many pieces she was eligible for based on her purchases. Because the promotion was at its end he gave her what stock remained and even carried the boxes out to her car.



Avery in uniform

On another occasion a Winchendon resident recalls his mother being invited to accompany Anna on some of her day trips. She had a big, green car and loved to drive throughout the region, not that such outings were ever aimless. Anna was in the habit of allowing her dividend checks to accumulate. She would then drive to various banks to open new savings accounts with them; thereby assuring that her savings would be insured.

Despite her frugality, Anna June Broadhurst was a generous soul; she supported the Clark Memorial, or as the locals still call it, "The Clark." She also helped needy youngsters purchase special items, such as sports equipment, that their parents couldn't otherwise afford. Invitations would be given for the children to visit a local store and there the gifts would be waiting for them, prepaid by Anna.

An active member of The Church of the Unity, where she'd volunteer to teach Sunday School, she was (no surprise) a generous contributor throughout the years, although few knew it at the time. John White, the church treasurer for nearly 60 years, well remembered Anna quietly asking about the church's finances and then helping out where she could.

It's telling that Mr. White was fairly worried about the church's future after her passing, which occurred in a (tax-free) Peterborough, New Hampshire nursing home on September 8, 1984. Those who knew her well maintain that her heart always remained in Winchendon, with her church, her friends and her fondest memories.



Life With Winnie

When Avery left Winchendon as a teenager, it was to attend Norwich University, a military college that also offers a liberal arts education to traditional students. Founded at Northfield, Vermont in the early 19th Century, Norwich maintains a uniquely American educational philosophy that trails back to Captain Alden Partridge, its founder.

It was Partridge's belief that a well-trained militia was the best way to prevent what he considered to be a grave threat to the nation's security, the rise of a professional officer class. The resulting hands-on notion of "working together," regardless of your socio-economic background, struck a resounding chord with Avery, who graduated in 1930.

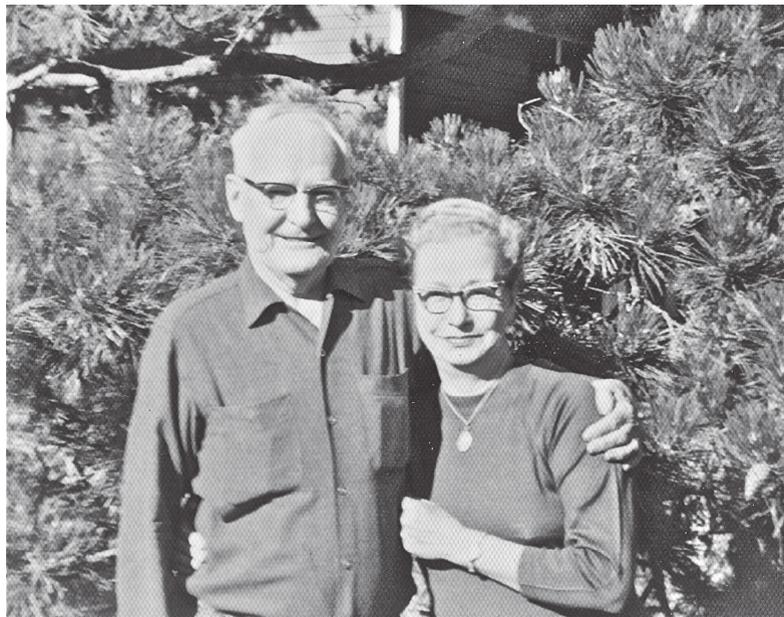
After college he quickly married and began a career as an office machine operator (for the International Business Machine Corporation)

during the hardscrabble Depression years. Although he and his wife had a son, Robert A. Robinson Jr. (who now resides in Arizona), their marriage did not last and with the nation at war he ultimately decided to join the Army, at the age of 36.

Enlisting at Fort Devens, Massachusetts on March 4, 1943, Private Robinson's tour of duty lasted through the duration of World War II, plus six months. According to his military record, at the time of his enlistment, he was 5 foot 4 inches tall and weighed 128 pounds. He served with the Army's Cavalry whose role was reconnaissance, security and mounted assault.

It makes sense that Avery would be stationed in Texas, as this is where the Cavalry units were located. It was while stationed in San Antonio, during that final six months in the army, he met a local widow named Winnie Mary Walther Coleman. Winnie, the daughter of Arthur and Frances Lee Walther, was born in Kendall, Texas. She was the youngest of three with an older sister Katherine and older brother Alvin.

