

# Harpswell Historical Society

# Newsletter

Summer 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.*

## Walter Norton Reminisces

*Members of the Norton family have been key supporters and benefactors of the Harpswell Historical Society since its inception. Thanks to the generosity of Walter and Helen Norton, along with others in the community, the Society acquired the former Bailey's Store in Harpswell Center and transformed it into the town's history museum. Thanks to them, the Society also found a way to save the 18th Century Tarr-Hackett home in Harpswell Center. The Nortons' assistance in preserving important historical sites and structures in Harpswell extends well beyond the Historical Society. Their legacy and generosity will continue to benefit the town for centuries to come. In the article below Walter and his sister Hannah share their recollections of Harpswell over the years.*

*By Louise Huntington*

Our neighbor, Walter Norton, grew up in the handsome Merriman house built in 1798 in North Harpswell. There is still a cellar hole on the property where an earlier house once stood.

When Walter was growing up, the Norton family included seven children, a hired girl, and there were often boarders, too. One of those boarders was Myrtle Edwards who later married Samuel Alexander – parents of David and Sam. In Walter's youth there was no indoor plumbing. One time, grandpa was situated in the outhouse in the dark of night. One of the lady boarders came out to use the facilities and accidentally found herself sitting in grandpa's lap. Imagine that.

The children from the Nortons' part of town went to the Harpswell Center School that has long since been torn down. There were eight grades in that one-room school. There were three in Walter's class: Lee Chipman, Chester Bibber, and Walter. Walter recalls that people told him how hard high school was going to be for him. Not at all, Walter says. He listened carefully to all the lessons for the older children, and by the time he reached high school, he had no trouble with his studies.

*Norton, continued on p. 2.*

### Contents

Walter Norton Reminisces.....	1
E-Mail Addresses Wanted.....	2
Board Meetings .....	2
Bailey Island 1913-1928.....	3
More History of Harpswell Place Names .....	5
Preservation Efforts at the Kellogg Church .....	5
How Did Harpswell Get Its Name?.....	6

Hanging May baskets was an important Harpswell tradition for years. Walter's sister, Hannah Dring, remembers making baskets from cereal boxes fitted out with crepe paper handles. The baskets were filled with home-made fudge and taffy. After hanging a basket on your friend's door, you knocked, and started to run off into the woods while your friend tried to catch you.

Walter tells about his rides to high school in Brunswick in Buster Estes' Packard. Buster was quite the driver. Sometimes he would even go as fast as 50 miles an hour. One icy day, Buster was passing Abby and Lawrence Bachelder, who were on their way to town for their daily doughnut, when Buster's car spun right around. Walter still laughs when he remembers the looks on the Bachelders' faces when they saw Buster's car zooming past them going backwards. Buster's car spun around at the bottom of the hill and then continued on as if that were a natural occurrence. Buster later died on Christmas Day 1956 while out duck hunting. The story was eloquently related in Lawrence Hall's short story, "The Ledge."

Apparently, the Harpswell roads were really awful back when Walter was young. He remembers watching cars getting stuck in a huge mud-hole near the top of his family's driveway. He recalls seeing the section of the Harpswell Road near his family's home finally being paved. In those days, people dug gravel for improving the road wherever they could find it. Depressions from the digging are still to be found in the woods on Harpswell Neck today.

According to Hannah, in the winter Walter's father hitched up the draft horses, Jack and Dandy, to each end of a log, and dragged it back and forth along their long driveway to make it just barely passable. Then he and the boys would shovel the rest of it. No aluminum shovels for  
Page 2

them; they used the living ones from the barn.

There are still stories about the thick ice that used to build up on Middle Bay. Children skated from the Neck to Birch Island, and their parents didn't have to worry about them. Walter maintains the ice could get to be three to four feet thick. He says Heular Marden once rode out to Eagle Island on his motorcycle.

When World War II came, Walter and his brothers went into the service. He enlisted in the Army Air Force and flew B-17's and later B-29's as a navigator back in the days of celestial navigation. Once, when Walter was stationed in Texas, his plane was flying over the Gulf of Mexico. Things were going well, so Walter took a nap. An hour later he woke up, and Walter was needed to get the plane out of the fog. They ended up in Denver – Walter's first trip to the Mile-high City. Later, Walter and his brother Andrew each had four years of college paid for by the GI Bill.

