

# Harpswell Historical Society



## Newsletter

Winter 2012

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*The Harpswell Historical Society is dedicated to the discovery, identification, collection, preservation, interpretation, and dissemination of materials relating to the history of Harpswell and its people.*

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### Plans for the Schoolhouse

The Harpswell Historical Society started with rather humble beginnings. Since that time we have grown substantially. This is due to the generosity of our town and its residents and the belief that there should be an entity to preserve our valuable past. At this time, the Board of Directors are starting to assemble a day long program for school children.

Here is how the program might work. It is not etched in stone and well thought out ideas are welcomed. A school bus arrives at the Historical Society and each student will draw a number. The number will put each student either in the District #2 School, Centennial Hall, the Museum, or the Meeting House. The students will spend time in each place.

In the School, the teacher will give a class from the 1840's.

In Centennial Hall, there might be a bit of oration, or a reading of writings of our town.

In the Museum, students will be shown artifacts that speak of our town's history. There will be a barn loom in good working order and each student

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### Lobsters of Colonial Massachusetts

*by Hubbard C. Goodrich*

Lobster was one of the natural bounties of the sea that explorers and colonists noted in their journals. In 1597, Charles Leigh recorded during his visit to Cape Breton of "the greatest multitude of lobsters." John Smith reported, "you shall scarce find any Baye or shallow shore (without) many clams or lobsters ... at your pleasure."

Lobsters were well known to the English. The 1604 account book of Thomas Wolmsly at Exeter Castle listed for fish an amazing assortment which included bass, carp, cockles, cod (fresh, salted & dried), conger, crabs, crawfish, dolphin, eel flounder, haddock,

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will pass the shuttlecock back and forth to create a small textile.

In the Meeting House, there might be a town meeting where students will be asked to do the town's business in times very different than today.

These are just the beginning thoughts for what will become a program of good value for students of our town.

## **President's Report**

This has been a very good year for our Society. Visitation to our Events and Museum grows every year. Our collection continues to grow. Our Board of Directors works diligently to bring our organization forward. We are very much in the process of bringing a school program to life and are beginning our fundraising to make it happen. This has been talked about for some years and now is time for this to happen. Is every thing perfect ? Well of course not, the present economy is not kind

to non profit organizations. However, The Harpswell Historical Society is a positive place in the fabric of our town. Life is good.

*Lobsters, continued from page 1, col. 2*

hake, herring, lamprey, lobster, mullet, mussels, oysters, perch, pike, plaice, porpoise. In 1615, Mayor Roy Lalle purchased nine dozen lobsters. In 1619, two men were fined 12 pence each for "ladeing lobster pots upon the Sabbath day." Pepys Diary mentioned lobsters 21 times between 1660-68.

European cookbooks included lobster as early as 1390 and in England by 1430. Anne Gibbins Gardiner of Boston and Gardiner, Maine, wrote five recipes in 1763 for lobster copied from British writers such as Hannah Glasse who published in 1743. Thomas Allen, proprietor of a New York tavern in 1774, offered salmon, eels, oysters and lobsters caught in Long Island Sound.

Because the colonists preferred their traditional beef and pork, it is believed that lobsters were dismissed as fit only for servants and slaves. In 1632, William Bradford complained that he had "only lobster to serve visitors." Legend has it that indentured servants of Massachusetts required that they could not be served lobster more than three times a week. This appears to be a myth as there are no colonial



*The District #2 Schoolhouse*

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records supporting the tale. Similarly erroneous is that lobsters were only used to feed pigs or fertilize the corn. In fact, lobsters were spoken of in primary sources with some regularity.

As the poor, the population most likely to take advantage of 'free' food, are unlikely to leave written reports of their diet, we must depend on literate and wealthier colonists for evidence of lobsters' popularity and commercial access. We find that lobsters are mentioned in diaries and ledgers more often than any fish other than cod. For example, The Rev.

Francis Higgins wrote c1630 of the "abundance of Lobsters, that the least Boy in the (Salem) Plantation both catch and eat what he will of them. I have seen some myselfe that have weighed 16 pounds .... So great, and fat, and lussious." Samuel Sewall ate "part of two great lobsters" (1689) for 3 shillings 9 pence each. Robert Hale reported a supper of roast and stewed lobster at Fredrick's Fort (Pemaquid) in 1731. A Boston account book wrote that Robert Brown paid a lobster woman 1 pound 5 shilling for lobsters sold door-to-door in 1737. Benjamin Eustis' Day Book recorded selling Benjamin Pickman 1½ barrels of pickled mackerel and two kegs of lobster in 1763 (for shipping south?). Benjamin Cleaves, during an expedition to Louisbourg, reported in his



journal of May 1745 that he dined on corn, rye, trouts and lobsters. Samuel Pierce of Dorchester is the only person who mentions fishing for them: "I went Lobstrin, catch 9," June 20, 1762.

