

MISSION STATEMENT
Adopted June 24, 2002
By the Membership
Tremont Historical Society

The Tremont Historical Society shall be dedicated to preservation of the history of the towns of Tremont and Southwest Harbor and adjacent islands. It will achieve this mission by gathering, cataloging, preserving, and making available to the public historical materials, such as genealogies and information showing the growth and development of the towns, as well as artifacts.

The Newsletter of the Tremont Historical Society

Vol. 12, No. 1

Spring 2009

Published periodically at Bass Harbor, Maine. The Society is a non-profit organization whose officers are: Muriel Davisson, President; Charles Liebow, Vice President; John MacDuffie, Secretary; and Michael Smith, Treasurer. The Newsletter is mailed to members and contributors. Extra copies are available. Newsletter Editor is John MacDuffie.



Photographer Unknown

Number 6562 - The Southwest Harbor Public Library Collection of Photographs

This store was described in an article in the Ellsworth American on July 8, 1871 as "John Chinaman's store" as visited by a group of Ellsworth businessmen and their families on a steamer excursion on July 4th of that year from Ellsworth to Bass Harbor. Daniel Cough's house is shown on the left. His store is the building on the right. (See following story.)

SPRING 2009 NEWSLETTER

Tremont Historical Society
P.O. Box 215
Bass Harbor ME 04653

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The President's Page

Dear Fellow THS Members,

The Historical Society opens its 2009 season of programs on March 23rd. Sarah Clemens will give a talk on the history and activities of the Maine Sea Coast Mission. As usual the programs this year will be offered on the fourth Monday of each month at 7:00 pm at the Bass Harbor Memorial Library in Bernard. Other programs planned so far will present the history of Art and Nan Kellam of Placentia Island, and granite quarrying in this area. And we will offer another installment of the November 2008 program with women from Tremont discussing what it was like to grow up and raise families here – an event that drew one of the largest audiences of 2008.

We are beginning to plan for getting an inventory of our artifacts, documents and photos into a database. If you have interest in this sort of thing please let us know, as we will need volunteers to accomplish it.

Let me encourage you again to volunteer in the Museum next summer. It will be open again on Monday and Wednesday afternoons from 1:00 to 4:00 pm. Not only do we need volunteers for these times, but we would like to open the Museum on additional days. It doesn't take much preparation; we'll have a training session in June and we'll provide you fact sheets about the history of Tremont and the Country Store Museum.

I'd like to pay tribute to the late Wayne Libhart, one of our most faithful Museum volunteers, with his wife Ginny, for a number of years--and a strong supporter of the development of the Museum. Wayne will be greatly missed

If you would like to volunteer, please contact me during the coming months. It's never too late. Describing the history of Tremont and the Country Store and showing artifacts from Tremont families from the 18th and 19th centuries can be very rewarding and fun!

Sincerely,



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“Let's Ask Ralph!”

In this feature, questions of various sorts are posed, sometimes by your Editor and sometimes by you—and these go to our Historian, Ralph Stanley.

Here is an answer to a question posed some time ago in “Let's Ask Ralph!”

Ed.: The story we published in our Fall 2007 edition, about that 4th of July 1871 excursion from Ellsworth to Bass Harbor on the steamer “Argo,” says that a lot of the people went to visit a nearby place of business run by a “John Chinaman” who had an American wife and a six-month old baby. Have you heard of a place like that?

Ralph referred us to Harvey Kelley who told us that this was in the place where Rosemary Tilden lives today on Bernard Road across from Lopaus Pt. Rd., which in the 1940's Mrs. Russ Mitchell ran as a millinery store. Ralph had explained that the original storekeeper was Daniel Cough, who was ancestor to a family of that name living today in Bar Harbor. (the late Bernard “Sonny” Cough, developer of Atlantic Oakes, was his descendant.)

After this information was shared in a later edition, I got a call from the present owner of the house next door, Della (Mrs. Wills) Dow. Here is my record of the information she shared.

