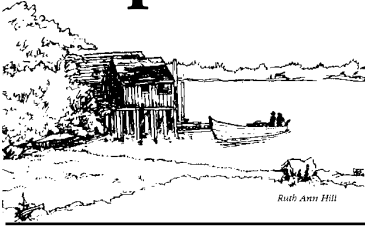


Harpswell Historical Society

Newsletter



Fall 2014

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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.

Laddie Whidden Reminisces

by Louise Huntington

Laddie Whidden traces his ancestry on his mother's side back to Andrew and Benjamin Dunning, members of the early Harpswell community back in the middle of the 18th century. The home of Deacon Andrew Dunning is the handsome old house we all see as we take the Mountain Road between Route 24 and Route 123, and look south. The home was built in 1757 and has been a landmark ever since. Benjamin Dunning was a magistrate who served as an Overseer of Bowdoin College from 1800 until 1808. Another ancestor, Joseph Ewing, from Scotland, owned a tract of land on Sebascodegan Island on the shores of what would become known as Ewing Narrows. The town maintained a ferry here in the 1700's so the people could cross over to the Neck and attend church at the Old Meeting House, which was the first church. The records show that two of the ferry tenders were Alexander Ewing and another was Henry Barnes.

Laddie, whose real name is Malcolm B. Whidden, Jr., was born in 1931 in Cundy's Harbor. His family moved to Brunswick when he was three years old and lived there for two years. His father, Malcolm, worked as a millwright at the Cabot Mill. As Laddie grew up the family moved to Harpswell Neck where he attended the Harpswell Center School except for two years when some of the grades went to West Harpswell. He and Hannah (Norton) Dring were the only two people in his class for a number of years. After finishing 8th grade, he attended Brunswick High School where he took the shop course, an excellent fit for a person with his strong abilities in mechanics and building.

After finishing high school in 1949, Laddie worked with his father trawling in the spring and also at several jobs that included boat building and construction. He served four years in the Navy as a machinist's mate. During that time, when he could get home, he worked on a thirty-foot lobster boat that he had set up outdoors by his father's shop. It didn't get finished until he got home for good.

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Laddie met his future wife Kay at the urging of her younger brother. They built their home on property owned by Laddie's father on Clark Shore Road where many family members now live. They have two children: Rhonda, born in 1958, and Clayton, born five years later.

During the fifties and early sixties there were two attempts to separate the town. The first was when the Navy lengthened the runways at the Naval Air Station. This caused the Middle Bay Road, as well as a new road that connected with Route 24, to be closed. Committees were formed to see if the Navy or Federal Government would fund the building of a bridge. As Laddie says, "It didn't get anywhere." A move to separate the town in two was made but did not pass, but there were a lot of hard feelings in town.

The second effort at separation was caused by the building of an addition to the new school on Great Island while they were still using the two old schools at West Harpswell and North Harpswell. Although this made economic sense, a lot of people were very upset. The second separation move failed, but according to Laddie it left half of the people in town not speaking with the other half.

Two local citizens on Harpswell Neck identified their friend Laddie as a potential and much-needed peace-maker who had connections on both sides of town. Laddie says that one day, Henry Barnes and Ned Frost came to his door with nomination papers for selectman, all filled out. It was 1962, and Laddie won that election. In 1966 the first money was set aside in a sinking fund at Town Meeting to build what would become the Mountain Road and a bridge over Ewing Narrows. Eventually, using funds from the state, the county, and the town, the bridge was built, uniting the town geographically, and opening up the stunning view we should never take for granted. Laddie served as selectman for the next 26 years, as his long-suffering wife kept wondering when he would ever retire.

Among other things, Laddie is a fisherman, carpenter, and mechanic, and he is possessed of a strong love for his town and a deep sense of duty. He is also blessed with an incredible memory. People in town remember him as a completely unflappable selectman, a person who didn't speak until the moment was right. He could clarify the most tangled legal problems with fewer words than any of us could think of. He had a real sense for doing the right thing for the good of the town. His evenhandedness, year after year, helped Harpswell weather a lot of storms.

Laddie Whidden to the Rescue

by Evangeline Sparks

Laddie Whidden's service to the community started way before he became a town Selectman. Evangeline Morse Sparks remembers when, at the age of six, she and two friends, Ellen and Carol Bibber, were playing down by the brook on the Allen Point Road in West Harpswell. It was at the edge of darkness one wintery day. Vange decided to try walking across the brook that ran from under the road near Roy's Corner. Often the dare devil in the group, she went for it. After taking several steps onto the mushy surface, she started sinking into the icy water midway across. Laddie, a high school student, happened to be passing by the brook and came to her rescue with some difficulty. She admits to her near panic and her gratefulness to Laddie. She recalls that he didn't scold her and in fact said nothing.

