

Isle au Haut Historical Society Newsletter

Winter 2022

Volume 4



Head Harbor, Isle au Haut

Mary Fennell

Birch Point Island

Kris Carlson-Lewis

When I think of Birch Point, I don't think of it as an island distinct from Isle au Haut. My perception is reinforced by the presence of the causeway that has been in place between Isle au Haut proper and Birch Point since at least 1900. Isle au Haut and Birch Point have phenomenal panoramas, offering views fanning out in so many directions. No wonder there have always been individuals desirous to own a piece of these treasures.

As with any other land in the United States, the islands were once inhabited by indigenous peoples. Before the introduction of land sales in this area, “squatters” of European immigrant ancestry did settle for periods of time on the islands in Penobscot Bay.

From the information I have been able to gather, Jacob Carleton was the original owner of Birch Point Island. James Irish, an agent for Maine’s State Land Office sold “an island called Birch Point” to Jacob Carlton of Deer Isle (Isle of Holt) on “the tenth day of September eighteen hundred and ## [as appears in the document].”¹ Maine attained statehood in 1820 and the sale of the island by Jacob Carlton in July 1825 limits the possible purchase from the state of Maine to between September of 1820 and 1824.

A hand-written account by Miss Lizzie Rich relayed a conversation between her grandfather, Stillman Rich and Dr. Z. Rita Parker [when she owned Burnt Island] during the summer of 1932. “Jacob Carleton built the brick house and he had a sawmill, built two vessels, and sold Birch Point to Nathan Fife.”² This statement is partially confirmed by the recorded deed of Jacob Carlton, mariner, to Nathan Fife, gentleman, both of Deer Isle, “the island north of the Isle of Holt, Birch Point Island, so-called, containing nine acres more or less...” It further specifies that said Fife “shall not build any wharfs or buildings that may obstruct or injure the mill or privilege which is now standing on lot number four on the Isle of Holt which is connected with said Birch Point Island by a dam or wharf running from one side to the other.”³



Photo of Birch Point late 1800s under ownership of James II and Ann Turner (IAH Historical Society) Note the lack of trees and connection with the mainland. Also note notation on the bottom of the photo: “Dr. Z. Rita Parker, before remodeling”.

Stillman also contended that Fife built the big house. Unfortunately, Nathan Fife’s existence on the island was short-lived. He was forced to take out a mortgage in December of 1826 with a

¹ Hancock County Registry of Deeds 229:529 (online 1888002327) recorded 4 Sep 1888.

² Notes copied from a hand-written report of a conversation between Dr. Z. Rita Parker, a summer resident and Stillman Rich, a native islander, Summer 1932 (holding of Isle au Haut Historical Society).

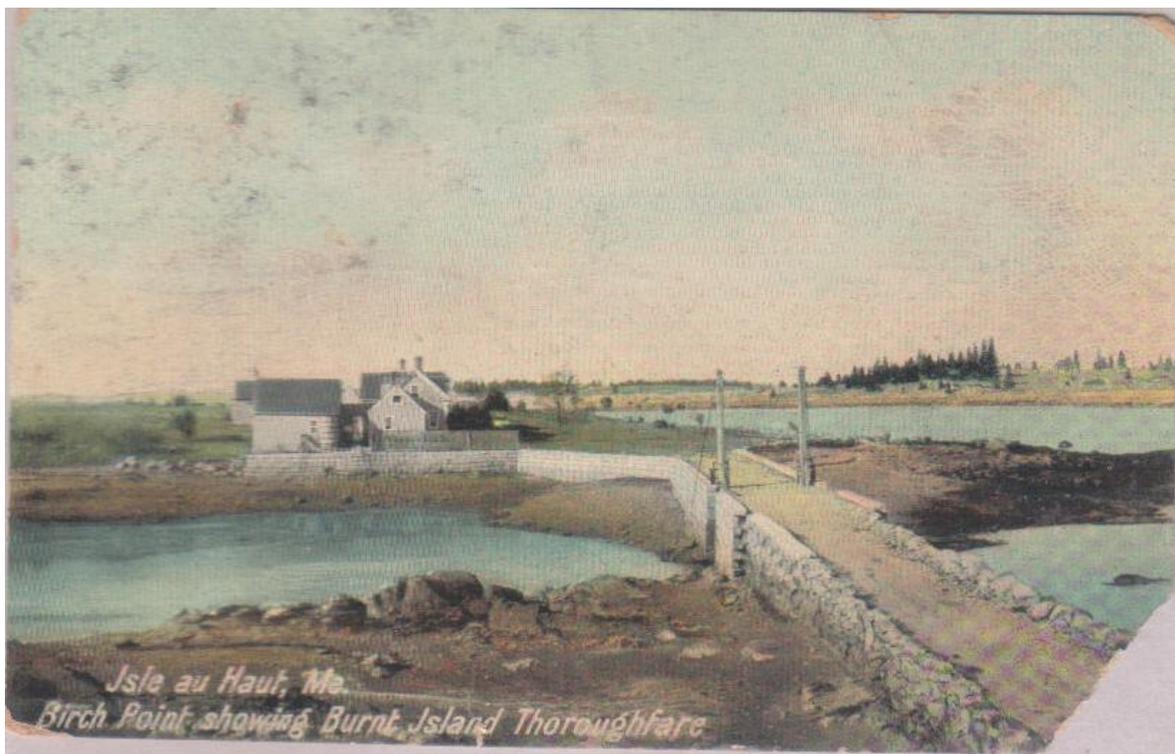
³ Hancock Registry of Deeds 47:517 (online 1775179327).

one-year window for repayment.⁴ He was unable to meet this obligation and was forced to sell. Thus, Nathan & Margaret S. Fife sold Birch Point Island with all buildings to Charles A. Brown of Provincetown, Barnstable County, Massachusetts in May of 1831.⁵

Fife apparently leased the Birch Point Island from Charles A. Brown later that month of May 1831 for a two-year term.⁶ Later, Charles A., yeoman, and Betsy Brown, his wife of Quincy, Massachusetts sold Birch Point Island to Ezra and James Turner of Deer Isle [Isle au Haut].⁷

James Turner II and his brother purchased this property for \$600 on 29 December 1836. James made his home there for the next fifty years or more in conjunction with adjacent Burnt Island. Ezra's exit from the land ownership has not yet been discovered. Stillman Rich further stated that James' son, Ezra Turner [2nd], lived in the brick house on the main island across from Birch Point.⁸ This statement has not been validated to date.

A mortgage between Ruth Sturdivant of Boston, Suffolk County, Massachusetts and Ann E. Turner, of Belfast, Waldo County, Maine for Birch Point Island was conveyed by said Ann E. and James Turner on 21 Sep 1887.⁹ The mortgage was discharged and property released to Ruth A. Sturdivant on 6 Dec 1888.¹⁰



Note the difference in buildings and causeway after purchase by Ruth Sturdivant. Circa 1908. (IAH Historical Society)

⁴ Hancock County Registry of Deeds 50:236 (online 1775026493).

⁵ Hancock County Registry of Deeds 56:42 (online 1775029575).

⁶ Lease agreement between Charles A. Brown and Nathan Fife (holding of Isle au Haut Historical Society).