The gentleman referred to in the *Ellsworth American* story of this holiday excursion to Bass Harbor as “John Chinaman” was actually Daniel Cough, who wore his hair in a long braid. He was born in Amoy (called Xiamen today) China in 1840 and came to Bernard in 1857 via Rockland as a cabin boy (in one account, he was a stowaway) on a vessel. He is known as the first Chinese person to live in Maine. He became a U.S. citizen in 1874 and died in 1906.

On January 17, 1870 Mr. Cough married Elvira Higgins who was born on Mt. Desert in June 1845 and died Dec. 10, 1897. They were parents of nine children:

Mary H. (1870-1890), Adoniram Bird (1872-1949), Arno (1874-1943), Ezra Raphael (1876-1944), Rena R. (1876-1879), Caroline C. (1879-1880), George D. (1881-1897), David (1884-1884), and another who died at birth in 1887.

The house next door (to the north) of the Tilden house (where the Dows live today) was the family residence. The Tilden house was the store location. Daniel bought the land for the house and store in 1868, building the smaller structure in 1873 and the homestead in 1878.

Mr. and Mrs. Cough and several of their children are buried in the Marsh Road Cemetery behind the Tremont School.

It is also said that Mr. Cough owned property at China Mountain, 167 feet in height, slightly northeast of Mt. Gilboa in Tremont, but would not live there because he thought it was haunted.

Further information on the events of the original story in the Ellsworth American has been researched in conversations with Harvey Kelley, Della Dow and Robert C. (Chummy) Rich:

The large school building used by a number of the July 4, 1871 revelers who visited Bass Harbor by way of the Steamer *Argo* from Ellsworth had a school room below and a hall above. The story said that there was a dance on the second floor while a number of the businessmen held a “railroad meeting” downstairs. Harvey Kelley produced a picture of a group of school children in front of a large building, which was their school--on the lower end of what is now Columbia Avenue. Della Dow said that old tax records on her property (when still owned by Daniel Cough) showed that as late as 1904 a tax of \$150 was levied on the Old School House. When the Dows purchased their property in 1952 from Leroy and Virginia Everbeck, there was still a large building on the lower end of what had been this property, now a duplex home occupied by two Thurston families. Chummy Rich said that later this building was owned by Archie McEachern, and finally was bought by his father, Bobby Rich, to expand his boatbuilding operation on the shore. It was used for storage of lumber and equipment until 1980 when it was demolished and the land used for parking and boat storage.

Editor

RALPH'S PAGE

Being a reproduction of articles of historical interest, selected by Ralph Stanley

The following article is reprinted, with permission, from the Bar Harbor Times issue of June 30, 1988. Considering the recent passing of Lester Radcliffe, it seems that this is a perfect time for this reminder of the history of Thurston's Wharf. Ed.

HISTORIC THURSTON'S WHARF REACHES A CROSSROADS

By Leanne Nickon

TREMONT -- "I've been walking up and down this ramp now for 41 years," says Lester Radcliffe, seated in his tiny office overlooking Bass Harbor on the end of Thurston's Wharf in Bernard. For 17 of those years he has owned the wharf and his lobster business that still bears the name of his grandfather, Fred W. Thurston. For 13 years before that he was a partner, and for 11 years before that, an employee.

Since Radcliffe started at the wharf in 1947, the business of buying lobsters from local fishermen, selling them on the local and out-of-state markets, providing a supply of bait, maintaining the pier, and keeping up with the weekly paperwork has kept him busy seven days a week. And those were long days, he adds. "It starts very early in the morning, and the last of the boats don't come in until 5:30 or so."

About two years ago, looking to finally slow down a little, Radcliffe put the wharf up for sale. There have been some inquiries, but it remains on the market today. Lobsters may be a hot commodity in Maine, but the businesses that buy and sell them apparently are not.



Thurston's Wharf to left. Rice Wharf to right.

The significance of the wharf to the town of Tremont has many local residents concerned about its future, should it be sold. "This is the only year-round access to the harbor," Radcliffe explains. "C.H. Rich's wharf, on the other side of the harbor, is open all year, but rough winter weather sometimes makes docking there impossible."

