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HARPSWELL HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Illuminating the Past | Navigating the Future

THE WIND & TIDE

FALL 2025

A New Day for the Harpswell Historical Society

From Our President

If you have traveled down Harpswell Neck and through the center of town at any point this past Spring or Summer you may have noticed the museum getting some extensive repairs and a new coat of paint that has made the building really shine on the outside. With six buildings and the statue of Elroy Johnson under its care, the museum and its contents are just a piece of what the Harpswell Historical Society is responsible for but, it is arguably the most important. Located in Harpswell Center it is also the center around which the group meets and works and while the outside has been rejuvenated, it is just the beginning of what we hope to do.

line. The truly exciting work though is being done by Dave Hackett, newly titled “Historian” of the group and decades long anchor of the organization. Assisted by Lin Riotto, a selfless volunteer with tremendous energy and knowledge, they are handling, identifying, and cataloging every single item in the collection with the hopes of eventually having an online database that the public can access. This includes: documents, pictures, artwork, textiles, machinery, memorabilia, and on and on and on. To label it an immense chore would be an understatement yet, every week they make a bit more progress and the list of cataloged items grows and new displays are planned for next Summer.

Along with all that there is a full board of directors and officers and a growing list of volunteers. WiFi has been installed at the museum to assist in research and cataloging. The “workroom” is getting a makeover with new equipment and work stations to research, receive, manage and appreciate the collection more easily. Our newsletter is being resurrected and will be a great way for supporters to not only keep current with what is happening but will also be a fun way to learn about Harpswell’s past. A revamped website and social media presence will be happening as well as presentations at different times throughout the year. And in the spirit of dreaming big, there is more both in the short and long term so stay tuned!

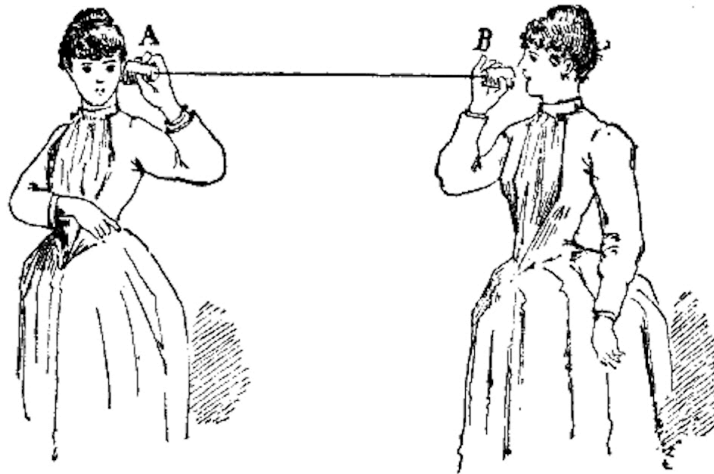
Of course, this all takes money and while we were fortunate enough to have a generous donor fund the exterior repairs, it is our hope that their generosity will inspire others by example to help get the inside of the museum tuned up as well. A fundraising mailer is planned to be sent out soon. When it arrives, please consider [donating](#) to the Historical Society. Any amount helps. Your donation is tax deductible as we are a 501(c)(3) entity.

— *Chuck Alexander*

The HHS at work - The News

improvements made to the exterior of the HHS Museum during the summer? Thanks to the generosity of North Harpswell resident Helen Norton, we painted the exterior of the building and made extensive repairs to the side

entrance and walkway. We are very proud of our “new” home! We are now renovating the interior of the museum. Thank you, Helen!



We are updating our technology!

—We added Fiber Optic internet connectivity for staff and visitors at the Museum. And we now have Zoom capability.

—Cundy's Harbor Librarian and history buff David Perrier donated a flatbed scanner for use at the Museum and set it up for us.

—We are rebuilding our website and plan eventually to share our stories on Facebook and other social media. *If you'd like to help with our social media presence, please click [here](#).*

Sorting through HHS treasures.