During Laddie's years as selectman, many new families moved to town. From being a quiet old-fashioned fishing town, it was turning into a very mixed modern community. At the same time, town government was becoming quite complex as state and federal regulations multiplied. Operating from the Town Office in the two small rooms upstairs in the Old Meeting House was challenging. There was hardly room to spread out the tax maps on the office work table. Desks and office equipment were cheek by jowl, and it was a challenge for the office personnel to maneuver in that crowded space. Furthermore, the Old Meeting House has no plumbing to this day.

Eventually the inevitable occurred, and a committee was established to plan a modern building for conducting the town's business. No longer would taxes be paid at Beverly Bibber's house or voter registrations be recorded at Clara Merriam's home upstairs at Garrison Hill Farm, nor would legal documents be filled out at Frances Johnson's kitchen table. At last, in 1987, the new Town Office was built on town land beside Strawberry Creek. It was the end of an era, and Laddie retired in 1988.

More recently, Laddie and many other town residents worked long and hard to clarify the ancient boundary between the towns of Harpswell and Brunswick. In spite of the group's best efforts that included research into centuries-old records in Boston, relevant official authorities decided against any change, and the group had to resort to placing a marker along Route 123 to show the original boundary line across the Neck.

For many years, Laddie has raised and lowered the flag at the Old Meeting House every day. He has replaced the flags as they've worn out. This dedication is a testament to the example he has set for us.

Memories of Ice Harvesting

by Pat Moody

In 1998, my 3rd and 4th grade students at West Harpswell School had the opportunity to interview several Harpswell residents. The project was funded by the Annenberg Rural Challenge Grant. Two other teachers, Martha Burtt and Ken Bedder, from the Harpswell Island School also worked on the project. Their students interviewed people from Orr's, Bailey, and Great Island, and my students talked to people on Harpswell Neck. The interviews were taped, and at a later time the students wrote about the people that they had interviewed. Stories from both sides were then compiled in a booklet (which is available at the Historical Society).

One of the people interviewed was Arnold LeMay. Arnie is no longer living, but at the time of the interview he was 81 years old and well known to many Harpswell people. My own first meeting with Arnie was when I was 3 years old and was asked to be a flower girl at Arnie's wedding. At that time, Arnie's bride, Virginia, was a neighbor of mine. The only details of the wedding that I remember are totally self-centered – wearing a pretty dress and having little sandwiches, cake, and punch after the ceremony.

My reason for including Arnie in our interviews was that I felt it would be an opportunity for my students to learn about ice harvesting in Harpswell, an important industry in its time, but one that is unfamiliar to most children of today.

We learned that the LeMay family started their ice business during the 1880s. There were no electric refrigerators and ice was needed to keep food cold. Many people owned iceboxes. Iceboxes were made of wood and were usually lined with zinc. A big chunk of ice was put in the top part of the box. As the ice melted, the

water would go into a pipe and then flow into a pan at the bottom of the icebox. If the icebox was in the shed, the water sometimes went into the ground. Arnie mentioned that if people didn't own an icebox, they sometimes kept food cool by putting ice with it into a pail and lowering it into a dug well or cold stream.

The LeMays delivered ice to all parts of Harpswell Neck and people came to the family home to buy ice. The LeMays also provided ice for the Auburn Colony, Merriconeag House, Guernsey Villa, Ocean View Hotel, and Lookout Point House. The price of the ice was decided upon by the weight and thickness. Arnie remembered it being two cents a pound, but the price may have been different at other times. Some larger ice businesses supplied fishing vessels with ice to keep fish fresh while it was being transported for sale in cities, but the LeMays weren't involved in that part of the business.

The LeMays lived on the Shore Acres Road which is near the present Harpswell Neck post office. Arnie's parents were Grace and Edgar LeMay. He had two brothers, Edward and Lewis, and two sisters, Dora and Lillian. At the time of our interview, Arnie was living in the same house in which he was born and brought up. At that time the house was about 235 years old. The pond next to the house provided the ice for the LeMay's business. It was truly a family business as even the children had their ice chores. At age 9 or 10, Arnie started to help with the cleaning of the pond, and by age 14 or 15, he joined in the harvesting of the ice.

