

The Newsletter of the Tremont Historical Society

Vol. 11, No. 2

Summer 2008

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.

THE SEARCH FOR ESTHER II

In 1961 I lost my father to a coronary. The loss hit hard. Then his lobster boat, the Esther II, aboard which I had spent many happy hours, had to be sold – a second excruciating loss for me. Over the years after that I often thought of tracking her down, but life and the emotions associated with her kept me from doing it. This is the story of my long-deferred hunt.

*George Trask
Spring 2008*



See story inside....

The President's Page

Dear Fellow Members,

Summer is upon us and we are busy getting the Bass Harbor Country Store Museum ready to open. The Museum will reopen on July 2nd. This year it will be open on Monday and Wednesday afternoons from 1:00 – 4:00 pm. Our special exhibit this year will be about the granite quarries of Tremont done by Steven Haynes. Please contact me if you are interested in volunteering at the museum. My contact information appears below.

The Tremont Historical Society monthly programs resumed in March with Peter Bachelder talking about the Green Mountain (Cadillac Mountain) railway followed by Muriel Davisson speaking about the history of Bartlett's Island in April. The program at our May meeting was a talk on Consolidation of Tremont Schools by Ginny Libhart. On June 23 Irving Siverman will present the videotape of the dedication of the Sea Memorial at the Tremont Town Dock. On June 29 Dick Jordan will present a musical program, including a sing-a-long, at his grandparents' Sarah and Wilford Kittredge house at the head of the harbor. The house is now owned by Bill and Tina Baker and we appreciate their willingness to open their home for this program. Dennis Damon will give us Ruth Moore reminiscences and ballads at the annual meeting July 28 and Henry Raup will speak about Mount Desert Island place names on August 28th. All these meetings will be at the library in Bernard. Please join us if you can.

The annual appeal this past year raised \$5100. We are grateful to all loyal members and friends who contributed. The Town of Tremont voted to give the Society \$2500 again this year. The total of \$7600 is very close to our annual estimated expenses of about \$8000. Let's hope that fuel oil doesn't go up too much in the coming year!

We look forward to seeing you in the Museum this summer and at our monthly meetings if and when you are in the area. If there are topics you would like to hear about, please let me know. This is your Society – come and enjoy it.

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Sincerely,



Special Musical Program at the Kittredge House June 29—2:00 p.m.

Dick Jordan is celebrating the 75th wedding anniversary of his grandparents, Wilford and Sarah (Carroll) Kittredge, with a concert of show tunes and popular songs, a sing-along, and a display of genealogical materials from his research on his Carroll family connections. Ralph Stanley will provide additional materials on the Kittredge family, and the Gertrude Carroll diaries. This event will occur at the Kittredge homestead across from the Tremont Community Building, now the home of Bill and Tina Baker. Refreshments will be served. Watch the Bar Harbor Times for a story.

“Let’s Ask Ralph!”

We have initiated a new feature in our Newsletters. Questions of various sorts are posed, sometimes by your Editor and sometimes by you—and these go to our Historian, Ralph Stanley.

From the last issue, the Editor wants to “Let’s Ask Ralph” the following:

In the story by Malcolm MacDuffie about his memories of the steamer “Mohawk” calling at the sardine factory wharf in Southwest Harbor, I wondered which was the Allen Lawler house which his family rented for their vacation. When I asked Ralph at one of our Board meetings he was not sure, but Meredith Hutchins overheard my question and said she would research the matter. The following is her answer:

Dear John,

The house your grandfather rented in Southwest Harbor near the marina is most likely one of the two described below. I’ve taken the information from Thornton’s Traditions and Records of Southwest Harbor and Somesville, page 156.

House #1: “The small cottage occupied now by Mr. & Mrs. C.W. Lawler was once a smoke house built by Benjamin Robinson. Later he finished the upper story as an apartment and here Mrs. Hannah Woodworth (afterwards Mrs. William L. Gilley) lived and had a milliner’s shop. The building then stood down below the bank near its present site. Mr. Robinson moved it to the location it now occupies and his widow sold it to Allen J. Lawler.”