A little closer to home, Elisha Eaton, the first minister of the new church in Harpswell Center, sold John Alexander three kegs of lobsters and one half keg of oysters in 1763 "delivered to him for West Indies."

Thomas Cutt of Biddeford bought four lobsters from Paul Hussey for 3s4p in 1768. In Machias, Samuel Holmes sold 18 lobsters for 4s3p (1772); Jonathan Woodruff sold six lobsters (and) two bushels of 'protators' (1776);

Timothy Yong sold 13; and Col. John Allan bought lobster, pork, beef and moose meat (1777). In 1784, Robert Pagan, a Loyalist who fled to New Brunswick, informed his wife in Falmouth that he intended to send by the schooner 'Seaform' a keg of pickled lobsters, some smoked salmon, some potatoes, turnips, mackerel, cranberries, beef, and a side of good mutton. In 1799, Ezra Smith of Topsham sold to Eli Cox lobsters for 17 cents (notice the shift from UK to US currency).

While difficult to transport any distance until the open-well smack was developed c1830, the lobster was eaten up and down the New England coast either fresh or salted. We hope this shows that lobsters were not the

Lobsters, continued from p. 3,

despised and ignored dish that has been portrayed in commentaries on the subject. Our colonial forebears certainly entered them into commercial activity and ate them with relish.

A **well smack** is a type of [traditional fishing boat](#) that has a *well* amidships. The well was filled with circulated external water, which kept fish alive until delivered to land and sold. It was a modified form of [fishing smack](#).



## Jordan Family of Harpswell

*Ruth Holbrook Sligar*

My curiosity about the Jordan name was aroused when, in the 1940's, my two brothers and my father all worked at the South Portland Shipyard, where they were hired by a cousin named Jordan. I also had learned that the Jordan family in Thornton Heights, South Portland, resided only a short distance from my home at that time. With my curiosity aroused and questions asked of my mother, I learned that my father's grandmother was named Mercy Ellen a/k/a Ellen M. Jordan and she had

married Abiezer Holbrook (my great grandfather).

After moving to Harpswell in 1995, I became very interested in researching my family history since my paternal grandparents had both been North Harpswell and Cundy's Harbor residents. I noticed an old map of Harpswell with property owners' names at the Town Hall, and Abiezer Holbrook appeared thereon. I subsequently found my great grandfather Holbrook's house on Peabody Road in North Harpswell. When the house came on the market, I was so curious to see the inside that I asked the property owner if I could visit. It was a remarkable experience standing in the room that had been the birthing room for my grandfather in 1867.

In my parents' possession, there were two silver napkin rings and one had the initials of MMJ engraved. I came to realize that those were the initials of my great, great grandmother Mercy Mer

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## E-Mail Addresses Wanted

Would you like us to email you future copies of the HHS Newsletters or news of upcoming HHS activities? If so, please send your email address to us at [harpshistory@outlook.com](mailto:harpshistory@outlook.com).

## Board Meetings

All members are welcome to attend both the board meetings and the public meetings. If you wish to attend a board meeting, or have a comment, please contact David Hackett (833-6322), Box 121, Harpswell, 04079.

## Old Crow Tales

*by David Merriman Sparks*

Every year, the crow population in Harpswell appears to grow larger, but those often annoying black busybodies have been around forever. Years ago when I was a youngster, I was sitting on the front porch of what at that time was my aunt Lucy Merriman's house in West Harpswell. The house was originally my great grandfather Walter H. Merriman's. There came a ruckus at Mary Randall's house next door, which you may know now as Betsy Alexander's. It seems Mary and her friend Vera Lowell were hanging out the laundry on a line out back. I could hear them saying "shoo, go on, beat it, shoo" and flapping the laundry in the air. What was happening was that as they would hang a piece of laundry, a crow would come down and lift the clothespins off, and the clothes would fall on the ground. This went on for awhile, and it was very entertaining for me to watch. We heard later that the crow was somebody's pet and was a pest all up and down Harpswell Neck. I don't know what ever happened to the crow, but I have my suspicions.

