

Spanning the Centuries - the Bridge at the Gut

The steady flow of visitors through the S Road School last summer attested to a keen interest in the bridge across the South Bristol Gut. Tracing the story of transportation modes across the narrow flow, from the rudimentary use of dugout canoes pulled by rope tow to the 1930s marvel of the soon-to-be-replaced hydraulic swing bridge, six large exhibit panels provided in-depth looks at the current span and at five of its documented predecessors. Newspaper articles from the 1880s told of the bridge's role in the community's desire to split off from the old town of Bristol, well before the separation occurred in 1915.

Oral histories captured some of the humorous anecdotes about earlier bridges across the Gut, such as Annie Mae Farrin's memory of the loud demise of the short-lived 1920s bascule bridge—"We heard this awful and bang and crash. End of bridge." Photos of and recollections about bridge tenders, who began to operate the Gut bridge in 1903, provided valuable touchstones to the past for those visitors whose grandfathers and great grandfathers counted among those early workers.

An additional panel in the exhibit showcased various interpretations of the current swing bridge in art, some of them by well-known local artists. Altogether, the Historical Society retrospective provided a much-appreciated glimpse into the past of a special part of South Bristol that resonates deeply for so many. Many thanks to **Carolyn McKeon** and **Dave Andrews** for making it possible.



The short-lived 1920's bascule bridge over the Gut.

Post Office History and a Special Postmaster

More than 150 year-round and summer residents came to honor retiring **South Bristol Postmaster, Wayne Benner**, at the SBHS Annual Meeting July and to view a slide show telling the fascinating story of post offices and postmasters in what is now South Bristol. Filled with photographs and little known facts, prepared and presented by **Cathy Stockwell**, the tale began as far back as 1639 when Maine was still part of the Massachusetts Bay Colony and continued, passing through Walpole, South Bristol village, Christmas Cove and Heron Island on the way.



The Post Office at Christmas Cove, early 1900's.

Mail was delivered to our rural community in different ways; from Newcastle by horse and buggy, down the Damariscotta on steamships and launches, and even by rowboat to Heron Island. Many post offices were in private homes or general stores; one was in a building with a bowling alley! The postmasters were a varied lot – there were storekeepers and innkeepers, sea captains and carpenters, teachers and homemakers, and even an undertaker!

Bob Emmons, SBHS Trustee and often called South Bristol's "Saturday postmaster," led a "roast" in honor of Wayne with a combination of never-before-seen photographs, never-before-told stories, and a hilarious skit starring Bob and **Bill Rittell**, known to all as the man who delivers the mail to our mailboxes. Postmaster Wayne then took the floor and told a few stories of his own.

Trustee **Donna Plummer** presented Wayne with a framed "Certificate of Appreciation" from all South Bristol residents in recognition of his twenty-one years of service to our community. SBHS gave Wayne a Flintstone lunchbox containing two neckties, one pink, one lavender, stenciled

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by **Joyce Vaughn** with the South Bristol zip code – 04568. There was a card and gift table for those who wanted to thank Wayne in their own special way, plus a large congratulations card that well-wishers signed.

Everyone enjoyed refreshments and then lingered to talk with Wayne, a postmaster who will be sorely missed!



Retiring Postmaster Wayne Benner sporting his new necktie.

SBHS News

Once again, SBHS was able to welcome visitors to both the S Road School and the SBHS Museum and Genealogy Center this summer. The volunteers who made this possible include **Donna Plummer, Sue Edwards, Don Edwards, Nat Hammond, Wayne Eugley, Ken Fink, Cynthia Garrels, Cathy Stockwell, Carolyn McKeon, Dave Andrews, Bob Emmons** and **Stan Wells**.

We were fortunate to have a summer intern as well, **Maya Ulin-O'Keefe**, who spent many hours on the all-important task of transcribing some of our many oral history tapes. Maya, granddaughter of former trustee **Polly Ulin**, attends Bryn Mawr College and worked at the Pemaquid Restoration this summer as well. The grounds of the S Road School were graced again this summer by abundant marigolds, hostas, day lilies and lupine, all planted by S Road neighbor **Gladden Schrock**.

