

Chapin Rustic Retreat Was Family Endeavor

By MAJ KALFUS Special to The New York Times

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BYRAM—Instead of hiring a builder, the Chapin brothers have made the completion of their rustic retreat here a family project.

Harry Chapin, a well-known singer and songwriter, and his brother Tom, the star of "Make A Wish," a television program for children, did most of the hammering, measuring and woodcutting for the new wing of the house, with their youngsters working eagerly by their sides.

Before playing a few sets of tennis on their aged clay court, Tom's wife, Bonnie, and his cousin, Frances, washed the dishes from the communal breakfast at the water pump, the only source of running water. The presence of an outhouse, set nicely on a nearby hill, also can be attributed to the lack of plumbing.

The primitive state of this century-old home is what its summer residents always have found to be so charming.

"After living in the structured confines of the city, this setting gives us a relaxing and anonymous kind of shapeless alternative," Tom Chapin explained the other day.

Grew Up in Brooklyn

The Chapin brothers grew up in Brooklyn Heights, but spent their summers in this Sussex County community. Music was always an integral part of their family life. They played many instruments and enjoyed singing together, as well as with the church choir; their father, Jim Chapin, a well-known jazz drummer, was a source of stimulation and encouragement musically.

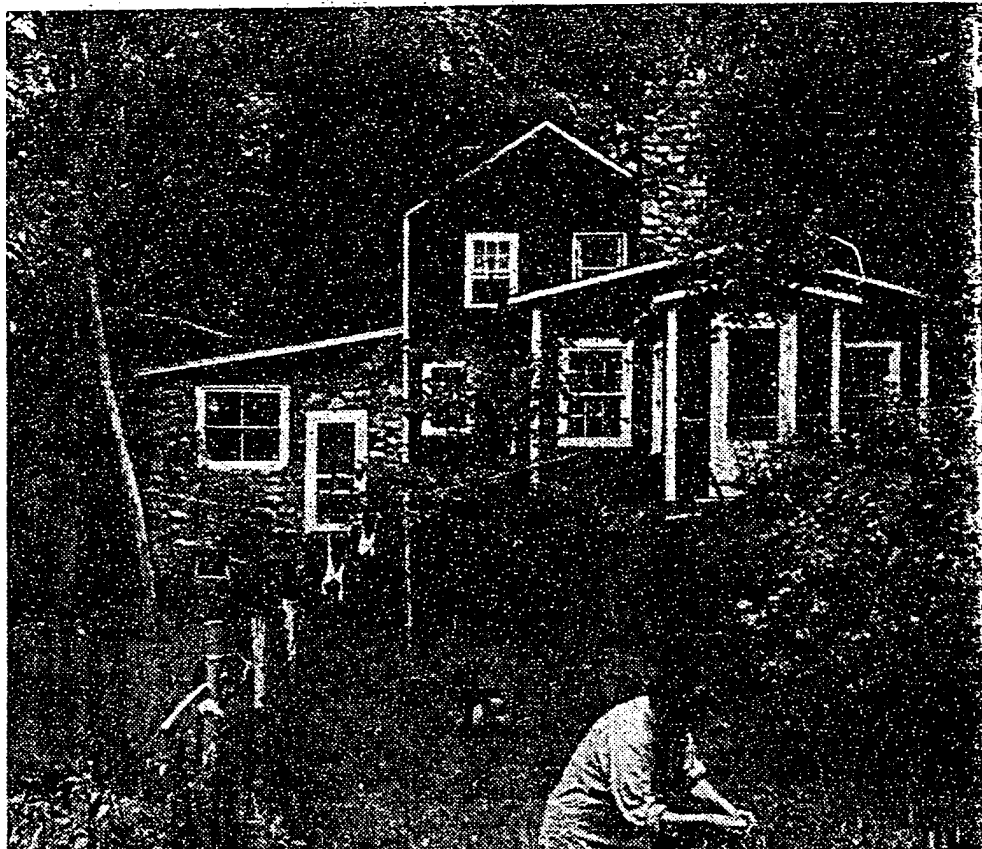
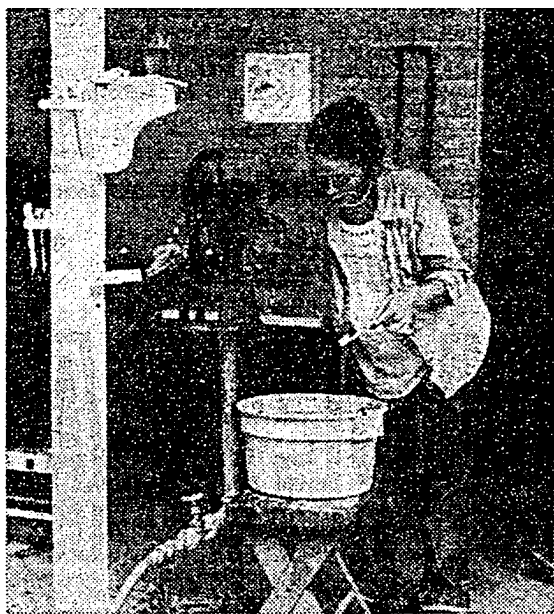
As Tom recalled:

"I found a Sears guitar lying around the house, Harry found a banjo in my grandmother's basement and our brother Steve joined in with his guitar—and that's how we got started as a group."

For quite a while, the brothers successfully sang "soft rock" together, meantime pursuing their college educations. Now, after being on their own for some time, they are again performing together on tour.

Harry Chapin, whose records, "Cat's in the Hat" and "Taxi," are known to millions, thinks of himself more as a writer than as a singer. When he is not on tour, or busy with his wife and six children, he spends much of his time writing songs, poems and screenplays. Not only will his fifth record album be released in the near future, but also a collection of poems entitled "Looking and Seeing."

Harry also has produced some well-received documentary films that include "Legendary Champions," an Academy Award nominee, and "Jewel in the Wind"



The New York Times/Lonny Kalfus

Clockwise from top right: Elspeth Hart, Harry Chapin's mother, in garden; Kenneth Berke, his grandfather, on front lawn; Harry Chapin and his brother's children building new wing and sister, Dana, washing up.

for the Alcoa Hour on TV. In a discussion about talent, which appears to run in the family, Harry disclaims the fact that it is a "gift."

"To be a writer, one must sit down and write—and work hard at it, he asserted. "My parents did not fill me with dreams of fame or wealth; instead, they led me

toward the things I cared about, and encouraged me to do them well."

Award-Winning Show

Tom Chapin is now in his fifth season with "Make A Wish," the Emmy Award-winning television show seen on Channel 7 on Sunday mornings. He has enjoyed working on the program, but appears anxious to get back to his music career and films.

In 1969, Tom helped to produce "Blue Water, White Death," a documentary on the great white shark, which sparked his interest in diving and the sea.

The original owner of the 150-acre retreat is Kenneth Berke, a well-known literary critic, writer and poet, as well as the Chapin brothers' grandfather. When not tec-

turing or teaching, he resides in his own century-old home on the property.

Elspeth Hart, Mr. Berke's daughter and the brothers' mother, has spent more than 50 summers at the retreat. As a result, she has developed an interest in plants and flowers, about which she has written a number of books.

Currently, Harry and Tom

are involved in raising funds for numerous charities. One in which Harry played a major role in establishing, is World Hunger Year; an organization that suggests ways in which people can reduce their consumption of meat by at least one-third and thus, hopefully, free, for use by nations in need of food, the grain that would be used to feed cattle.