I'm not sure how long crows live, but later on in life when I joined the work force, I was working on the plumbing at a house undergoing renovation on Bailey Island. At one point I had to go out to the truck for some parts, and on the way I heard a voice that sounded like a friend of mine say, "hello." I looked around and saw nobody, so I kept walking and again the voice said, "hello." As I turned around, I happened to look up, and there it was setting on a branch. So I

said "hello," and it answered me "hello." I went back in the house and told the carpenters what had just happened, and they began to laugh and then cuss. It seems this crow had been pestering them all the time they were working outside on a staging putting on shingles. If they laid anything down and didn't watch it, the crow had it. The crow was very sneaky about doing it. And again, I'm not sure what happened to the critter, but I did hear from other people that it was a pest all over the island.

## Harpswell Men in the Revolutionary War

Researcher Nancy Lecompte has created a website on a Regiment of the Continental Army. Several Harpswell men were members, and their casualties seem to have been out of proportion to other towns in the region. Go to <http://home.roadrunner.com/~nlecompte/regiment/index.html>

## Where To Find Us

Visit our website at <http://www.harpswellhistorical.org/>

Like us on Facebook at <http://www.facebook.com/HarpswellHistoricalSociety>

Email us at [harpshistory@outlook.com](mailto:harpshistory@outlook.com)

## Board Members

Paul Dostie, Dave Hackett, Ed Phinney, Rob Porter, Ann Standridge, Burr Taylor

## Bowdoin Students Volunteer at HHS

Sixteen Bowdoin students volunteered to come to Harpswell on a beautiful September 15 to help the HHS spruce up its buildings and a graveyard that it maintains. Twelve students scraped and painted parts of the HHS Museum, tidied up its second floor, and cleaned a shed holding a 19th century horse-drawn hearse. Four others cleared out weeds and brush from the two Stover cemeteries off the Stover's Point Road. They were a talented group that asked questions about the HHS and the people in the graveyards, and said that they left with a feeling of accomplishment. Thank you to these community-minded Bowdoin

students and the Common Good Day program at Bowdoin. This year on September 15, the program saw 500 Bowdoin students and alumni volunteer for community service projects around the country. The students are not paid and receive no class credit for their work.



*The Society would be grateful if you decided to send in your membership or membership renewal dues with this newsletter. You are welcome to use the form below. Many of you have missed several years. We will welcome you back. If the information is on your check, there is no need to fill out the form.*

### Harpswell Historical Society Membership

Please give whatever amount you feel is appropriate for you.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Town, State, Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Winter address, if different \_\_\_\_\_

*Your Contribution is tax deductible.*

Please make your check payable to Harpswell Historical Society and mail it to Harpswell Historical Society, 929 Harpswell Neck Road, Harpswell, Maine 04079

riman Jordan. Mercy married my 2nd great grandfather Dominicus Jordan, born 22 January 1797 in Harpswell, and died at the young age of 51. Dominicus is buried at the Old Cemetery behind the Meeting House in Harpswell Center.

Wheeler and Wheeler's History of Brunswick, Harpswell and Topsham, states that Dominicus was among the original subscribers to Harpswell's Centre Congregational Parish's new constitution, when founded in 1843. This really impressed me, as I had become a member of the Elijah Kellogg Church, formerly the Centre Congregational Parish. Now, I really felt like a true member of the community.

I discovered more Jordans in the Sinnet Genealogy in the Harpswell Historical Society's archives. Abijah Young Jordan (3<sup>rd</sup> great grandfather) was one of six children born to John Jordan b. 1712 in Falmouth. He settled in Brunswick, about 1734, and afterward resided in



*Former Holbrook house on Peabody Rd*

Harpswell.

"Portland in the Past", a book by William Gould, quotes a letter written to him by H. G. Storer regarding the baptismal font that was once used by Rev. Robert Jordan, an Episcopal clergyman and the Jordan ancestor that was one of the first settlers in Portland when it was still called Falmouth. This font is now at the Maine Historical Society. Rev. Robert came to America in 1640 and settled in Spurwink. In 1642, he married Sarah, daughter of John Winter. He was one of four men appointed to govern the Province of Maine in 1665. He subsequently moved to Newcastle and afterwards to Portsmouth, N. H. where he died in 1678.

This exciting search was a great experience, and I have since met many others

## Upcoming Events

Join us for:

Lighting of the Christmas Tree and Caroling at 5:30 pm on December 8 at Centennial Hall.

Vespers at 2:00 pm on December 9 at the former East Harpswell Church on Cundy's Harbor Road.

## Thanks

Many thanks to the following people for volunteering on Sundays this summer at the Harpswell Historic Museum: Dave Hackett, Kate Chipman, Paula and Gard Conley, June Phinney, Rob Porter, JoAnn Rogers, Ann Standridge, Hope Tanguay, Eleanor Wilson.

**Harpwell Historical Society**

929 Harpswell Neck Road

Harpwell, Maine 04079

<http://www.harpwellhistorical.org/>