This house (covered with wood shingles) still exists at the end of Lawler Lane, SW Harbor, right at the edge of the water. It was lived in by Allen’s son Chris and Chris’s daughter, Rosemary Therriault and her husband, Eugene, until their deaths.

House #2: The next paragraph of Thornton after the one quoted above says: “Mr. Lawler [Allen] built his own residence about 1897.”

This house, much extended toward the shore, still exists between the stone house and Fiddler’s Green Restaurant on the right side of the road as you come into Southwest Harbor from Tremont.

Both houses are near the marina. Ralph Stanley might have further info that would elucidate the matter.

Best,
Meredith

In the further expansion of the details of the story about a July 4th excursion in 1871 from Ellsworth to Bass Harbor, I asked if anyone knew more about the Cough family who ran a store where Bob and Rosemary Tilden live today. I got a call from Della Dow who lives next door to the Tildens in the house which the Coughs occupied during those years. She provided me with a good deal of information on the family which I look forward to sharing in a future issue of this Newsletter. Ed.

RALPH'S PAGE

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

The following article came to me from Ralph's sister, Ruth S. Holmes. Ed.

THE MISSING BRANCH OF THE DIX FAMILY TREE

Several persons, in the past and recently, have compiled genealogies of the Dix family of Tremont. All those that I have read agree that William Dix (d. 17 Aug. 1814) and wife Eunice Tinker (d. 2 Nov. 1849) had at least three sons: Capt. Jonathan T. (d. 6 Oct. 1885), William and Capt. George (d. 16 Dec. 1894.) Jonathan (my ancestor) and George lived in Tremont, are buried in Hillrest Cemetery, and their wives and children are well known. However, the fate of brother William apparently remains a mystery.

I believe I can solve the mystery. The branch didn't fall far from the tree. William Dix married (Int. 25 Oct. 1825, Mt. Desert, both of Mt. Desert) Ann L. Grindle, daughter of Francis Grindle and his first wife, Judith Carter of Blue Hill. Francis is said to have come to Islesborough, Maine from Mt. Desert or Blue Hill when he was quite young. William (b. 20 August 1804, Tremont; d. 25 August 1876, Islesborough) and Ann (Grindle) Dix also settled in Islesborough.

In Farrow's 1893 *History of Scarborough, Maine* (reprinted 1965), pages 191 and 192, nine children of William and Ann Dix are listed. Dates of birth and names of spouses are included, and six grandchildren also are listed. More information on the family can be found on other pages. A booklet containing additions and corrections was reprinted in 1991 by Islesboro Historical Society, with an every name index. Interested genealogists will find many leads to further research.

Ruth S. Holmes
286 Maple St.
Kingfield ME 04947

In the next issue, we will share a story of a shipwreck in which the ship's captain was R.B. Dix. Ed.

Discover Your Family!
A Workshop on How to Do Genealogy
Sunday, June 29, 1:00-4:00 p.m.
Connors-Emerson School
Bar Harbor
Reserve a place by calling 276-9323

The panel of genealogists will include Thomas Vining, Ralph Stanley, Elaine Fernald, Sheldon Goldthwaite, Patti Leland-Hanson, and Bar Harbor Town Clerk Patricia Roy.

+ No charge to members of the Tremont Historical Society +

The Search for *Esther II* George Trask

In the late '30s or maybe as late as 1940, my father, Orville Trask, returned to Bass Harbor from a first career with Ditto, Inc., in Chicago, got married, had a boat built from a half-model he carved, and set out to make a living from the sea. That boat, the *Esther*, was built by Sim Davis at the Cold Storage and was launched in the spring of 1941. Dad used her lobstering at Mount Desert Rock winters, tub trawling for hake summers, and taking out parties at other times. She caught fire and burned coming around from Southwest Harbor to Bass Harbor in the late '40s. I don't remember much about her, even though there are family pictures of my sister Muriel and me aboard her, but her keel was on the beach down at Wonderland for many years and her mahogany stern washed up on the beach near our house in Bernard while I was in college in the early '60s.

