

The Newsletter of The Tremont Historical Society

Vol. 5 No. 4

Fall 2001

Published quarterly at Bass Harbor, Maine. The Society is a non-profit organization, whose officers are: Arlene Bartlett, President; Charles Liebow, Vice President; John MacDuffie, Secretary and Treasurer pro tem. The Newsletter is ordinarily mailed to members and contributors.

From the President's Desk

The Tremont Historical Society began the project of renovating and enhancing the Bass Harbor Country Store in Bass Harbor on August 21, 2001. Since that time much has been accomplished. Even with a few minor delays such as moose and deer hunting season, bad backs, etc. the work goes on. All contractors have been put in place and when one is finished another moves in to do his thing.

We have been very fortunate to have Wayne Libhart, Building Committee Chair, lining up these workers for us. At this writing the chimney (which had to be totally replaced) is almost complete. The foundation has been repaired where necessary, drainage installed around the perimeter, some rotten sills replaced and the basement floor poured. Next will be the plumbing and heating systems, and our carpenter is already at work on the winter project of interior construction. He has given us a completion date of May 1st, 2002.

If all goes as planned, May will be moving month as items stored at the Library will be moved with care to Tremont's new Museum. Volunteers will be working on the displays in June, and when this is completed a celebration will be in order. I'll keep you informed via the next Newsletter on these plans.

Enjoy the holidays and have a great winter,
Arlene Bartlett, Pres. T.H.S.

Trivia Question:

Was there ever a woolen mill in Tremont?
If so, where and when, how long and who
and what and how many?

*(The Editor is very well trained in the
traditional journalistic questions, eh?)*

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RALPH'S PAGE

**Being an occasional reproduction of articles of historical interest,
published in the *Bar Harbor Record* and selected by Ralph Stanley**

Aug. 28, 1885

The schooner *Alice Lewis*, Capt. Fernald, caught a man-eating shark twenty-seven feet long and seventeen feet in circumference in a seine off Mount Desert recently. The liver of the shark netted the crew \$80 worth of oil.

Southwest Harbor May 7, 1886

Clark Brothers, at their new weir off Fernald's Point, are getting plenty of herring.

Long Island May 7, 1886

Nice spring weather—the fishermen are getting a good lot of fish. The *Abbie Morse* landed ninety tubs here a few days ago caught on "German Bank." She also had a number of large halibut which they took to Southwest Harbor to sell—Mr. McIntire had a cargo of salt landed for him from Boston a few days ago. He has chartered the *George M. Hodgdon* and is having her put in good order for the fishing grounds. She is to be manned by some of our smartest island boys.

Bass Harbor Apr. 16, 1891

Schooner *Honest Abe* arrived at this port on the 11th inst. with merchandise for Underwood Watson and others, also schooners *Balance* and *Gen. Grant* with salt for the fish dealers. The wharves present a busy appearance as there is a large fleet preparing for fishing and coasting.

Lamoine Apr. 16, 1891

F.D. Hodgkins & Sons will send the three-masted schooner *F.D. Hodgkins* to the Magdalene Islands after a load of herring. This is the first vessel from Lamoine that has engaged in the herring business for twelve years. It was formerly followed to quite an extent.

Southwest Harbor June 11, 1891

Capt. Lewis Holmes, who recently lost the *Franklin Pierce* near Portland with a full cargo of fish, has purchased another vessel. The *Pierce* loaded fish for Messrs. Parker, who also owned a part of the vessel. There was no insurance.

Cranberry Island May 4, 1897

Capt. Gilman Hamor has carried into New York a fine trip of fresh mackerel. A baby boy has come into his home since he went away on his mackerel cruise.

Cranberry Island May 18, 1897

Cpts. B.H. Spurling and Gilman Hamor have each carried into New York a second trip of large fresh mackerel.

Manset, May 15, 1901

Over 150,000 lbs. Of fish was deposited at the fish wharves last week, the result of the first trip of the fishermen. The fish are salted, dried and shipped in the fall, giving employment to quite a number of men in splitting and curing.

Mt. Desert's Forgotten Village

By Diana Abrell

The Bar Harbor Times, June 9, 1988

Continued from July 2001 Issue

Lyda remembers Christmas at the Center School. "We had a huge tree and a concert," she said. "All the families took gifts for the children. Oh, it was a great, great treat."

Along with the school, the Grange Hall was also an important center for community activities. Lyda says she couldn't wait until she turned 14 so she could join the Grange. "They all told me, 'You don't want to join because you'll have to ride the billy goat.' Of course there wasn't any," she laughed. The Grange, a social organization with agricultural ties, held meetings every Thursday and community suppers and dances on Saturday nights.

Nearly everyone in the village attended the Center Methodist Episcopal Church. The plain rectangular frame building with the arched windows was built in 1834 and lasted until the early 1950's when, after having lapsed into deterioration, it was taken down.

