

South Bristol Historical Society

NEWSLETTER

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Summer Return of the Wabanaki Basket Weavers

Maine is in the homeland of the Wabanaki, the People of the Dawn. Starting in the late 19th century, Penobscot and Passamaquoddy tribal members returned to coastal Maine in summer to make and sell their handcrafted items. In Lincoln County, they stayed for much of the season and set up encampments at popular vacation destinations such as Boothbay Harbor, South Bristol's Christmas Cove, and Pemaquid Point. Skilled artisans, they made and sold baskets of ash and sweetgrass, as well as other unique items. Local residents remember seeing them gathering sweetgrass around the tidal marshes.

The Penobscot Ranco family came to Boothbay Harbor & Christmas Cove for many years in the first half of the 1900s. In Christmas Cove they stayed in a small building north of the Holly Inn, on "The Bar". Mary Elizabeth Ranco was an accomplished Penobscot basket weaver. Mary was born in 1885 on Indian Island (Old Town) and



Mary Elizabeth Ranco
Photo penobscotculture.com

married Joseph Sapiel. They had six children; two were born in Christmas Cove: Frances 1910 & Doris 1915. After Joseph's death in 1924, Mary married Byron Spencer and they had two more children.

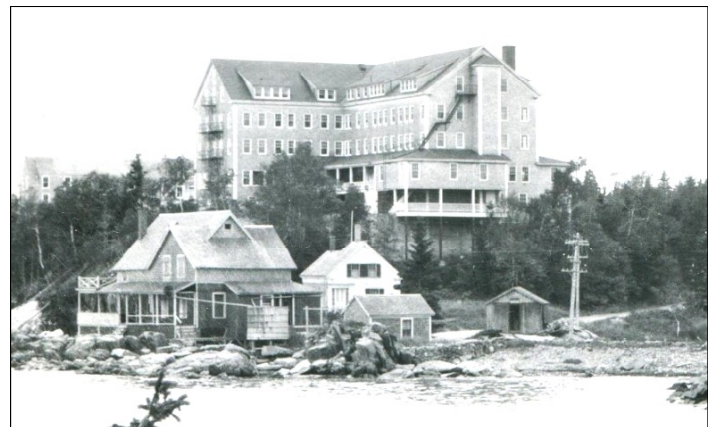
Heron Island summer resident Floyd Humphries wrote in his *Boyhood Memories* "A family of Indians... came to Heron several times during the season, in birch bark canoes, to sell handcrafted sweetgrass baskets, toy canoes, and tomahawks carved of wood, delicate canoes fashioned in birch bark, sturdy ash and birch bark boxes useful by the hearth."

Wabanaki basket weaving is not a lost art. Today, Theresa Secord, a member of the Penobscot nation, is revitalizing the art form and creating new generations of basket weavers.

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Penobscot Sweetgrass Basket, collection of Wanda Rice



Penobscot Craft Shop 1930s, lower right building below Holly Inn, near "The Bar" Cottage

SBHS BOARD MEMBERS

Co-Presidents – Larry Kelsey & Nancy Adams; *Vice President* – Wayne Eugley; *Historian* – Scott Farrin;

Secretary – Deb Storch; *Treasurer* – Betsy Graves;

Trustees – Dave Andrews, Mary Avantaggio, Jason Bigonia, Wendy Jackson, Carol Kelsey
Carolyn McKeon, Jack Speranza, Warren Storch, Ellen Wells

2021 Summer Events—Highlights



Schooner Lewis R French in Christmas Cove

June — *Schooner Lewis R French* celebrated 150 years, in *Christmas Cove*. An exciting event for everyone, the schooner crew offered tours at the Coveside dock and SBHS presented a talk on local 19th century shipbuilding at the CCIA Casino, followed by a Q&A with schooner Captain Garth Wells. See the videos on our YouTube Channel.

August — *Lincoln County Pilgrimage* celebrated the Maine Bicentennial . South Bristol was well represented with numerous sites on the tour: Old Walpole Meeting House, Walpole Chapel, Thompson Ice House, Roosevelt S Road Schoolhouse, SBHS Museum, and Union Church.

