

The Newsletter of the Tremont Historical Society

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



Viola Benson Watson photo

Last time I issued a challenge to the imaginations of readers. I asked you to study this photo with care, and consider various features showing themselves, and suggest in your communication: What is happening in the lower left quadrant? How do you explain the curious objects on the roof of the building near the center of the photo? What is likely to be found in the large round containers on the wharf? What about the schooner at the head of the wharf? Can you tell us anything about the dory? What kind of small boats are represented by the portions you can see to the far right? What is that tall pointed structure rising above the roofs? Why does the peak of the roof to the left of center appear spiky and ragged?

Your Editor, I explained, in his ivory tower (otherwise known as Red House) overlooking Thurston's and a portion of Mooring Basin A in recently dredged Bass Harbor, slaving away to produce this occasional Newsletter, gets lonesome at times and wishes he had some word of response from readers.

Well, I now have the pleasure to share with you three such responses which tickled my fancy as I'm sure they'll tickle yours!

J. MacD., Ed

Response #1, from Lee Minkler of Charlotte, Vermont—a long-time summer resident:

My Dad and I would go hand lining with Ralph (Benson), and unload the catch at the old wharf that appears in the picture. In the lower left are the fish-drying racks. As I remember they were quite extensive, and took up a good portion of the cove where the parking spaces are now. The curious objects are the smoke stacks from the wood stoves that heated the fisherman's workshops. The large round containers would be bait barrels, but I think that many of those objects are the stacked boxes that the dried fish are packed in for shipping. The schooner is tied up where the davits were located for loading, and unloading the boats. We would use a two-tined fork, much like a three-tined hay fork, to transfer the fish that we had caught, from the boarded off bins on the cockpit sole of Ralph's boat, a 1954 Bunker and Ellis 34 footer, with a 48 hp, hand-start Redwing marine engine, into the bucket that was lowered down from the davits, and hauled back up by a donkey motor, on the wharf. The schooner itself I would guess to be a typical two-masted coaster of the early 1900s, of about eighty feet, hauling maybe salt, dried fish, salted fish, or even a wet hold with live lobsters. The dory would appear to be just a typical Banks style, with hard chines. As for the two boats that we can only see the sterns of, I would guess that they are both power boats by the fact that on the farthest one you would see the aft end of the boom if it was a sailboat, as the gaff-rigged boats of that era had very long booms. The nearer one has a lifted, and then reversed transom which was a common design for a power boat of that time. It must be just before high tide as there is no wind, and both boats on moorings are facing out the harbor. I think that the tall pointed object is a non-operational wind mill with the filled-in part being a water tank. The pointy objects on the far roof ridge would be seagulls, but it is rather strange that there is only one seagull on the nearer roof. Thanks for the fun, Lee

Response #2 is from Alan MacDuffie of Cape Elizabeth, Maine—the Editor's #2 son:

OK, here goes:

Photo was taken around 1912 in Bass Harbor, Maine. It's a Tuesday, about 1:30 pm. Tide is nearly high. Fish is haddock, caught the day before. Joe and Bill are doing the flaking. They just had a fight about which of their wives could bake the best pie. Classic schooner, dory, and motor launch visible in the water. The dory needs to be bailed. The lobster traps on the roof are the result of a dare amongst the men about who could chuck a trap that high in the air. The photographer was from Boston, name of Gilbert, come up on the train to Bangor, and horse-drawn wagon from there.

Am I close?

Al

Response #3, from Rev. Colin Windhorst of Dennysville, Maine—a clergy colleague who spends a week each year as a “color commentator” on the windjammer Mary Day out of Camden; he is also an active and studious member of the Dennysville River Historical Society:

Ahoy! Mr. Editor,

This is just to follow up on the lovely job you are doing on the Newsletter of the Tremont Historical Society from your “ivory tower”, with all those wonderful pictures, My guesses as to the specifics are :

- The man in the lower left at the fish flakes is stacking the dried cod under wooden covers, perhaps in anticipation of possible precipitation --the sky looks overcast and the water calm with a possible storm coming on.
- The hogsheads (they appear bigger than regular barrels) are for packing the dried fish, driven in hard with a rammer and pressed to accommodate over one hundred pounds each.
- The shed along the wharf with the small stove pipes could be a can manufacturing shop, currently idle (there is no smoke), but usually redolent with the smell of charcoal, hot solder and tobacco juice.
- The schooner is a seiner of some kind unloading fish to be processed, either herring, cod or mackerel, and very fragrant.
- The good sized dory alongside the wharf is probably a tender for all purpose work.
- Behind the cannery rises the water tower, and beyond that is the roof of a smokehouse decorated with gulls; a top of mast with the hint of a yard is visible between water tower and the smoke stack on the factory roof
- On the right we can just see the fantail of a small sloop and the tip of a double-ender(?)
- On the roof at the center of the building appears to be some kind of access hatch—I am mystified on this one!