David Hackett and Lin Maria Riotto lead a team of volunteers that is making steady headway in inventorying, cataloging, and digitizing the thousands of items in the HHS Museum. Thus far, they have completed our genealogy collection and are now working with the hundreds and hundreds of photos and maps previously donated to the museum. Your help would make the project go more rapidly and smoothly. *If you would like to volunteer, please click [here](#).*



Bowdoin students visit the HHS

On August 13 Bowdoin first year students visited the HHS, the Old Meeting House and the Old Burial Ground.

The visit was part of a “community immersion” orientation trip that all first year students take when they



first arrive at Bowdoin. These students also met with other voluntary organizations in Harpswell and spoke with a variety of town’s people, including the Harbormaster and fishermen.

Report from the Annual Meeting

The members of the HHS convened its annual meeting on August 10, 2025 and elected a new Board of Directors.

Chuck Alexander (president)
Dave Sparks (vice president)
David Hackett (HHS historian)
Sue Gagne (treasurer)
Lili Ott (secretary)

Sam Alexander
Chip Black
Wendy Van Damme
Rob Porter
Leith Smith



Our guest speaker was on-island resident Brad McFadden, who brought history to life as he shared the fascinating story of the 1718 journey of the Andrew McFadden family to Merrymeeting Bay. He gave an in-depth report on the materials found in the dig with crisp images of many of the 250 pieces. Afterwards, Sam Alexander displayed a rifle that traces its origin to the Tower of London in 1633. It may have arrived in Harpswell with his ancestor William Alexander, who had worked as a privateer and possibly captured the weapon from a British ship. The Alexanders have cherished the heirloom for generations. [Read More](#)

Coming Events

Mark your calendars and join us for our first presentation of the New Year on **January 17, 2026**. More details to follow.



In collaboration with the town and other organizations in Harpswell we are planning a series of community-wide events to celebrate the 250th anniversary of the



to commemorate the 250th anniversary,
please share them with us at
harpwellhs@outlook.com

Volunteer Spotlight

Shines on June Phinney

For years, June Phinney has been the steady heartbeat of our volunteer docent program - coordinating a roster of dedicated community members all summer long, welcoming new volunteers with gentle guidance, and rallying work crews each year for “Operation Sparkle,” a spring cleaning of the museum that she branded with a fun name because she knows how to motivate people to pitch in and move us forward.



June leads by doing. You’ll often find her serving as a volunteer herself, greeting visitors with an easy smile and a twinkle in her eyes, helping them discover the stories behind our artifacts or answers to their questions. Her gift for hospitality turns a visit to the Harpswell Historical Society into a memorable encounter with local history.

June’s vision has also strengthened the foundation of our collective knowledge. She had the idea to make a recording with HHS Historian David Hackett explaining the provenance of many core items in our collection. This resource helps docents and preserves institutional memory.

It came seems especially at home interacting with the public, that's no accident. Her warmth, style, and stage presence - familiar to many from her roles in Harpswell Community Theatre shows - infuse our programs with good energy. June is one of the community-builders who keep our organization vibrant and caring, and we are grateful for the joy and dedication she brings to the Harpswell Historical Society.

—Wendy Van Damme

Building our Volunteer Corps

On November 9, HHS secretary Lili Ott and board member Wendy Van Damme brought together volunteer docents and community members eager to participate in the mission of the Harpswell



Historical Society. More than 20 people gathered to hear updates, share ideas, and explore ways to strengthen the HHS educational mission and volunteerism in the year ahead.

HHS Historian David Hackett and board member Sam Alexander showcased fascinating Harpswell artifacts during the “Intriguing Items” segment, while archivist Lin Maria Riotto highlighted how online research offers an important volunteer opportunity that can be flexible and performed remotely.