⁷ Hancock County Registry of Deeds 64:200 (online 1775034120).

⁸ Notes copied from a hand-written report of a conversation between Dr. Z. Rita Parker, a summer resident and Stillman Rich, a native islander, Summer of 1932 (holding of Isle au Haut Historical Society).

⁹ Hancock County Registry of Deeds 218:382 (online 1887002926).

¹⁰ Hancock County Registry of Deeds 230:387 (online 1888003491).

Ruth Sturdivant apparently made numerous improvements to the homestead. Stillman Rich noted the spruce trees that inhabit Birch Point were brought from Merchant's Island by Mrs. Sturdivant in 1890. She also undertook a complete rebuilding of the causeway that connected Birch Point Island to the main island. This undertaking was commented on in an *Island Advantages* newspaper clipping "Grandpa Read This. B.S. Thurlow, who has been employed at Isle au Haut building a sea wall and bridge has finished the job and returned home Saturday."¹¹ Mrs. Sturdivant referred to her renovated seasonal home as "Ruthden" and enjoyed many a summer there until her passing in 1921 when her daughter, Florence, inherited the property. According to an excerpt on Rita Parker in Harold van Doren's 2012 book, [*A Island Sense of Home*](#), an auction was held at Ruth's home in 1928 which appeared to be well attended.¹²

Dr. Z. Rita Parker purchased the island in 1931 from the estate of Florence Sturdivant. Rita, a summer resident along with her friend Dr. Katherine Butler, owned the property until her death in 1973. The island has become subdivided since that time so there are currently three seasonal families with homes on Birch Point, one being the boathouse which was converted into a summer home.



Old map of Isle au Haut from a Massachusetts survey of the Isle au Holt division done by Rufus Plummer in 1785. Birch Pt. in the NW corner.

¹¹ Newspaper clipping supposedly taken from *The Messenger* of November 2, 1900 and found in the Scrapbook of Miss Lizzie Rich (holding of Isle au Haut Historical Society)

¹² Harold van Doren, *A Island Sense of Home*, (Stonington, ME: Penobscot Books, 2012), 158.

Memories of Dr. Z. Rita Parker at Birch Point

Harold van Doren

In the spring of 1956, my father was surprised to get a letter from Dr. Z. Rita Parker postmarked from Coconut Grove, Florida. We had heard she was a private psychiatrist for the Rockefellers and knew she lived at Birch Point, but aside from exchanging a brief “hello” after church services, we barely knew her. Her letter was exploratory, asking permission for me to help her with gardening and yard chores on the Island. My father was agreeable, and I was glad to be able to make some spending money, so he let her know it would be fine.

That summer, the day before I was to start work, I told my old friend Maurice Barter what I was going to do. He shook his head woefully. “Boy, that’s going to be the hardest work you’ve ever done. Y’know, she’s got a chicken house that’s full of sh*t and you know how nasty that is! And, yes, she’s got a bunch of big ol’ dogs you’re gonna have to clean up after. You’ll rue the day you ever ran afoul of her!”



Dr Z Rita Parker in her 1924 Graduation photo from Cornell Medical College. Weil-Cornell Medical Archives.

Well, I went home and told my parents what Maurice had said. That night, after I went to bed, I could hear them having a wondrous fracas over it. “I don’t want him to do that kind of work!” growled my father. “Oh, I think it’d be good for him!” countered my mother. “He needs to learn about caring for animals.” I fell asleep before any resolution was reached.

The next day, my parents said nothing about it, one way or the other, so I decided to ride over to Dr. Parker's on my bicycle and see what would happen. All the way down to Birch Point I kept listening to see if I could hear any dogs. Silence. I couldn't hear any chickens either. "Maybe they're all inside," I thought.

At the house, Dr. Parker came out, sun bonneted, and we went to her workshop. I came within a hair's breadth of asking her where her dogs were but managed to hold my tongue. Over her work bench was a puzzling sign which read, "The man who loans tools is out." It took quite a while for me to appreciate the double entendre.

Dr. Parker was probably in her 60's and a rather small person so she needed help with chores such as digging in her garden, gathering seaweed and mussel shells from the beach, and repairing the chicken wire fencing to keep out the deer. At 13, I was no powerhouse but could be of some use, and at a dollar an hour, I was doing better than if I had been picking berries instead.

Unlike Ruth Sturdivant, Dr. Parker did *not* want to have spruce trees on her land. She offered me a penny apiece to pull out the little ones. After working at it for a short spell, I realized it wasn't going to be easy money and hedged on doing any more.

I stopped in to see Maurice on the way home. He was wearing a big grin. "Well, how'd it go?" he asked, mildly.



"Let's Get To Work!", Dr Parker drawn from memory by Harold Van Doren

"There's no dogs and there hasn't been chickens out there for years!" I replied, accusingly.

"Well, I met your father today overtown and he was telling me all about how he didn't like to see his son working there." Maurice slapped his leg, guffawing. "I had to own up to him that I was the one who told about the dogs and chickens. He said if he'd known it was me, he'd said to take it with a grain of salt! Ha, ha, ha!"

“Yeah, that’s what I’ll do from now on, too,” I blustered. “I should have known better after trying to teach you how to read!” (That’s another story!)

Dr. Parker was the first person I worked for, and she was usually pleased with whatever I did. However, there was one notable exception. What little lawn mowing I’d done at home had been with an old reel mower on a small, dry lawn. The front lawn at Dr. Parker’s was quite different - expansive and lush, shaded by two huge trees and the grass had gotten very high. She had a rotary mower, and when I finished, I could see that it didn’t look quite right – it had a ragged look to it. I laid it to the grass being too high for the mower. The next day, Dr. Parker greeted me with a scowl. She told me that her guests had asked what had happened to her lawn. I tried to tell her I’d done the best I could, but she wouldn’t buy it and made me do it over – a tiresome chore. But, after experimenting, I figured out that the passes had to be well overlapped to get a clean cut. (It’s equally important to keep the mower blade sharp.) So, from working for Dr. Parker, I learned an important lesson that has stuck with me – if you’ve done a job right the first time, you’ve done it twice.

There are many things about Dr. Parker that I never knew, such as her given name. Whatever it was, she never used it. I do know for a fact that she didn’t care for rock n’ roll music. A summer minister’s son, (George Fisher) and I were painting a bedroom together and singing “Wake up little Susie”, at the top of our lungs and suddenly from another room, Dr. Parker yelled, “For god’s sake, will you shut up?” I didn’t think we sounded *that* bad.

I will remember Dr. Parker for providing me with my first job, her generosity in giving me an old piano from her chicken house (It didn’t have any smell!) and her extraordinary ability to guess the weight of cakes at church fairs. She won almost every time.



Boom Beach, Isle au Haut

Mary Fennell

Isle au Haut: Lost and Found

Leslie Knowlton

This is the story of connections both missed and made, of an island's role in memory and meaning. It's the story of how a place unspools history in unexpected ways, changing one's perspective and identity while deepening appreciation for ancestors whose choices impacted generations to come. It's also the story of one family's remaining mysteries—puzzles I hope to solve.