Walter and members of his family still live on the beautiful family property on Harpswell Neck.

## **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@gmail.com](mailto:harpshistory@gmail.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.

## **Board Members**

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

## Bailey Island 1913-1928

*Excerpts from a presentation to the HHS by Leona J. Harris on June 17, 1983*

I remember the winters as being very cold with lots of snow. We always had a snow bank along the ell of our home that reached to the eaves of the roof. The roads were cleared by a group of men using hand shovels. The snow piled so high along the roadside that the men working would hang their coats on the cross arms of the telephone poles.

There were few cars on the island in those days, and when winter came it was the custom to put the automobile to bed for the winter. A car at that time either had no heater or a poor excuse for one, and the side curtains that snapped in to enclose the car did not keep out a heavy rain and certainly not the cold. There were few horses on the island in my time. I especially remember the two work horses that Leo Murray owned. They were named Bob and Molly. As children we rode them bare back.

We had telephones on Bailey Island in 1913 but only a few. There was one heavily loaded party line, "the six line." There were thirteen parties on the six line. When one signaled the operator, several receivers could be heard going up. The curious wanted to know who you were calling.

There was no electricity on the island then, so the homes were lighted by kerosene lamps. I remember what a chore it was to clean the lamps each day. Wash and dry the chimneys, fill the lamp base with kerosene and trim the wicks. If



*Mackerel Cove in winter 1933 -1934,  
Bailey Island, Maine*

the wicks were not properly trimmed, when lighted they would streak and blacken the chimney.

Our home was comfortable -- a seven room house with attached shed. It was heated by two wood and coal burning stoves. The four bedrooms were unheated. On each bed was a feather tick the size of the mattress, which was made of two large pieces of closely woven cloth, called ticking, and filled with feathers...probably the down or breast feathers from sea birds, which we ate in season and saved the feathers for pillow making. Sleeping in a feather bed was like sleeping on 'Cloud Nine' and very warm. Other tools for warming a bed in a cold and I mean COLD bedroom was a Pebbly Beach rock that had been worn smooth by the undertow as the rocks were washed back and forth on the ocean side of the Island. During the day, these rocks were kept in the oven of the kitchen stove or in the top of the living room heater. When we were ready for bed, we wrapped the hot rock in an old bath towel and put it at the foot of our bed between the blanket and sheet. The rocks held their heat for most of the night keeping us warm...except for our noses! On very cold nights, mother would bring a heated flat iron upstairs and iron the sheets before we got into bed.

The weekly wash was all done by hand. First, the water had to be carried from the well outside the house. The water was heated on top of the stove in a copper wash boiler. My mother put the white clothes in the boiler and they were boiled with a spoonful of something called "Cleanall." If too much Cleanall was used, it ate the clothes and they came out in shreds. The boiling was to loosen the dirt. The clothes were then scrubbed on a washboard with bar soap; Fels-Naptha and Proctor and Gamble soaps were my mother's favorite brands. After two rinsings and going through a hand wringer, they were hung on a line outside to dry. Most of the clothing in those days needed ironing, so of course there were huge ironings to do.

This was done with a flat iron from the hot stove with a rounded wooden handle that fitted into the top of the iron. It was necessary to change the iron often as they cooled quickly.

It was in the late 1800's that the ladies here at Bailey's felt the need of their own church. They organized a sewing circle which they called the "Willing Helpers" to work toward a church building. Among the many fund-raising events were the suppers which were held in their own homes. The Willing Helpers succeeded in their project, and the church was built. It is still a working church, and the deed is still held today by the "Willing Helpers Sewing Circle," which still meets every Wednesday. It contributes to the support of the church building and is also the sole supporter of the island cemetery.

At age five, I started first grade at our island school, which housed grades 1-9. High School was either at boarding school, or some families that moved to Portland for the winter sent their teenage children to Portland High School.