Cotton Damon, faithful SBHS treasurer for ten years, resigned this spring when he moved to the Portland area to be closer to family. Cotton not only kept our books in good order and provided clear and timely financial reports, but also volunteered for many other tasks and never failed to bring along his fine sense of humor.

Officers elected to two year terms at the July Annual Meeting were: **Ellen Wells and Cathy Stockwell, co-presidents; Betsy Graves, Treasurer; Deb Storch, Secretary; Dave Andrews, Historian.** **Trustees** elected for three year terms were: **Carolyn McKeon, Donna Plummer, Nathaniel Hammond, Warren Storch, and Sue Edwards.** Continuing as **Trustees** are: **Larry Kelsey, Charles Beaudette, Cynthia Garrels, Carol Kelsey, Genie Cole, Larry Reed, Wayne Eugley, and**

Bob Emmons.

Planning for the **South Bristol Centennial** celebration continues: a reprise of the 2003 Ellen Vincent exhibit, the new veterans' memorial, and a publication collecting all the SBHS articles and programs on our town's history are in the works. The Spring newsletter will have all the details.

SBHS Collection Keeps Growing

Since the Fall 2010 newsletter report, more than 225 items have been entrusted to SBHS. Each one adds to an understanding of the history of our town and helps SBHS fulfill its mission to "collect and preserve historical memorabilia." What follows is just a sampling, designed to illustrate how varied and important these gifts are: a turquoise and white **souvenir creamer and plate** from the **Summit House**; three scrapbooks of newspaper articles about **South Bristol in the 1960's**, compiled by Marj Farrin; 8x10 **photos** taken at the Gut in the early 1900's; numerous documents including **minesweeper blueprints** from **Bristol Yacht Co. and the Gamage Shipyard** in the 1940's and '50's; two issues of '**The Clam Digger**,' a summer newspaper published in Christmas Cove around 1920; the **red wool jacket** worn by **Herbert M. Thompson** when scraping snow from the Thompson Ice House pond; six **small wooden drawers** from the store adjacent to the swing bridge at the Gut, each labeled by its contents; Portland Press Herald **clippings** 1960-1965 including views of the **Holly Inn Annex, Gamage shipyard, ice cutting at Thompson Ice Pond**; transcription of a **honeymoon diary** kept by Letty Searls Halmshaw in 1918; numerous items related to the **Tracor** sonobuoy operation on Rutherford Island in the 1970's; five-page, **handwritten poem** "Memories of Long Ago – A Day in Winter" written in 1897 or 1898 and signed by Vinal Kelsey; large framed document, red wooden box and two journals from the **Redmen's organization**; **christening dress** of Edward Feckett Tibbetts, father of Geraldine T. Kelsey; **costume** worn at Redmen's meetings; **metal plaque** inscribed "Presented by Elijah M. Woodman to the town of South Bristol August 24, 1918, commemorating incorporation of the New Township"; portrait of **Joseph Drummond Sproul** and a framed **oil painting** by Parker Gamage of a barkentine believed to be one of Captain Sproul's ships. Many thanks for each and every addition to our collection!

On Heron Island - Circa 1885

The letter reproduced on the following pages is one of the many significant and unusual items given to SBHS this year by the estate of Mansfield Hunt. Mike was active in the group that established SBHS in 1998, was secretary of the CCIA for many years, and worked closely with H. Landon Warner as 'Lanny' was writing *A History of the Families*. We do not know how this letter came into his possession, but are grateful that he kept it!

Dear Miss Strong,

Your being at Heron Island reminds me of my childhood days about there, sailing around the island and landing there to pick berries. I'll bet it isn't any more attractive now than it was, Christmas Cove is less so, but as I remember Heron Island it was grown up thick with trees with a little more open pasture land at the North end. It can't be more than full of trees so perhaps your Heron Island is about as I knew it. Anyway, the sky, sea, and rocks haven't changed.

I feel quite agrieved when I recall to you my first acquaintance with your island fifty years ago. In 1882 my father, who loved prowling around New England, went to Christmas Cove, and next summer he took Mother and us four children to board at Eliphalet Thorpe's. Soon came other West Roxbury and Jamaica Plain people. As a little boy I learned to row and later sail a boat and we ventured further out of our Cove on voyages of adventure. Linekine Neck, Heron Island, and as I got venturesome I sailed around the White Islands and as a great achievement one day sailed my little open boat around Pumpkin Rock. I know you know it, far out south of you.

