

South Bristol Historical Society

NEWSLETTER

South Bristol, Maine 207-350-3247

SBHistorical@gmail.com | www.southbristolhistoricalsociety.org

Volume 27 | Number 1

Established 1998

Spring 2024

Sproul Homestead 18th & 19th Century Documents

In April of this year the Historical Society was offered a collection of 18th and 19th century deeds and other documents relating to the Sproul Homestead, one of the South Bristol properties listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Current owners John Robinson, Jr. and spouse Alexa McCallum met with Society Board members to discuss the future of the historically significant collection.

It appears that the documents “came with the house” when the Robinson family purchased the property in 1960. Through the years these documents had been stored in the attic and today are in remarkably good condition.

The collection consists of twenty-two items ranging in date from 1749 to 1848, the oldest being a deed from George Craddock, Pemaquid Proprietor heir, to Robert Sproule of Bristol, first settler to establish a farm on the current Robinson property.

Discussion about our ability to safely store these items resulted in a decision to approach the Maine Historical Society in Portland about donating the documents to the MHS, which has proper storage facilities and can make them available for research through their collections network.

South Bristol Historical took temporary custody at the initial meeting with Robinson & McCallum. Within a few days Board members had inventoried and digitally copied the entire collection. David Andrews contacted Maine Historical Society’s Collections Curator who was more than



The colonial Cape structure (left-side) of Sproul Homestead was likely built in the mid-18th century when the 100-acre property was first deeded to Robert Sproul.

happy to review the documents for accessioning. On May 16th Andrews delivered all items to the MHS, and now the final step will be to issue the official Deed of Gift, listing SBHS as the transfer donor with Robinson and McCallum as original donors in the provenance notes.

SBHS created high quality scans of each item and continues to work on transcribing some of them—a difficult job if one is not accustomed to reading 18th century script!

For a complete list of the documents in the Robinson Collection see page three of this newsletter.

Property Ownership Controversy Explained

By David Andrews

The deeds, wills and other documents in the Robinson collection provide an interesting insight into how property was acquired in the 18th and early 19th century in rural South Bristol. There are three deeds in the collection that are especially interesting. These are :

- The June 19, 1749 deed from George Craddock of Boston to Robert Sproule for land in Pemaquid for which Robert paid 100 pounds sterling;

- The November 20, 1762 deed from J. Silvester Gardiner of Boston to Robert Sproul for land in Harrington (Bristol) for which Robert paid 10 pounds sterling;
- The July 13, 1815 deed from Massachusetts, referencing the 1815 McClintock survey and confirming Robert Sproul’s ownership of his proprietor land (owned then by James Sproul, III, who was Robert’s nephew).

Continued on page 4

SBHS BOARD MEMBERS

President – Larry Kelsey *Vice President* – Nancy Adams *Historian* – Scott Farrin

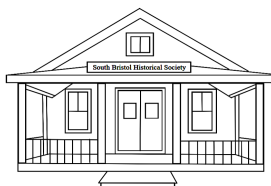
Secretary – Liz Lombardo *Treasurer* – Jack Speranza

Directors – David Andrews, Mary Avantaggio, Jason Bigonia, Wayne Eugley, Brian Farrin

Rob Lincoln, Carolyn McKeon, Ralph Norwood, Renee Seiders, Deb Storch

2024 Programs & Events

- **June 15, Saturday, 10am**— Cemetery Walk at the Kings Cove Cemetery & McFarland-Erskine Family Cemetery. Both cemeteries contain stones with burials ranging from the early to late-19th century and are near each other off the McFarlands Cove Road. Meet at the Thompson Ice House on Route 129 for parking instructions.
- **June 26, Wednesday, 7pm**— South Bristol in the 17th Century, a presentation by David Andrews who will share his research into early colonial South Bristol, focusing on some early settlers near what is known today as The Gut. At the Union Church Parish Hall.
- **July 11, Thursday, 6:30pm**— Annual Membership Meeting followed by a presentation by South Bristol resident Tim Dinsmore about 19th and early 20th century shipbuilding along the Damariscotta River. Dinsmore is a historical archaeologist with the Maine Historic Preservation Commission and is currently president of the Newcastle Historical Society. At the Union Church Parish Hall.
- **July 23, Tuesday, 6pm**— Heron Island History, a presentation by Heron Island summer resident Steve Signell who will discuss the island's early cottagers, Hotel Madockawando, store keepers, post masters and all-around caretakers including members of the Gamage and Jordan families. At the CCIA Casino in Christmas Cove
- **Aug. 14, Wednesday, 7pm**— “Harry & Hilda: Letters Home” A presentation by author Jennifer Church, granddaughter of Hilda Hamlin. Church’s book offers readers an in-depth look at the long life of Maine’s “lupine lady”. Hilda Hamlin (1889-1989) scattered lupine seeds from South Bristol to Damariscotta, inspiring the fictional character in Barbara Cooney’s beloved children’s book, “Miss Rumphius.” At the Union Church Parish Hall.
- **Sept. 19, Thursday, 6pm**— South Bristol Town Trivia at the Wawenock Golf Course. Buffet food and cash bar in the dining room followed by our Town Trivia Contest. Price \$25 per person. Part of the proceeds will be donated to the Walpole Union Chapel Restoration Project.



