

Harpswell Historical Society

Newsletter Winter/Spring 2015

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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..

The Growth of a Resort

by Joyce Bibber

South Harpswell was developed as a resort in the late nineteenth century; but the earliest summer residents had come long before, when the area was a seasonal haven for residents of inland river valleys during the centuries before the white men arrived. They wintered in the forest areas where game was more plentiful, but journeyed to the coast during the summers in part to gather and dry fish for their winter consumption. As many as thirty-four shell heap sites located on the shores of the Neck prove that they indulged in a change of diet.

When white settlers first began seeking out the Maine coast as a good spot at which to enjoy summertime is not recorded; but at least a small amount of summer visiting must have preceded an attempt to exploit the attractions of the Potts Point area, underway by 1835. Why else would anyone open a hotel which was so far from a highway? That year Alexander Wentworth bought about two acres abutting the old Pinkham cemetery north of the present causeway in South Harpswell, approximately where the Indians had camped only a decade or so before.

Wentworth's deed mentioned land and buildings. The latter were not described, but tradition says that Charles Bailey was then hired to erect a summer hotel, this borne out by a mortgage given Bailey by Wentworth later that summer, on a two-story building, known as the Harpswell Mansion House. Bailey's heirs had to foreclose in 1844: and the property went through a variety of owners in the next few decades. Eventually it came into the hands of Frederick Dearborn, of Brunswick. From 1853 to 1860, no matter who the actual owners were, the proprietor was Aaron Adams, whose regular advertisements in the Brunswick newspapers provide information on the hostelry.

The ads, together with editorial comment, leave no doubt that the Mansion House was intended as a summer business. It opened



Steamer arriving at Harpswell Center

The Puritan Tithingman

excerpts from an article from
The New England Historical Society

<http://www.newenglandhistoricalsociety.com/puritan-tithingman-powerful-men-new-england/>

The job of the tithingman, which dates back to the earliest days of the New England colonies, went beyond policing people who were supposed to be in church. A key responsibility was keeping order in church during the long (and sometimes tedious) services.

To assist him in his duties, many tithingmen were given
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in May or June and closed early in the fall. Adams attempted to accommodate potential guests by leaving a horse at a Brunswick stable for them to use in driving down the peninsula. When *The Brunswick Telegraph's* editor spent a vacation at the Mansion House in July of 1857, he composed a long column for his paper, extolling the pleasures of the place, including its swings and bowling alleys, but mentioning particularly the fishing. Adams also from time to time

A long carriage ride to South Harpswell might be avoided by travelling from Portland by water.

sent the editor news items about good fishing in the area.

By the time Frederick Dearborn took control of the Mansion House in 1860, South Harpswell was becoming easier for guests "from away" to reach. Brunswick had trains to Bath and to Portland in the late 1840s; and there were connections between Portland and Boston even earlier, by 1842. Mansion House carriages were made available at the Brunswick station daily during the season. A long carriage ride to South Harpswell might be avoided by travelling from Portland by water. Although steamship lines between Portland, Boston, and towns along the Maine coast were in operation in the 1820s, and although small privately owned steamers may have stopped at fishermen's wharves earlier, the "Harpswell Steamboat Landing Company" obtained its land on Potts Point only in 1856. Rumors of service from Portland were frequent in the following years.

The first positive indication of scheduled service to Potts Point was in an 1864 advertisement which stated that a steamer was making two trips a day to and from Portland. Even that situation did not continue unbroken, as Portland's destructive fire in July of 1866 disrupted operations from the city, forcing local hotel guests to hire sailing vessels to make the trip there. Delays caused by

a lack of wind highlighted the value of the steamers.

Meanwhile, interest in summering on the Maine coast sparked the building of hotels like the Ocean House, put up in Cape Elizabeth in 1849 and enlarged soon after, and the Ottawa House, erected in 1853 on Cushing's Island.



A Group at Otterbrook Hotel

Farther east, Bar Harbor's first hotel was opened in 1855. It was to be expected that Harpswell, with its rugged scenery and location not too far from the cities, would attract new investors. In 1864 the Mansion House got competition.