We, the whole two and one half miles of Bailey Island, were like one big family. We sometimes had our differences, but on the whole had a closeness and looked after one another. Our social life varied; we made our own. The ladies did a lot of social calling with one another. The willing Helpers Sewing Circle met once a week. By now, Library Hall had been built and was an active lending library. Clam chowder and baked bean suppers were popular. Myda Perry and Effie Smith were the cooks. When I think of the suppers I picture Georgie Thomas. She always attended and always sat in the same place. She was a heavy woman and very pretty. Georgie had a smile for everyone and an infectious laugh.

Following the supper, tables and chairs were cleared away, the floor swept, and it was



*Last telephone switchboard from Bryant Pond, Maine<sup>4</sup>*

time for dancing the waltz, the fox trot, and square dancing. Our type of square dancing is now called "Contra." Square dancing was very popular. Olin (Bunker) Johnson was the caller. Two of the square dances that we did were called the "Boston Fancy" and "Lady of the Lake." There was a lot of swinging in those dances. Charles (Muffin) Sinnett, Walter Merrill, and Bunker Johnson all had a fast and firm swing, and it was to their delight if they could lift a pretty young girl off her tip-toes.

The orchestra was usually three instruments. My grandfather John Munsey on the violin, Aunt Hannah Munsey or Ethel Johnson at the piano, and Ethel's son Linwood on the drums. Lin sometimes gave us an extra treat by playing the bones.

*The Society would be grateful if you sent in your membership donation, if you haven't already.*

## Current Preservation Efforts at the Kellogg Church

*By Robert Porter, William Greenwood,  
and the late David Hunter*

The Elijah Kellogg Church, since its construction in Harpswell Center in 1843, has been an important focus of religious life for Harpswell Neck and surrounding areas. Over the decades, its religious role has broadened to become a much loved and admired symbol of continuity for Harpswell, as well as an icon of architectural beauty for locals and thousands of tourists and visitors from away each year. Along with the Old Meeting House (the original church Meeting House), the Old Burial Ground, the Tarr-Hackett house, Centennial Hall, the History Museum in Bailey's Store, the one-room District 2 school house, the Scout Hall, the Old Cattle Pound, and the ancient horse-drawn town hearse, the imposing white Kellogg Church completes the set of buildings and objects that make up the Harpswell Center Historic Park. One could hardly imagine Harpswell Center and the town without it.

With that in mind, the members of the Kellogg Church voted to proceed with a preservation program so that congregants, town folk, and tourists will be able to use and enjoy the church for at least another two hundred years.

Preservation will include removing centuries of paint from the original clapboard siding and repainting. The hand-made side windows will be removed, stripped of paint and repaired with new glazing and paint. The shutters and entrance doors will also be removed, stripped, repaired and repainted, and a number of the original hinges will be replaced with similar original hinges. If sufficient funds are raised, the arched glass window over the entrance will be restored in place. It was built in the 19th century by Moses Bailey, a master joiner from West Harpswell. Finally, the more than 100

foot steeple will be fully restored. Still viewable from Harpswell Sound, it will continue to be a landmark for Harpswell and other seamen as it has for more than 171 years.

The Kellogg Church was designed by architect Anthony Coombs Raymond of Harpswell and constructed in 1843. The church is a beautiful example of the classic Greek Revival style that was popular in the 19th century. Because of its historical significance, it was placed on The Registry of Historical Places in 1978. In drawing up plans for restoring the church, a number of interesting facts were discovered. The existing original clapboard siding was milled from early growth timber, air dried and installed with exceptionally skilled joinery. Short pieces were necessary to eliminate all knots. There is no apparent rot, and the joints are tight. Properly preserved, the siding is capable of serving the building for another 171 years. A clever and thoughtful wall design, which includes air space between the inner and outer walls that allows for constant air flow between them, created a natural ventilation system that has prevented rot, internal moisture and mold. This clever ventilation system will be maintained.

Harpswellians of all beliefs and backgrounds can help to preserve this irreplaceable symbol of our town and connection to our past and future by sending donations of any amount to the Capital Campaign Fund, The Elijah Kellogg Church, 917 Harpswell Neck Road, Harpswell, ME 04079.

## More History of Harpswell Place Names

**Harpswell** land was once included in Westcustago, which was incorporated on 9-22-1680 as a plantation and called North Yarmouth.