Early in their courtship Avery's uncle, Samuel Robinson, who had suffered a stroke and required help, asked Avery to come to Stamford as soon as he received his discharge. When that day arrived Winnie opted to join him. The couple was married enroute, in Birmingham, Alabama on September 10, 1947. When they at long last arrived, Uncle Samuel, who had accrued a sizeable fortune and was now president of the National Bank of Stamford, gave them the house at 46 Main Street.



Avery and Winnie in their backyard, 46 Main Street, Stamford

Most of the generous gifts and financial support that was provided by Avery and Winnie through the years found its origins at the chrome legged, white metal topped table ensconced in the kitchen of that house. In the back was Winnie's beloved garden, where she could often be found feeding peanuts to the neighborhood's ever-increasing population of chipmunks and squirrels.

When Samuel Robinson died in 1948, he left part of his substantial estate to his wife, Jennie and the rest to Avery and Anna. Eventually Avery would become a director of the Bank of Stamford, a position he held until a few months before his death. When Aunt Jennie died in 1955 the remaining portion of the estate (nearly \$8 million) was left to them as well.

High spirited but thoughtful and generous to a fault, Avery and Winnie lived life to the fullest. Unfortunately they were both heavy smokers. Avery died from emphysema at the age of 77 on October 3, 1983. Winnie, who suffered from acute respiratory failure died thirteen years later, on September 24, 1996.

In accordance with his Uncle Samuel's wishes, Avery's Last Will & Testament declared that a sizeable portion of the Robinson family assets be used to set up a charitable foundation, formed specifically to aid the communities of Stamford, Worcester and Winchendon.

At the time of his death these assets amounted to approximately \$7,330,000. Anna, who died the following year, left an additional \$3,590,000 to the newly named Robinson-Broadhurst Foundation, Inc. When Winnie died in 1996 another \$7,540,000 was left to the Foundation along with an additional \$7,700,000 from trusts that had been set up by Anna and Avery.

## *The Robinson-Broadhurst Fortune*

So how did Avery Robinson and his sister, Anna become so wealthy that they (along with Avery's wife, Winnie) were able to form a major foundation and contribute to their communities with such generosity? And how is it that they remained so well grounded and devoted to their small town roots?

Well, it's clear that level-headedness, astuteness and determination are inherited Robinson traits. Along with a keen interest in community service, each of the founders of The Robinson-Broadhurst Foundation, Inc. possessed these family qualities in great abundance.



Robert Avery Robinson and Anna June Robinson in 1908 when they were very young



Avery in his summer attire

Avery and Anna were born to Byron and Eliza Belle (Young) Robinson in Winchendon, Massachusetts, Eliza Belle's hometown. By all accounts their wedding in the summer of 1900 had been quite an affair with more than 400 guests filling the pews of the Unitarian Church on Central Street. Significantly, Byron's best man was his youngest brother, Samuel, or Sam for short.

Like his brother Byron, Samuel C. Robinson had grown up in Worcester, New York, where he was known for his keen participation in community affairs. Sam was a "mover and shaker" who ultimately became the president of the (nearby) National Bank of Stamford.

His firm conviction, that the best way to help one's community is to invest locally, prompted him to purchase a sizable amount of the bank's stock, while his wife Jennie (Jane), who also worked at the bank, shrewdly came to hold a number of private mortgages.

It was this same conviction that impelled Sam to make a considerable investment in the fledgling company of an old acquaintance, T.J. Watson, Sr. of Binghamton, New York. That company was the International Business Machine Corporation, later known solely by its acronym, IBM.

When Sam suffered his stroke in 1947, he asked Avery (who brought along his new bride, Winnie) to come to Stamford to help care for him. There he gave them the house at 46 Main Street where they resided for the remainder of their lives.



The dedication ceremony of the Conservation Building in Stamford took place in 1962. From left to right (facing the camera): Fred Murphy, Len Govern, Avery Robinson and a representative from New York state. Senator Ogden Bush (with his back to camera on left) also was in attendance.

When Sam died in 1948 he left part of his substantial estate to his wife Jennie (who died in 1955), and the rest to Anna and Avery (who would become a director of the National Bank of Stamford). Long inured in the importance of local investments, they hung on to the stock.

After Avery's death, the Robinson-Broadhurst Foundation, Inc. was incorporated on March 24, 1984 and recognized as a 501(c) (3) charitable foundation by the IRS on the 10th of June 1985.