"It was such a shame," reminisced Lyda. "That beautiful church—eight oil lamps hung in a circle from the ceiling. There was a beautiful choir loft, a black walnut pulpit, and a cathedral ceiling." Each pew had a swinging door with a lock. And each family owned their own pew and even the ground under the pew. "It's still recorded in the Registry of Deeds office," said Lyda. The pews were registered to families with names like Harper, Ober, Hodgdon, Murphy, Dow, Robbins, Billings, and Stewart, names that still fill the local phone book.

Sundays in Center

Families came over from Bartlett's Island for Sunday services and brought their lunch. Lyda remembers that her aunt and uncle, with whom she lived, severely restricted her activities on Sundays. She was never allowed to play or even to carry on a seemingly innocent activity like crocheting. "It was a very boring day," she said.

Families in Center were very self-sufficient, according to Lyda. Everyone had a farm with a garden, pigs, chickens, and a cow called a "beef critter." There was always a good supply of fish. As Lyda remembers, everyone in the village worked in Center, either farming or at the lumber mill, except her uncle and two other men. From April until November these men traveled by horse and carriage to Bar Harbor on Sunday afternoons to work all week painting and hanging paper in the summer cottages. On Saturdays they would return to Center to spend one evening and night with their families. It took three or four hours to get to Bar Harbor by horse and carriage.

Most of Mt. Desert Island was closed to automobiles; the road through Center, however, was open to Southwest Harbor. It was dirt, and great clouds of dust rose whenever a horse pulling a carriage galloped through town. Lyda remembers when the first Stanley Steamers came. "There were wet spots on the road," she said. Around 1915 a few Model T Fords were seen.

Candy for Apples

"It was wonderful when it was the carriages and the rusticators," Lyda recalled. "I remember once when we found some candy at the back door and a note saying, 'Thank you for the apples.' Someone had picked some from our trees."

Ed. Note: Someone who had read the previous installment of this story in the July issue wrote to me to say that another interesting story about Center had appeared in a later Times issue. I have lost her name, but you'll find the article she suggested reprinted elsewhere in this issue. I apologize for two Center stories in one issue, but I not only find them fascinating, but am very responsive to communications from readers!

Commercial Changes in Bernard: The Blacksmith Shop

By Harvey Kelley

As time passes, local commercial enterprises change—some grow, new ones are started, some disappear. Our memories of these activities grow cloudy and often disappear along with the enterprises.

A partial list of commercial ventures that have existed and then vanished in the community of Bernard would include several general stores, a department store, a livery stable, a steamboat wharf, an ice storage facility, a year-round hotel and a blacksmith shop.

Some recollections of the blacksmith shop serve as one example of the changes that can take place and be easily lost. The Dan Benson shop was a busy community center from the late 1800's through the first thirty years of the 1900's. It was started in answer to the needs of the local fishing industry, and the work done at the shop was almost exclusively related to marine interests.

Located in the yard of what is now the Harvey Kelley residence, the shop was situated so that it had an excellent view of the harbor and its activities. Only a few residents are left who remember the shop and its contribution to the community.

We usually think of horse shoes when we hear of a blacksmith shop, but this was not the case in Dan's shop. It specialized in things that went with boats and fishing. A few older residents of Bernard remember that it also was the place where a child with a broken toy could get immediate help. And it was a gathering place for local residents while waiting for the mail, as the post office was just across the street.

Common products of the shop included anchors, grappling irons, stem irons, skegs and rudders, rings and staples for lobster buoys, scallop drags, clam hoes, mooring chain, davits, dip net bails, chisels, and tongs—to name only a few.

Not all of the business was “cash and carry.” As a youngster in the household this writer remembers a steady supply of clams and

scallops which arrived in the early evening with a knock on the door and the inquiry “Would Dan like these tonight and would he take it off my bill?” It sometimes was a mysterious box or bag of lobsters that appeared on the back porch. They generally looked to be a little smaller than the legal gauge.

Located so that Dan had a prime view of the harbor, the shop also served as an information center. Before the advent of ship to shore phones and when lobsters were landed at the scows out in the harbor, it was not unusual for our phone to ring on a stormy afternoon. It usually was a request to ask Dan if a certain boat was in yet.

Dan was active in town affairs, and the shop was the site of many unofficial conferences and decisions on what needed to be done to solve a problem in town government.

Dan's death in the early 1930's closed the activities of a key entity in Bernard's economic and social life. It is still possible to see a grappling iron or some other marine item made in his shop and still in service on the waterfront.

(Ed. Note: Harvey Kelley, as you can tell from this article and others he has contributed to past issues of the Newsletter, has many very detailed memories of this community when it was very different from what we see today. It is my intention to “pick his brains” frequently for the benefit of our readers who are interested in the history of Tremont.)

