

# South Bristol Historical Society

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## Newsletter

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### First Historical Highlights Tour a Huge Success!

The morning of Thursday, August 19th, dawned bright and clear—a good omen. Numbered signs and colored balloons dotted the sides of Ridge and Clarks Cove Roads. The Town Hall was a mini-museum featuring old photographs and information about Clarks Cove. The lawn of the Walpole Chapel sported tables with fresh flowers and home-made refreshments. Homeowners and SBHS members were at their posts. A year of planning and preparation was complete. All was ready for our first Historical Highlights tour. Would anyone come?

More than 120 people came! They came from near and far, from here and away, to see where the earliest settlers of South Bristol lived, raised families, worked and died. They saw homes built in the 1750's, a wonderful 200+ year old barn, and a 1930's Sears kit house. They viewed historical buildings—the Walpole Chapel, Centennial Hall and Gladstone School. They walked to old mill foundations, cellar holes and cemeteries. They toured an early cape house, stripped bare to its original bones, in the process of being reconstructed. They read the names of early settlers

from a late 1800's Friendship or Signature Quilt. They saw a unique hooked-rug stair carpet which tells the story of an 1820's farmhouse by tracing the families who lived there and their occupations in graphic form. They studied old photographs displayed at the Town Hall. They picnicked at the Darling Center or lunched at one of our local restaurants. They had a wonderful time!

The goal was to bring history to life in a way that could be easily understood and enjoyed. Comments from participants indicated that we accomplished our goal! Thank you to the homeowners and residents of Walpole for their generous cooperation, and to Cathy Stockwell and all the other SBHS volunteers who made it possible. All proceeds will be used in support of the SBHS Oral History Project and the conversion of more than 100 audio cassette tapes to digital format. We hope to offer historical highlights tours of other areas in South Bristol in the coming years. If you missed the tour, the guide booklet is still available for \$5. Contact SBHS at 644-1234 or sbhs@tidewater.net for information on how to obtain it.

### Significant New Additions to the SBHS Collection

Two new artifacts, significant both in actual size and in the place of each in the history of South Bristol, were donated to SBHS by Linwood Gamage on October 13, 2010. The magnificent anchor which for over forty years nestled in front of the Gamage home on Shipyard Road now sits proudly in front of the SBHS museum, and the large grinding stone which sharpened the tools used by the men who built the ships launched at the Harvey Gamage shipyard rests against the porch until a more suitable location can be prepared. SBHS is most grateful to Linwood Gamage, and to Plummer Excavation who transported the anchor and grindstone from the Gamage property to SBHS at no cost, making possible the acceptance of these artifacts.

The anchor, found east of the Thread of Life ledges in 1968, may be one of two set by the Canadian schooner *Ocean Belle* just before she struck the ledges in November, 1889. The story of the heroic rescue of all but one member of the crew by three Christmas Cove men is told in the article beginning on page 2 of this newsletter.



*The Gamage grindstone is carefully lowered into place at SBHS with the help of Plummer Excavation.*

### Spirit award

The Spirit of America Foundation, a charitable foundation started in Augusta, Maine, in 1990 to honor volunteerism, presented SBHS with the "Spirit of America Foundation Award" for outstanding community service to the town of South Bristol on October 20, 2010. The honor recognized the Society in particular for its work in restoring the S Road School. SBHS President Ellen Wells, S Road School Restoration chairman Donna Plummer, and SBHS Treasurer Cotton Damon were on hand to accept the plaque memorializing the award. The Lincoln County ceremony was the first county-wide event organized by the Foundation; the awards have previously been made by individual participating municipalities. The handsome plaque presented to SBHS by State Representative Jon McKane is on display at SBHS.

## Membership

Sincere thanks to long-time members **Herb and Anne Sears** who recently expressed their strong support for SBHS by becoming Life Members. We welcome new members **Andrew and Ruth Jones, Marilyn Arsem, Lisa and Brian Garrison, Louisa Kaymen, Rebecca Rice, Kathy Spofford and Bob Koukol, Catherine Faust, Pat and Tiger McCarthy, Weston Waite, and Janice Seiders**. Many thanks as well for the additional financial support provided by our 31 Sustaining Members, and to all our members—more than 250 of you as represented by 150 individual and family memberships—thank you for your continuing interest and help.

**Please note that if you find a membership renewal form enclosed with your Newsletter our records indicate that we have not received your 2010-2011 dues. We hope that you will take this opportunity to renew your membership!**

## Officers and Trustees

At the 2010 Annual Meeting trustee **Cathy Stockwell**

was elected Vice President and **Nat Hammond, Polly Ulin and Sylvia Greene** were elected trustees. Re-elected as officers were Ellen Wells, President; Cotton Damon, Treasurer; Michele Christensen, Secretary; and Dave Andrews, Historian. Trustees continuing to serve are Charles Beaudette, Eugenie Cole, Cynthia Garrels, Larry Kelsey, Carolyn McKeon, Donna Plummer, and Gail Seiders. We greatly appreciate the support given SBHS over the years by retiring trustees Bill Kelsey and Chuck Plummer.