With gear in the water at the time she burned, Dad needed another boat fast, so he bought one called the *Alma*. I don't know anything of her pedigree, but he didn't like her – too low-sided, and he couldn't swim.

So with financial help from my mother's sister Ruth Moore, he had his cousin Bobby Rich build the *Esther II* off the Sim Davis molds sometime in the early '50s, I think 1952. She spent a fair amount of time at the Rock, too, winter and summer. By 1955 the hake came back, so Dad decided to try trawling again. I was 12 and got to go with him. Thus began four summers of "education" which I loved and hated at different times, but have since come to look back on fondly. I learned a lot from that experience hakin' and achin' - about perseverance, the value of a dollar, and sunrises at sea.



Launching Day—ca. 1952

Then in January 1961 the family was stunned – me particularly – by Dad’s unexpected death from a coronary. The *Esther II* was sold south that summer to Brant Rock, Massachusetts, to a fisherman named Robert Dunbar, and I went off to college in the fall. Over the following 43 years I thought of her from time to time, more frequently at first, less so as time wore on. When something brought her to mind I would often wonder whether my decision to go to college instead of fishing her to pay off Dad’s gear bill had been the right choice. I thought about tracking her down many times, but never summoned the courage to go looking – even during 1984-85 when my family and I spent the school year in Boston while I went back to graduate school. I guess I was afraid I wouldn’t find her, and afraid I would.

On Saturday, November 4, 2004, an opportunity came along to go looking for her, and I decided to do it. My wife Jackie was headed to Boston on a day trip to go shopping with our middle daughter Amy. They wouldn’t need the car (easier to take the T into town) so I went along and continued on down the South Shore from Amy’s Quincy apartment to Brant Rock (which is part of Marshfield), not knowing how I was going to go about finding a fifty-something year old boat which had probably been hauled up into the cricks to die a long time ago.

Arriving there, I took a short drive around the head of the harbor and down the west side without seeing anything that resembled her, so turned around and went back to a small general store at the head of the harbor. Told my story to an older clerk there and asked if she knew of such a boat. She didn’t, but pointed to a street across the road and told me that if I followed it I would come to a big parking lot on the east side of the harbor, with a boat yard nearby. I might find someone there who would know more. So down I went.

I found the parking lot, but there wasn’t a soul around. I did, however, see what looked like a Ronald Rich boat a couple of rows into the boatyard. Walking in to look closer, I found a man (subsequently identified as Jim Fox, owner of the boatyard) working underneath her stern. I asked him if this was indeed a Ronald Rich boat. He looked me over carefully and then responded “Ayuh, how’d you know?” I introduced myself, explained my various connections with the Riches and why I was there. He kindly took me out around to the waterside of the shop and pointed out all the Rich-built boats that he knew of in the harbor. None of them was the *Esther II*. We walked back to his job and as he crawled back under Ronald’s hull he said, “If you want to know about Rich-built boats in Brant Rock, you need to talk to Ray Noyes. He’s owned 3 or 4 himself, and knows quite a lot about the others. He might know something about your father’s boat.”

So I hopped in the car and went back up to the store, where there was a phone booth. Found two listings for Ray Noyes and one for R. Noyes. With information about the neighborhood where Ray lived that Mr. Fox had provided, I got the right one on the first try. Mrs. Noyes said Ray was gone for the day but would be around all day Sunday, and that I could call back then. In my excited/disappointed state of mind I blurted out that I was only down from Maine for the day and would be going back that evening. Mrs. Noyes allowed as how the phone would probably work from Maine, too.

The next evening Ray and I had a nice chat. He told me that he had indeed owned several Bobby Rich and Chummy Rich boats, and not only did he know about the one that had once been Robert Dunbar’s, he had owned her!

He proceeded to tell me this story:

This saga will be continued in the next issue. Ed.



Esther II, now known as *Finestkind*, in sad state of repair as Ray Noyes found her at a Braintree MA boatyard—probably in the late 1980's or early 1990's.