The tale traces back more than two centuries to Isle au Haut but was sparked last summer on Deer Isle, where I have a seasonal home. I began a project looking into how five generations of my family had divided what started as a 50-acre plot of land on Dunham Point Road in Sunset, property purchased in 1868 by my great-great grandfather, Henry Wilson Knowlton.

I knew lots about my family's tenure on Deer Isle, but little about their previous decades in Maine. I knew that Henry's grandfather William Knowlton, my four times great-grandfather, had lived on Isle au Haut in the early 1800s. I'd heard he died there after iron he was unloading from his boat pinned him to the beach; the tide came in and drowned him. I'd heard that his son Robert "Goddy" Knowlton, my three times great-grandfather, bought York Island and moved the family there. I'd heard Robert moved around 1840 to Deer Isle, where I'd seen his widowed mother Elizabeth's grave in the woods off Route 15. And I'd heard William lived in Belfast before Isle au Haut and at some time was in Nova Scotia. That was about the extent of my knowledge regarding William and Robert, based mostly on family lore and notes from genealogy buff Dr. Benjamin Lake Noyes (1870-1945) of Stonington.

Before last summer, Isle au Haut existed in my mind mainly as a magical place where we went in my 1960s childhood to visit Tony Pomeroy, my father's best friend. Tony would pick up my family, including my four younger brothers and me, in a vintage car I recently learned was a Chrysler called "Lulu." We motored to the house that I also just learned was near Barter Creek, and I recall a woodsy dirt road smelling of spruce and pine.



Left to right: Stephen, Robert, Leslie, David and Mark Knowlton in the vintage car. All photos taken around 1967.

On Isle au Haut we adventured to places like Boom Beach, marveling at its round rocks. Once we were fogged in and stuck on the island for three days but didn't mind a bit. Other days we

boated around Penobscot Bay in tandem— my father, Bruce Knowlton, at the wheel of his wooden Old Town, and Tony piloting his Boston Whaler—stopping to picnic and goof around on Russ and Wreck islands.

Those happy and carefree times ended abruptly with my father's sudden and untimely death in 1972, when he was just 45 and I still a teenager. In the more than half-century since, I've been on Isle au Haut just a few times via the mailboat, never staying more than an hour, not even remembering or thinking to ask where Tony's house had been. That's absolutely astounding to me now, as is the fact I never wondered where and how my own family had lived on the island two centuries before. I'd buried such thoughts away.

Before the age of the internet, I once or twice searched for and failed to find Tony, wanting to talk about my dad and days gone by. Five years ago, I tried again only to learn I was way too late — Tony, too, had died. Feeling very sad, I found and contacted his daughter Wendy and was happy to hear she's still on Isle au Haut in summer. We exchanged emails and spoke of getting together but hadn't followed through.

Then came last September. My daughter Siri came from California to Deer Isle to celebrate her 40th birthday. I wanted to get her out on the water but by then my brother Steve's boat was hauled for winter. One sunny morning, Siri and I hopped on the mailboat to Isle au Haut and along the way marveled at the sparkling water, islands set like glittering jewels. When the boat made a stop at Point Lookout and the captain said it wasn't a public dock, I had no idea I'd ever been there before. Later I'd be astonished to realize I had a photo we'd taken there when visiting Tony more than 50 years prior. On the island, while waiting for the mailboat's return from Duck Harbor, my daughter and I popped into the gift shop. For some reason, I told the friendly woman working there that my ancestors long ago lived on the island but I didn't know much about it. She responded with enthusiasm, asking questions and volunteering to give my contact information to someone at the historical society. I jotted down my name and phone number and gave them to her but didn't think anything would come of it.

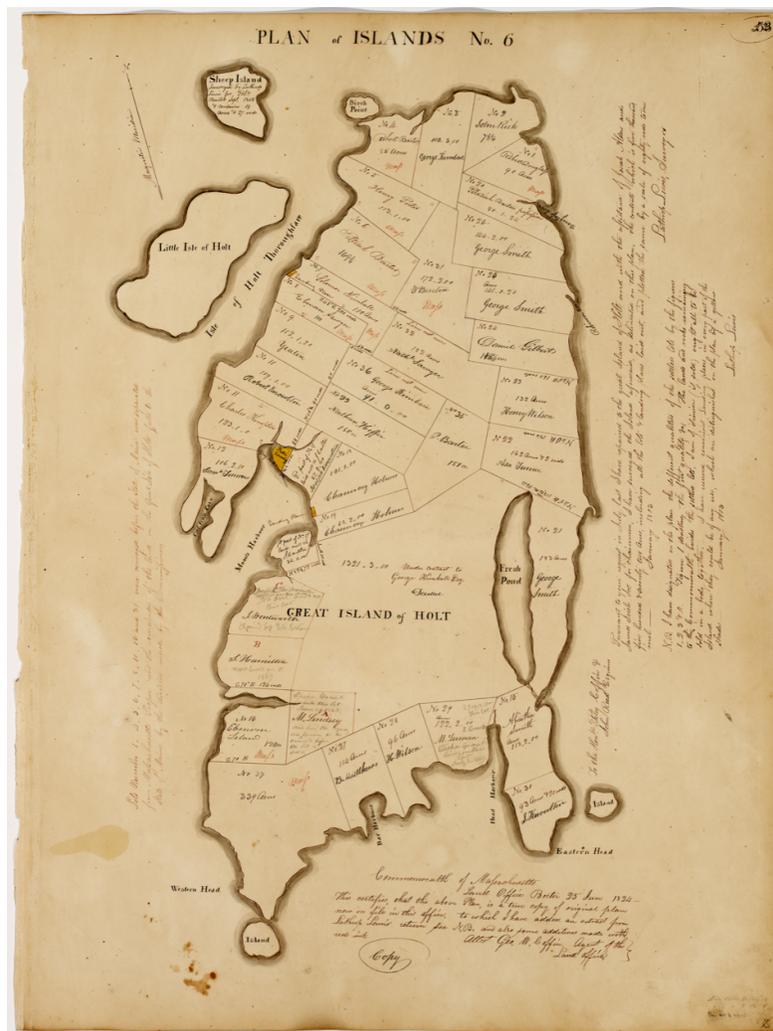
Returning home to Englewood, New Jersey the following week, I started trying to figure out how my family ever got to Maine in the first place. I looked through books I had, ordered more, and began examining Family Search Library records. A week later, I was surprised and thrilled to receive a phone call from Kris Carlson-Lewis. We shared what we knew about William and she told me things I didn't know. Right afterward she emailed an early Isle au Haut map depicting my family's lots. She also snail-mailed a package of pages she'd copied for me from books and other sources. Many emails and phone calls later, thanks in no small measure to her guidance and generosity, I'm much further along in my research about my family's pre-Deer Isle history in Maine. I also again connected with Wendy Pomeroy.

I know now from deeds, vital records and church logs that William, a mariner born in Massachusetts in 1754, was in Chester, Nova Scotia by 1775, when both places were part of British Colonial America. There he married Elizabeth Smith and purchased property on East Gooseberry Island, later moving to the shore in town. Chester is on Mahone Bay, a place I saw by looking at maps and satellite photos is much like Penobscot Bay, dotted with hundreds of islands.