Museum Accessions

Listed below are a few more notable items catalogued at our museum during the winter of 2024.

- ◆ South Bristol panorama, circa 1892. Eight photos taped together into a panorama of the Village looking west, north and east from the cupola of Summit House. Probable photographer is G. H. Roberts. Gift of Alvin Gamage
- ◆ Copy of advertising poster for Christmas Cove Land Company, including map showing lots and text promoting Christmas Cove, circa 1894. Gift of Cynthia Garrels
- ◆ Copy of map of “The Summer Colony at Shipleys Point-Christmas Cove-Maine” with 12 numbered house lots, dated June 27, 1927, produced by Albert Taylor, landscape architect from Cleveland, OH. Gift of Cynthia Garrels
- ◆ ***Stop by the Museum this summer to see our collections. We’ll be open Saturdays from 1pm to 4pm, June through August, or email us to coordinate a time that works for you.***

Sproul Homestead Document Inventory

List of documents donated to the SB Historical Society by John Robinson, Jr. and Alexa McCallum

- June 19, 1749 Land deed from George Craddock (Pemaquid Proprietor heir) to Robert Sproule of Pemaquid, for 100 pounds sterling
- Nov. 20, 1762 Land deed from J. Silvester Gardiner (Kennebec Proprietor heir) to Robert Sproul, for 10 pounds sterling
- Aug. 18, 1788 Promissory note from William Sproul to his father Robert Sproul—amount of 900 pounds “lawful money of this state”, for 50 acres of land
- Dec. 30, 1792 Will of Robert Sproul
- Sept. 17, 1798 Will of Thomas Sproul (son of Robert Sproul)
- Sept. 9, 1793 Probate of Robert Sproul, attached to fragile original will of same (widow Sarah Sproul as executrix)
- Feb. 3, 1796 Land deed from Thomas Johnston to James Sproul III, minor—150 acres
- Nov. 5, 1796 Seaman’s Certificate of Thomas Sproul of Bristol, sailing with “master” Thomas Johnston to West Indies on Schooner Hope.
- June 18, 1799 Quitclaim deed from Ebenezer Blunt to Sarah Sproul, relinquishing his claim to estate of Jany Blunt (except for acreage)
- Sept. 14, 1803 Land deed from William Sproul III, mariner, to James Sproul III, for \$100.
- May 14, 1812 McClintock survey of land in Lincoln County, executed for Robert Merrill, abutter to Sproul
- July 13, 1815 Land deed from Massachusetts referencing 1815 McClintock Bristol town survey and confirming Robert Sproul’s ownership of his proprietor land (owned then by James Sproul III)
- June 22, 1820 Copy of division of Robert Merrill’s estate, by his executors, to his heirs
- July 18, 1821 Land deed from Stetson Soule (son-in-law of Robert Sproul) to James Sproul, 120 acres and crops in Bristol for \$870 (with some connection to Lincoln Academy).
- Aug. 22, 1825 Land deed from Alfred Hutchins, mariner, of Bristol, to Alexander Clark of Bristol, 26 acres for \$150.
- Apr. 3, 1826 Land deed from Mary Merrill, Robert Bucklin and other Robert Merrill heirs to James Sproul II, for ___ acres in Bristol for \$550.
- Nov. 13, 1826 Land deed from Wilson Merrill of Bristol to James Sproul, ___ acres for \$500.
- Nov. 27, 1827 Land deed from Robert Bucklin (Merrill heir) to James Sproul II, ___ acres for \$100
- Sept. 18, 1837 Land deed from Aaron Fuller to James Sproul II of Bristol, \$800 for 110 acres in current-day Bristol
- Nov. 20, 1837 Receipt from Abner Baker to ____?
- Mar. 1, 1840 Letter from ship broker Salomez Aine (Dunkirk, FR) to Captain Sproule of the ship Spaletta, in Boulogne-sur-Mer, FR, about the vessel’s grounding and arranging for its freight to be offloaded
- Apr. 3, 1848 Family Register of Nathaniel Currier and Sophia Clark, and their seven children (4 of them alive when last entry made in 1848)