All in all it looks like quite a busy place, though the absence of more workers suggests they are either inside or have finished for the day.

These are my surmises--Please let me know your thoughts!

So, Shipmates, you see how three brilliant minds can garner rich harvests of meaningful historical data from a single photo from that bygone era when cameras had pieces of glass inserted into their innards to record scenes and stories of note to all future generations. Ed.



Photo by Viola Benson Watson

This wonderful picture, published in the previous issue, occasions the need for the Editor to write a short article, following, about something exhibited here that might not be known by all our readers.

The Strange and Wonderful Art of “Reversing on the Switch”

The Friendship Sloop pictured here, with a harbor full of similar vessels behind her making up the fishing fleet of Bass Harbor in the early part of the 20th century, is obviously not under sail as she approaches the wharf on which Viola Benson Watson is standing with her camera focused. She is returning from a day of lobstering, ready to unload her catch at the wharf on the spot where to this day F.W. Thurston Co. of Bernard receives the produce of modern lobstermen on a daily basis.

This vessel is among those which made the first and most significant move toward a new era by installing a marine engine, down in her bilges inside the small cuddy just aft of the mast. This would have been a single-cylinder, two-cycle engine which had three prominent features that a modern inquirer must be sure to understand: the engine could only be started by hand; there was no neutral or reverse gear; and such engines are capable of running either forward or backward, according to which direction is chosen when being manually started.

Now consider the awkwardness of the scene you are looking at in this picture: this rather heavy vessel is moving toward the wharf “with all deliberate speed” but soon must come to a stop alongside. But in order to reverse the engine to provide the “brakes” to her forward motion, it must be stopped and then re-started in the opposite rotation. But the skipper of this vessel is one person, who needs to steer as well as operate his power plant. To re-start the engine he needs to be down in the bowels of her, facing the engine’s flywheel, so he can start it in reverse. Not an easy task, especially if he is still wearing his oil-pants and jacket as well as his boots. And from the starting position he needs to be back in the cockpit rather quickly, so that as she comes alongside the wharf he can pass a line around a piling to keep her from blowing off or drifting back. (It is high water; Tryhouse Point is covered so it has lost its usual capacity to be a breakwater for the western side of the harbor; and it’s rather breezy this afternoon.)

Well, what resource does our skipper have to meet these challenges? One more capacity of a two-cycle, make-and-break marine engine has not been mentioned. It is possible to throw the engine into reverse by the simple manipulation of the ignition switch (typically a knife-switch mounted on a convenient bulkhead.) The skilled operator opens the switch to stop the motor, and then closes it again at the exact time when the forward momentum of the engine reaches the right point in its rotation, so that if spark to the cylinder is restored, the engine resumes combustion in the opposite direction! It’s called “reversing on the switch.” It’s almost as simple as moving a lever on a modern lobster boat from the forward to the reverse position.

I said “almost.” The difference, of course, is that the precisely correct timing of the use of the switch is crucial. Fishermen who used this method of maneuvering their vessels under power, no doubt, got to be very skillful in doing so. Their approach to wharves probably became as routine as similar operations we are all familiar with (parallel parking, anyone?) But – BUT – something can always go wrong, and from time to time surely one of these engines or engine operators might have slipped up. And when an engine which a skipper intends to start in a reverse direction happens to continue its operation cheerfully in a forward direction when the wharf is close, and—who knows—the stern of another vessel already tied up there, just ahead of the intended berth of the arriving vessel, looms up: ructions can occur!

This is enough to illuminate your study of the wonderful picture which we have published, along with the wharf picture, twice. Think about it. Enjoy it. Imagine what might be just about to happen. +++

THE STEERSMEN

By Arthur Kellam

Here is episode 3 of the mystery written by Art Kellam of Placentia Island, found in his desk which was donated to the Historical Society last year.

RENTAL POSITION FILLED BUT NEW ONE OPENING INTERAMCO FIELD SURVEY
EASTERN BOLIVIA SAILING SIX WEEKS ELEVEN HUNDRED MONTH CAN HOLD
EIGHT DAYS THANKS AGAIN FOR YOUR HELP Signed PRESCOTT

“Thank you. Please mail that over to me in the morning.”