Around 1790, with Elizabeth and their first five children, William moved to Penobscot Bay. He first obtained 109 acres in Ducktrap Plantation, the part later to be called Northport, on what deeds called Knowlton's Cove. Two of his brothers who'd fought in the Revolution came up from Massachusetts and owned shore lots next to William. Deeds say William sold his Northport land

in 1798 and purchased 25 acres in Belfast. He sold that in 1802 and bought 1.5 acres in Northport, selling that in 1803.

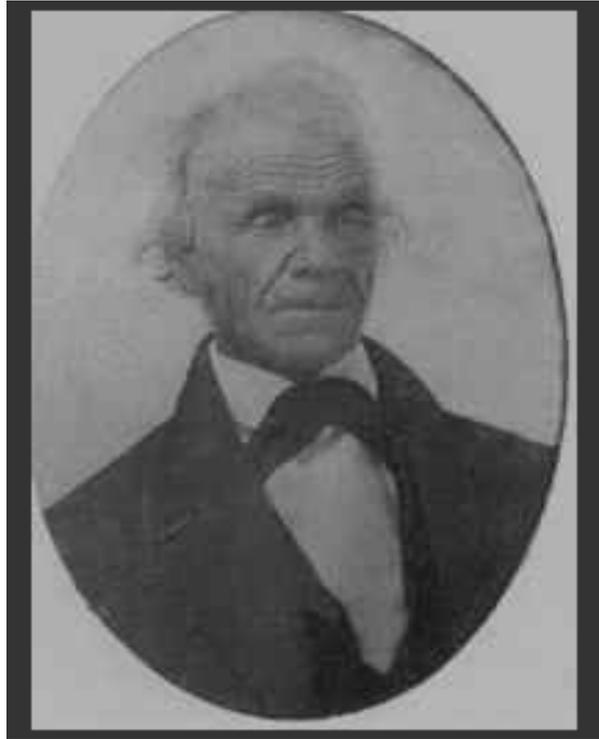
Providing clues to what may have happened during that time, Benjamin Noyes' notes say that William once was wealthy, building ships and owning a hotel. Those notes also say William was financially ruined after two of his ships carrying salt from Liverpool were lost at sea. This may all be true, but I have yet to find proof of any business or ships associated with him. My grandfather, Douglas Knowlton, wrote that William reportedly bought Isle au Haut land "from the government for a dollar an acre" but the only family deeds I can find on that island were issued after Maine achieved statehood in 1820, and William was already dead. The numerous and confusing family deeds from 1820 to 1842 are recorded for Robert and his brother Joseph. Robert was the first recorded owner of lot 10, 109 acres on what's now called Robinson's Point, the site of the lighthouse. It was on this acreage that William was reportedly found dead on the shore and buried, but again, I have no way to officially document the death or burial.



1803 map annotated in 1824 showing Robert Knowlton's lot #10, probably first purchased or claimed by his father William Knowlton. Robert's brother Joseph Knowlton owned lots on Eastern Head and Moore's Harbor.

Some records say William died around 1820 but it may have been a decade earlier because, as Kris Carlson-Lewis pointed out to me, his wife Elizabeth is listed as head of household in the

1810 census. I see from deeds that title to York Island flipflopped back and forth between Robert and Joseph and Henry Wilson for more than a decade, and it was a lightbulb moment when I realized Robert named his son, my great-great-grandfather Henry Wilson Knowlton, in honor of the man who appears to have been his friend or close business associate. I learned that my three times great-aunts married into other Isle au Haut families, including the Merithews and Smiths. I am just beginning to see the vast and intricate web of family ties woven across and around Penobscot Bay and extending into other parts of Maine. I have new gratitude for William, Robert and Henry Wilson Knowlton, as well as their wives, who paved the way for me and my offspring to be where we are now on land we love, along with many other of their direct descendants.



Robert "Goddy" Knowlton. Date unknown.

I know I have many more ties yet to uncover. I hope to someday find out exactly where on Isle au Haut William was buried so I can visit that grave. I want to know what life was like for him and his family, and just what was his and Robert's relationship to Henry Wilson? Who were Elizabeth's friends? Did anyone keep a diary? I long to walk the land they walked, discover where their houses were, understand the social history of that era and place, and imagine it all through the eyes of those who made my existence possible.

I'm tallying the days to summer when I can get back to Isle au Haut and gaze through a prism of new and clearer glasses. I look forward to meeting Kris and Wendy in person, and making even more new Isle au Haut friends. And I want to show and tell it all to my grandson Jace Robert Serrano, one of Williams' many eight times great-grandchildren, now about the same age I was when my family roamed with Tony Pomeroy on that enchanting island so very long ago. I hope Jace will never forget.

Thus my story comes full circle, molting bittersweet and lost memories into happy new ones.

On the Edge

Kathie Fiveash

*Penobscot Bay Press will publish a book of Kathie Fiveash's poems, entitled **Human/Nature** this spring.*

Between the mainland and the open ocean
islands scatter seaward, cast in granite,
furred with spruce, knobbed by glacial boulders,
washed by tides. This is where I live.

Waking before dawn, I watch the lights
of lobster boats, already out to sea,
flare and fade as they turn and idle,
waiting for half-light to begin their work.

There's nothing between here and Portugal
but those fishermen and Great Spoon Island,
the far-ranging seabirds and the weather,
wind and water, endless ranks of swells.

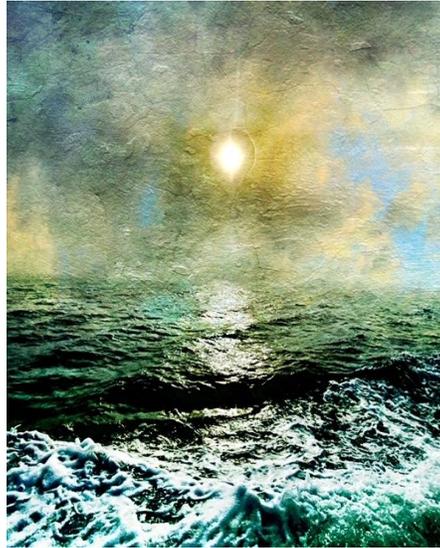
Distances surround me. Dwarfed and bounded
by the expanses where I cannot go,
I'm always on the shoreline, always looking
outward at something greater than myself.

My claim is staked here, where I grow my garden.
I watch the sun and moon rise from the sea
and set behind the ridge of Mt. Champlain.
Here I hunker down against the wind.

I watch the seasons and the ceaseless passage
of everything that holds me – earth, island,
my body engraved by love and work and time,
and moving ever closer to the edge.

Always, edges crumble and recede.
The edge of autumn will subside to winter,
winter bow to spring. One day the edges
of everything I know will disappear.

My garden, without my hands to tend it,
will be encroached, enfolded by the wild,
the wild I've loved above all else, the wild
into whose keeping I entrust my life.



Sunrise, Isle au Haut.

Mary Fennell



Kathie's Garden.

Mary Fennell

Head Harbor Over Winter

John DeWitt

Living in Head Harbor over the colder months isn't for everyone. The warm days of summer and early fall are fond memories, most of the houses are empty, and winter begins to show what it's made of. For some it would be a very lonely place to be, but for those who don't require being around others all the time it can be a beautiful, restful place.