Transcription of 1749 Sproule Deed *From the Robinson Collection*

To all People to whom these presents shall come Greetings, know ye that I George Craddock of Boston in the county of Suffolk in the province of the Massachusetts Bay in New England Esq. For and in consideration of the sum of One Hundred pounds New tenor to me in hand before the ensembling hereof well & truly paid by Robert Sproule of Pemaquid in the County of York and province aforesaid husbandman. The receipt of which of I do hereby acknowledge and myself therewith fully satisfied and contented and therefor and of every part and parcel therefor do exonerate, acquit, and discharge the said Robert Sproul his hires Executives, and Administrators forever by these presents have given, granted, bargained & sold aliens, convey and (illegible) unto him the said Robert Sproul his heirs (illegible) forever a certain lot or parcel la(nd) (illegible) at Pemaquid in the County of York and province aforesaid containing by estimation One Hundred acres be it more or less being Lot Number Eighty seven in the First division letter A In the Town of Harrington bounded Easterly on the Johns River Westerly on the Damerescotty River North by East & South by West on lands laid out to settlers as laid down in the proprietors plan referenced thereto being had will more fully appear, To have and To hold The said Granted and bargained premises with all the privileges and appurtenances thereto belonging or in any (ones?) appertaining to him the said Robert Sproul his heirs and assigne(sic) to his and heirs Sole proper use benefit and behoof forever and I do covenant to and with the said Robert Sproul his heirs and assigne(sic) to Warrant and defend against the Lawful claims and demands of the heirs of me the said George Craddock or any claiming by from or under me In Witness wherefor I have hereunto set my hand and seal this nineteenth day of June in the Twentythird (sic) Year of Majesties’ Reign annoques(sic) Domini One thousand and seven hundred and Forty nine Sign’d Seal’d and Delivered (in) the Presence of George Craddock Peter Johonnet John Crawford

Robert Kelsey Woodward —Citizen Highlight

Many people remember Robert Kelsey Woodward as a hardworking man who was a dedicated public servant to the town of South Bristol for nearly 30 years. But the extraordinary thing about Woodward is just how involved he was as a volunteer while maintaining an active career.

Bob Woodward had a head for numbers and management, and a belief in civic duty—a trait most likely inherited from his parents. Bob's father, Robert Hanley Woodward, was a farmer and caretaker, and one of the first three selectmen to serve the town after its formation in 1915. He served as Selectmen Chair in 1937 until the time of his death in 1950. Bob's mother, Angie Kelsey Woodward, had been a school teacher before she married, and later the town Treasurer for many years before she died in 1949.

Bob was born in 1908 and attended the one-room schoolhouse in Walpole then graduated from Lincoln Academy in 1925. His formal training in business management was at the Maine School of Commerce in Auburn. Bob's early career included positions with CMP, Tidewater Oil, and Bath Iron Works. His longest and probably most well known position was 28 years running the office at the Harvey Gamage Shipyard, retiring in 1974.

Bob met his wife Eugenie Bang when they were children. She had summered at Clarks Cove with her family from Staten Island, NY. Eugenie attended Elmira College and worked for Chase Manhattan Bank before marrying and settling in South Bristol in 1935. They had 2 daughters.

Bob's town involvement covered almost 30 years as town treasurer, plus many years on the school board and as secretary to the Board of Selectmen. He was on the Board of Trustees at Lincoln Academy and a Director at the First National Bank, both for 18 years.



Robert & Eugenie Woodward
Ann Hillis photo, mid 1970s

Bob had a strong interest in history and was a charter member of the Lincoln County Cultural & Historical Society. He helped to preserve the Old Walpole Meetinghouse and was President of the West Bristol Cemetery Association.

Bob and Eugenie had 63 years together, living long lives in South Bristol. Bob died in 1998 at age 90 and Eugenie died in 2003 at age 96. SBHS President Larry Kelsey remembers Bob as a trusted and reliable man who helped guide the course of our town and kept the office running smoothly at the shipyard. He was a rare individual who did important work with an eye for detail, and could mediate many situations when necessary.