Vernon started to hang up, then lightly struck the receiver hook with an impulsive finger, and continued to listen. A moment later, he returned to the comfortable but plainly furnished living room, shutting the hall door needlessly hard. He gave a sigh and a somewhat rueful laugh as he sank back in his fireside chair.

“There you are, Frank. That was very timely. I couldn’t have asked for a better example of what I was talking about.”

As firmly and deliberately as he did most things, the Reverend Francis Vernon Stone closed a small book and placed it on a nearby table. His heavy and muscular frame seemed somehow at odds with the thin, acute face that he turned toward his cousin. Narrow, sharp brows and hair still black heightened the contrasts in him. He frowned a little, in mild perplexity.

“I don’t follow you. That wasn’t any bad news just now, I hope?”

“No, no. Not bad news. Not at all. Just news. It got rather a poor spread tonight, though, I must admit. Only five people hung up, after they thought I had. Maybe that Minton monitor is still listening. What would the Winter Point Committee on Subsolar Affairs do without her, I wonder?”

“They would mourn her. And they would mean it, too.” The minister’s voice then lost its unwonted edge. “They would even miss either of us, I think.”

“Oh, undoubtedly. Body and soul.” Vernon made an apologetic gesture and ran a stubby hand distractedly through his hair. “All right, Frank, I’m sorry. But they’ve been getting me down a little, lately, and I don’t think their gossip’s funny, any more. I did, when I thought their interest friendly; I’m not sure it’s even neutral, now. God bless the doctor in this house, but the Devil take him for a neighbor! I didn’t bury myself down here to have everyone dodge my eye or talk me short.”

The minister took his time refueling the fire, adjusting the wood until the flames crackled up between the pieces brightly. He remained on one knee, smiling thoughtfully at the blaze.

“Even after eight years, I sometimes find them a little hard to understand, too. I wonder whether you really try, Charles.”

“I cer-tain-ly do. I’ve tried and tried and tried. But dammit, there’s something wrong, and I can’t seem to find out what it is.” Willingly diverted by a whimsical thought, Vernon shed his hasty, worried manner. “Sherlock Holmes had it easy, the lucky devil. Half his clients seemed to come in with some trick kind of mud all over them, to help deductions along. In my case, the mud’s on me, boys. Source unknown.”

Stone laughed freely and made a quick decision. With a quizzical glance, he said, “Well, you might be worse off. There’s so little mud down at Summerlee Head these days, anyway.”

The younger man frowned and tapped his foot and was not amused, merely replying, “That makes you part of the grapevine.”

“You know I am. But just a minor tendril, Charles; rather a withered one, in fact. I contribute nothing, which greatly vexes the vine, I’m sure. They’re too simple and direct to understand that I never force your confidence.”

“Well, I see that, all right. Thanks, incidentally. Say, what in hell do you suppose those coots were doing down there, anyway? It was twelve above, that day.”

The minister looked at him earnestly, almost wistfully. “Honestly, Charles, don’t you know?”

“All I know about it is that I was snubbed right down to the ground—and not for the first time, either. I used to like this place and wanted to belong here. But I’d better tell you now, I’m thinking of leaving, and that’s about when I started to. So maybe I’ll not have to ask any favor of Elder Summerlee, after all.”

Incongruously, the other laughed and said, “Of course you won’t!”

During the puzzled pause this gave the doctor, Stone swung his chair around and faced him. Still smiling, he waited until Vernon was about to speak, then spoke, himself.

“They probably want me to handle this, anyway. Now, whatever those men were doing there, they weren’t snubbing you. They never have. Dan was rather rattled and didn’t think very quickly, Charles. Nobody expected you down there, in that weather, and I suppose he thought that his surprise was partly spoiled. He was bound and determined that it must be a surprise, and the rest of us agreed; after all, it was his land and he gave it freely.

“I couldn’t do much, but I did write to a couple of summer people. They will take care of some of the building materials and nearly all of the furnishings and clinic equipment. Nancy Purcell should have her R.N. in the spring, and offers to help you. It’ll all come to a few more mills on the dollar. Some of the men, of course, can contribute little but mere labor.”

One more installment remains. Are you beginning to get the drift? Ed.

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IN MEMORIAM – Arlene Mitchell Bartlett 1929-2013

Arlene was a Bernard girl, daughter of a fisherman and a millinery store owner, member of Pemetie High School’s class of 1947, and apparently always interested in the history of our town. When our museum, the Bass Harbor Country Store, was operating in part as an outlet for local crafts and baked goods in the summers, Arlene was one of its proprietors. But her heyday was when she served as president of the Tremont Historical Society, during the time of the major effort of a capital campaign and extensive renovation and improvement of the Store to make it a true Museum for the town.