The Robinsons' good friend and family attorney, Robert (Bob) McDowell was legally responsible for the development of the foundation and its first official meeting was held in Winchendon two days after the passing of Anna, who was to be a director. Winnie would remain as a director until her death in 1996.

According to Betty Krull, Avery's former bookkeeper, Bob McDowell and Avery spent many hours sitting at the Robinson kitchen table, Avery with his "Moose Milk" (whisky and milk) and Bob with his cigars, as they "hammered out the details of the subject at hand."



The Stamford Chapter of Rotary International was another organization that benefited from Avery's benevolence. Eric Theile and Glenda Collins are shown accepting a check from Avery.

Through the years such benevolence has come to the aid of:

The Stamford Community Hospital

The Stamford Library

Scotch Valley Ski Resort

The Conservation Building in Stamford

Stamford's Volunteer Fire Department

The National Bank of Stamford

The Stamford Golf Course

The nearby Hobart Masonic Lodge

Robinson Terrace Skilled Nursing Facility

First Presbyterian Church, which received funding for maintenance of building and grounds and its Sunday School Program

The Utsayantha Chapter of the Order of the Eastern Star, which received funding in memory of Avery and Anna's Aunt Jane Robinson and Uncle Sam Robinson

Stamford Central School

The Salvation Army of Oneonta

Boy Scout Troop 32 in Stamford

The Indian Hills Girl Scout Council



Winnie, Anna and Avery Robinson

In addition to several silent partnerships (including a local cauliflower farm and a florist) many institutions benefited from the Robinson's generosity. Fittingly, their final project was the Robinson-Broadhurst Foundation, now housed at 101 Main Street in Stamford.

On his death bed Avery asked his most trusted friend, Bob McDowell to look out for Winnie, which Bob did faithfully, until his own tragic death on June 23, 1989. Bob also remained actively involved in the Foundation until the day he died.

According to the May 1987 Annual Meeting Minutes of the Robinson-Broadhurst Foundation Inc., Avery and Anna's estates contained 38,452 shares of IBM stock worth approximately \$6 million, along with a sizeable amount of Stamford National Bank stock.

But laws change and revisions were made to the Internal Revenue Code, making it illegal for a private foundation to hold more than 20 percent of the voting stock of an unrelated business. Consequently, most of the foundation's shares in the National Bank of Stamford (now The National Bank of Delaware County) had to be divested.

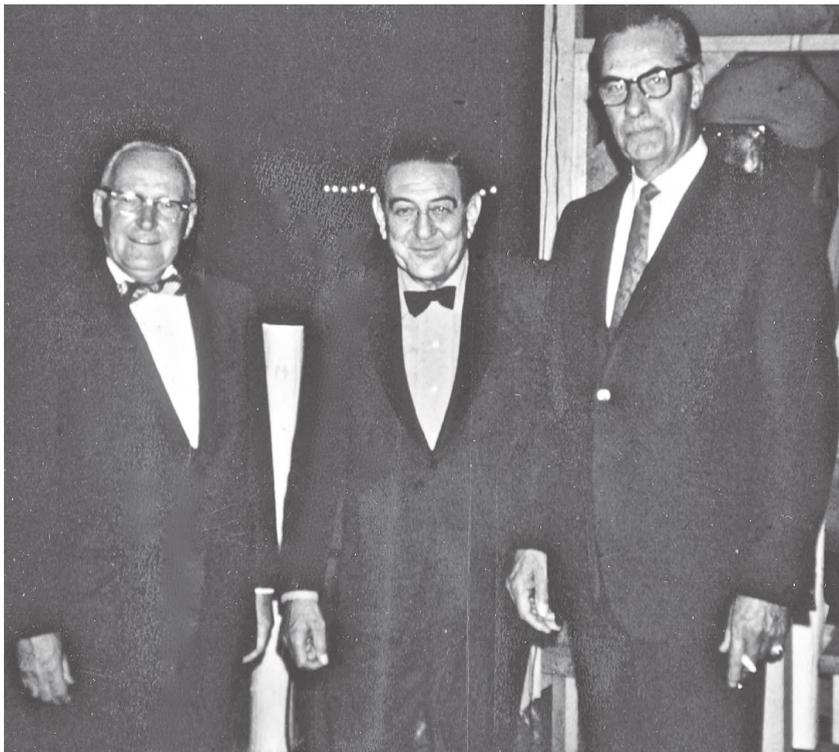
A limited amount of IBM stock is still owned by the Foundation, however. Regardless, as of its May 2011 Annual Meeting, the Robinson-Broadhurst Foundation Inc. still maintains a healthy endowment of approximately \$50 million.