Source: LCN Digital Archives

Ownership Controversy *Continued from page 1*

What's so interesting about these three deeds, you ask? Well, they are all for the same 100 acre farm that Robert Sproul was probably living on after 1749. (The farm still exists and is now owned by the Robinsons.) Okay, next question—why did Sproul need all these deeds?

The answer to that question dates back to the early 17th century when England was just starting to think about colonizing the Atlantic coast of North America. James I, who was King at that time, wanted desperately to get into the colonization game. His problem was money. He did not have any to spare for the expensive, and risky, business of starting settlements in the new world. His solution was to privatize the whole thing by chartering two joint-stock companies in 1606 to raise the capital needed and reap the profits from the undertaking. All he wanted in return was one-half of any gold, silver and precious stone they found.

The Plymouth Company, based in Bristol, England, was

granted the land from (present day) New Jersey to the St. Croix River in Maine. Under the leadership of Sir Fernando Gorges and Sir John Popham, the Company initially underwrote the 1607 Popham settlement on the Kennebec River. It lasted one winter. To spread the risk, the Plymouth Company decided to subdivide the land and grant "smaller" areas to other entities, referred to as proprietors. The Pilgrim settlement at Plymouth and the Massachusetts Bay Colony are examples of these grants.

There are two grants that are of local interest. One is the 1633 grant of 12,000 acres, which encompasses the whole of the Pemaquid Peninsula to Robert Aldworth and Gyles Elbridge, business men of Bristol, England. The other is the 1627 grant of land that extended 15 miles on both sides of the Kennebec River to the Pilgrims at Plymouth Plantation.

Continued on next page

Property Ownership Controversy Explained *Continued from page 4*

During the late 17th and early 18th centuries there were many grants of land in Maine as well as outright purchases of large properties from Native Americans. The John Brown purchase, from the local Sagamore Samoset, of an 8 square-mile block of land near Round Pond is a famous example of the latter. Given the very limited knowledge of the geography of Maine at that time, boundaries of these grants and purchases could be best described as fluid, and overlapping property lines were commonplace. In the case of South Bristol, we were included in both the Pemaquid and Plymouth properties.

The Pemaquid Patent was ultimately sold to Nicholas Davis, a resident of Pemaquid in the 1650s, and was inherited by his heirs (the Pemaquid Proprietors). The Plymouth Patent was sold in 1661 to four Boston men and also inherited by their heirs (the Plymouth or Kennebec Proprietors).

Starting in 1676, the English settlements in mid-coast Maine were devastated by a series of attacks by Native Americans and French forces. By 1690 the Pemaquid Peninsula was abandoned by the settlers and would remain “a wilderness” for almost forty years. Over that period the original ownership of the Peninsula faded into obscurity.

So what does all this 17th century stuff have to do with Robert Sproul and the three deeds for his farm? Hang on while we fast forward to 1727 and bring our protagonist into the picture.

Robert Sproul was born in Ireland (almost assuredly Northern Ireland) about 1716 and was of Scotch-Irish ancestry. At age 11, he immigrated with his father James, mother and 1 year old brother to the Massachusetts Bay Colony. Two years later, in 1729, the Sproul family was at the newly reconstituted settlement at Pemaquid. Robert married twice—Ann Reed in 1753 and Anna Little about 1759. To the best of my knowledge, he lived either on his father’s farm in the Harrington Meeting House neighborhood or on the 100 acre farm (today the Robinsons) that he first bought in 1749 at age 33. Robert died on March 25, 1793 at the ripe old age of 77.

The Sproul family came to the “wilderness” enticed, probably, by the promise of a deed to 100 acres of land, from Colonel David Dunbar. Dunbar had become the Surveyor General of His Majesty’s Woods in North America and Nova Scotia in 1727. His duties were to safeguard the British Naval interest in the forests—think broad arrow pines—and to start a new colony between the Kennebec and St. Croix rivers. He planned to center the colony at Pemaquid and settle the land with landless Scotch-Irish immigrants. The trials and tribulations of the Colonel during his short-term stay in New England were many but the retelling of these is beyond the scope of this article.

Of importance to us is that Dunbar’s legal right to give deeds, in the name of the King of England, to land already

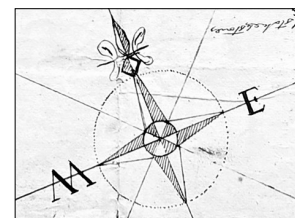
owned by the 17th century patent holders was challenged. The King lost the legal battle and the Dunbar settlers, like the Sprouls, were left holding worthless deeds and became squatters. The Proprietors quickly realized that there was money to be made by selling the squatters deeds to their own properties. Also, because of the hard work of the settlers, even the yet unsettled lands had changed from “wilderness” to much more valuable property.