The wind blows most of the time, and is a major part of the weather, no matter which way it blows. The ocean storms come in hard, and at times the surf on the southern end and the east side produces a steady dull roar that can last a couple days or more. But there is also calm once in a while, when you can hear the bell buoy ringing at Roaring Bull quite clearly, or even Thunder Gulch sounding its name if the big swells from the south are still rolling in. Sometimes the calm comes with frigid temperatures that produce sea smoke (vapor), which looks like steam rising from the water. On the coldest days it becomes thick like fog, rises, and makes up its

own clouds and snows as it moves out over the ocean, like the lake effect snow from the Great Lakes. There are also times when the wind brings warmer air in off the ocean, and it is milder here than the mainland. Some storms with an easterly or southerly wind will mix with sleet/rain or even change to rain.

A warm, tight house makes living here in winter quite comfortable. It can be rough doing outdoor chores and such, but you dress for the occasion and have that nice warm place waiting to go back into. On the nicer days to be out walking, the snowy shores and woods can be breathtaking, and you get to see how many and what kind of animal neighbors you have. Indoor work is saved for winter as much as possible, and it is also the time for the hobbies you have not had time for the rest of the year. It is a very peaceful time, when you can slow down and rest up a bit for the coming spring. To some, winter is looked forward to almost as much as spring, summer, and fall.



Bungy's Head, with Merchant's Cove and the southern shore in the background. The morning sun was just hitting the west shore of Head Harbor after a snowfall, and the tide had gone leaving the dark, bare shore. 1/8/22 John DeWitt



Head Harbor, looking south at Harvey's Beach and the ledges beyond. It was a bitter cold morning with sea smoke pushed by a light northwest breeze. 1/11/22 John DeWitt



Sunset over Western Head. One of those very cold sunny days that had little tiny crystals in the air at times, producing this phenomenal aura. 1/27/22 John DeWitt

A Donated Letter

Kris Carlson-Lewis

In the spring of 2021, the Isle au Haut Historical Society was the recipient of a greatly appreciated donation from B.J. Eckardt of Belmont, New Hampshire. It consists of a letter written to Lucretia P.H. (Haskell) Turner from her niece, Elcy (Webster) White of Belfast on April 18, 1841. I envision Elcy penning this note gazing out her window towards Isle au Haut from a distant horizon such as the top of Caterpillar Hill [in reality, Belfast]. It provides a heartfelt woman's view of life at that time.

We share a transcription of the letter with you.

Please note that the punctuation and capitalization are mostly as written by Elcy and that Lucretia P.H. Turner, you may recall from a previous [Newsletter, Winter 2020, V2](#), was instrumental in the construction of our church.



The sloop "Secret" and what may have been Lucretia Turner's home, now the Gailey home, in the background. From a glass plate negative, Deer Isle Historical Society and Penobscot Marine Museum. Circa 1850.

"My Dear Aunt

You no doubt have assured me of neglect in not answering your very kind and affectionate letter, which I receiv'd with great pleasure. I must plead guilty tho' my time is so much occupied for others. I have but little to myself, tho I have neglected writing. You have not been absent from my thoughts; I think of you often, and your husband, children, and long to be with you. the longer I am separated from my friends the dearer they are to me. I think absence serves to strengthen the affections of those we love. In my solitary moments, I sit down, and look across the deep blue waters of our bay, to the distant land where reside my friends, bound to me by the strongest ties of consanguinity, and love, and feel a sadness at heart, which I cannot express, a thousand recollections, and associations, of the past, rush to my memory, and I feel what a change has come over the scene, and I seem to be left alone. But I will not indulge in

melancholy associations of the past, and useless regret. I feel that all the changing scenes through which we have to pass, are superintended by that All wise Being, who has called us into existence, and knoweth what is best for us, and ordereth all things to work together for good to those who love him.

While I have been sitting by my window, writing I have looked at the blue hill top of your Isle and can, in imagination see you in your little domestic circle performing the cares, and duties of wife and mother. I should like to be one of your number, how many things we should have to converse upon. You mentioned Eliza Kimball was married to Benjamin S. I am glad to hear it. He will compensate for the loss of his brother and I can hardly realize our Caroline is married to Walter. I received a line from her saying Walter had recently been at home, and was desirous for her to go with him to N. York but her friends dissuaded her from it. I hope kind heaven will prosper them in their connexion, with each other, and neither have cause for regret. Father has met with a great loss I feel very much for him. I think he has lost a kind and affectionate wife. I know of no one, he could have married I should have liked better, to have taken the place of my own dear departed mother. I think it must have brought to his mind sad, and bitter recollections of my mother's death. I pray his afflictions may be sanctified to him for his eternal good, and may he find pardon and acceptance, through the mercy of the blessed Saviour. I presume you will be going up soon to Grandmothers. I hear Joshua is married and lives there, and Mary also is married, but Pearl and Martha it seems have dissolved. I expect soon to hear Caroline is married. I wish I could meet you again at the Island and spend longer time with you. I hope you will write often and I will endeavor to do the same.

If your husband is post master now, he has the privilege for franking letters on both sides, you know, he can frank the letter I send, and those you will send me, so we may write often without regard to postage. I wish we could have communication oftener with each other, though my letters are not so interesting to you as yours are to me. As you are not acquainted here, still a few lines from an absent friend is received with pleasure and seems almost like seeing one.

Tuesday morn, April 20th Dear Aunt, I have just risen from my bed, and have awaked to behold the light of a beautiful morn, the sun has arisen in all its glory, and every thing around looks bright and cheering, and I sit me down to say a few more words to you, again now I am at a loss what to say. I have nothing of any importance. It has been very sickly here of late. There has been a great number of deaths, principally among children, the scarlet fever, throat distemper, canker rash etc., has been prevailing to a great extent. There is to be a funeral of a lady here, to say a new neighbor to us, who died Sunday of consumption just after she gave birth to a child. she was a very fine woman, and I think a Christian. I think she has made a happy exchange, tho she had every thing to attach her to this world, riches and friends, she had to have it. But what is there here that we should set our affections upon. I feel every day more and more the uncertainty, the precariousness of every thing earthly.

Give my love to your husband, tell him I have not forgotten him although five years have rolled away since I last saw him, is it possible, can it be, that I have not seen him for that time, it seems to me but yesterday. how rapid and imperceptible is the flight of time. I hope I shall see you all before long, my regards to Mrs. Turner and Catherine. Write soon, your niece.

Elcy"

Stone Walls on Isle au Haut

Bob Gerber



Example 2. A rambling stone wall on the Landers property, the east side at Eaton Cove. Dick Marks

Isle au Haut, as in much of New England, has stone walls built by early settlers. The earliest year-round settlements by people of European descent on Isle au Haut probably date back to Revolutionary War days, but most walls were probably built in the 1800s, a period when sheep raising was a major agricultural activity on the island. Many stone walls probably served a dual purpose of keeping livestock contained, and in marking a property boundary (as Robert Frost said in the poem, *Mending Wall*, “good fences make good neighbors”). Within the areas of kitchen gardens, rocks had to be cleared from the surface and plow zones in order to grow crops. Some short “stone wall” segments were created as small animal pens or dry masonry foundations of buildings. Modern stone walls are rare and are usually part of gardening or terracing around houses. The stone wall around the former Gerber house on the East Side, just south of the Stevens house, was probably built from stones removed from the house crawl space and land clearing done to build the ranch house there circa 1965, and piled on a line between several huge surface boulders to form a property line on the eastern side. Parts of old stone walls have been dismantled and used in building or road construction projects.

