

Harpwell Historical Society



Newsletter

Summer 2002

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

Members and Friends of the Society

Momentum is a wonderful word and it certainly has swung in our Society's direction. The sign on the porch roof of our newest building proudly proclaims Harpswell Historical Society Museum & Archives. A few weeks ago after some advertising and phone calls, the first attempt to clean out the former Bailey's Store was met with very great success. I was able to count at least fifty of Harpswell's citizens who came armed with curiosity and goodwill. A woman came in and said that she was going to the Recycling Center and was there anything that she could take. We promptly filled her car! A young man came in to see what was going on and took 4 truck loads away. At the end of the day the building was very nearly cleaned out. Our Society has many friends. Thanks to all.

For our Society to create a Museum & Archives is certainly a leap of faith. That large leap of faith is helped by the good work of Walter Norton. Since starting last August Walter has raised \$150,000 dollars for our cause. His fund raising is ongoing this summer to meet our goal of \$250,000. Walter's good

work does not let any of the rest of us off the hook however.

Soon we will be sending a letter urging financial support for our cause to all in town. Please be generous, ask your friends and neighbors as well.

Together we will build a place to be proud of, our common history deserves nothing less.

Respectfully Submitted,

David Hackett III

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Harpswell Genealogy

The Harpswell Genealogy Group has been meeting on a fairly regular basis during the past six months at the Orr's Island Library on the second Sunday of the month at 4PM.

Attendance was a bit thin at first but August and September were well attended with six and nine people in attendance respectively. The beginnings of a reference library have been started, with many of the Charles Nelson Sinnett genealogies now and several Harpswell Directories available for research and a good start on a set of Harpswell Town Reports. Several local and out of state genealogists have placed copies of their family research in our library but we are still seeking copies of Brunswick High School and Mt. Ararat yearbooks, family bibles which contain vital records of births and deaths and other family history related items.

It is expected that the reference library and index will be relocated to the Harpswell Historical Society's new Archival research room at the new museum sometime around Memorial Day. Come in and discover your family history. We expect to be open on a regular basis (to be determined) as well as on the second Sunday of the month throughout the summer and fall of 2002.

Centennial Hall

Several activities have been scheduled at Centennial hall. In addition to the Garden Club Art Show and Flower Show, there were meetings of the Historical Society, an evening of bluegrass music with Jim Chard and the Windy River Band(John Taylor, Beth Elena, Ken Thompson), a night of Chamber Music with the quartet of Louise Huntington, Cynthia Friend, Marion Corda, Judith Elser; guests, David Lipton, Catie Moore, line dancing, Matt Newberg, singer/songwriter, and the Annual Meeting of the Harpswell Land Trust. These were well attended and plans are being made to continue to offer a variety of programs over the next year.

Although the renovation to the Museum and Archives has diverted time and effort away from the Hall this year we are happy to report that Ron Chipman has nearly finished restoring the ceiling. The emphasis this summer will be to raise money to finish the small kitchen.. Plans are underway to move the school house to a foundation to the right of its present location

Officers and Directors 2001-2002

David Hackett, III (President)
Peg Newberg
Burr Taylor
Gerald York (Secretary/Treasurer)

Calendar for 2000-2001

- Oct. 25th Board Meeting—
Old Town Meetinghouse
- Nov. 29th Board Meeting—
Old Town Meetinghouse
- Dec 13th Board Meeting—
Old Town Meetinghouse
- Feb. 28th Public Meeting—
Cundy's Harbor
Community Hall
Public
Guest Speaker: Jarrod
Diels-Roll of the
Pejepscot Historical
Society; Topic: Joshua
Chamberlain
- Apr. 25th Board Meeting—
Old Town Meetinghouse
- May 23th Board Meeting—
Old Town Meetinghouse
- Memorial Day Centennial Hall
- June 27th *Public Meeting—
7:30 pm Location and
speaker to be announced
- Jul. 25th Board Meeting—7:00
pm
Old Meeting House
- Aug. 22nd Annual Meeting—
Centennial Hall, topic and
speaker to be announced.

*to confirm meeting or speaker
call David Hackett (833-6322) or
Peg Newberg (833-6336)

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.

Many thanks to contributors of artifacts and services:

- ◆ Paul Bird
- ◆ Pat Mooney & class
- ◆ Harpswell Selectman
- ◆ Kellogg Church
- ◆ Joyce Thomas
- ◆ Joan & Emile Chonko

HARPSWELL CENTER

A sad accident occurred here Saturday afternoon in which Thomas M. Stover lost his life. That morning he went to Ragged Island to assist Isaac L. Dunning get his sheep and was accompanied by Gilbert Dunning and Elwood Allen. They were in two dories and a float. On returning that afternoon they were near Stover's Point when Gilbert rowed along side and inquired how Mr. Stover was getting along. He replied that he was all right and that he would take his time the rest of the way. It was snowing and darkness was coming on, but he was only about two miles from home and no danger was anticipated. The men soon arrived at Geo. A. Merriman's.