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A Biography of Ruth Moore of Gott's Island, Maine

From the Introduction to *When Foley Craddock Tore Off My Grandfather's Thumb*, the Collected Stories of Ruth Moore and Eleanor Mayo, published 2004 by Blackberry Press, Nobleboro

By Sven Davisson

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Continued from last issue

The Maine they returned to in 1947 was drastically different from the one that Ruth had left in 1921 to attend New York State Teachers College (now SUNY, Albany.) Since the turn of the century, the fishing industry and the communities with which it was intertwined had undergone dramatic changes. Island villages had all but disappeared by the end of the 1920's. The gas engine eroded the significant advantages of living close to the fishing grounds. The young, who boarded off-island so that they could attend high school, felt little pull to return to the islands upon which they grew up. Charles B. McLane, author of *Islands of the Mid-Maine Coast*, notes "The Great Gott community held together longer than similar island communities in the area." After several important houses and community buildings burned in successive fires of 1927 and 1930, the exodus from Gott's began. When Ruth's parents, Philip and Lavina Moore, left in the early 1930's, closing post office and store, the island's fate was sealed.

Another significant factor in the changing coastal economy of the first half of the 20th century was the increased commodification of shore property. Choice shorefront lots became more valuable as salable parcels than as bases for fishing. The disparity between those buying and those selling the land meant that local people were, more often than not, taken advantage of. Ruth often told how her grandfather had warned against this process, "If you sell your land for money, what do you have when you've spent the money? Nothing." Ruth, who minored in economics at Albany, had a better comprehension of what was going on than most. Her work with the NAACP, no doubt, contributed greatly to broadening her understanding of the process of economic pillage directed against a disadvantaged people. It's no coincidence that she included a black family among those taken advantage of in *Spoonhandle*. The irony of the quick dollar meant that the local fishing community had sold en masse their connection to their livelihood—the coastal meeting of land and sea. This process occurred all along the New England coast. It is an issue that the Maine Legislature is grappling to come to terms with to this day.

Ruth and Eleanor's house remained the center of their activities for forty years. Ruth wrote twelve more novels and three books of poetry there. Eleanor completed five more, three published and two still in manuscript. The house and its outlying buildings are a testament to the two's diverse interests: antique glass bottles, Native American artifacts, old maps, fossils and geologic specimens clutter every available inch. They gardened extensively, the skills Ruth learned while managing the Hobarts' Martinez ranch showing through in an eclectic apple orchard outside her bedroom window and an arbor of grapes outside Eleanor's. They treasured their privacy—even resorting to having their guesthouse towed away in an attempt to discourage visitors. They constructed a secluded shoreside camp that Ruth could escape to and write undisturbed. Soon enough they settled back, once again becoming enduring fixtures in the fabric of village life. At the annual town meeting held in March of 1950, Eleanor was elected "second selectman, assessor and overseer of the poor." She was the first woman ever elected to serve on Tremont's Board of Selectmen. She continued to serve the Town in one capacity or another until the late 1970's.

Ruth credited the longevity of their relationship to adhering to a strict policy where "nobody meddled." Eleanor was a skilled editor and read Ruth's manuscripts before anyone else. Their creativity was mutually intertwined. When Eleanor succumbed to a brain tumor in 1981, the event devastated Ruth. Her voice still broke, years later, describing it: "My friend who lived with me for some forty years, she was a great deal younger than I, died in 1981 and she had cancer and for the last three years of her life I took care of her here, without sending her away to the hospital until she had to go. When

she died I was exhausted. I didn't feel like writing or doing anything for a very long time." In letters written during the time following Eleanor's death, Ruth described herself as having "lost her guts." She explicitly credited the poet Gary Lawless with reenergizing her to begin writing again. After unsuccessfully attempting to interest other Maine publishers in reissuing her work, Lawless contacted Ruth about doing the job himself through his Blackberry Books imprint. She agreed, and so began a continuing project of republishing her books. Without Lawless' intervention it is likely that most of the poetry in the posthumously released collection *The Tired Apple Tree* would never have been written.