"The big concern is that places along the shore are going to be bought up and not be available to the public," says Bernard resident Harvey Kelley. One proposed use of the wharf by a prospective buyer was nixed by the recently enacted shoreland zoning, which prohibits multi-family dwellings. But Radcliffe, who has made a livelihood from the wharf, and Kelley, who "practically grew up on the wharf as a kid," would like to see the property continue as a fishing-related business. By doing so the wharf would be continuing a tradition begun more than 100 years ago.

The name Thurston has been attached to the wharf for 64 years, but its history extends back to the 1860's, when a sardine factory was built on the site. After changing hands several times, the property eventually came into the hands of a Dr. Watson, who also owned the old Town Hall in Bernard. The buildings on the wharf saw a few different businesses come and go through the years, among them a marine engine machine shop, a pool room and a barber shop. "I remember getting my hair cut there when I was eight or ten years old," Radcliffe recalls.



Freeman Gott's fast fishing sloop, the **Merry Wings**, slides off the ways at Thurston's Wharf around 1900. The launching was an early high point in the history of the wharf, which has become an institution in Bernard and one of the few remaining fishing wharves in Bass Harbor.

The highlight of the wharf's early years, Kelley says, was the launching of the *Merry Wings*, the fastest fishing sloop the island had ever seen. It was owned by Freeman Gott, who Kelley describes as "a fisherman and somewhat of a dealer. Uncle Free was a small mild-mannered fellow until he got at the tiller of a boat," recalls Kelley. "Then he was a son-of-a-gun. Every summer he would slick his yacht up and put on a special suit of sails he kept just for racing. For ten years in a row, he cleaned up the trophies at the Northeast Harbor races."

Watson sold the property to Morris Thurston in 1924. His cousin Fred went to work for him at the wharf, becoming a partner in the 1940's. In those days, Kelley says, the life of the town centered more around the harbor than it does today. People traveled to Boston or Rockland by steamboat. Supplies were brought into town by boat. Since gasoline was brought in by coastal tanker from Rockland, it was dispensed to fishermen out in the harbor, rather than from the wharf. A square-ended scow called the *Slavery*, anchored in Bass Harbor, was used to sell gasoline and to buy and sell lobsters.

The *Slavery* carried two 500-gallon gas tanks. Radcliffe recalls playing on the scow, also helping his grandfather by running the gas pump, filling five-gallon cans, and lining them up along the side for the boats that came by. After working long hot days pumping gasoline, he says, the boat's name seemed appropriate to him.

In 1947, Radcliffe's step-father Harvey A. Moore bought Morris' half of the business and became Fred's partner. That same year, Radcliffe got out of the service and came to work at the wharf full-time. When Fred died in 1958, Radcliffe became Moore's partner, and when Moore died in 1971, Radcliffe eventually acquired the other half to become the sole owner of the business.

In his years spent on the wharf, Radcliffe has seen the business change in a number of ways. The advent of modern communication equipment has made one aspect of running the wharf a little easier. "If you have a boat that fishes for you, you have to worry about him," Radcliffe says. "Before the days of radio, if someone didn't come in at such and such a time, you'd feel responsible for finding out where he was." Kelley recalls that his parents, whose home afforded a clear view of the harbor, would look out for boats at their moorings; people would often call them to see if certain fishermen were home yet.

The method of payment has changed since the days when a boat would come in with 100 pounds of lobsters and the wharf owner would pay cash on the spot. Paying fishermen once a week according to their catch for the week facilitates record-keeping for business and tax purposes, but also means more paperwork and bureaucracy. The market for lobsters has changed, Radcliffe says. "They used to go more to Boston and Portland, and now there's more of a local market."

Formerly, Kelley says, most of the local catch would be transported to Rockland on lobster smacks. These were large specially-built vessels, sometimes converted sardine carriers, with two watertight bulkheads surrounding a mid-section that was bored full of holes. The lobsters would ride in this section, washed by a continuous bath of seawater as they traveled.

Of course the price of lobster has ridden the inflationary wave like everything else. In the 1930's, Radcliffe says, a lobsterman could make a good living if he sold his lobsters for 25 cents per pound. Today, Radcliffe pays \$3.75 per pound.

