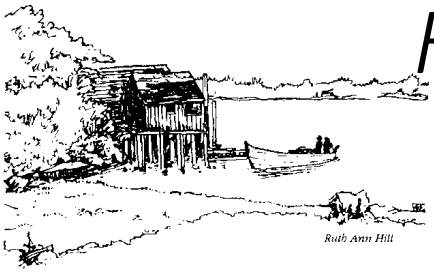

Harpswell Historical Society

Newsletter Summer 2016

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www.facebook.com/harpswellhistoricalsociety

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..

John Darling Hermit of Pond Island Fact from Fiction

by Gerry York

The story of John Darling is a mixture of fact and fantasy that is hard to sort out. Some folks were embarrassed by it, some were angered by it and some seemed to take delight in sensationalizing and embellishing it. The media of the time (and today as well) used the tale of the "Hermit of Pond Island" to scare and amaze readers. The "Hermit" was featured on postcards, in histories and as an example of what might happen to a child that didn't work hard and learn those ABC's. The story of finding John frozen solid in his bed of rags and eaten by everything from rats to seagulls has been told around many a campfire.

John was born about 1850, the son of Isaac and Rebecca Wallace Darling at Sebasco in the town of Phippsburg. To the best of our knowledge he had one brother, Darius born about 1838 and a sister, Angenette born in 1853. Darius married and had a family the descendants of which still live in this area. Of Angenette there is no further information.

The remainder of John's early life is unknown but on August 28, 1871 at the approximate age of twenty-one, John married his first cousin

***Darling**, continued on p. 2, col. 1*

Harpswell Day: A Celebration of Traditional Handcrafts and Subsistence Skills

Join Harpswell Heritage Land Trust and Harpswell Historical Society for a celebration of traditional handcrafts and subsistence skills. Saturday, Oct. 1 from 12-4 p.m., rain or shine, at the Harpswell Historical Society, 929 Harpswell Neck Road. For all ages, there will be many things to see, do and learn about during this free event celebrating Harpswell's history.

- Observe demonstrations of skills and handcrafts, including weaving baskets, spinning wool, weaving cloth, hooking rugs, woodworking, churning butter and more. Many of the demonstrations encourage active participation.
- Deepen your understanding of Harpswell's rich history through a tour of the old graveyard and Meeting House. Browse the historic artifacts in the museum. Learn about the architecture of the historic buildings in Harpswell Center.
- Help press cider and sip it warmed with cookies in the Historical Society Museum kitchen. Harpswell Coastal Academy will have other food for sale as well.
- Visit sheep from Two Coves Farm in the town's historic cattle pound.
- Enjoy live music provided by Harpswell Coastal Academy's House Band and others.
- Listen to readings in the Meeting House and a reenactor's stories in the graveyard.
- Bring your kids to learn from a period schoolmarm in the one-room schoolhouse, play with toys of long ago and listen to storybooks in a fishing schooner stern.
- Check out antique cars.

For more information:
www.hhltmaine.org, or
207-837-9613, or
outreach@hhltmaine.org or
www.harpswellhistorical.org, or
207-833-6322 or
harpshistory@gmail.com.

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Aurilla Darling who was younger than he by several years. Two years after that in September of 1873 she gives birth to a son named James. James lives but Aurilla dies soon after the delivery. So we find John at the age of twenty-three, widowed and with a new born son. Again over the next six years we lose track of John Darling and family.

The next recorded event takes place on August 3, 1879 when John weds Albertina Gilliam(Tina) of Orr's Island. The Darlings will now make their home on property belonging to Tina's parents on the back shore at Orr's Island. Six year old James now has a mother. John and Tina survive the struggles of making ends meet while having either four or six more children.

By the end of 1897 John is forty-seven years old, Tina thirty-three and they have been married for eighteen years. Their six children range in age from twenty-four years to less than one year. They are living on Orr's Island on Tina's parents land and now they are told the land has been sold to a syndicate of Philadelphia businessmen who will be selling off lots for summer cottages. The Darlings must move but to where? Whatever the reason, John chose to relocate to Pond Island, a treeless rocky low island about a half mile to the south of Orr's Island. At this point in time no one may have owned the island which could have made it attractive to John. He built a two room shelter in the middle of the barren ledge and banked it well with seaweed and driftwood. It was probably insulated with newspaper, rags or earth. The roof was flat and there must have been some sort of wood stove. Quite likely one room was for sleeping and one was for cooking and eating.