Arnie told us that the pond had to be kept clean from snow because leaving snow on the pond would produce soft ice. The ice had to be at least a foot to fifteen or eighteen inches thick before it could be harvested. It took two days to harvest the ice from the pond. During a really

cold year, ice could be harvested more than once during the same year.

There were ten to fourteen men in an ice harvesting crew. Some of the Harpswell men that worked at LeMay's pond were the Bibbers, Merrimans, Chipmans, and Allens. Arnold's mother was the only woman that helped.

In describing the harvesting process, Arnie told us that the harvesters started by using a board to make a straight line down the center of the pond. Sharp grooves were then made in the ice. They used an instrument that tipped to make a guide mark to the next groove. To cut the ice they used a saw with teeth that were about a foot long. They were then able to use a bar on the grooves and could get blocks of ice that were even and uniform in size. The blocks were 22 inches wide and 44 inches long. The weight of the blocks was 250 to 300 pounds, depending upon the thickness of the ice.

As the ice was cut, it was pulled out of the pond by a horse. A rope on a pulley was attached to the horse and went to a hook that was on the blocks of ice. The horse walked along the edge of the pond and drew the ice into the ice house where it was stored. The LeMay's ice house had a space between the walls of the ice house and the ice. The ice was stacked and covered with sawdust. This method kept the ice from melting throughout the summer.

Arnie told us that he really enjoyed cutting ice because it was something different to do and it was also a social time. However, he did say that it could sometimes be dangerous because someone could fall in the pond or get hit by a block of ice. He recalled a time when George Allen fell in the pond and his clothes were frozen like ice. George went into the LeMay's house for a while and then was taken home.

We learned from Arnie that there were other places in Harpswell that harvested ice. There were some people that harvested ice for their own use. He mentioned

the Will Dunning and Lawrence Merriman families who harvested ice for use on their farms. Fred Miller, who owned an inn, also harvested his own ice. Ed Hayes Moody on Basin Point sold and delivered ice the same as the LeMays. On the other side of town, a lot of ice was produced at Dingley Island.

Arnold LeMay continued to help with the family ice harvesting for several years after he was married. The family stopped ice harvesting in the early fifties. By then most people had electric refrigerators and not much ice was needed. It was the end of the LeMay business and the end of an era.

Outhouse Needed!

We are looking for an outhouse for the 19th Century Harpswell schoolhouse behind Centennial Hall for use when we begin our one-room school house history program there next year. Based on the experiences of participants in history programs at one-room school houses in other towns, use of an outhouse is often one of the more popular opportunities for students. If you know of a lonely, unused and unwanted outhouse, please contact Dave Hackett at 207-833-6322.



Bowdoin Students help paint the school house on Common Good Day

Betty Bailey Behanna

We received the following letter from Betty Bailey Behanna in response to Louise Huntington's article "Walther Norton Reminisces" in our last issue of the Newsletter.

Your Summer issue of the Newsletter's article about the Norton family brought many memories of Harpswell back to me. My Bailey family has a long history in Harpswell dating back to October 27, 1755, when Jacob Bailey of North Yarmouth purchased land on Basin Point from Henry Gibbs of New Town, Massachusetts. His land included most of Basin Point from the basin down to the end of the Point. Over the years and many generations, portions of the land were sold, with the end of the Point sold to the Green family of Troy, NY and the land from Half Way Gate (access road to Barnes Island) and down the hill to the access road to the Mill Pond to the Wooley family of Massachusetts. By 1940, the land remaining in the Bailey family was owned by my uncle, Raymond Bailey, Sr.

In 1946, at the end of World War II, Uncle Ray sold a shore lot to my parents, Albert and Phyllis Bailey, for \$50, and our family cottage was built during the spring of 1947. George Norton, Walter's father, was contracted to build our fireplace, and Harry Stevens of Ash Cove was the carpenter. I have fond memories of Mr. Norton arriving for work in his old (1920's) Ford truck, coming down over the hill, which was still a dirt road with a grass center. I remember well when Helen Norton's family purchased Barnes Island. It was wonderful to see lights on again over there. I also remember when many young men returned from the War, including the

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What Harpswell Means To Me

By Michael Abreu

I was born and raised on Bailey Island, surrounded by a large extended family and a strong sense of community. My family and its ancestors have lived on Bailey Island for generations. Every day, my family and ancestors would go out onto the water, no matter the weather or conditions, and worked as hard as they could to make a living for their families. Having grown up in this environment, I think that my work ethic is part of my DNA and is ingrained in me.