Stone walls are most ubiquitous in the parts of New England that have glacial till at the land surface. Glacial till consists of an unconsolidated heterogenous mix of boulders, cobbles, gravel, sand and silt. Glacial till was created when the last continental ice sheet (The Laurentide Advance) built up and moved southeast over New England from 22,000 to 17,000 years ago. The ice sheet plowed along old soil deposits from previous ice advances of the last 2,000,000 years, and plucked off blocks of rock from underlying bedrock and broke it into a variety of sizes. Most loose rock transported in glacial ice was deposited within 5 to 20 miles from the bedrock source, although some brachiopod fossil-containing rocks in Penobscot Bay were transported 120 miles from their unique bedrock source in northwestern Maine.

Most of the surface boulders on Isle au Haut are granite and came from the Stonington area or the granite bedrock within Isle au Haut. The cobbles and boulders tend to be sub-angular to sub-rounded through the process of ice transport. Granite is a fairly durable rock and could be transported much longer distances in larger sizes within and under ice than softer rocks, such as the Penobscot Formation phyllite, which gets ground up into silt-size soil in short distances of transport. Granite boulders, left on the ground surface by melting glacial ice, are called "erratics". The somewhat rounded rocks make building a stone wall difficult and a lot of intermediate cobbles and gravel are usually necessary to underpin and stabilize successive layers of the wall. Areas of New England where the glacial till is composed of metamorphosed rock, such as mica schist, usually produce rocks with more flat surfaces that make it easier to construct a classic wall where each successive layer of rock is made up of pieces that cover at least two individual rocks underneath it. Industrious wall builders would split rocks to create flat surfaces. The process of splitting rocks was to use a small hand sledgehammer and star drill to create a line of holes at intervals along a line of weakness in a rock, then drive in shims and wedges to split the rock. There is not much evidence on Isle au Haut of rock splitting to build walls.

The highest density of erratics on Isle au Haut tends to be in the valleys and lower portions of ridges and hills. Erratics on the high ground tend to be rarer. The high ground areas, however, often have relatively flat slabs of loose rock that has exfoliated through freeze-thaw cycles on the surface over the last 15,500 years. Large erratics of greater than 3' are usually spaced on the order of 100' or more apart on the lower elevations in Isle au Haut. There are some areas where there are clusters or almost solid blankets of cobbles and boulders. Other clusters of cobbles and boulders are found in former "raised beach" areas. As the last glacial melted on Isle au Haut about 15,500 years ago, mean sea level was about 225 feet higher than today (because the land had been depressed by the weight of glacial ice). Beach deposits similar to Boom Beach formed around this level and at several other lower elevations during sea level "still-stands" as the land rebounded. Along the southern limb of the Long Pond Trail in the Park, near the intersection with the Herrick Trail coming up from the west side of Long Pond, these beach deposits are well displayed on the surface. There are many stone walls in the general area of the old farmstead that is accessed by the Herrick Trail. In addition, there are piles of stones at intervals within the former pasture where clearing the land of surface rocks consisted of moving rocks to local circular piles within the pasture area.

In the early 2000s, Dick Marks gave a talk on Isle au Haut stone walls that had struck his fancy. In that talk, he gave some facts of interest:

- a) At one time, there were 250,000 miles of stone walls in New England.
- b) Families plus oxen and a "stone boat" were all involved in moving rocks from the land to the wall site. (A one-handed rock could be carried by the children, a two-handed stone by the women, and two men with a stone boat and two oxen would manage the big ones to line the first row of the wall.)
- c) Two men with a sled and two oxen could build from 12 to 14 feet of a wall in a day.
- d) To form a property boundary, the general rule (according to Dick Marks) was that a fence or stone wall had to be a minimum of 4 feet 5 inches high (to be able to be seen in winter? to prevent sheep from getting over the wall?).

Four examples of stone walls

The first example, below, is a Google Earth aerial photo of walls that were constructed around the original farmstead on what is now the Landers property. You can readily see traces of wall segments that consisted of both animal pens and general fencing of pasture areas.



Example 1. Aerial view of the Landers property and their many stone walls Google Earth.

Example 2, photo at top of previous page, is a picture of the wall segment in the right-hand side of the above Google Earth photo, looking northeast toward York Island.

Example 3, pictured right, is of a wall segment that runs north-south along the east side of Mt. Champlain (granite), at elevation 70', just south of the trail leading from the East Side to the summit. This wall is unusual in its height and in the number of relatively flat pieces of rocks in the wall that are laid at an angle to the horizontal. This location is on the lower slopes of Mt. Champlain is the type of location where flatter rocks peeled off the surface of the granite on Mt. Champlain would have been likely to be. The wall actually runs a fair distance to the south, intermittently, and its purpose is unknown.





The photo above was taken looking west on the old Wentworth homestead, just north of Wentworth Creek, and west of the Park Road in that area. This was probably an animal pen. It was built up against a steep section of ledge lying just to the north. This lies on a terrace at the southern foot of Wentworth Mountain, which is granite.



Cranberry Bog. Mary Fennell

Marshall McBean Oral History

Dick Marks

Below is an excerpt of a Marshall McBean Interview conducted by Dick Marks, August 18, 2013, at Marshall and Jean's home in Head Harbor. Kris Carlson-Lewis did the transcription. The entire interview, as well as others, can be heard and read at [The Isle au Haut Historical Society's website](#). Sadly, Marshall died on November 2, 2021. Stories and memories of Marshall can be read [here](#).

We want to also remember other members of our Island community who have recently passed away: [Zav Giragosian](#), [Martha Greenlaw](#), [John Jacobus](#), [Gerry Kriegel](#), [Bill Landers](#), [Fran Schonenberg](#), [Tina Tully](#) and [Bob Turner](#). They all are and will be missed. The editors apologize if we have inadvertently missed anyone.



Marshall after a swim at The Pond. Summer 2021. Mary Fennell



Jean and Marsh at the annual Triathlon sporting their medals. 2019. Mary Fennell

Marshall (~23:13 into the interview): I was at Johns Hopkins for about 10 years, at the School of Hygiene and Public Health as a regular faculty member. There, I was able to do a fair amount of vaccine research as well as I ran the program in preventive medicine which was the biggest program. We had over 30 people in our program which was basically unheard of at that time.

Dick: That definitely was, it was unheard of when I was in school; it was a part-time job. And we learned how to how deep to dig privies and how long your septic drain fields had to be. That's about all I learned in public health when I was in school.

Marshall: It has certainly changed with environmental health and the strong realization about the role of behavior in disease.

Dick: They didn't have any vaccines when I was in med school. They got the Salk vaccine and I missed taking it for some reason and it was in my senior in med school. So, I went to my internship at Fitzsimmons Army Hospital. My first rotation was pediatrics and the first patient, a two year -old, I saw in the emergency room had polio. Golly, was I scared! I went the next day and got the vaccine.