These days, as the wharf remains on the market and Radcliffe continues to work seven-day weeks, he seems to be torn--he would like to see the wharf sold soon, so that he can leave the tremendous responsibilities of running the business and maintaining the facility to someone else, after so long. But he would also like to see it remain as a lobster wharf, or at least a fishing-related business. He is hoping someone comes along who is willing to put in the long hours, like he has done, to make the business work. When that happens, he says, he would still like to be around there, maybe doing some repair work or advising a new owner about the business.

"I wouldn't be too far away," he says.

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As local folks know, in 1991 Lester's son Michael and his wife Libby bought the business, and in 1993 opened Thurston's Lobster Pound on a portion of the wharf, serving seafood and other items. This has been an extremely successful enterprise and continues today, no longer operated personally by Michael and Libby but leased by its long-time manager, Sharon Gilley. The traditional business at the wharf continues much as it has for close to a century.

The Steamer *Norumbega*

by Harold Beal

Originally published in The Pow Wow II, alumni newsletter for Pemetic High School

The steamer *Norumbega* was built in Bath, Maine in 1902. She was 146 feet long, 28 feet beam, drew 10 feet of water and grossed at 304 tons. She had engines of 700 HP and a crew of 15. She was a wooden twin screw steamer built for Maine Central Railroad's Mt. Desert Ferry and "Around the Hills" service from Bar Harbor to Southwest Harbor with calls at Seal Harbor and Northeast Harbor. She was very fast, economical to operate and popular with visitors to Mount Desert Island. In all the years she was in service she had only one serious accident.

On August 2nd, 1913 around 11 p.m., while traveling from Northeast Harbor to Southwest Harbor in a dense fog, *Norumbega* ran ashore on Clark's Point. She was around 100 to 150 yards east of the steamboat wharf where she should have been. She was under the command of Capt. J.L. Norton. At the time she had only two passengers on board and they were taken off easily.

She was under little headway so didn't hit the ledge very hard and didn't leak, appearing to have very little damage. Next morning at around 11 a.m. she had about 4 feet of water under her and the steamer *Moosehead* tried without success to pull her off. It was not until Tuesday, August 24th, 22 days later, that she was refloated. The steamer *Sappho* took her place until she could be repaired and returned to service.

The following story came out in the Bar Harbor Record on August 28th:

"The passenger steamer *Norumbega* of the Maine Central Railroad fleet, which was stranded on the ledges at Southwest Harbor Monday night August 2, was floated on the high tide late Tuesday last week by a wrecking company. The steamer, which was valued at about \$75,000, was leaking only slightly, and was in much better condition than was expected. She was towed to Rockland Wednesday, where a survey will be made to ascertain the extent of her injuries. Two pontoons were placed under each side of the steamer and the two tugs succeeded in moving her from the rocks on which she reclined on her beam ends at low water."

I also learned that it wasn't two tugs that rescued her. It was one tug helped by the Maine Central's powerful 2,400 HP steamer *Moosehead*.

I'm not sure how long she was out of service but know that after 28 years of service she was sold in 1930 to the Romance Line Steamship Co. for the excursion business in Boston Harbor. At times she made trips to Provincetown and the Cape Cod Canal, and was later chartered to the Nantasket Beach Line.

On the night of May 30, 1934, while tied up alongside another Maine steamboat, *May Archer*, at the Quincy Drydock & Yacht Co. wharf undergoing repairs for summer service, *Norumbega* was found to be on fire. Two watchmen were obliged to move off the steamer in order to save their own lives, and they cut the vessels adrift to prevent the fire from spreading to the wharf property. While the firemen watched helplessly the vessels burned in midstream. At 6:00 a.m. both steamers were towed back to the wharf where within minutes they both burned to the water's edge. The loss was figured at \$200,000.