That year John T. Smith, of Portland, acquired a plot of four and five-eighths acres, stretching across the near-island of lower Potts Point, from east shore to west shore and almost adjoining the steamboat wharf. On it was erected a large hotel called the Sea-Side. No depiction of this hotel has been found. The structure was probably fairly elaborate, having been designed by Portland architect George Milford Harding, much of whose other work boasted extensive heavy decorative trim. Described by Smith as "the largest establishment, constructed expressly for the purposes of a Hotel, at any Watering Place on the coast of Maine," it could accommodate a hundred and fifty guests and was three stories high, although an 1866 guest reported that its third-floor rooms had not all been finished. The location pro-

vided vistas out to sea to the south and of the White Mountains to the west, and three hundred feet of verandas enabled guests to sit outside to enjoy the views. Advertisements mentioned, and a visitor delighted in being able to see, Orr's Island, "consecrated by the genius of Mrs. Stowe." The Sea-Side establishment

also included a bowling alley, which connected the main building with the stable.

The Sea-Side House was not in operation long enough to stimulate much change in the area, although Erastus Simpson purchased a wharf and land for a store next to it. If he anticipated great business from the hotel guests, these plans were doomed on a September evening in 1866, at the end of the hotel's third season, when a "domestic" noticed smoke coming from the stable. Fire proved impossible to contain, as it spread through the connected buildings. Little except some of the furniture from the first two floors could be saved. There was talk at the time of arson, and it need not be precluded, of course, especially since reported vandalism of Smith's next business, a billiard saloon in Brunswick, raises the question of how much he might have tended to antagonize others.

With only partial insurance, and with difficulty collecting on that, Smith did not rebuild. He moved to Brunswick and

Resort, continued on p. 3,

Resort, continued from page 2

opened first the billiard room, then an ice cream parlor, and then the Bowdoin Hotel. In 1875 Smith had his Potts Point land surveyed and divided into twenty-nine small lots, reserving one larger section for a hotel (never built). Although eight of the lots changed hands quickly, those sales did not signal a sudden spurt of building in the area, as none of the early buyers made further use of his new property.

As both the Mansion House and the Sea-Side had been reported full in the high season, the destruction of the latter could have meant a great deal of business for the former; and Dearborn planned for expansion. Just a month after the Sea-Side burned, he purchased the nearby house which Sidney Bailey had been using as a boarding establishment; but enjoyment of the expansion was confined to a single summer. The Mansion House also went up in flames, on July 4, at the beginning of the 1868 season.

The newly bought house was one of two known to be open to boarders later that month. In 1873, Frederick Dearborn deeded the structure to his son George, who had been managing it. The younger Dearborn enlarged the house to three stories in 1875-6 and ran it as a small hotel, called the second Mansion House, for a decade and a half. When he closed it and left the state in 1892, the property was left in the hands of creditors, and eventually became rental housing.

The 1870s, then, began with little in the way of a summer resort in Harpswell. Two early hotels had come and gone. Some people were taking in boarders, but most did not advertise; and it is doubtful if many houses had more than a few guests at a time. Mentioned as among homeowners taking boarders in 1868, were Dearborn and "Captain Blanchard, late Depot Master . . ."

Others who catered to guests were not named, but the Paul Stover household at Stover's Point probably also had boarders that year. Lydia Dinsmore Stover had herself been a summer visitor when she met her husband-to-be in the

1840s; and she since had entertained boarders regularly. Mrs. Stover's own accounts for 1873-4 show that a few summertime guests paid a dollar a day per person, seventy-five cents more if there was a horse to be boarded, most remaining only a week or so. By 1872,

Then, in 1866, about forty boys from the Franklin Family School in Topsham, loaded with their gear into two "monster hayracks," headed for South Harpswell for several weeks of studies combined with recreation.

storekeeper Joseph Lawson's farmhouse was open to boarders, also.

Additional visitors came to stay in tents. Some at Potts Point earned newspaper mention as early as 1862. Then, in 1866, about forty boys from the Franklin Family School in Topsham, loaded with their gear into two "monster hayracks," headed for South Harpswell for several weeks of studies combined with recreation. The outing became an annual affair, and the original policy of the boys' cooking their own food was superseded by a system of taking meals at the Mansion House. In 1872, female students were included, although they slept in boarding houses instead of in the tents.

The field day which marked the closing of the school's session came to be considered a spectacle worth observing, especially as the Brunswick newspaper regularly touted the event as the

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"Harpswell Regatta." One year a few boys greased their borrowed dories with porgy oil to make them slip through the water better: the following year all dories were so oiled. By 1875, two to three hundred spectators were present for the event; and the numbers had nearly tripled a year later, with excursion boats arriving from Portland and Yarmouth. At that time one newspaper commented, "We have never seen so many camps on the Neck in any previous year, and we learned that the houses are all full."