August — *The hidden history in the landscapes of Clark's Cove*. An engaging presentation by historians Jayne Gordon and David Andrews. See the video on our YouTube Channel.

Museum News—Accessions

This year the Historical Society has received numerous items to add to our collections at the Museum and online.

Harry Bell has donated a photo collection consisting of 100 or so images of Walpole and surroundings taken by his mother Joan Van Nostrand, in the 1930s and 1940s. The collection contains Van Nostrand family members and neighbors (some families represented : Haley, Brown, Mank, Fitch, Curtis, Little) as well as images of activities no longer practiced. Included is a photo of Will Feltis (at left), who farmed “the old fashioned way” and Dan Curtis haying with oxen. (back page). The Historical Society would appreciate our readers’ help to identify some of the images.



Will Feltis of Walpole

The William and Gertrude Rice family donated a collection of photos and ephemera. Among the collection are items from Gertrude’s membership in Degree of Pocahontas (DOP) including her membership certificate, pin, and fringed dress worn at DOP meetings. The Degree of Pocahontas was the ladies auxiliary of the Improved Order of Red Men, a fraternal/patriotic society.



Degree of Pocahontas Membership Pin

Also in the Gamage/Rice collection is a letter and map to Harvey Gamage from the National Science Foundation, Office of Polar Programs in 1975, informing him that a point of land in Antarctica has been named Gamage Point. “Gamage Point marks the north side of the entrance to Hero Inlet on the southwest side of Anvers Island. The U.S. Antarctic Research Program (USARP) Palmer Station is located on this point. The name, applied by Advisory Committee on Antarctic Names (US-ACAN), is in association with Hero Inlet inasmuch as it was the Harvey F. Gamage shipyard in South Bristol, Maine, that built the Research Vessel Hero.” (*description from National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency*)

Another curious item in the collection is a certificate from the Maine Three-Quarter Century Club, signed by Gov. Brewster, recognizing Mrs. Mary Gamage for achieving 75 years of age !

Historical Society Scholarship Award 2021



Nuala Glendinning with SBHS Board Members Betsy Cable Graves and Donna Farrin Plummer

Each year the South Bristol Historical Society gives a \$500 scholarship to a South Bristol resident graduating from Lincoln Academy, based on the recommendation of the LA Guidance Department.

The 2021 scholarship was awarded to Nuala Glendinning, daughter of Jay and Melissa Glendinning.

While at Lincoln Academy Nuala was active in the sports soccer and lacrosse, Outing Club, Y-Team Leaders, Lincoln Academy Community Fundraising Organization (LACFO) and Interact Club.

Nuala attends the University of Maine at Orono where she studies business. Congratulations Nuala!



Nuala Glendinning
Recipient of 2021 Scholarship Award

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In 1993 Secord co-founded and directed the Maine Indian Basketmakers Alliance (MIBA) in Bar Harbor. Theresa Secord says, “The preservation of ash basketry is still at the heart of my work. I weave baskets using the same wooden forms and tools that have been handed down to me from my great-grandmother Philomene Saulis Nelson.”

There is much in the news recently regarding Native Americans. President Biden proclaimed the 2nd Monday in October as Indigenous Peoples’ Day. November is Native American Heritage Month, meant to celebrate the cultures, histories and contributions of Native people. It is also meant to educate people about Native culture and the challenges Native people have faced historically. In January 2022, Maine’s next legislative session will take up an important bill to reinforce the sovereignty of the four Wabanaki tribes, now with nearly 8,700 members. LD 1626 “An Act Implementing the Recommendations of the Task Force on Changes to the Maine Indian Claims Settlement Implementing Act” seeks

to allow Maine tribes to be treated the same as tribes in the other 49 US states. Because of the language in laws passed in 1979-80, the state of Maine deals with the tribes as municipalities, rather than as sovereign nations. This situation limits tribal rights to self-governance and has also prevented Maine’s tribes from benefiting from many federal laws passed since 1980.