## Help the SBHS Collection to grow

The artifacts, genealogies and documents in the SBHS collection are a resource for students, for those seeking to know their family's roots, and for anyone with some curiosity about this town and its people. Help keep this collection growing by sharing your family tree, family photos, stories, letters—we can scan documents and photos right at SBHS while you wait, then add the copies to the collection. Next time you clean out the attic, an old desk or closet, keep SBHS in mind!

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## Schooner *Ocean Belle* Rescue

**T**he majestic anchor which now rests in front of the SBHS museum measures roughly seven feet in length along the shaft and five feet between the flukes at the base. It was found east of the Thread of Life ledges in 1968 by Captain Harold Morton when it caught in his trawl; he subsequently gave it to Harvey Gamage. The anchor may well be one of two set by the 86-foot long schooner *Ocean Belle* just before she was forced up on the ledges in a gale on November 28, 1889. The subsequent rescue of all but one of the crew of the ill-fated schooner put Christmas Cove in the news as shown by the following account:

### *A Brave Deed*

### *Rescue of five men from a watery grave*

### *By the heroic acts of three men from Christmas Cove*

Last Thursday morning schooner *Ocean Belle*, Captain Ruggles, of Digby, N.S., to which place she was bound from Boston, with a cargo of general merchandise, was wrecked on the Thread of Life Ledges in John's Bay, Bristol. The schooner sailed from Boston Tuesday afternoon.

At about 12:20 o'clock Thursday morning, when two miles off to the southward of Monhegan, the gale struck them from the east, and after vainly trying to keep their course, they were compelled to run for Boothbay Harbor. At daylight, with the wind almost a hurricane, thick sheets of rain obscuring everything, they somehow lost their reckoning and found themselves among the breakers. Both anchors were put out, but the chains snapped asunder, and she soon struck on the ledges.

About seven o'clock in the morning, Capt. Manley Brewer, Anson Marden, and Loring Thorp [also sometimes spelled "Thorpe"—Ed. Note] discovered the wreck, mounted a dory on wheels, and carrying it to the eastern shore of the island, launched it in a small cove and pulled off. It was so rough they could not reach the vessel, but landed on the back side of the ledges, and went to the front where the vessel lay, about one hundred and fifty yards off the ledge on a sunken rock.

The men on board, with the sea making a clean break over the vessel, made a piece of plank fast to a rope, and payed it out until it struck the rock where the rescuers

were. After great effort, it was secured from the breakers, the rescuers nearly losing their lives in the act, and they hauled the rope in with a second line bent on it till both were on shore. Here they made a large one fast to a rock, and then, with the second line secured to the men under their arms, the pulled five of the crew through the one hundred and fifty yards to the rocks.

One of the crew, Benjamin Wintzell, did not want to leave the vessel, but after all had gone, he made the attempt. In fastening the noose around the hawser, he constructed a knot that slipped, and when about halfway in, it tightened, and the running line could not be pulled, and so the unfortunate man was drowned.

The vessel rolled over and went down in less than half an hour after the crew had left her. Taking two of the men who were the lightest clad, in the dory, the rescuing party made a successful landing and returned for the captain, mate, and seamen. When they got most to the rock they found, however, that the sea had made so fast, that it was simply impossible to reach them. The breakers had arisen with fearful violence, even on the landward side. The brave fellows, loath to give up, kept watch through the blinding rain, hoping the sea would run down, but at dark they were compelled to leave and trust that the sea would not wash off the poor fellows, nor the cold freeze them before morning.

The anchor donated by Linwood Gamage in its new resting place in front of the SBHS building on Route 129 in the village.



At daylight Friday morning, the sea had so abated that they were rescued, fearfully chilled, after thirty hours on the barren rock, and the body of the drowned sailor was recovered. He was buried at the Cove Sunday. The crew were hospitably cared for by the generous people of the place.

A large amount of the cargo, flour, beef, etc. has been picked up along the shore for several miles.

The wreck of this vessel brings to mind the disasters of past years. Only about ten years since the *Charlie Bell*, of St. John, N.B., went ashore on Thrumcap Island, four men were lost and only one saved, while only a few years previous to that a vessel went ashore near the scene of the present disaster, and one man died of exposure....

### Bravery Rewarded

It is with pride that we copy the following concerning the three brave men who risked their lives to save others.

The Canadian government has recognized their heroism and rewards them for their courageous conduct.

Ottawa, Ontario, Jan. 8, 1890. Hon. C.H. Tucker, Canadian Minister of Marine, is sending through President Harrison to each of the three fishermen of South Bristol, Maine, named respectively Brewer, Marden, and Thorp, a gold watch suitably inscribed as a token of their courageous conduct in saving the lives of five of the crew of the schooner *Ocean Belle* of Digby, N.S., on the 28th of November, last, under circumstances of unusual bravery.