Tina moves in with her parents and the Town of Harpswell began paying for a doctor to treat her.

Tina discovers she has cancer and being on Pond Island would make doctor's visits difficult. Tina moves in with her parents and the Town of Harpswell began paying for a doctor to treat her.

The Town also is paying for doctor visits for Tina in 1900. She hangs on until August 2, 1901 when she passes away we assume at her parents' home.

News accounts say John then spent the next 20 years on Pond Island. But, with the possible exception of maybe one year his wife and children did not.

One of Albertina's nieces has said that John never had a cross word to say about anyone even though many people played tricks on him. "If Uncle John had ever wanted to, he could have broken any one of them in two but he never did. He always had a nice even temper." John found seasonal employment with S. J. Prince and Sons on Orr's Island salting fish, unloading fishing vessels, shoveling coal and other laboring jobs. He lobstered and fished the waters around Pond Island from his dory and, while there is no doubt his was a rugged life, he apparently found it suited him well. Edward Rowe Snow also paints a picture of John as a businessman. It seems that John would hire out to the folks that came to the island looking for pirate gold and for fifty cents a day he would dig a hole as deep as the customer wanted.

Eventually John was unable to continue living on Pond Island. At some time before his death in 1918 (probably about 1914) the Town of Harpswell provided him with a small cabin on Long Reach Mountain Thomas Alexander was contracted to look in on him. His death certificate records the place of death as Harpswell, Long Reach Mountain and indicates he was a resident there for four years and gives the date as January 15, 1918. It is signed by Dr. G. M. Elliott of Brunswick and gives the cause of death as an uncared for Vented Hernia with Excessive cold of two days duration as contributing cause. It appears that at least part of the legend of the hermit is true. John did die alone and was likely frozen when he was found. There is no stone for John

"If Uncle John had ever wanted to, he could have broken any one of them in two but he never did. He always had a nice even temper."

***Darling**, continued on p. 2, col. 1*

***Darling**, continued from page 2*

at Orr's Island and no record of his burial in the Orr's Island Cemetery. John may be buried with his wife on her father's lot. Then again they may have been buried in unmarked paupers' graves.

This article is abridged from the article of the same name on our website: http://www.harpswellhistorical.org/history/johndarling.htm You can read the full article on line.

The Isles of Casco Bay in Fact & Fancy

For twenty years Pond Island was the lonely home of its only occupant John Darling the famous hermit of Harpswell, a ne'er-do-well in his own village, so the authorities decided to maroon him on the barren Pond Island. All this time he existed on decayed fish and half-putrid crustaceans cast up by the tides and drank the stagnant brackish water of the ponds without any visible effect on his health. Now and then visitors arrived, curious to see the marooned hermit and frequently from them he received gifts of tobacco and other comforts and luxuries. But for months at a stretch he saw no human being, heard no human voice, and in time he became so accustomed to his solitary existence and so attached to his miserable shack and barren island that it is doubtful if he could have been induced to leave them. At last, one wintry day, duck hunters noticed that no smoke rose from the crude chimney of the shack on Pond Island. Wondering what was wrong they landed to investigate, and found him lying among the filthy rags that he had called a bed — lifeless — frozen as hard as the granite rocks of the island where on he had been condemned to live and die an exile.

An excerpt from *The Isles of Casco Bay in Fact & Fancy*, by Herbert G. Jones, 1946

History of 19th Century American Poorhouses

What were poorhouses? (often also called Poor Farms -- and several similar terms)

Poorhouses were tax-supported residential institutions to which people were required to go if they could not support themselves. They were started as a method of providing a less expensive (to the taxpayers) alternative to what we would nowadays call "welfare" - what was called "outdoor relief" in those days. People requested help from the community

Poorhouses were tax-supported residential institutions to which people were required to go if they could not support themselves.

Overseer of the Poor (sometimes also called a Poor Master) - an elected town official. If the need was great or likely to be long-term, they were sent to the poorhouse instead of being given relief while they continued to live independently. Sometimes they were sent there even if they had not requested help from the Overseer of the Poor. That was usually done when they were found guilty of begging in public, etc.

[One misconception should be cleared up here; they were not technically "debtors' prisons." Someone could owe a great deal of money, but if they could still provide themselves with the necessities for remaining independent they might avoid the poorhouse.]