When Mr. Stover did not come his friends became anxious and went to hunt him up but were doomed to disappointment. Sunday the search was resumed and his body was found washed ashore on Johnson's Point at Orr's Island. His boat was south of the body with a large hole smashed in her side. No trace of the sheep was found. Dr. Mansur was called and pronounced death due to drowning.

Theories differ. Many think that the boat was struck by the ice and, fearing, that she would go down, he got on the ice cake in hopes he would be picked up, and there he was frozen to death. Others think he got lost in the thick snow and rowed out into the bay and when his boat capsized he clung to her

until he nearly reached the shore and was overcome by the cold and was drowned. The funeral services were held from the Congregational church Tuesday at 11 a. m., Rev. R. B. Dills officiated. The subject selected for his impressive remarks was "What is Your Life, It appeareth for a little while and then passeth away." The church choir composed of Mrs. M. J. Curtis, Mrs. Augustus Merriman, George B. Littlefield, W. S. Allen, John A. Curtis, and Freeland Smith with Mrs. Elwood D. Allen organist, rendered three selections in a creditable manner. A cluster of thirty-six white chrysanthemums and ferns, a gift from Geo. A. Merriman's family, rested on the casket.

The deceased had been assistant keeper on board the lightship Cape Elizabeth, 74, since she has been at her station, and was at home for a two weeks vacation. He was highly respected by his ship-mates, who will sadly miss him. He is survived by two sisters, Miss Elizabeth Stover of Brunswick, and Mrs. Lydia S Merriman of the Center, and one brother Penned A. of Portland, besides many relatives and friends.

Harpswell's Oldest Twins Celebrate 88th Birthdays

NORTH HARPSWELL. Nov. '22 - Harpswell's oldest twins, George W. Wilson and Betsey A. Ricker celebrated their 88th birthdays this afternoon at the home of Mrs. Ricker's son, Leon M. There was a reception attended by just about everyone on Harpswell Neck.

The turnout of well-wishers was not surprising. George and Betsy are descendants of one of the oldest families in the area. Their parents were Edward and Harriet Stover Wilson

Both were born in the family homestead across the road from the Grange Hall, and not too far removed from their present homes. Both were married at the Kellogg Homestead. George married the former Harriet L. Robbins of Camden on Feb. 24. 1894. Betsy married Edward C. Ricker on July 14, 1886.

George had five children, Clifford, Elmer, Clem, Helen and John, while Betsy had four children, Elizabeth, Raymond, Edmund and Leon. Betsy has 17 grandchildren, and 14 great grandchildren, while her brother has 13 grandchildren and eight great-grandchildren. Most of them were on hand for today's festivities.

Both are extremely active for their age. They participate in community affairs. They voted on the recent separation referendum question which produced more votes for setting up the separate

town of Harpswell Neck, than against it. However, the fact that fewer than 60 percent favored separation resulted in defeat for the separation movement.

George Wilson has spent most of his life at sea. He went to sea at the age of 18, covering just about every important port on both the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans. For 21 years, between 1910 and 1931, he captained yachts, skipping one for Ollen L. Lindley, a vice president of the New York Stock Exchange; and another for L. F. Crawfoot of Omaha, Neb.

He sailed on four different schooners and two steam-driven Texas Oil tankers. For two and a half years he sailed on the George R. Skolfield, a three master built in 1885, which visited ports in Australia, India and the Philippines. The George R. Skolfield was the last ship to be launched from the Skolfield yards here.

More recently, until his retirement, Capt. Wilson worked as a carpenter and painter, a trade which is being followed by other members of the Wilson and Ricker families.

Adopt a Harpswell Cemetery

The Harpswell Historical Society has the responsibility for upkeep of two Harpswell Cemeteries. The Wilson Cemetery near the Ewing Narrows Bridge and the Meriam Stover Thomas Cemetery near Stovers Cove. We are looking for volunteers to make a spring and fall trip to these sites and check on their condition to determine if tree limbs needed to be removed, grass cut and leaves raked, etc. If maintenance is found to be required the volunteer would contact a board member who would see the problem taken care of. A very minimal amount of time would be required by these volunteers and they would not need to be a year round resident. Interested persons can contact David Hackett at 833-6632.

Web site: www.curtislibrary.com/hhs

Remember the Society's web site! There you can find the latest update in the schedule of Society events, the newest projects, updates for ongoing projects, miscellaneous Harpswell history, old photographs and postcards, read the latest Society newsletter, discover links to other history related pages and find contact information for Society officers. Bookmark the Harpswell Historical Society Web-Pages for your history needs.

Harpswell Cemeteries

Do you have an old family cemetery on your Harpswell property or know of one on a neighbor's property? The Historical Society is interested in cataloging and recording the location of any of the many small family plots which once served the small farms and homesteads. These old burial grounds of sometimes only one or two plots are slowly being forgotten and lost to development and undergrowth. Stones are eroding and valuable family information is lost to future generations. The first step in reversing this trend is to record the inscriptions on the stones and the location of the plot. If you have information that can assist in this project, please contact Gerry York 833-5873 or email gyork@clinic.net.