Arlene and her devoted husband and helper Bob spent untold hours at the Museum, putting artifacts on display and cataloging photos and other records of life in Tremont during its long history. It was more than a hobby for her—it almost seemed a passion and a career.

So we pay grateful tribute to Arlene Mitchell Bartlett for her legacy which still blesses us and our visitors, who give us many compliments on the variety and interest of our holdings.



This delightful harbor scene, borrowed from the Town of Tremont historical site, brings particular pleasure to your Editor, as it is the exact slice of Bass Harbor which I see every day from my home on the Bernard shore just above Thurston's Wharf and Lobster Pound. The smallish but truly neat and inviting sloop moored in the foreground, is too small to be a work-boat, I believe—she smacks of pleasant afternoon sails when the summer weather is just right. And this reminds me powerfully of the sloop IF, my first boat with a very similar appearance (except for the clipper bow and long bowsprit) which was moored in approximately the same spot in the summers of 1947 to 1953. A part of her story, and mine, follows. Ed.

BRINGING IF TO MT. DESERT

By John MacDuffie

During my years around Bass Harbor as a summer kid, beginning when I was 10, rowing around the harbor provided many pleasures and a lot of room for my imagination to roam freely. I poked around wharves, and sometimes under them, just to see what was there. I rowed up to the head of Bass Harbor, past Bobby Rich's boat shop and over to John's Island, where I could land and inspect derelict boats and lobster cars on the beaches. "Up the creek" to the lovely pool by the Rich Cemetery on the Bernard Road, under the bridge and into the winding marsh passage where the water was delightfully warm for swimming, though its slimy bottom was never fun to touch with bare feet—these were part of a domain in which my parents felt secure that I could come to no harm.

The boat for my transport was a pram about 7 feet long, actually designed by naval architect Billy Atkin and using the name he gave to the model—*Petey*. She had once been tender to Dad's yawl *May Mischief*, built in the early 30's at Southwest Boat Corp., but sold when a summer home was much more urgently needed than a cruising boat. *Petey* was my best friend in those years as a rather solitary kid who was his

own preferred companion. But dreaming reached far beyond just a little rowing in a protected harbor. I was on the hunt for a boat in which I could sail far away to explore a world of excitement and adventure. While wintering in Ellsworth, I haunted Guy Closson's little boat yard on the shore of Union River Bay, where a variety of vessels were hauled out, some of them permanently. The most fascinating, not hauled out but moored at a small wharf, was the schooner *Alice S. Wentworth*, a venerable coaster in rather tough condition, being slowly repaired by a retired schoonerman who was brother to the owner of the yard.

And it was he who revealed, when I inquired if he knew of any small sailboats for sale, that he in fact owned one that he might part with. She was 16 feet by about 5, a former seine skiff that he had remodeled with a centerboard trunk, outdoor rudder, bowsprit and gaff rig, properly decked, and very cute to look at. Her price was \$125. The spring I bought her was 1947, and I made many bike trips to her berth on the shore to get some paint on her and rig her for a sailing adventure when school let out. For I was determined, at age 16 and not exactly an experienced sailor, to bring her to Bass Harbor myself. My father was complicit in this scheme, apparently believing that I could not get into very much trouble in those semi-protected waters along the west shore of MDI, where numerous lobster fishermen would be nearby to rescue me. Maybe he thought I was somehow charmed with his own life-long fascination and intuitive skills at sea.

IF, as I named her after a sloop my grandfather had owned when he was about my age, was moved down the shore so she would float on the tide the day before the adventure. She was anchored overnight to begin the swelling of her dried-out seams from prolonged storage in a barn. The next morning after I picked up my final report card at Ellsworth High School, Dad drove me down first thing and set me aboard in a borrowed punt with my lunch and a chart. His only advice, as I remember it, was to tie in a reef, as we had a pretty fresh NW breeze that was perfect for a sail to the south'ard. I dutifully did that, and started out with a rush. I cannot begin to describe the joy of that beginning—off on my own, rushing forward with the fresh breeze at my back, captain of my own vessel, totally confident that this maiden voyage would be triumphantly successful!

Dad told me later that he drove down to Oak Point Lobster Pound at the opening of Union River Bay into Mount Desert Narrows. He said he was not the least bit surprised, as he saw me sailing by, that I had already shaken out that reef and was kiting along joyfully, having my hands full to keep her on course as she tried to take charge with the following breeze and sea almost surfing her along. My own memory of that first couple of hours was that it was exciting, all right, and a challenge for sure to control her—but I was mostly aware of the sound of bilgewater from seams not yet fully swelled, sloshing against floorboards. I had my hands full steering—how was I going to pump her out?