WINTER and SUMMER ADDRESSES

We intend to follow our “snow birds” when they are away from Tremont in the winter season, but we know that people leave and return at various times—so we're not sure what we should do. If we have your seasonal addresses, are you getting the Fall and Winter issues where you are? If not, drop us a note and we'll try to follow your instructions. One thing we can do is mail your Newsletters First Class, so they will be forwarded. Let us know!

Center Celebrates Columbus Day

By Nan Lincoln

From Bar Harbor Times Oct. 8, 1992

One hundred years ago, Oct. 12, on the 400th anniversary of Columbus' arrival in the New World, the folks of Center on the western edge of Mount Desert gathered at their church to celebrate the day.

It was a more innocent era, back in 1892. As the wives packed picnic lunches for their families—all dressed in their Sunday best—and husbands hitched up the horses or set the sails on their fishing boats for the short ride to the church, it is doubtful they were troubled by such thoughts as the negative impact the eventual European onslaught would have on the indigenous New World cultures and people. They likely never questioned the character of Columbus and the explorer/adventurers who followed.

Among those who gathered to have their picture taken for the big event were Butlers, Reeds, Obers, Stewarts, Someses and Hodgsons, descendants of some of the first fishermen, farmers, sailors and mill workers to settle on Mount Desert Island just a few generations before. The discovery and settlement of new lands was not simply a national historical event to them; it was a personal triumph in the not-so-distant histories of their own families. For them, Columbus was an unqualified hero, and as they celebrated the quadricentennial of his journey across the Atlantic, they also celebrated the journey of their own ancestors which had brought them here to this wedge of forest, field and shore bounded by the villages of Pretty Marsh, Seal Cove, and the ocean.

Lyda Butler Noyes, a 90-year-old former Center resident, who now lives in Sullivan, was not born when that Columbus Day photograph was taken, but she can pick out her grandmother, Lena Shuman Butler, wife of Civil War veteran Andrew Jackson Butler, standing stiffly in the back row. "And there's my Aunt Mae Butler Harper," says Noyes, pointing to a dark-haired girl holding a fiddle and staring at the camera with the worried expression of a shy adolescent girl who is about

to be asked to perform in public. "She became my foster mother after my parents parted," Noyes recalls. "She never was comfortable playing for an audience."

Her mother, Janie Ober Butler, is there, too—a moppet in blond ringlets and floppy party hat that must have been specially made for the occasion, probably in patriotic red, white and blue. In the back row is a stern-looking elderly lady dressed in swathes of dark taffeta, with a square little hat jammed on her brow. This face was the first Lyda Noyes would have seen when she entered the world—for Ellen Ober was the midwife who delivered her and most of the other Center babies. Standing to the right, with drooping mustaches, is the handsome Rev. Warman, Center Church's Methodist minister. Mrs. Rich, the formidable Center schoolteacher, has placed herself in the middle of a group of her younger students. Her stony expression suggests a woman who would permit neither fidgeting nor nonsense during this important photographic occasion. Everyone—Dows, Rumills, Robbinses, Grays, and Murphys—even little Gerald Stanley in the arms of his mother, Carrie, show in their earnest expressions and formal poses that they regard this as an auspicious and important event in their lives.

And, in fact, Lyda Noyes says, the Columbus Day activities that day were remembered long after by the folks of Center—so much so that when Lyda was growing up, her own memories mingled with the stories she had heard and it almost seemed that she had been there, that if she looked very carefully she might find her own face in the old photograph, too. And in a sense it is there—a premonition of Lyda in the faces of her relatives.

Center no longer exists as a village. About 35 years ago, when it lost its post office, it became a part of neighboring Seal Cove. New houses have been built and new folks have settled in the area. The fields where Center's oldest living resident, Albert Hodgdon, 92, once tended his father's dairy cattle are now dotted with the homes of people who no longer make their living from the land, but drive to

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OUTSTANDING EVENT HELD TO HONOR THOSE LOST AT SEA

August 26 was a remarkable day in the history of the Town of Tremont. In an event planned and directed by the Chairman of the Centennial Club of the Tremont Historical Society, Irving Silverman, a massive granite Sea Memorial stone was dedicated to the memory of 141 men, women, and children from the town who lost their lives at sea from pre-1805 until 1991.

A crowd of at least 200 people gathered on the Town Wharf in Bernard on a bright and breezy Sunday afternoon to hear brief remarks from a distinguished group of local citizens and other community leaders as the Sea Memorial was dedicated. Another special feature of the day was the symbolic blessing of the fleet of vessels which call Bass Harbor their home, along with “all who sail in them” on the great variety of voyages which people undertake upon the ocean waters.