SBHS member Stan Wells, great-grandson of Loring Thorp, found several letters pertaining to the rescue in the family home which was built by his great-grandfather at Christmas Cove around 1865. One to Loring Thorp from Dwight Ruggles, owner of the *Ocean Belle* and on board at the time of the wreck, is dated Dec. 6, 1889, and says:

Dear Friend

I arrived home Wednesday and was pleased enough. We had a hard chance up to Portland. We did not get there until half past five that evening. I went up and found the British Consul He found a comfortable boarding house so we had a good nights rest. The next morning we went up to the B. C. [British Consulate] and had everything fixed up so we started for St. John soon after dinner and arrived in St. J. at daylight next morning. Had a good trip home. I made up my mind to try to get a living on the land. ...The B.C. said you

well deserved a medal and would get one. I signed some papers to that effect. I told him the story how much risk you run and then I give him the paper to read. He thought you was a noble lot of men. I told him I knew you was...

Your Grateful Friend,  
Dwight Ruggles

Later in December, the British Vice Consul wrote, probably to Loring Thorp, discussing the bills presented by the South Bristol men for board and lodging of the crew and for the burial expenses of the seaman who drowned. Apparently the bills for lodging were acceptable, but as to the burial expenses, the Vice Consul wrote: "It seems to me that G.W. Gamage bill for digging grave \$3 is a little high. Please tell me any circumstances connected with it that would make it consume a whole [day]." The correspondence does not indicate how that disagreement was resolved!

A pencil draft of a letter from Loring Thorp to Capt. Ruggles makes reference to another letter from him:

Capt. Ruggles

Dear Sir:

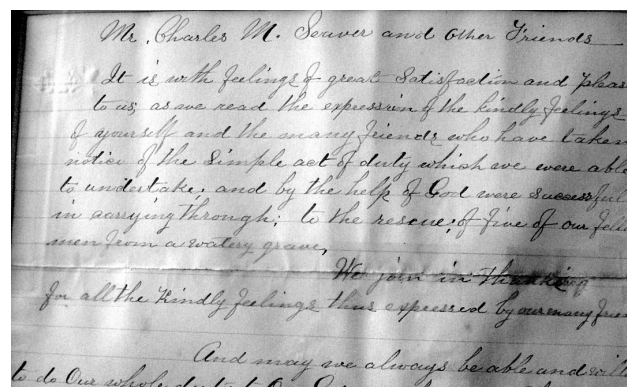
Yours of 29th November has been received, and I am very glad to know that you are getting along so nicely without seeking your fortune on the treacherous sea any more and I am very much surprised and pleased with the nice present your wife has so kindly sent me for which I am truly thankful for. It is pleasant to be remembered by one's friends in such a manner and I shall not be likely to forget the kind feelings thus expressed by you and your wife.

We are all well in this neighborhood. Capt. Brewer and Anson Marden are at home at this time and have both received your letters, as I understand.

My Wife joins with me in our best regards and good wishes to yourself and Wife.

Yours Truly,  
Loring Thorp

Also among the papers in the Wells' attic was a letter dated June 17, 1890, from the Bath Customs House to the effect that "Three Gold Watches have been received from



A draft of a letter sent by the three rescuers from Christmas Cove, Loring Thorp, Anson Marden, and Manley Brewer in response to the one they had received from some of the summer boarders.

continued on p. 4  
FALL 2010 3

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**Schooner Ocean Belle Rescue .....continued from page 3**

the Canadian Gov't for saving the crew of the Canadian Sch. Ocean Belle, Nov. 28, 1889. For Manley Smith Brewer, Anson P. Marden, Loring Thorp of South Bristol, ME.”

Perhaps the most interesting documents, however, are an exchange of letters between some summer visitors to South Bristol and the rescuers which clearly express the mutual respect in which they held each other. The letter was signed by 14 individuals whose last names included Seaver, Potter, Green, Dennett and Keyes, easily recognized as among the early summer boarders at Christmas Cove:

To Manley Brewer  
Loring Thorp  
Anson Marden

Your friends in West Roxbury and vicinity having read with great interest your brave and successful exploit in rescuing the shipwrecked crew of the Schooner “Ocean Belle”, wish to express to you their admiration and commendation of your courage in attempting the rescue in the face of great peril, from which so many would have hesitated.

That your labors were so successful and that you were enabled to save to their families so many of the crew, must be a great satisfaction to you, and we take much pleasure in testifying in this way, our esteem for you as men, and our admiration for your unselfish efforts in the cause of humanity.

A pencil draft of a reply to this letter was also found among the papers in the Wells house, and reads as follows:

Mr. Charles M. Seaver and other Friends

It is with feelings of great satisfaction and pleasure to us, as we read the expression of the kindly feelings of yourself and the many friends who have taken notice of the simple act of duty which we were able to undertake; and by the help of God were successful in carrying through; to the rescue of five of our fellow men from a watery grave,

We join in thanks for all the kindly feelings thus expressed by our many friends,

And may we always be able and willing to do our whole duty to Our God, and the cause of humanity, is the wish of,

Yours in Friendship,

The fate of the three watches remains something of a mystery. Manley Brewer’s watch may have been given away by his son Elliott Brewer when he was in failing mental and physical health; the Loring Thorp watch was probably given to a grandson, Loring Thorpe Poole, but its whereabouts after his death are unknown; nothing is known about what happened to the Marden watch. If you can help complete this fascinating story with any information about the watches, please contact the Historical Society!