Well, I learned soon enough that you can heave to, after a fashion, while you pump—and you'd better do it, too, because the more water she had in her, the harder she was to steer and the more drunkenly she rolled. This was my periodic pursuit throughout that day, but the favoring breeze held and the only challenge, really, was that I had to beat into Bass Harbor when I got there, rounding Lopaus Point and discovering how well she'd go to windward, when all was said and done.

I really can't answer questions like, "How did you know what you were doing, if you'd never sailed this boat before, didn't know the waters, had no adult with you to coach you, just mainly sailed off into the unknown with really no skills, no experience, no training?" And even more, I have no idea how my

father could allow this foolhardy adventure in the first place. It would not seem to have been good judgment on his part, would it? I've often asked myself if I would have sent my son off at that age under those circumstances.

At last, I can say this. My own #2 son, Alan, (whose whimsical piece you might have read earlier in this publication) seems to have inherited similar proclivities and intuitive skills, for though he did not start at age 16, he has always had an amazing aptitude for sailing. And I have never worried much about him when he was afloat. So there may be something, after all, which explains how I could make that voyage without mishap, and how my Dad could have gone about his day's work in Ellsworth while it was happening, apparently serene and secure. When I got the boat moored in Bass Harbor, borrowed a punt and came ashore, I found I was right on time to catch the mail truck back to Ellsworth, and walked into the kitchen at home as supper was put on the table!

Believe it or not, all this is true!

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BOOKS FOR SALE!

<u>Author</u>	<u>Title</u>	<u>Price</u>	<u>Plus 5.5% Tax</u>
NEW!			
Capt. Ray Williamson	Maine Windjammer Cruises <i>Keeping the Tradition Alive</i> 11" x 14" "coffee-table" book filled with photos of schooners in old and newer times, pursuing the windjammer trade pioneered by Capt. Frank Swift in the 1940's and thriving today.	48.00	50.64
DVD			
Chummy Rich: Maine Boatbuilder	<i>The Building of Andromeda</i>	Members 14.95	15.77
Peter B. Blanchard III Photos by David Graham	We Were an Island <i>The Maine Life of Art & Nan Kellam</i>	27.95	29.49
Raymond C.S. Finney	Summers with Percy <i>A Biography of Percy Reed</i>	15.00	15.83
Dean Lunt	Hauling by Hand <i>History of Frenchboro</i>	25.00	26.38
Christina Gillis	Writing on Stone <i>Gott's Island</i>	24.95	26.32
Ruth Grierson (text) Richard Johnson (photos)	A is for Acadia	15.95	16.83
Wayne Libhart	The Jury is Out The Jury is Excused	10.00 14.95	10.55 15.77
Virginia Libhart	The Enchanted Land	8.95	9.44

	Carrie's Dream (ages 12-15)	8.95	9.44
	Carrie Makes Waves (ages 12-15)	8.95	9.44
	Makin' Do (ages 12-15)	8.95	9.44
Ruth Moore	The Weir	14.95	15.77
	Spoonhandle	13.95	14.72
	The Fire Balloon	15.00	15.83
	Candlemas Bay	10.95	11.55
	Speak to the Winds	10.95	11.55
	A Walk Down Main Street	10.95	11.55
	(NEW) Time's Web (<i>poems</i>)	13.95	14.72
<i>Ruth Moore, 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	14.95	15.77
	<i>Stories by Ruth Moore and Eleanor Mayo</i>		
Sandy Phippen, Ed.	High Cloud- <i>Letters of Ruth Moore</i>	16.95	17.88
Paul S. Richardson	The Creation and Growth of Acadia National Park	29.95	31.60
Wendell Seavey	Working the Sea <i>Autobiographical</i>	15.95	16.83
Sheldon "Smitty" Smith	Memories of a Lifetime (poems)	10.00	10.55
Craig Milner & Ralph Stanley	Ralph Stanley: Tales of a Maine Boat Builder	24.95	26.32
Tremont Women's Club Muriel Trask Davisson, Ed.	Two Tall Tales	9.95	10.50
	<i>Serially written by 24 members of the Tremont Women's Club, 1940's and '50's</i>		

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.

The charge for shipping the Chummy Rich DVD is \$3.05.

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, or contributions to the Annual Fund in any amount, provide membership through the next June.

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

Name(s) _____

Address _____

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

Address _____

E-mail address for meeting notices ___ or this Newsletter__ (please check which)

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**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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FALL 2013 NEWSLETTER