I suppose it was about 1884 or 85 we used to go out to Heron Island, no wharf, no buildings, no owner, to pick raspberries and blueberries. I remember skunk currants. Are there any now? I don't remember any road to the south end, that came later. It was state land tho some Foster boys had claimed it for pasture purposes but they paid no taxes and had no sheep there; so a man from Jamaica Plain named Dockray, who was of the earlier boarders at Christmas Cove, paid \$50 for a tax title to the Island. There was some legal fuss and I remember unintelligible talk as a boy about 'quit calim deed' and 'warrantee deeds' and Dockray sold the Island for \$2500 to some Greenfield people. I believe they built the wharf at the north end, about 1888 or 89 I suppose. Our old natives at the Cove predicted it wouldn't stand, but it did. Then of course came the Hotel Madockawando and many cottages. And there you are. With no cove or harbor, no beack and no space for outdoor games, we always felt many places were far uperior to Heron Island, but it is surely a restful place with fine sea air and surf. I have some photogrphs I took about 1904 I'd like to show you.

But to fo further. I'd like to tell you of our first going down to Christmas Cove, for you must remember it was from our summer colony that your Heron Island was 'colonized'.

In 1882 our West Roxbury neighbors the Dennetts, asked their Damariscotta relatives, the Achorns, if they knew of any board place. Mr. Will Achorn travelled, selling groceries in those days and knew the Thorp's store at Christmas Cove and arranged with Eliphalet Thorpe and his wife to take their first summer boarders. J.&E. Thorpe has sent out a fleet of schooners to the Grand Banks for cod fishing and on account of Gloucester foreign-manned boats the Maine schooners were being crowded out of the business. They were hard hit. All their sons and neighbors sailed on these boats and fairly soon, from the samll beginning every fisherman's house took boarders, built additions, boat shops were turned into dining rooms, fishermen became masons and carpenters and built cottages, or sailed parties out in boats they built in the winter. Women took in washing, men planted gardens, in short they were glad to

take the summer boarders and the money they spent. At one time a steamboat man told my father that Christmas Cove stood first in freight, baggage and passengers of all landings between Bath and Pemaquid. We had two steamers a day of the Bath line and other steamers of Portland and those of the Islands. But it is of those very early days I want to tell you. About 1883, I have lately compared remembrances with George K. Dennett who was among his family party in 1882. He says, Will Achorn, his cousin, told them to go to Bath by boat; it was the 'STAR OF THE EAST', then by smaller boat to Boothbay 4 a.m. to 6:30 a.m. about, then by stage, which they found was a Democrat wagon, across the land to East Boothby which we knew as Hodgdon's Mills. There was a tide mill there that worked a saw mill, and there was shipbuilding. There they took a ferry to So. Bristol and found a small open sailboat manned by 'Eben' clad in pants that didn't meet his boots, vest that didn't meet the top of his pants, no coat, and old straw hat that we later knew for years; that allowed strands of hair to appear through the top. It was foggy, in time the crowded boat drifted and went to So. Bristol, where upon Eben suggested sailing these new city people around the pint into the cove. No one knew what they were in for but there was wind against tide and most of the city summer people on that voyage were sick and disgusted when they arrived about noon at the Cove.

But Eliphalet and Aunt Betty, their youngest son Bet and Bert's wife Emily were lovely people and from that moment there grew up a friendship of years. They are all dead. Three years ago Alice and I drove down from Wiscasset the first time for seventeen years, and I went into the cemetery. There are the stones, Eliphalet, Elizabeth, Albert C., Emily, Loring, Lewis, Edward, Mary Brewer, and Miss Arlita Thorp, who once knowingly told me "all of the nice girls didn't marry". She was then seventy-five or so.