Marshall: That's a real generational thing...

Dick: I think I had polio when I was about eight or nine because I had flu symptoms and was sick to my stomach. I woke up one morning and couldn't move. I just couldn't get out of bed and I'd fall. My father had to take me to the bathroom. My parents said, 'If you aren't better in two or three days, we'll go to the doctor.' I gradually got better. So, I really think I had it, it was a brief episode. Anyhow, that's water over the dam, thank God.

Dick: When did you meet Jean and where?

Marshall: That's a good story. I was a fourth year medical student and it was Christmas vacation. So, I drove from Boston down to New Jersey. I stopped to see my best high school friend in New York City and stayed overnight with him and his wife. His mother happened to be there, too. But I announced to them that I was getting married. And they said, "When?" "Sometime between now and June." "To whom?" And I said, "I don't know." After they stopped laughing, they said, "Let's give you this person's name." And that was Jean. That's the short version of the story. The slightly longer version was I did call her up in January after I got back to Boston. She was living in Cambridge. And as I remember she was too busy to talk the first time. At the second call, she was willing to let me take her out.

Dick: What was she doing at that time?

Marshall: Actually, when I met her she was working in a botany lab at Harvard. She had moved up the young graduate ladder by then. But, she was in Cambridge. So, we went out. We did folk dancing which is what she likes to do a lot. And which was my test. If a woman couldn't go folk dancing, I wasn't interested because they were too fancy for me. Then, three weeks later, we decided to get married. I think I asked her to get married. So, we decided three weeks later. Then, I went to Guatemala for a month because I had been committed to do some small research.

Dick: And you were in medical school?

Marshall: I was in medical school. I was in an elective period. I got back and we were married on April 6th. End of story.

Dick: What year of school were you then?

Marshall: Fourth year.

Dick: Fourth year. So she was with you at CDC [Centers for Disease Control]?

Marshall: She was with me PGY1, PGY2 [post graduate year].

Dick: She went to Africa?

Marshall (~28:20): ...went to CDC, went to Africa

A Personal History of Merchant's Island

Tim Hendersen

My grandmother, Lena Frances Merchant, was born on December 29, 1919, on Vinalhaven, not far by water from her ancestral home of Merchants Island. Her father, James Addison Merchant, was a fourth-generation son of Merchants Island, born there in 1862.

James, known as Addie by his friends, married Lillian Belle Robbins (see photo below) and lived on Vinalhaven, working as a quarryman. Addie came from a line of Anthony Merchant men. The first, Captain Anthony Merchant, Sr., settled Merchants Island, known then as White Island, in 1770 where he raised sheep, sending them up the river to Bangor for slaughter. He hailed from York, Maine, an adventurous sailor, who passed on his love of the sea to generations after him. I apparently missed that little piece of genetics. His son and grandson, Anthony Jr. and Anthony III, were fine seamen in their own right, plying the waters between Maine and Massachusetts, transporting goods and granite along the coast. Much of the cargo shipped to Boston was cellar stone from quarries in Green's Landing.



Lena Frances Merchant

Besides shipping, Anthony Merchant III served as tax collector for Deer Isle and surrounding islands. The Merchants, as most men of their time, earned a living with whatever venture proved most lucrative in any given season, sailing, fishing and farming being the most common.

I've held many jobs myself, including drilling granite in Stonington as a young man. In the summer of 1986, I worked with my father and a small crew repairing the remaining homes on Merchants Island. I had little knowledge of family history at that point, and didn't care either way, being consumed with juvenile dreams of girls and cars. My dad may have mentioned these things to me then, but I don't recall. I missed a genuine opportunity to connect with my past.

Captain Anthony Merchant, Sr. fathered eight children, five inhabiting Merchants Island and nearby Burnt Island as well as Camp and Wreck Island: Anthony Jr., John, Nathaniel, and two daughters, Eleanor and Miriam. Nathaniel's son, Nathaniel Merchant, Jr., moved to Isle au Haut around 1820 and acquired 550 acres of land on the southern coves. There he built a home at the head of what is now Merchants Cove, known locally then as Natties Cove. He also built a

fishing shack at the head of Duck Harbor, providing easy access for his primary income as a fisherman.

This land was sold to Ezra Turner in 1870 and then to Ernest Bowditch in 1894, eventually becoming part of Acadia National Park. Land originally owned by Captain Anthony Sr. on Merchants Island was purchased from his descendants soon after 1900. Nat's home on Merchants Cove is evidenced only by an old cellar hole now, but the footpath he created to other homesteads around the cove remains under the guise of the Goat Trail. Above the cove, the Nat Merchant Trail bears his name, along with Merchants Brook, extending past the Ridge Trail towards Wentworth Mountain, maintaining the memory of the man and his family that settled the area.