Harpswell Historical Society Membership

- | | | | |
|-----------------------------------|-------------|----------------------------------|--------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> \$10.00 | Individual | <input type="checkbox"/> \$15.00 | Family |
| <input type="checkbox"/> \$25.00 | Contributor | <input type="checkbox"/> \$50.00 | Patron |
| <input type="checkbox"/> \$200.00 | Life | <input type="checkbox"/> ____ | Other |

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 c/o Gerald York, Treasurer; Harpswell Historical Society; 1334 Harpswell Islands Road; Orr's Island, ME 04066

THE MYSTERY OF HOW THE TOWN OF
HARPSWELL GOT ITS NAME

By Richard R. Wescott

An interesting question about the history of Harpswell is why Governor Thomas Pownall bestowed the name Harpswell upon the district into which the General Court of Massachusetts incorporated "Merriconeag Neck and the Islands adjacent" on Jan. 25, 1758.

The basic facts of how the district got its name were well known to George A. and Henry W. Wheeler. In their History of Brunswick, Topsham, and Harpswell, Maine, 2 vols. (Brunswick, Me., 1878), they were accurate when they wrote that the name Harpswell had not been used before the General Court incorporated Merriconeag Neck and the surrounding islands into a district. They were wrong, however, when they agreed with Reverend Elij Kellogg that it was named first by the General Court.

The Wheelers noted that traditional accounts assigned credit for the choice of the name Harpswell to the influential Dunning family. They speculated that some English immigrant from the vicinity of Harpswell in Lincolnshire, England might have suggested it to the Dunnings, who, although they were from another county, supported its suggestion to the General Court in 1753. Certainly Andrew Dunning, as district clerk, was in a position to make such a suggestion, but there is no specific evidence that he did so.

Writing a century after the

wheelers, Miriam Stover Thomas in an article, "Harpowell, England, and Harpswell, Maine, USA," The Harpswellian, 1973 (Cundy's Harbor, Me.: The Camp Fire Girls; 1973) argued that several early settlers of Harpswell, including Rev. Elisha Eaton, were descendents of Mayflower Pilgrims who settled in Plymouth, Massachusetts in 1620. She wrote that she was, "...reasonably sure that the descendents of the Pilgrim: from near Harpswell, England, wished to name their new town in America after that pleasant place of origin in Lincolnshire." There is no evidence in the surviving historical records that support her thesis.

A more plausible answer to the question of how Harpswell, Maine came by its name was suggested recently by -Mr. Mark Tatum of Hall Farm, Harpswell, England with whom I, as Secretary of the Harpswell Historical Society, have corresponded for the past two years. He sent me a xerox copy of two pages from an article entitled, "Letters from John Wallace to Madam Whichcot," published in Vol. 66 (1973) of the Lincoln Record Society which bears upon the question of how Harpswell, Maine received its name. Subsequently, he sent to me xerox copies of several relevant pages on Harpswell, England in a work by P. Everson "Change and Continuity: Settlement Patterns in West. Lindsey.

The village of Harpswell, England existed, as early as the Middle Ages. In 1086, however, it was divided into, two-manors, one of

which passed under the control of the Whichcote family in the 15th century. They took over the other manor in the 16th century. Several generations of Whichcotes gradually removed the tenants from the village of Harpswell, and they replaced it with Harpswell Hall, a manor house, around which they gradually constructed an extensive set of formal gardens. In the early 17th century, a government survey reported that "Sir Hamond Whichcote, owner of the whole towne consisting of 11 farms besides his manor house hath inclosed most of the said houses and the rest made cottages and hath converted 500 acres of arable land into pasture." Eventually by the early 18th century some of the displaced families returned Harpswell and 16 or 17 households of residents lived there as renters. In 1700 Colonel George Whichcote married Frances Meres. After her husband's death, eventually she moved to lodging near London to save money; for, although she owned nearly all of the land in Harpswell, the rents from her farms did not produce sufficient income to keep her in proper style at home. John Wallace was her steward who kept her informed about her business affairs in Harpswell and on the local news in general.

In a letter in January, 1726, Wallace reported to Madam Whichcote that her friend Lady Saunderson, wife of Sir Thomas Saunderson had become the godmother of a child of Capt. William Pownal of

Lincoln. This child was probably the captain's second son, named John, born in 1724, who eventually became the head of the powerful British Board of Trade. His first son named Thomas, who was born in 1722, became the Governor of the Province of Massachusetts Bay in 1757 after working for some years for the Board of Trade. It was he who approved in 1758 the bill enacted by the General Court of Massachusetts "incorporating a neck of land called Merriconeag Neck, and certain Islands adjacent, in the County of York into a Separate District. In the final draft of the bill the space for the district's name had been left blank, but the name Harpswell was inserted after the bill was passed by both houses of the General Court.

The evidence is circumstantial but suggestive that Governor Thomas Pownal, who was in a position to do so, named the District of Harpswell, Massachusetts in honor of Harpswell, England before he signed the bill into law.