Before poorhouses

Prior to the establishment of poorhouses the problem of what to do with paupers in a community was dealt with in one of three ways:

1. *Outdoor Relief provided through an Overseer of the Poor:* When people fell upon hard times and members of their family, friends or members of their church congregations could not provide enough assistance to tide them over, they made application to an elected local official called the Overseer of the Poor. Within a budget of tax money, he might provide them with food, fuel, clothing, or even permission to get medical treatment to be paid out of tax funds.
2. *Auctioning off the Poor:* People who could not support themselves (and their families) were put up for bid at public auction. In an unusual type of auction, the pauper was sold to the *lowest* bidder (the person who would agree to provide room and board for the lowest price) -- usually this was for a specific period of a year or so. The person who got the contract got the use of the labor of the pauper for free in return for feeding, clothing, housing and providing health care for the pauper and his/her family. This was actually a form of indentured servitude. It sounds a lot like slavery -- except that it was technically not for the pauper's entire lifetime. And it had many of the perils of slavery. The welfare of the paupers depended almost entirely upon the kindness and fairness of the bidder. If he was

The person who got the contract got the use of the labor of the pauper for free in return for feeding, clothing, housing and providing health care for the pauper and his/her family.

***Poor**, continued on p. 4, col. 1*

***Poor**, continued from page 3*

motivated only by a desire to make the maximum profit off the "use" of the pauper, then concern for "the bottom line" might result in the pauper being denied adequate food, or safe and comfortable shelter, or even necessary medical treatment. And there often was very little recourse for protection against abuse.

3. *Contracting with someone in the community to care for Paupers:* In this situation the care of a *group* of paupers was delegated to the person(s) who would contract to provide care at, again, the lowest price. This system allowed the opportunity for somewhat better supervision as indicated in the terms of the contract -- which might specify what minimum standard of care must be provided and that community officers would do inspections, etc. There were still often the same opportunities for abuse that were noted above.

Note: In some cases (before state laws began to *require* the establishment of County Poorhouses) local communities had already discovered that a place to house paupers helped reduce the cost of poor relief. These small town poorhouses were the prototypes for the later state-required county poorhouses. Those earlier poorhouses often instituted the use of an adjacent farm on which the paupers could work to raise their own food, thus making the houses more self-sufficient (relying less on local tax funds). That is how the term "poor farm" came into being.

The Beginning of the County Poorhouse System

During the second quarter of the 19th century, as the industrial revolution had its effect on the United States, the importation of the factory system from England was followed almost immediately by the full scale adoption of what seemed to be an inherent component of that system -- the Poorhouse System. These poorhouses were built with great optimism. They promised to be a much more efficient and cheaper way to provide relief to *paupers*. And there was a fervent popular belief that housing such people in institutions would provide the opportunity to reform them and cure them of the bad habits and character defects that were assumed to be the cause of their poverty.

*These poorhouses were built with great optimism. They promised to be a much more efficient and cheaper way to provide relief to **paupers**.*

The Disillusionment

By mid-century, people were beginning to question the success of the poorhouse movement. Investigations were launched to examine the conditions in poorhouses. They had proven to be much more expensive than had been anticipated. And they had not significantly reduced the numbers of the "unworthy poor" nor eliminated the need for "outdoor relief". [This was public assistance given to those living outside the poorhouses. It was given somewhat grudgingly to those considered to be (perhaps!) more "worthy" poor --who might only briefly and temporarily require assistance to procure food or fuel or clothing when they fell on very short-term hard times.]

The Civil War

But the Civil War was the major preoccupation of American society during the third quarter of the century. Major systematic changes in social welfare policy had to await calmer times. Ironically, the faltering poorhouse system was sheltered from the impact of the poverty produced by the war itself. The war created widows and orphans; and it deprived elderly members of families of the support they might have had in their old age, had their sons and grandsons lived or remained able to work. While many looked forward to the time ... "*When Johnny Comes Marching Home Again*"... many soldiers limped home to be disabled for the rest of their lives. However, a relatively small proportion of these casualties of the war ever wound up living in poorhouses.

The poorhouses were spared this circumstance for two reasons. Special laws were passed requiring that any needed assistance to veterans and their families had to be provided as outdoor relief -- specifically prohibiting placement in the poorhouse. And the Civil War Pension Plan provided -- although belatedly and awkwardly and controversially -- for soldiers and their family members.

The Transition

By 1875, after the regulation of poorhouses in most states became the responsibility of the State Board of Charities, laws were passed prohibiting children from residing in poorhouses and removing mentally ill patients and others with special needs to more appropriate facilities.