Ruth noted the irony that the revival of her books came at the time of, and was due in no small part to, the upsurge of interest in Maine regional writing in general—known as the Maine Renaissance. Driven by the national attention focused on Carolyn Chute and her novel *The Beans of Egypt Maine*, there was a huge surge of interest in Maine writing during the 1980's. Amidst all the attention swirling around Ms. Chute, a few voices spoke up reminding everyone that there was a writer who had "outdone the Beans" and done it almost a half-century before. It was with this that Ruth Moore was elevated to her rightful place as the "grandmother" of Maine letters.

Throughout her career Ruth resisted the "regional" label. In conversation, she recalled how she would go to after Thayer Hobson, her publisher, for casting her as a regional author. It was certainly good marketing at the time—lending authenticity and novelty, in no small part, in an attempt to increase sales. With good reason, she aggressively resisted the label. In a letter to Sandy Phippen on 1 August 1980, she said the "regional" was one of only two words she considered obscene, the other being "interview." Maine, she argued, "is a microcosm of everywhere else." Maine is in its way a chimera—an affluent suburb of Boston in the south, Appalachian poverty in the north and uncomfortable mix of amusement park and commercial fishery along the midcoast and Downeast. Ruth was adept at capturing the incongruities and tensions of Maine in a way that rings as true today as it when she wrote them. Being known as a regional writer comes with its own particular costs. Lost in all this talk of Maine writing is the fact that Ruth was a significant player on the national literary stage. *Spoonhandle* sold over a million copies in its day, was a national bestseller and was one of the books the nation was reading in 1946.

In her time, Ruth was hailed as "New England's only answer to Faulkner." She was a regional writer only in the sense that one could call Faulkner regional, in that he wrote of his "postage stamp of soil." Both writers had the gift of capturing the universal in the local. John Gould in his *Times* review of *Candlemas Bay* observed "To deal in human universals, making the individual everybody yet keeping him a sacred self, is a gift most writers lack."

A novel about New York City or Chicago is ever and always about New York City or Chicago, while a novel about a Maine island of Jefferson, Mississippi, in adept hands, could be about any place in the world. *The New York Times* said of Ruth, "It is doubtful if any American writer has ever done a better job of communicating a people, their talk, their thoughts, their geography, their way of life." The secret that underlies her success at capturing a people and their locale was her solid, steadfast adherence to a basic philosophy:

"The only thing I really try to do is not to tell a lie about a place," she stated. "If I'm describing something, I know what I'm describing. I just tell the truth about what there is."

+ + +

This biography of Ruth Moore has been published in three issues of this Newsletter. Ed.

We are pleased to share the three issues in which this biography of Ruth Moore is published with the members of the Gott's Island Association, with the help of its Secretary, E. Northwood Kenway. We invite those folks to become members of the Tremont Historical Society and thus regular subscribers to this Newsletter. Ed.

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

Author	Title	Price	Plus 5% Tax
Abbe Museum	The Indian Shell Heap	\$ 7.50	\$ 7.88
Dean Lunt	Hauling by Hand <i>History of Frenchboro</i>	25.00	26.25
Wayne Libhart	The Jury is Out	10.00	10.50
Wayne Libhart	The Jury is Excused	14.95	15.70
Virginia Libhart	The Enchanted Land	8.95	9.40
Virginia Libhart	Carrie's Dream	8.95	9.40
Nan Lincoln	The Summer of Cecily	17.95	18.85
Nan Lincoln	Cecily's Summer	16.95	17.80
Ruth Moore	The Weir	10.95	11.50
Ruth Moore	Spoonhandle	10.95	11.50
Ruth Moore	The Fire Balloon	15.00	15.75
Ruth Moore	Candlemas Bay	10.95	11.50
Ruth Moore	Speak to the Winds	10.95	11.50
Ruth Moore	A Walk Down Main Street	10.95	11.50
Ruth Moore	Tired Apple Tree (poems)	8.50	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 Two Tall Tales
Muriel Trask Davisson, Ed.

9.95

10.45

Serially written by 24 members of the Tremont Women's Club, 1940's and '50's

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.

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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 _____

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.

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

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