Perhaps it was the boarders and the campers who were the anticipated customers for two apparently short-lived restaurants of the early 1870s. In 1871, George L. Randall, of West Harpswell, advertised a chowder house at Potts Point; and two younger men from the area, identified only as "Pinkham and Merrow," announced a similar undertaking two years later.

Events in 1875 provided a boost to the future resort. Even though that year's subdivision of the Sea-Side property did not lead to an immediate influx of cottagers, knowledge of the undertaking must have served as one motivating force for development. Also important was the introduction of a new steamship, owned by citizens of Chebeague Island and put into service between Harpswell and Portland. The Henrietta's first trip was announced on May 14, 1875. The little steamer remained in local service for at least six years and offered improved ties with Portland and the trains.

(Part 2 of this article will continue in the next edition of the newsletter. Full version available now online at

www.harpswellhistorical.org

Board Members

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



"Whew! That was close!
We almost decided something!"

Tithingman, continued from p. 1

a long staff; one end was rounded or sharp and on the other a soft implement was attached, such as a feathery deer tail or rabbit's foot. When the tithingman spotted an unruly child acting up, he would get a rap on the head with the hard end. Similarly, a man nodding off during the service would get a pop on the head to wake him. Women who dozed off got a tickle with the other end of the pole and a harder poke if that failed to wake them. Women were more often able to get away with a little nap during church because the bonnets or hats they sometimes wore blocked the tithingman's view of their faces.

Alice Morse Earle, in her book, *The Sabbath in Puritan New England*, tells how most ministers encouraged the tithingman to be vigilant, as they disliked seeing people sleeping in the pews. The tithingman was often busy, especially as the services dragged on. Since many New Englanders spent most of their time working, some took the notion of a day of rest literally. The wisest course was to simply apologize when the tithingman corrected your behavior, because often they had the power to arrest someone or put them in the stocks if they were unruly.

Outside the church, the tithingmen also were responsible for making sure children were being properly schooled in the Bible and that people in the taverns weren't getting too drunk. Most towns had several tithingmen to keep an eye on things, as the Puritans were sticklers for rules.

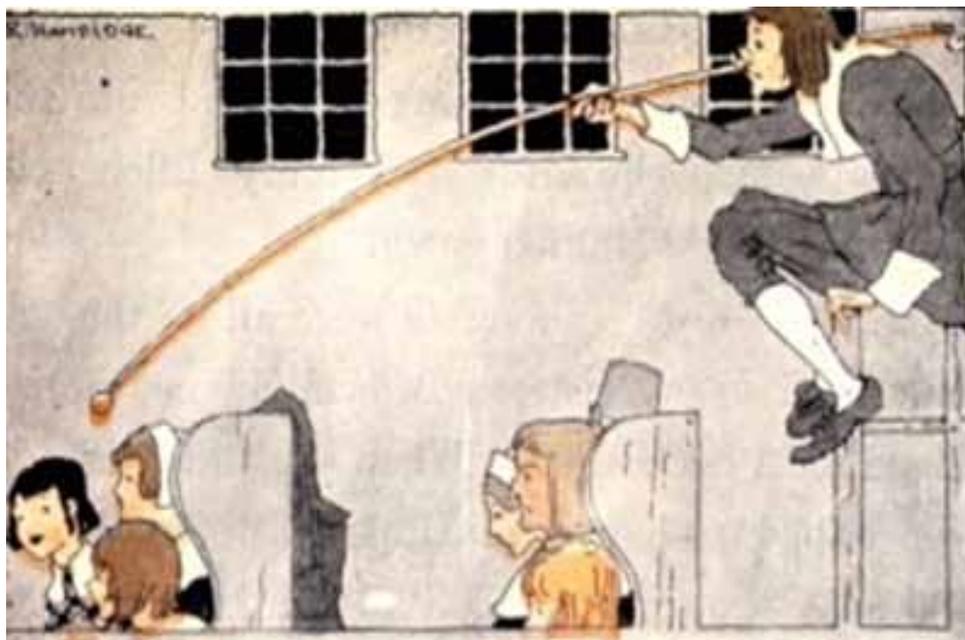
But perhaps the most important duty of the tithingman was to see that people were paying their proper share in contributions to the church.

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In recent years Harpswell's very own modern-day "Tithingman" appears annually at the Elijah Kellogg Church's Heritage Sunday service in June and cautions parishioners with the following:

"Hear Ye: Hear Ye!