The poorhouse population was even more narrowly defined during the twentieth century when social welfare legislation (Workman's Compensation, Unemployment benefits and Social Security) began to provide a rudimentary "safety net" for people who would previously have been pauperized by such circumstances. Eventually the poorhouses evolved almost exclusively into nursing homes for dependent elderly people. But poorhouses left orphanages, general hospitals and mental hospitals -- for which they had provided the prototype -- as their heritage.

Subsistence

Subsistence is a word used very little in this day and age, but to our forebears it was the way of life. The times have changed as they must, that is why our Society and it's Museum are a great connection to the past and it's ways.

Most of us know little about how to use the woodworking tools of the past. When was the last time that you saw someone using a Barking spud, a Broad axe, a Froe or a Scorp (either open or closed). In the world of weaving, do you know the difference between a Warp and a Weft and how to load the Raddle.

Last winter the second floor of our Museum was renovated to better suit our needs and course toward the future.

The largest room has become The Subsistence Workshop. It is a work in progress for sure. In this Workshop there is a 150 year old Barn Loom in working order, and, yes, you can try your hand at weaving. There are a working spinning wheel, a woodworker's bench and vises, and tools of the trade. and an adequate library that speaks well to the abilities of the past. If you would like to sit and read or talk, instead of chairs there are the stern rail, wheel and wheel box from an old schooner.

This is meant to be a very hands on enterprise, a place to experience the abilities of the past.

Carriage that belonged to Elijah Kellogg about 150 years ago. It looks a bit ostentatious for him. There must be a story here.

Acquisitions

The Museum regularly acquires new items. Some of them relate to our Subsistence Workshop. We have pictured a few of them here.

Rug of the Old Tide Mill at Basin Point. Made by Williatta Bibber Stover. Donated by Peggy Given White, Reading, MA in memory of Bernard Waterman.

A Veliciped (Jigsaw)
Millers Falls (MA) Tools

A Cobbler's Bench

Above, the Cobbler's Bench, shoe lasts and boot are from the Walter Norton family. The child's boot is 6 inches high and 6.5 inches long. The sole of the boot is attached with wooden pegs.

A three burner Glendale gas stove

From: Clif Cook

Sent: Sunday, July 17, 2016 11:38 AM

To: harpshistory@gmail.com

Subject: Old photos of Bailey Island

While going through some old family photos, I found some when they summered in Maine. Thought I'd share them with you.

[Note: They are all dated 1896.]

Little Harbor

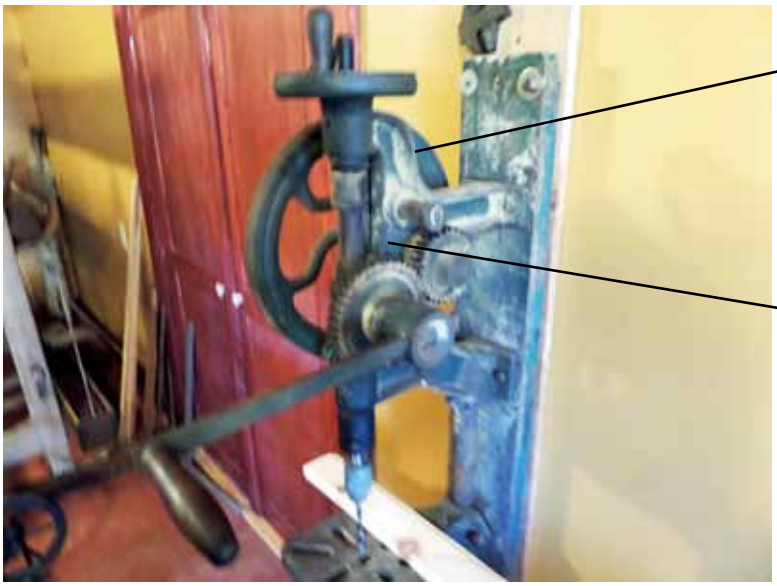
Southwest Bailey Island

Unkown

Southwest Bailey Island

Little Harbor

Southwest Bailey Island



Drill Press: Each turn of the handle turns the eccentric which pushes the drill bit down further, 1900 or earlier.

Help Us Cut Our Costs

A big thank you to the **one hundred four** people who have agreed to receive their newsletter by email.

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!

Board Members

Sam Alexander, Paul Dostie, Dave Hackett, Daniel McMahon, Ann Standridge, Burr Taylor

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