A Proclamation by Governor King was read by Rep. Tina Baker:

WHEREAS, the Town of Tremont lies along the Maine coast and has experienced the many benefits that the ocean brings to the economy, culture and environment of the town; and

WHEREAS, the citizens of Tremont have also experienced the tragedy that the ocean can bring as over one hundred and forty of its citizens have perished at sea in the past two hundred years; and

WHEREAS, the Centennial Club of the Tremont Historical Society and the citizens of Tremont have decided to honor the memory of those lost at sea by the dedication of a Sea Memorial Monument; and

WHEREAS, with the dedication of this memorial, the citizens of Tremont will ensure that the memory of those lost will live on,

NOW, THEREFORE, I, ANGUS S. KING, JR., Governor of the State of Maine, do hereby proclaim August 26th, 2001 as

TREMONT SEA MEMORIAL DAY

throughout the State of Maine, and urge all citizens to pay their respects to the memory of those who lost their lives at sea.

Signed by Governor King and State Seal attached

Irving Silverman acknowledged the exhaustive research effort by Fran Martin, the contributions to the project by business owners Ron MacQuinn, Doug Gott, Allen Parsons, and the Fernald Family; numerous individual donors; also the officials of the Town of Tremont for their great cooperation and assistance, the Boy Scouts for ushering, the Coast Guard Commander and Color Guard, local clergy, and a significant group of citizens, including descendants and survivors of several who were lost, taking part in the dedication ceremonies.

Generous and laudatory newspaper coverage was afforded this important event. Significant was this portion of an editorial in the *Bar Harbor Times* of August 30, 2001:

“In the past, Tremont has enjoyed the dubious distinction of being referred to as the backside of Mount Desert Island. This derogatory designation is especially curious, as the first-ever meeting to organize a government on MDI was held in Tremont more than two centuries ago, making it, if anything, the last town that should take a back seat to anyplace else.

“Whatever their placement on the map, the solidarity MDI’s communities share when it comes to losses to the sea transcends any notion of cartographic eccentricity.

“When it comes to honoring the losses of island families who have lost loved ones to the ocean, it really isn’t a question of which town is on the front side and which may be thought of as being on the back. On Mount Desert Island, all towns face the sea.”

RESPONSE FORM

Please clip and mail to Tremont Historical Society, P.O. Box 215, Bass Harbor ME 04653

Yes ___ I/we wish to begin membership in the Tremont Historical Society

Yes ___ I/we wish to renew membership for another year.

Enclosed is my check in the amount of \$5.00 per person for annual dues.

Please make checks payable to Tremont Historical Society

Dues paid in 2001 or the first six months of 2002 will establish membership through June of 2002.

YES ___ I/WE WISH TO CONTRIBUTE \$ _____ TO THE COUNTRY STORE FUND

Please list names of all persons for whom dues are paid, or all donors of contributions.

Name _____ Phone _____

Address _____
Street or Box # Town State Zip

Check if this is a summer address _____

If different, please enter winter address below:

Address _____
Street or Box # Town State Zip

✂ -----

Center Celebrates Columbus Day

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work in the larger towns of Southwest Harbor, Bar Harbor, or even off-island. Harper's Store, where young Lyda and Albert could buy penny licorice while their parents shopped for nails, flour and calico cloth, is gone, and the schoolhouse where they once sat in orderly rows to learn their lessons has since become a private residence—the squat, sturdy shape of its former self still visible beneath its new dormers, windows and other extras. The church where the families of Center stood to have their picture taken, that Oct. 12, 100 years ago, is gone, too, and many of their names can now be found on the lichen-spattered gravestones in the little Center churchyard, now surrounded by forest.

But in Lyda Noyes' photo album and in the memories of those who lived there—and, like

Albert Hodgdon, who still live there—the community is still alive and bustling with activity.

“I tell people I've lived in two centuries in one,” says Hodgdon. “The first fifty years belonged to the past century, my second 50 in the 20th century.” Although he says he appreciates the conveniences of the modern era, he does miss those days when life, while harder, was simpler. When horse-power came from horses—or mules, and a community was a place where people actually communed.

Perhaps, too, he misses a time when a hero was a hero. And the accomplishments of a man like Christopher Columbus could be celebrated wholeheartedly by families who were proud and grateful to have found themselves in a place called Center.

MISSION STATEMENT
Adopted April 17, 2000
By the Board of Directors
Tremont Historical Society

This historical society shall be dedicated to the work of gathering, organizing, preserving, and making available to the public both historical materials and information showing the growth and development of the Town of Tremont including

- a) the early period during which it was a part of the Town of Mt. Desert Island, including the entire island and many of the adjacent islands;
- b) the period during which it included the area now known as the Town of Southwest Harbor;
- c) the period from the separation of Southwest Harbor to the present.

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