"All and every person and persons whatever shall, on the Lord's Day, carefully apply themselves to duties of re-



Tithingman illustration from The Child's World, Third Reader, Hetty S. Browne

ligion and piety, publicly and privately, and no tradesman, artificer, laborer, or other person whatever shall, upon the land or otherwise, do or exercise any labor, business, or work of their ordinary callings, not engage in any games, sport, play or recreation on the Lord's Day, or any part thereof (works of necessity and charity only excepted) upon penalty that every person so offending shall forfeit five shillings.

"No traveler, drover, horse courser, wagoner, butcher, higgler, or any of their servants shall travel on this day, or any part thereof, except by some adversity they were belated and forced to lodge in the woods, wilderness, or highways the night before, and in such case to travel no farther than the next inn, or place of shelter, upon the penalty of twenty shillings.

"No vintner, innholder, or other person keeping any public house of entertainment shall encourage, or suffer any of the inhabitants of the respective towns where they dwell, or others not being strangers or lodgers in such houses to abide or remain in their houses, yards, orchards, or fields drinking or idly spending their time on

Saturday night after the sun is set, or on the Lord's Day, or the evening following.

"All and every justice of the peace, constable, and tithingman are required to take care that this act in all the particulars thereof, be duly observed, as also to restrain all persons from swimming in the water, and unnecessary and unseasonable walking in the streets or fields.

"It is my prescribed duty to diligently look after such as sleep or play about in this meeting house in times of public worship of God on the Lord's Day.

"Let all who have heard, revere and adhere to these laws of Sabbath reverence and public decorum.

"All rise."

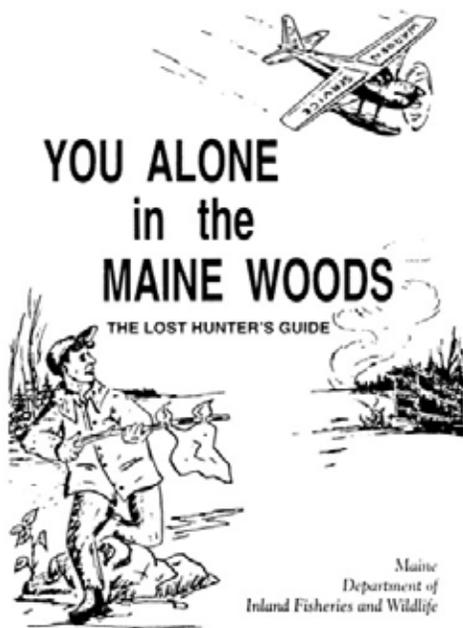


Gareth Anderson Shares His History

By Louise Huntington

Gary Anderson is known to us in Harpswell as an authority on safety and survival for hunters and hikers. He has dedicated much of his life to making the Maine woods a place where animals can thrive and people can enrich their lives interacting with nature.

Gary's family goes way back in Harpswell. His mother is descended from one of the four original Alexander brothers who came to Harpswell from Ireland in the early 18th century. His grandfather, Charles Anderson, came from Scotland. At the age of 12, Charles came across the Atlantic on a sailing ship. The British Navy was a harsh institution in those days, and the young lads aboard



Available as a free pdf from the Maine
Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife

ship were whipped daily whether they needed it or not. As his ship approached New York City, young Charles jumped overboard and swam to safety and a new life in America. For a time he lived in Norfolk, Virginia, working in the tobacco fields. Still a teen-ager, he went to Halifax, Nova Scotia, surviving a shipwreck in the process. From there he went to Boothbay, Maine, where he met William Alexander, Gary's mother's grandfather,

and joined him on his fishing boat. Charles eventually settled in Phippsburg.

Gary was born in 1934, the year his grandfather Charles died. Gary attended the Cundy's Harbor school through 6th grade. The Cranberry Horn School had recently reopened at that time, and he went there for 7th and 8th grades. From Cranberry Horn he went on to Brunswick High School. After high school, Gary served in the Korean War from 1953-57. He remained in the Reserves after the war and worked for a number of years on publicity and recruiting. He then graduated from the Criminal Justice School at University of Maine on the GI Bill.

From 1972-1997 Gary worked for the State of Maine as Safety Officer and Search and Rescue Coordinator. During his years with the state, Gary traveled around both the state and the US training his counterparts in survival and safety in the wilderness. He is the author of the handbook, *You Alone in the Maine Woods – The Lost Hunter's Guide*, first published by the Maine department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife in 1972. It has been reprinted many times. This practical, down-to-earth publication is full of essential information for hunters and hikers who could get lost in the woods. Many other states have used the handbook as a model for their own publications.