In the Bar Harbor Times on April 11, 1934 the following story came out:

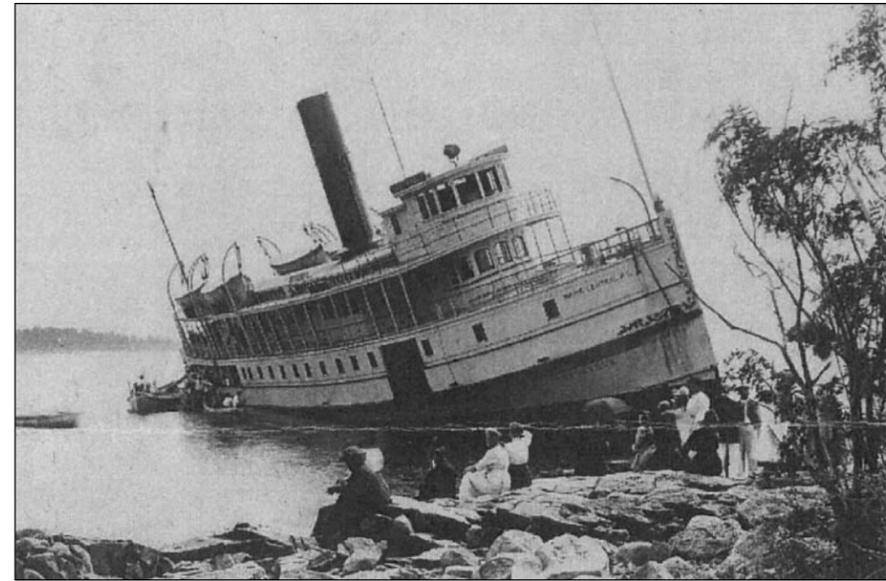
EASTERN STEAMSHIP LINES TO DISCONTINUE ISLAND BOAT FRIDAY
The *Westport* to make its final scheduled run to Mount Desert Friday
Island to receive future service via Bucksport

“Friday will mark the passing of the Eastern Steamship Lines steamer service to Mount Desert Island as the *Westport* makes its final scheduled trip from Rockland and return. Commencing next Tuesday all freight for Mount Desert Island will be handled through Bucksport, being brought over the roads by trucking companies. Commencing May 1st passengers for Mount Desert Island will disembark from the Boston-Bangor steamships at Bucksport and be brought over the road by motor coaches. Thus for the first time in nearly a century Mount Desert Island will be without steamboat service.”

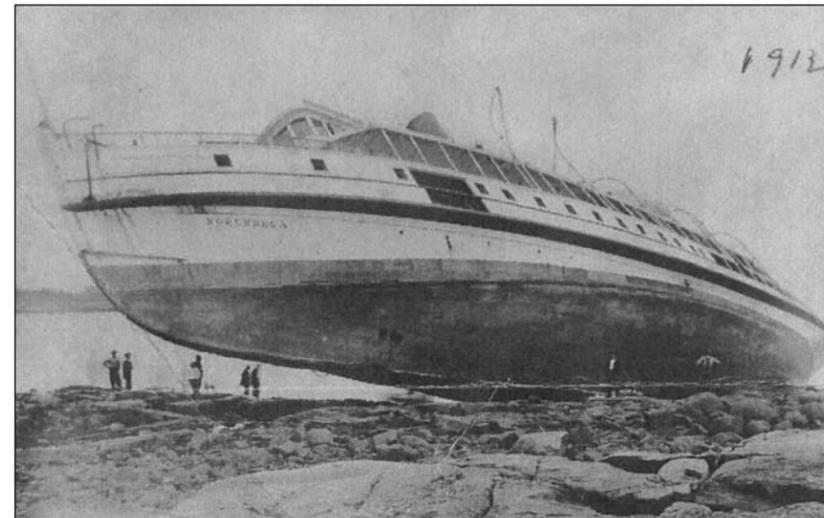
I don't personally remember the *Norumbega*, but used to ride on the *J.T. Morse*. The Captain let Dick Bulger and me ride from Manset to Southwest Harbor, and then we would ride our bicycles back to Manset.