Every summer for the past three years, I worked for Glen's Lobsters, the local lobster buyer on Bailey Island. Working there was a great experience for me. I was able to learn more about my roots and connect with my community. But working there is no easy job. During my time working for them, I had multiple coworkers. Most of them either quit or were fired. Working for Glen's Lobsters was a very physical job that included working in the sun all day and lifting and moving heavy objects. My job includes buying lobsters, crating lobsters, loading the crates onto lobster trucks, and unloading bait trucks. The last of these tasks was most difficult. Bait trucks can take up to two hours in which around 100 barrels of bait are filled.

The beginning of my first year, I did not do all that much. I was a freshman in high school and very little was expected of me. But as time went on, I became a more and more valuable part of Glen's Lobsters. I soon worked my way up to working over 40 hours a week. I worked as hard as I could while

there, and I feel that it really paid off. I think working there improved both my work ethic even more and helped to create a positive attitude when challenged with difficult tasks. Working for Glen's Lobsters was not easy, but I loved it.

Bailey Island and Harpswell are beautiful during the summers, and while working I was able to enjoy it all day long. But after work, I continued to enjoy the many great aspects that Harpswell offers. Being able to go out on the skiff that my grandfather, Peter Rogers, built with his bare hands is one of the greatest feelings in the world. With this skiff my family and I also went to a little island called Jaquish off of Land's End. On Jaquish we had cookouts, went swimming, and even sometimes spent the night. It was such a great adventure, and it is definitely something everyone should be able to experience.

Living in Harpswell has turned me into the person I am today, and I am very grateful for being able to grow up and live here. It has taught me good work ethics and determination while also teaching me how to enjoy life.

Editor's note: Michael Abreu is currently a freshman at Northeastern University. This is an edited version of an essay he wrote earlier this year.



Bailey, continued from p. 5

Norton boys and my cousins, Ray Jr. and Bill Bailey and my brother, Don Bailey.

We needed to furnish the cottage, and when there was an estate sale at a home on Hurricane Ridge, Potts Pt., my mother and I went over to see what we might use. She purchased a very old washstand made of pumpkin pine to use as an end table. The top of the stand was in very poor condition and, when she showed it to Mr. Norton, he told her he had some old wide pumpkin pine boards in his barn and offered to take it home and repair it. He returned it in beautiful condition, and she enjoyed having it for many years.

In 1975, my parents sold their place and moved to Rochester, NH, taking the washstand along with them. I inherited it in 1988 and took it to Albany, NY and then on to Sarasota, FL when my husband and I retired. Eventually, it will return to Maine, in Bar Harbor, not Harpswell, when it is inherited by my niece, Linda Bailey Blasen. Thanks to Mr. Norton, I have a little piece of Harpswell to help me remember my wonderful summers there.

Best regards to all who are fortunate enough to live in my favorite place.

Bette Bailey Behanna
Sarasota, FL

Help Us Cut Our Costs

We appeal to readers to send their email addresses to harpshistory@gmail.com so they can receive their HHS newsletter by email. It would help us save postage, printing expenses, and time for the volunteers who must individually fold, address, stamp, and mail each hard copy. You will receive the newsletter in color, too. Thank you!



HHS Annual Meeting - August 20, 2014

President Dave Hackett welcomed members to Centennial Hall for the 36th annual meeting of the Harpswell Historical Society on August 20 and observed also that it was the 14th year of the Society's History Museum. Dave noted that during the past year Harpswell friends and residents had generously transferred a number of important town artifacts to the museum, including the 1872 diary of a 15 year old Harpswell teenager; Native American pottery shards from Graveyard Point in South Harpswell; the water jug from a one room school house on Bailey Island; a thick Katie Allen family scrapbook of Harpswell news articles and memorabilia from the 1940s and 50s; a portrait of Capt. Shubael Merriman who sailed around the world in the 1800s; a KKK robe from when the movement existed in Harpswell for a short time during the 1920s; and the uniform that Arnie LeMay wore while playing for the Harpswell Baseball Team a half a century ago.

Dave told members about upcoming plans to transfer valuable oral histories about the town from deteriorating cassette tapes to more modern, longer-lasting media. He also highlighted plans to begin history programs for students next year at the centuries-old one-room District #2 school house now located behind Centennial Hall.

The guest speaker at the meeting was Linda Novak, a historical archaeologist and the director/curator of Old Fort Western in Augusta. She spoke about the history of Fort Western and local life and trade at the fort as reflected in its five account books from the period 1767 -1807. For more, go to <http://www.oldfortwestern.org>

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