The Stamford Golf Club



Sisters-in-law: Anna and Winnie



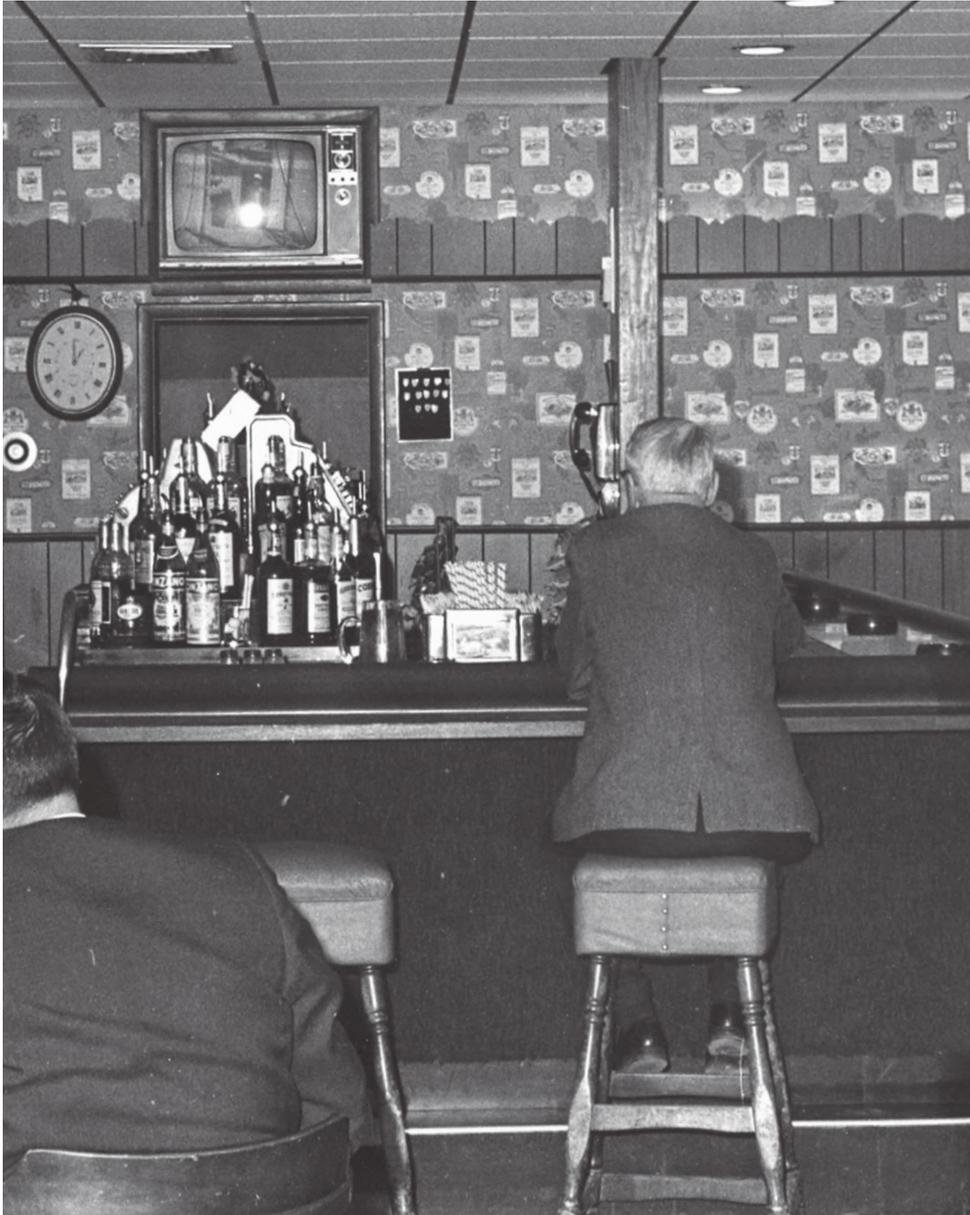
The Robinsons invited the Guy Lombardo Orchestra to perform at Scotch Valley. Shown in this 1968 photograph is Avery with Guy Lombardo and Ed Gilbert.



Avery and Winnie at Grossinger's 1961



Avery (talking with Dr. and Mrs. Manzanero), Winnie and Anna at Scotch Valley, 1968.



One of Avery's favorite spots to relax was at the Scotch Valley bar where he could watch television from his favorite stool.