Volunteer positions are available now for remote work as researchers and biographers. Once interior building renovations are complete in the spring, other volunteer roles will open, including archival assistant, photographer,

shown by participants promise a deeper connection with the community and a bright future for HHS.

— *Wendy Van Damme*

[Volunteer Here](#)

From our Museum collection.

What is it?



Can you identify these two objects?
Hint: They relate to one of Harpswell's traditional occupations.
You'll find the answer at the end of the newsletter [here](#).

Our Thanks to Outgoing President David Hackett



History Writ Large and Small. Dave Hackett's Harpswell Legacy

— ***Lin Maria Riotto***

It is impossible to think about the Harpswell Historical Society Museum and Archives without thinking of David Henry Hackett III, who as president of the organization for 31 of its 46 years, has been preserving the past for the future since 1979. Presiding over a vast storehouse of Harpswell artifacts, images, art, records, documents, oral histories, genealogies, David has worked hard to attach narratives that give depth and context to each item. In recognition of his expertise, David has become the HHS Historian. [Read More](#)

A Fond Farewell to HHS Friends

Pat Moody

Longtime HHS supporter Pat Moody deeply loved Harpswell and its history and published oral histories recorded by her students. Read more about Pat [here](#) and her time as a teacher [here](#).

Ed Phinney

preserving Harpswell's heritage, notably documenting its hotels and guest houses and amassing a huge collection of early 20th century Harpswell postcards. Read more about Ed's love of history [here](#). You can view Ed's postcard collection at the Pejepscot History Center [here](#).

Looking at Harpswell History

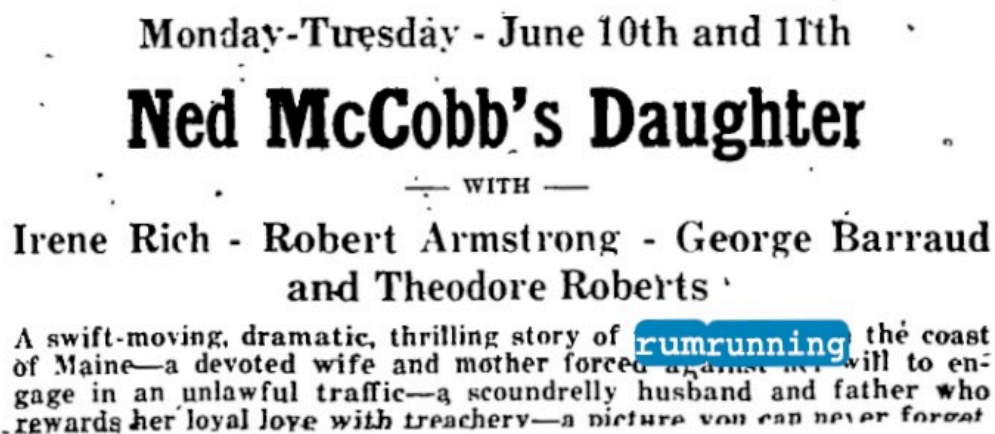
Harpswell Cousins Preserve Harpswell History

Three year's ago, five cousins on Orr's Island brainstormed on how to share, identify, and discuss old photographs of Harpswell. What resulted is a popular Facebook group called "[Harpswell Yesterdays](#)" with over 4.5K members who enjoy identifying people and places not only for themselves but for future generations. The group also has a [website](#) called Harpswell Islands Genealogy and History Center.



"Rum-Running" in Harpswell

On a moonless September night in 1929, a ship cautiously made its way toward Casco Bay and dropped anchor. Minutes later, a speedboat pulled alongside it and the ship's crew gingerly passed down box after box of illegal whiskey to the waiting boat. The alcohol was destined for anxious, and armed, bootleggers at a Harpswell's Gun Point cottage. In the pitch-black night, lights fastened to two flag poles were a beacon to welcome the whiskey peddlers. (Photo from *Brunswick Record*, 1929, courtesy Gerry York) [Read More](#)



For film buffs: In 1928 Pathé Exchange released an early “talkie” film about rum-running on the Maine coast. It showed at Brunswick’s Cumberland Theater only three months before the Gun Point raid. (Photo: Brunswick Record, 6/6/1929) [Read More](#)



Image: Gerard Mercator (1512-1594) from OldWorldAuctions.com

Where Exactly Is Candy's Harbor?