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Continuing our “Let's Ask Ralph!” feature, the Editor sought further details on this story from our Historian (who recently celebrated his 80th birthday.) Ralph first said he believed the date of the event was August 13, 1912. He checked this with his sources and discovered that he was correct. Then, consulting his extensive catalog of fragmentary memories on divers topics, Ralph said “I believe the reason she got on that ledge was that the engine room crew had gotten into the habit of banking the fires as soon as they left Northeast Harbor, as it was such a short run to Southwest and they would be spending the night there. That time she didn't have quite enough steam to make it to the wharf, and when the engines died she just drifted onto the ledge with the tide. That would explain why she suffered no damage.”



Norumbega next morning about one half tide



Norumbega at low tide



Norumbega, another angle at low water.



Norumbega, after she was freed from ledge.

BOOKS FOR SALE!

As visitors to the Country Store Museum are aware, the Historical Society carries a number of books which we think might be of interest to folks near and far. Some are historical in nature; others are of various sorts, with Tremont authors. The Directors have recently decided to offer these books by mail to readers of the Newsletter. The following list will serve as your catalog.

Books Available from the Tremont Historical Society

<u>Author</u>	<u>Title</u>	<u>Price</u>	<u>Plus 5% Tax</u>
Dean Lunt	Hauling by Hand <i>History of Frenchboro</i>	25.00	26.25
Wayne Libhart	The Jury is Out The Jury is Excused	10.00 14.95	10.50 15.70
Virginia Libhart	The Enchanted Land Carrie's Dream Carrie Makes Waves Makin' Do	8.95 8.95 8.95 8.95	9.40 9.40 9.40 9.40
Ruth Grierson	A is for Acadia	15.95	16.75
Ruth Moore	The Weir Spoonhandle The Fire Balloon Candlemas Bay Speak to the Winds A Walk Down Main Street Tired Apple Tree (poems)	10.95 10.95 15.00 10.95 10.95 10.95 8.50	11.50 11.50 15.75 11.50 11.50 11.50 8.90
<i>Native of Gott's Island, whose novels received the following plaudit from the New York Times: "It is doubtful if any American writer has ever done a better job of communicating a people, their talk, their thoughts, their geography and their way of life."</i>			
Sven Davisson, Ed.	Foley Craddock <i>Stories by Ruth Moore and Eleanor Mayo</i>	14.95	15.70
Sandy Phippen, Ed.	High Clouds <i>Letters of Ruth Moore</i>	16.95	17.80
Wendell Seavey	Working the Sea <i>Autobiographical</i>	15.95	16.75
Tremont Women's Club Muriel Trask Davisson, Ed.	Two Tall Tales <i>Serially written by 24 members of the Tremont Women's Club, 1940's and '50's</i>	9.95	10.45
Craig Milner & Ralph Stanley	Ralph Stanley: Tales of a Maine Boat Builder	24.95	26.20
Raymond C. S. Finney	Summers with Percy <i>A Biography of Percy Reed</i>	15.00	15.75

Book Orders should be sent to Tremont Historical Society, P.O. Box 215, Bass Harbor ME 04653. Please add shipping costs of \$3.00 per book, and 50 cents for each additional book in the same order.

We also have many copies of a booklet published in 1998, "The Historic Homes of the Town of Tremont," with photos and historical facts on 85 structures in the Town of Tremont. These booklets are available free on request. If mailed, we ask for a donation of \$1 to cover mailing costs.

The following Response Form gives readers of the Newsletter an opportunity to show support for our work in recording Tremont history and making various artifacts and materials available to the public through the Country Store Museum. Membership by payment of dues is only one way of doing this. Another is by responding to our Annual Appeal each year in late summer or early fall. For those who live in the area, we invite your offer of time and effort to help by staffing the Museum or work in other areas of interest to you. Please let us know of your interest in contributing to the fulfillment of our Mission.



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 \$10.00 per person for annual dues.

Please make checks payable to Tremont Historical Society

Dues paid at any time of the year will provide membership status through the next June.

Contributions to the Annual Fund in any amount carry membership status until the following June.

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

Name _____ Phone _____

Address _____

Check if this is a summer address _____ If different, please enter winter address below:

Address _____

If you would like to receive e-mail notices of meetings, etc. please enter address below.

E-mail address _____