Looking north from Holly Inn
Penobscot Craft Shop at center



Penobscot Basket
Collection of Wanda Rice

For more information online

boothbayhistorical.org/ranco-baskets-online
wabanakialliance.com, penobscotculture.com
mainewabanakireach.org, therasasecord.com
upstanderproject.org –Films: Dawnland & Bounty

Harvard Foster— Young Volunteer Firefighter 1921



Plummer Leeman House, originally home of Menzies Gamage
Corner of Shipyard Road and ME-129
Burned April 1921 and sadly resulted in the loss of life.

One hundred years ago South Bristol suffered a painful loss that motivated the town to fortify themselves with essential fire-fighting equipment. Lincoln County News Digital Archives reveals the story.

In the early morning hours of April 13th, 1921, fire broke out at the Plummer Leeman house in South Bristol village, north of the bridge. The fire destroyed the entire house. SBHS Board member Larry Kelsey remembers his father Wilder, who was at the fire, recounting the sad story of walking with 19 year-old Harvard Foster near one of the damaged chimneys when part of it fell and struck Harvard. He died later that day from his injuries. A month and half earlier Harvard was married to Clarion Morton of New Harbor. The accident was a devastating event for the family and the new town (separated from Bristol in 1915) which very quickly afterwards raised the money to acquire a more modern fire engine and hose.

Parents Bainbridge and Alice, and brothers Irving and Tom, had lost their dear Harvard to a horrific accident. The young widow Clarion Morton Foster moved back to New Harbor, where she later married Cabot Poland in 1923. She helped her brother Samuel's daughter, Alphra Morton Benner, raise her children.

House History Plummer Leeman and his wife, Martilla, who was daughter of shipbuilder Menzies Gamage, had been living with her parents in the house, caring for them in their old age. Menzies died in 1918 at age 85, his wife Clarinda Farrar Gamage died in 1917, age 81. After the fire in 1921 Plummer and Martilla built a new home on the corner of the property. Later Martilla sold land to Eliphalet McFarland who built the house later known as "Gray Lodge" on the site of the Menzies Gamage house. (From H. Landon Warner, "A History of Families and Their Houses, South Bristol")

Fire and Serious Accident at South Bristol

The home of the late Menzies Gamage known as the Plummer Leeman house was destroyed by fire at 4 o'clock Wednesday morning. It was one of the village landmarks, erected in 1850, but was in perfect preservation. Fortunately it was a still morning. The absence of any fire apparatus compelled a big crowd of workers to stand by and see it burn. It was ignited from a chimney in the eastern ell and burned

slowly. Most of the furniture on the first floor was removed.

Harvard Foster was seriously injured by a falling chimney and received a bad cut on his head and some internal injuries. Dr. Fernald was called promptly and attended the young man, who was removed to his home nearby. All the village did what they could with hand buckets to prevent the fire spreading. The loss is said to be four thousand dollars with two thousand insurance.⁴ The town is sadly in need of some protection from fire that is now utterly beyond control and is leaving bad gaps in our picturesque village.

Harvard Foster died 14 hours after his injuries at the Plummer Leeman fire from a falling chimney. He sustained a compound fracture at the base of the skull and never regained consciousness. Dr. Fernald and Dr. Clark did all they could for him. His father and mother came from Portland and were with him. He was a popular young man, recently married, and will be missed by a host of friends.

Some action is needed for a fire apparatus, but a general apathy seems to prevail on this important subject. It will be too late to lock the door after the horse is stolen. We will all suffer if some action is not taken and we have had more than our share of narrow escapes.

LC News, 4-14-1921

Harvard Foster

The funeral of Harvard Foster, one of the most popular young men of South Bristol, who died from injuries received at the Plummer Leeman fire, was held Friday afternoon at the home of his uncle, Justin Foster. A large company of relatives and friends were present. Rev. Dr. Jackson conducted the impressive ceremony and Elmer Elliott had charge of the arrangements. The casket was covered with flowers and a large floral tribute was provided by his host of friends and companions in South Bristol. It was one of the largest funerals ever held here. The circumstances surrounding it added to the sorrowful final.