— David Perrier

For many places, these questions are easily answered. Even the borders of Harpswell are well defined. But the various areas within this Maine town are not so easily determined and it requires a little work to try to make sense of where the borders are. [Read More](#)



The Captain Johnson H. Stover Jr.'s Home in South Harpswell.

— William McLin and Samuel McKeon

The Stover family has a long history in Harpswell, spanning several generations going back to the early 18th century. One of the first Stover houses in Harpswell reportedly was a log cabin built on a hill overlooking the cove that now bears the Stover name. The beautiful home on that hill today was built by Capt Johnson H. Stover, Jr. in 1806 and was considered the largest and finest house on The Neck. He also owned the Stover



Harpswell Historic Park Gardens

— *Becky Gallery*

The Harpswell Garden Club is approaching its 100th anniversary in 2031. Did you know that our own organization, the HHS, was established by the Garden Club in 1979? The Garden Club currently provides oversight of the Union Church (1841), the town office gardens, and the gardens in the Harpswell Historic Park by Centennial Hall. [Read More](#)

Orr's Island Artist and Historian Chronicles His 18th Century Ancestors

— *Brad McFadden*

At our August annual meeting Orr's Island resident Brad McFadden spoke about the 1718 journey of his ancestors from Fort Popham to Merrymeeting



Native Americans forced them back to Fort Spelman. From 2012-2016 Brad and more than a dozen volunteers carried out a dig at the site and found hundreds of artifacts including a clay pipe possibly smoked by Brad's 7th great grandfather 300 years earlier. [Read More](#)

What is it? The answer is....



The two items are a needle and a mesh board, both tools that were used in the repair of the netting in lobster traps. The needle is not really a sharp instrument like those used in tailoring and sewing. The long, slender, boat-shaped wooden object with the white braided cord wrapped around it is a netting needle. This tool is used to carry the cord and pass it through loops to create knots and mesh. The cord is wound onto the needle, and the open end allow the cord to be easily released as the net is formed. The rectangular wooden block next to the needle is a mesh board or gauge. Some call it a toggle. (What would you call it??) The blocks come in different sizes are used to ensure that all the loops (or meshes) in a net are of a consistent size, by wrapping the cord around the gauge before tying each knot. Each person had his own size mesh board. It created a certain shaped mesh when knitted, which the fisherman thought would help to fish better.

Articles wanted: *If you are interested in Harpswell history and have written an article on Harpswell's history or have an idea for a future article, we would love to hear from you. Write to us at harpswellhs@outlook.com*

is a “beta” version, a work in progress. We are still learning how to use the software necessary to produce the newsletter. Thanks to all who helped with this edition, especially Graham, Chuck, David H, Lin, Wendy, Lili, Sarah and the authors who contributed their time and talent to write the fascinating articles in the “Looking at Harpswell History” section. The newsletter and the long versions of the articles are posted on our [website](#). Printed copies are available at the HHS museum and other locations around town.

— RCP



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This newsletter is proudly produced in Harpswell. Typos are intentional.

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.

HOW TO CONTACT US

Harpswell Historical Society

929 Harpswell Neck Rd

Harpswell, ME 04079

Email: harpswellhs@outlook.com

Facebook: Not Yet

The Harpswell Historical Society is a non-profit 501(c)(3) volunteer organization founded in 1979.

We thank you for supporting the HHS.

How to donate

Send donations to HHS, 929
Harpswell Neck Rd, Harpswell,
ME 04079, click the button
below, or use the QR code.

Harpswell Historical Society



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