Lillian Belle Robbins

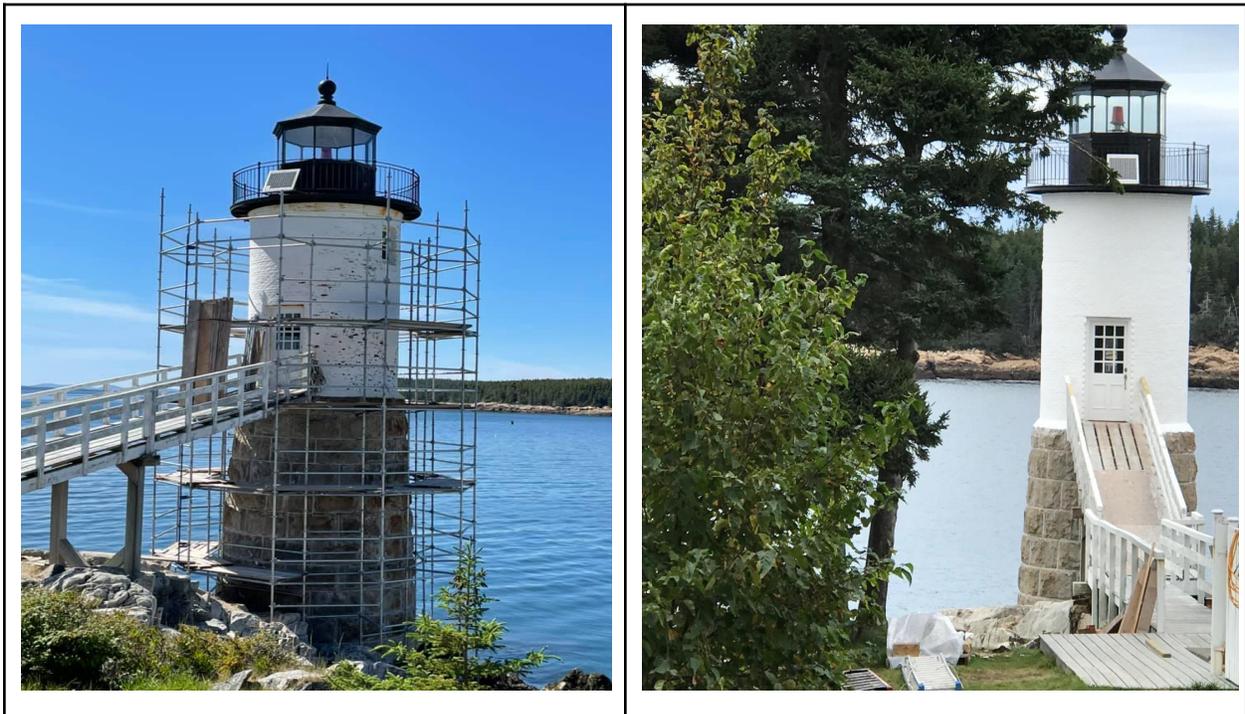


Brackish Pond at Merchants Cove. Mary Fennell

Isle au Haut Lighthouse News

Wendell Chamberlain

In October 2021, the renovation of the Isle au Haut lighthouse structure was completed after several years of planning and fundraising. The Town contracted Knowles Industrial Services to restore the tower and granite base. During the brief summer when we thought getting vaccinated would bring an end of COVID, 3 masons, living on the island, spent the summer removing massive brick portions of the tower, pointing the granite base, replacing steel support beams, replacing disintegrating interior wooden blocks, installing Jeff Burke's beautifully made bell doors, and completing the project with several exterior coatings to protect the bricks. A huge task on a remote island.



The major work is done but there are items still needing attention including metalwork for the lantern room, and exterior railed deck and the bridge to the Lighthouse needs upgrading. These tasks would address the exterior and safety issues and lead to a fully restored lighthouse. The engineer's work has commenced on developing the next scope of work.

The Friends of the Lighthouse Board thank everyone for their support. Islanders assisted the masons: bringing water to the site, assisting with diesel fuel, providing rain barrels, renting their cottages so masons could live on island, doing laundry and helping on site. And residents, seasonal residents and visitors contributed generously for years to see this project happen. Their investment was rewarded this past summer!

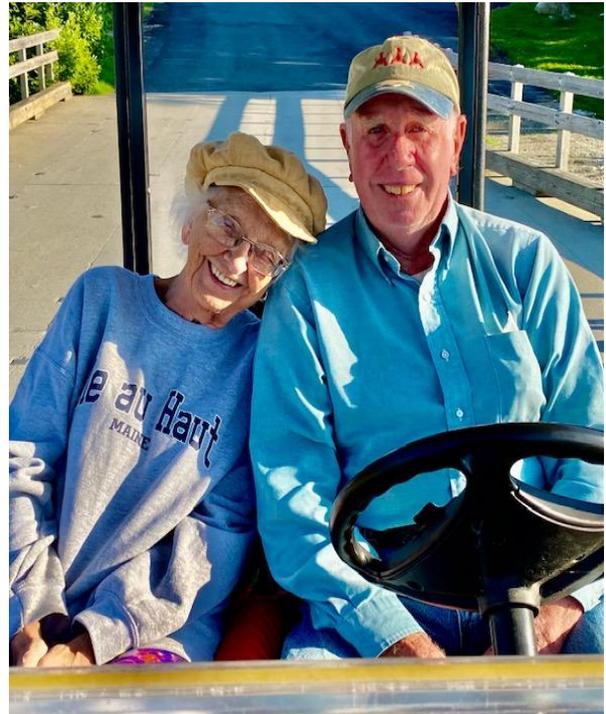
Our thanks again to all who made this possible and hope everyone will get a chance to visit next summer.

Some Folks from Isle au Haut

Mary Fennell



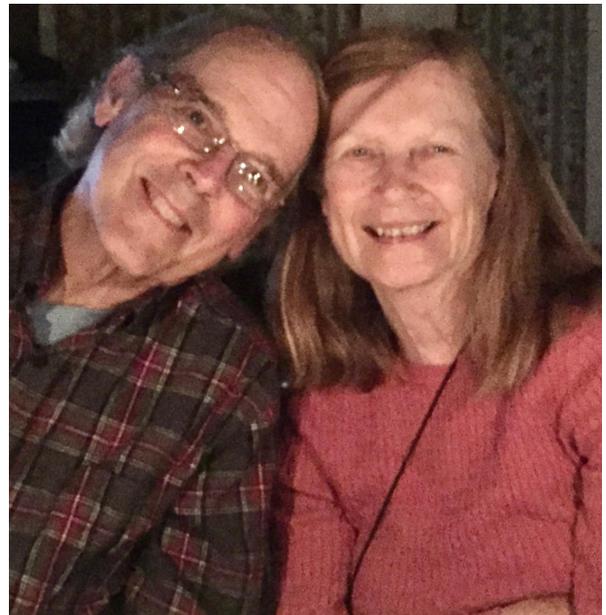
Margie and Moby



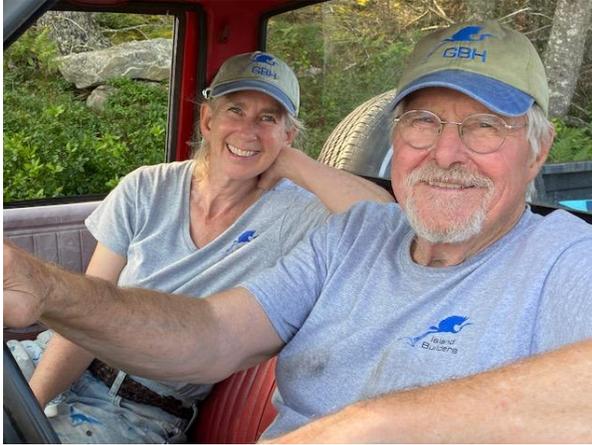
Bernie and Bill



Charlotte and Gerry



Jeff and Judi



Kate and Ellard



Dorothy, Rudi and Family



Tim, Matilda, Diane



Sue and Ian

A Note from your Historical Society

We hope that you have enjoyed this Winter 2022 Newsletter. Copies of previous Newsletters can be found on our [website](#).

The Isle au Haut Historical Society has not been idle during the Winter. We have been busy and productive during the past year despite the limitations imposed by COVID.

- Kris Carlson-Lewis, our secretary, continues to lead the way in researching island families and documenting the content of our collections.
- Bob Smith, an active board member, is working with the Maine State Archives on a computer program that will store digital scans and photographs of our historical materials in a secure, organized, and searchable form. This will make images of the holdings of the Historical Society easy to access and assure their availability for future generations.
- Tom Guglielmo, acting president, has been producing our Newsletters.

We hope you will consider becoming a member or renewing your membership in the Isle au Haut Historical Society for 2022. To do so, please send your name, email address, and annual dues payment of \$10 (check preferred) to The Isle au Haut Historical Society, PO Box 7, Isle au Haut, ME 04645.

Member dues help preserve our rich Island history and support Historical Society programs. We especially welcome your involvement. If you are interested in joining us, please send an email to IsleauHautHistory@gmail.com.

Thanks to all who have contributed to this year's Newsletter: Kris Carlson-Lewis, Harold van Doren, Leslie Knowlton, Kathie Fiveash, John DeWitt, Bob Gerber, Dick Marks, Tim Hendersen, Wendell Chamberlain, and Mary Fennell. Special thanks to Mary Fennell for her many lovely photos and hours editing, Kris Carlson-Lewis for her article and editing, and Bob Smith for his wisdom and help editing this issue.