*Continued on p. 4*

## How Did Harpswell Get Its Name?

Harpswell, Maine was named after the village of Harpswell, England. It is a small parish of Gainsborough in the West Lindsey District of Lincolnshire. Apparently, no other “Harpswell” exists in the British Isles. The derivation of the name Harpswell is uncertain. The name could have come from the Old English “hearpere” meaning “harper’s spring” or “spring of the harp or harp player,” a reference to a musician, especially a folk musician, who played the harp. Other possible derivations are from an Old English name *hearp* (Hearp’s spring) or from a contraction of *here-paco*, meaning “a military road” since it is close to a Roman road and a much older Jurassic pre-historic track running through it. There is another, less charming idea that it was derived from a spring having curative properties for herpes! The name appears in the 1086 Domesday Book as “Herpeswella.” In the 1300s, the town name was spelled “Harperswelle.”

Historians have put forth several theories about who actually gave the name to our town. According to Wheeler’s History of Brunswick, Topsham and Harpswell, “...the name was probably first suggested by... emigrants from that vicinity and favored by the Dunning’s.” Harpswell native and historian, Miriam Stover Thomas, reasoned that a number of Harpswell’s early settlers who signed the articles on the separation of Harpswell from North Yarmouth were descendants of Pilgrims who worshipped in Harpswell, England, and who later landed at Plymouth, Massachusetts, in 1620. These

included Simeon Hopkins, Edward Doty (Doughty), James Ridley, Taylor Small, John Additon, Samuel Otis, and Francis Eaton, whose grandson was Rev. Elisha Eaton. In the 1990s, Harpswell historians, Richard R. Wescott (USA) and Mark Tatum and Lady Monson (UK), put forth a third and probably more accurate theory. They believed that Massachusetts Province Governor Thomas Pownal, from Lincolnshire, named the town Harpswell when he signed into law the bill that incorporated “a neck of land called Merriconeag Neck, and certain Islands adjacent...” into a separate district called Harpswell on January 25, 1758.



### Harpswell, England

The parish of Harpswell in England is a beautiful settlement with the few houses grouped around a church from 1042. The church has an Anglo-Saxon tower restored about 1890 and is dedicated to St. Chad, a prominent 7th century Anglo-Saxon churchman who introduced Christianity to the pagan kingdom of Mercia. The village itself, however,

predates the current church edifice by several centuries. Recent excavation uncovered substantial building remains from Norman times and pottery and other remains from as far back as the Roman era (43-409 A.D.), indicating that Harpswell had long been a significant settlement.

In 1086 Harpswell was divided into two manors, both of which eventually passed to the Whichcote family in the 15th and 16th centuries. The family built Harpswell Hall, a manor house around which it constructed extensive formal gardens. On one side of Harpswell are the slopes of Lincolnshire Cliff, an agricultural area on top of which is an ancient road leading south one hundred miles toward London. The nearby former RAF airfield was called Harpswell Aerodrome when it first opened in 1918. In 2001 Harpswell had a population of 65 persons living on 2,165 acres of land, whereas by comparison, Harpswell, Maine had a population of 4740 people in 2010 and an acreage of 15,744.

Links:

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Harpswell,\\_Lincolnshire](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Harpswell,_Lincolnshire)

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/St\\_Chad%27s\\_Church,\\_Harpswell](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/St_Chad%27s_Church,_Harpswell)

Adapted from an article by Miriam Stover Thomas in *The Harpswellian* of

1978; notes from Richard R. Wescott (circa 1994); correspondence from Mark Tatum in May, June 2014; and Wikipedia (information on Harpswell, England, and St. Chad's Church).

*Place Names continued from page 5*

The **original name** of our town was Merriconeag or Merruconegan, which means “carrying place,” a reference to the portage point in North Harpswell.

**Prior to 1683** Bailey and Orr's Islands were called The Twins.

**Bailey Island** was once called New Capenewaging, then Will's Island, and finally by its present name after Dean Timothy Bailey, who purchased the island around 1750.

**Orr's Island** originally was called Little Sebascodegan, which means “little measure.”

**(Great) Sebascodegan Island** was earlier called Shapleigh's Island after Major Nicholas Shapleigh, who purchased most, if not all, of the area now included in the town of Harpswell.



*Road entering Harpswell, England*

## **Harpwell Historical Society**

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