As part of his work with the state, Gary was sent to the state of Virginia to train the first FBI Hostage Rescue Team in survival techniques. The government had constructed an entire town in the woods of Virginia, complete with an airstrip, to teach this elite corps of FBI agents how to handle hostage work in remote areas. The government at the time was trying to outfit the FBI with some of the newest materials – synthetic fabrics that proved to be pretty useless in the cold. Gary, true Mainer that he was, knew that nothing beats layers of wool socks and jackets and pants in cold weather. He was given money to go shopping at L.L. Bean for suitable winter gear. An experiment took place: 25 men were dressed in the fancy new fabrics and 25 were in layers of woolen clothing. They were all sent out in the cold overnight in the mountains

of western Maryland to see how they managed. Imagine which group stayed warm and dry!

Gary tells that the single most important piece of legislation for preserving wildlife and habitat in the U.S. was the Pittman-Robertson Act of 1937. This was designed to stop the near-extinction of many species. To this day it provides money to the states from the Department of the Interior to purchase land and to protect wildlife. The money is raised from the excise tax on arms and ammunition. This funding may not be used for any other purpose. White-tailed deer and wild turkeys are two familiar species that have been saved by this program, as well as eagles, osprey and other non-game species.

In 1984, Gary and his wife Anne built their home on Widgeon Cove on property owned by Anne's family. As an interesting aside, the house adjacent to that property was moved by oxen to Sunset Hill Farm, the family home of Sam and David Alexander. Although moving houses was quite common at the time, it was quite an undertaking. Partway to their destination at the end of the first day, everyone stopped to rest near the intersection of today's Neil's Point Road and Route 123, and held a square dance in the house before going home to bed.

As readers of *The Harpswell Anchor* and Channel 14 viewers are well aware, Gary continues to share his stories about the town and his family. He is a woodworker who creates working duck decoys, moose calls, and walking sticks. His son Bob carries on his parents' tradition of concern for the community and love of words by editing and publishing *The Harpswell Anchor*. Gary and Anne's daughter Lynn is a Natural Health doctor and yoga instructor in Los Angeles. Like her father and brother, "Dr. Lynn" is also an author. Gary and Anne have four grandchildren and three great-grandsons and are expecting a great granddaughter in July.

To learn more about Gary Anderson visit the Harpswell Academy's
Voices of the Sea project at
[harpswellstories.org/
2015/02/27/gary-anderson/](http://harpswellstories.org/2015/02/27/gary-anderson/)

Harpswell Memory

by Shea Nelson

One early spring day, feeling somewhat stir-crazy after a long Maine winter, I decided to take my dog on a walk. Our meanderings brought us to Mitchell Field, or as I affectionately call it, the Fuel Farm. Walking around the track, nothing seemed too out of the ordinary, just your typical ocean breeze and overcast hues. Ordinary, that is, until I rounded the final corner of the dirt path and caught sight of the ocean stretching out in front of me.



Something about the view, the weather, my mood (I'm not sure which), struck a chord within me. I stopped walking immediately and just stood there, my mind churning and drinking in the sights. Two walkers moved along like lazy, multicolored ants in the distance. The seaweed and sand swirled with the lowering tide. Nature has left me dumbfounded in the past, but never has a place so interwoven with man's influence done the same.

I believe that this is the essence of Harpswell, a place where humans and the natural world coexist in some sort of mutual appreciation. Many friends of mine hunt, fish, and lobster, but they still retain a respect for the beauty surrounding them. This is

Mitchell Field

nowhere more apparent than in the place where I found myself that day with my brown dog. The land remains a preserve of sorts, with land un-open to development. A community garden sits at the roadside, and large community events take place along the beach.

In this way, Mitchell field epitomizes Harpswell's core values. Man and nature live at a happy medium there, given the opportunity to do so because of the tendency of Harpswellians to appreciate and protect such an ideal. Not to mention the great uniqueness of this place...I mean, where else can you walk around on a long abandoned refueling base?

I appreciated all of those things that day as I stared down from the lazily curving hill. I realized the level to which Harpswell's essence had permeated my person and why I'll always say, "That's where I'm from."

Editor's note: Shea Nelson is currently a freshman at Tufts University. This is an edited version of an essay he wrote last year.

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