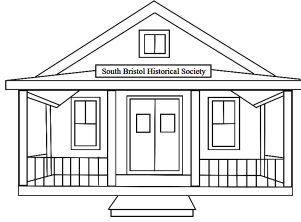
The problem South Bristol settlers faced was that both the Pemaquid Proprietors and Plymouth Proprietors claimed ownership of the land. The only way to get a clear title to your property would be to obtain a deed from both entities. It is not known if Robert Sproul was living on the land he purchased from George Craddock, one of the Pemaquid Proprietors, or was purchasing a new home site. He was 33 years old in 1749 and didn’t marry until four years later so a new purchase seems likely. The price of 100 pounds is more than the Pemaquid Proprietors were generally getting from existing squatters which also might indicate a new purchase. The second, 1762 deed from J. Silvester Gardiner, a leader of the Plymouth Proprietors, for 10 pounds is, obviously, just a payoff to avoid the hassle of a law suit.

Okay, that could explain the first two deeds. But what about the deed from Massachusetts?

Starting around 1760 and continuing into the early 1800s, the various Patent holders sent agents and surveyors to the mid-coast to force squatters to “pay up or get out.” It would be an understatement to say many of the people living in the region were unhappy about paying top dollar for land they had turned from “wilderness” to productive land. As time went on, the Proprietors became more aggressive. Law suits were threatened, and local bands of “white Indians” assaulted agents and supporters of the Proprietors. Stones were thrown through windows, fires were set. A man was killed. The local militias defied orders to quell disorder. Lawlessness gripped the mid-coast. Alan Taylor, in his book *Liberty Men and Great Proprietors – The Revolutionary Settlement on the Maine Frontier, 1760 to 1820*, lists over 160 “acts of extralegal violence associated with the land controversies” between 1792 and 1820. Two were in Bristol, in 1792 and 1810. Finally, Massachusetts had to step in to stop the chaos. They forced a deal on the Proprietors to take woodland in another part of the Maine wilderness in exchange for signing their Patents over to the State. Then Massachusetts, in turn, gave warranted deeds to everyone who had been affected by the controversy. This included the heirs of Robert Sproul.

So, there you have it—the reason there are three deeds for the same original Robert Sproul homestead property.





South Bristol Historical Society

2124 State Route 129
PO Box 229
South Bristol, ME 04568

**This Summer
Visit Our Historic Sites**

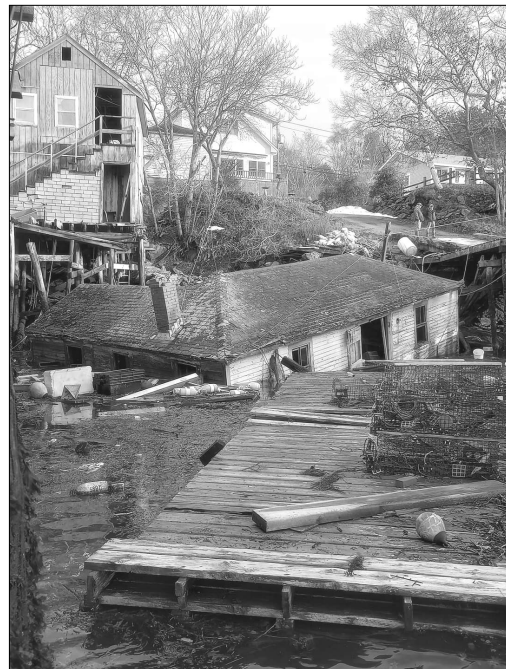
**S Road School
Historical Society Museum
Old Walpole Meetinghouse**

**July & August
Saturdays 1pm-4pm**

Two January Storms Made Devastating History in 2024

Many of South Bristol's waterfront properties were damaged during the two January storms that produced huge tidal surges. The photo on the right shows the half-submerged old wharf house once owned by Captain George Rice (1869-1957) a life-long South Bristol fisherman. The structure was badly damaged beyond repair and current owner Chuck Plummer said it was cut up in pieces and removed.

The South Bristol Historical Society is requesting photos from the January 2024 storms for the purpose of creating an online gallery which will be shared publicly on our website. If you'd like to offer your South Bristol photos or stories for this project please contact us on Facebook or email photos directly to sbhistorical@gmail.com.



January 2024 storm tides damage structures on The Gut in South Bristol

Photo by Amy Lincoln Sykes