The next summer my father took Mother and four children down to the Cove. He had been down exploring the previous summer but was not on the first trip with the Dennetts. My what a trip - railroad from West Roxbury to Boston at Park Square, horse car to the Bath boat on Atlantic Avenue, an all night trip to Bath, that is, to about 4 a.m. when the call "Popham, Popham" woke us up. No adults, it was beautiful to sail up the quiet Kennebec at dawn, for I know that from some of the later years as I continued to go to Christmas Cove till I was about thirty, every summer, but I was ten that first year and ought to have been asleep going up river. Two of us were younger than ten. Off the steamer we got about 4:30 and would you believe it had to wait until about 8:30 for the boat through the islands. But I was not accurate as to this for in those very first years it was the steamer boat leaving Bath about five that we took to Boothbay, and later the 8:30 boat went right to Christmas Cove. But to Boothbay that year 1885 Eben Otis met us in his little sail boat, mainsail and jib, and he sailed over the day before and curled up in his boat cuddy all night. In went the trunks, lowered by tackle from the Wiwurns and stood on end in the cockpit, the Seavers arranged around them on the seats. Tired, assuredly, cross, probably, and hungry. Did the wind hold good? Often it didn't and a long tedious sail it was around Ocean Point and Linnekins Neck to the Cove. If we arrived at noon we were lucky. On looking back I really wonder that we should have gone more than once, if even once, but the charm of Christmas Cove certainly appealed to us. The Cove on one side and open ocean on the other, the islands, Monhegan and

Pemaquid Point and the open pasture with berries, cleared years before by some early settlers who left the name Varnum's Cove and well. I don't know when the Thorps came, but Jonathan was dead and his brother Eliphalet was very old when we first knew him. But they were kindly people, nice to all and as storekeeper gave a handfull of rasins for a cent. It was in that store that the smell of tobacco plugs, coffee and what not, place it unmistakeably as one of those NewwEngland general stores. And then the cracker barrel stood open to Eben Otis who used to dip in for his noodday lunch. Eliphalet would take up the big knife and without a word, slip Eben a slice of cheese. Eben seemed old then but I doubt if he was forty as he lived years after that sailing parties out and at last living "on the town" in his little house.

I am probably right in saying the Heron Island cottagers first came as we did, but has the added journey from the Cove out to Heron. But the fame of this beautiful seashore spread fast and not many years went by when the 8:30 boat from Bath stopped at Heron Island and Christmas Cove and the Portland steamer ENTERPRISE stopped at Heron Island and Haughtily sailed by Christmas Cove not stopping. It was a rolling old tub anyway, and almost a punishment to sail on the ENTERPRISE, even on a pleasant day.

Mr. Dennet who has been to the Cove for 51 years has just lod his cottage. My father built one about 1886 the second piece of land to be sold by the Thorps from their open pasture land, now all grown up to spruce woods and trees and divided off by fences and walls. It was these fences, walls, and trees and automobiles that deove us out, and father and about all the early cottagers sold their places about en years ago (1924), all but Mr. Dennett. The life there changed a lot; we used to sail and row, and every one had a row boat. Tennis came, and as the place swarmed with young people, one of the fish houses was made into a little theatre fro shows and for dancing. Swimming was not so popular except with men, but my sister who learned to swim was quite a famous person, and of course swimming wwas with short sleeves, loose coat, or what do you call it - pants, kneeskirts, stockings and shoed. She could dive too. But I suppose gasoline spoiled sailing and rowing.

And so I am glad to pass this comment on to you, at Heron Island. Did you get up at 4 a.m. and end you journey in a sailbat? No. But enjoy if you will my writing about those old times.

Yours very truly,

Henry M. Seaver

7/11/34

Pittsfield, Mass.

South Bristol Historical Society

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Holly on Class Night when she received the scholarship.

First SBHS Scholarship

It was an exciting moment for SBHS – and for Holly Stegna, when she became the first recipient of the SBHS Scholarship, to be awarded each year to a Lincoln Academy graduate who lives in South Bristol. The \$500 scholarship to help defray expenses for post-Lincoln Academy studies, whether at a four-year college or another educational institution, was established last year by SBHS as a way of expressing appreciation for the support SBHS receives from the community. Holly is a Walpole resident, daughter of Larry and Julie Stegna. She attended South Bristol Elementary School on her way to Lincoln Academy where she began study of the Japanese language. She will continue her study of Japanese at Elizabethtown College, Elizabethtown, PA, and plans to major in International Business.