Harvard Foster was a native of the village, only 19 years of age and recently married a young wife, Clarion Morton of New Harbor. He was a model young man of quiet disposition, without a bad habit. He was a lover of the outdoors and the most successful hunter in our town. During the war and after he never lost a day at the ship yards in East Boothbay and gave his pay to help his family. He sacrificed his life to save the property of a neighbor and there is a sermon in this example. He will be missed by many whom he always greeted with a pleasant smile.

The body was followed by sincere mourners to its resting place in the family lot.

LC News, 4-21-1921

The death of Harvard Foster at the Plummer Leeman fire has aroused the town and a subscription paper for a fire engine and hose collected \$100 the first day.

The floral offerings on the grave of Harvard Foster attracted visitors to the church yard Sunday. The weather had preserved the flowers in all their beauty.

Many of our young men had narrow escapes at the Leeman fire from falling bricks and flaming timbers.

LC News, 4-28-1921

Ten years before the Plummer Leeman fire, South Bristol had acquired a "chemical engine" in 1911. (see clipping below)

APPARATUS ARRIVES AT PSYCHOLOGICAL MOMENT.

South Bristol, Me.—A chemical engine, the first piece of fire apparatus the town ever owned, arrived opportunely. The engine had been unloaded from the car and put in the freight shed when a fire was discovered in the annex of a summer hotel at De Grasse Point. The machine was hurriedly unpacked and dragged by volunteers to the scene, where it was effective in preventing the spread of flames to the neighboring cottages.

Bulletin League of American Municipalities
Printed 1911, Vol. 12, No. 9



Foster brothers, Irving (left) and Harvard (right)
Photo courtesy of Diana Foster Prentice

South Bristol received their "new combination motor fire engine, both water and chemical" in January 1922. Built by D. E. McCann of Portland, it weighed 4 tons with two 40 gallon chemical tanks, 40 hp Continental engine, heavy cord tires and chains. It was equipped with hook & ladder, a search light and bell, and could throw a chemical stream 200 feet using 3/4" hose. (LC News article 1-12-1922)

Gone But Not Forgotten

A recent change to the landscape around Poorhouse Cove reminds us that historic places may not exist forever. The Poorhouse Farm dwelling is gone, but its place in South Bristol's town history is not.

An early resident of South Bristol named Bedfield Plummer, Sr. purchased three parcels of land between

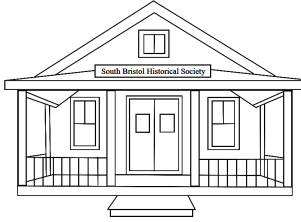


Photo: LandVest, Inc.

1763 and 1790, bounded by Wurlings Bay (today known as Poorhouse Cove) and the Damariscotta River and built a cape on the eastern shore. After Bedfield's death in 1803, sons James and Bedfield, Jr. divided the land in equal parts, along an east-west line. James Plummer lived in the old family house on the south parcel, while Bedfield Plummer, Jr. built a new Federal style home (circa 1810) on the north parcel. This house was purchased by William T. Kelsey from Thomas Erskine in 1873.

William Kelsey became Overseer to the Poor, built separate quarters for the indigents and worked them on his farm. Kelsey was also a stage driver, ship builder, and brick maker. He lived with his family in this house until 1900. There had been half a dozen owners between 1900 and 1976 when David and Gina Riddiford purchased Poorhouse Farm. The Riddifords maintained their historic home for 45 years, and recently sold it in 2021.

For more about historic preservation for the individual and the community, visit maine.gov/mhpc and historicnewengland.org.



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GIVE THE GIFT OF MEMBERSHIP



Dan Curtis and boys, haying in Walpole
circa 1930s
Photo donated by the Bell family

| | |
|-------|-----------------|
| \$10 | Individual |
| \$20 | Family |
| \$40 | Sustaining |
| \$250 | Individual Life |
| \$350 | Family Life |

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