

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.



Photos by Viola Benson Watson

Here are two delightful scenes, at least to the eyes of this devotee of little, low-powered launches in which one can go out from a harbor like ours with a child perched on the fore-deck, perhaps headed for a picnic on Gott's Island or at Ship Harbor or Placentia. This little boat, about 20-22 feet, has a watermelon hood for wet weather or rough water, supported by that bow athwartships. The engine, most likely a two-cycle make-and-break single cylinder, perhaps a Mianus or Hartford or even a Palmer or Gray of 3 to 5 horsepower, is installed near the stern under that sliding hatch behind the skipper. It is thus protected from getting any stray ropes or clothing or hands tangled in its spinning or plunging or superheated parts—and of course the human beings aboard are protected as well! The harbor will be reverberating just now from the staccato explosions of the little engine, with its distinctive tone and nuance which can be identified instantly by every harbor habitue and most of the neighbors. "There goes

Capt. Benson with his precious little granddaughter, out for some fun. Hope it don't breeze up too smart before they get back."

In the harbor you can see the Watson Wharf, later Thurston's, in its earlier configuration. Peapods, punts, sloops, and at least one launch of the fantail-stern variety are seen nearby. It must have been a few years into the 20th century

This cover photo will serve to introduce what we call The Watson Collection of over 100 glass negatives left in the attic of the Watson house on Tremont Road near the corner of Lopaus Pt. Rd., and given to us by Dr. Pam Watson, whose husband's great-grandfather was Dr. Willis Watson. The photos were taken by Dr. Watson's wife, Viola, a member of the Benson family whose progenitor, Benjamin, built the homestead on the Bernard shore, Steamboat Wharf Road, where the Editor of this publication resides today. We hope to share many more of these wonderful images in the pages of our Newsletter, currently and in future. Ed.

THE STEERSMEN

By Arthur Kellam

We continue with the second installment of the story written at Placentia Island in 1953 by Art Kellam, for a story contest sponsored by Atlantic Magazine. The first installment found Doctor Vernon receiving a registered letter at the local post office as a storm gathers over the harbor. Ed.

Aunt Jane Minton lived on the big hill across the harbor, just where the telephone line, after reeling drunkenly along the shore, left the road and staggered off through the woods. For Aunt Jane—three longs and a short—it was a good central location; the mere technical apparatus of the exchange was stored over the post office, in charge of another Miss Patterson. Too rich for contempt and too poor for envy, Widow Minton was everyone's confidante, and it did not seem to matter that nearly everyone was hers.

Two days after the tremendous news about Dr. Vernon, she rocked placidly in her kitchen chair, braiding a rug and still simmering, like many another, with speculation as to the size of his inheritance. But the topic's very brightness evoked a certain shadow. Although no one had yet decided on the figure, there had quickly arisen a widespread uneasiness that the village soon might be again without a resident physician. She rocked harder, and wished that the telephone would ring.

The diversion that came was only Berlin, the grocery boy. He climbed the porch steps noisily, exchanged a nod with her in passing a window, and entered, adroitly bumping the back door shut.

"Put the box on the table, Berl. Any mail?"

"Ayuh. Just ads and your bill from Doc Vernon, though." He rummaged in one end of the laden crate.

"Well, thanks anyway. If you still like doughnuts after the last time, go look in that big crock over there. I made a little million of 'em yestiddy."

She laughed and looked through the mail, sorting out a few merchandise coupons with a practiced eye, until only a small sealed envelope remained.

"Return in five days to CHARLES E. VERNON M.D.," she read, in a mincing tone. "All right, Charles E., M.D., I may pay you sooner than that. Little you need my money, though. Say, Berl, have you heard anything more about where he might go?"

“Nope.” Then, after a busy pause to regain speech, “Ma was talkin’ to old lady Hammond this mornin’. She don’t know nothin’, either.”

“Pshaw! Much she’d learn, poor thing. Besides, the doctor’s gone most of the time she’s there, and Rev. Stone’s a regular clam, drat him.”

“Well, maybe he’s not goin’, anyway. Nothin’ much wrong with those doughnuts, Aunt Jane.”
“You might take another handful and tell Lucy Patterson to come have lunch here today, will you?”

As the little truck sputtered away dutifully down the hill, the old lady sighed, then settled her bifocals accurately into place.

Winter Point, Maine
November 23, 1940

Sir:

I will have nothing whatever to do with your proposal. I little foresaw this ...

“Oh my goodness,” gasped Aunt Jane, “Oh me, oh my!”

With trembling hands, she refolded the letter and tried irresolutely to force it back into its envelope...

Sir:

I will have nothing whatever to do with your proposal. I little foresaw this when I last attended the late Mr. Prescott. It is at least some help to me that you presume to put your bribing offer into writing. Threaten his son or impede probate in any way, and I will personally hand over your letter to Mr. Duell. Should that not suffice, I will then act further to expose you, if it takes every cent I have.

I want no reply from you.

Charles E. Vernon

Badly flustered, she folded the latter smaller and smaller, as she moved aimlessly about the house. Returning to the kitchen, she lifted the stove lid, then hesitated, as common sense began to return. The letter was firmly readdressed to the doctor and propped up prominently on the kitchen table, for Miss Patterson to take. This was hardly done before the telephone rang, mercifully. It even rang three longs and a short.

Summerlee Head was a cliffy promontory standing about eighty feet above high water, at the upper end of the harbor. Its top comprised four or five acres of fairly open spruce and fir, fringed with a strip of long wild grass curving over to the rocky brink. The grass was dry and slippery in summer, and, after a serious accident some years past, old Dan Summerlee had strengthened the line fence back near the road, had posted notices, and had generally laid down the law on trespass and responsibility.

Dan, like his father before him, owned a big house and a boat shop down the harbor, and the headland had been up for sale, halfheartedly, for a long time. Dan’s taxes on it were small, but his price was tremendous and something of a joke, even among the summer people.

With the light early snow of winter blown away, the ground was tightening deep and hard with frost when Vernon drove slowly down a rough dirt road and parked near the boundary of the property. As a

place to walk and think and be alone, he had come to feel that the grove and the point were, in a sense, his own. A hurried trip to Boston had left him tired and dull, and he wondered whether a short turn in the dim, quiet cold would help, today.

Even before reaching the fence, he received the first discordant impression. A little way off and somewhat obscured by bushes, a section of the wires had been rolled back, and a faint track of wheels, accented by an occasional frozen rut, wound away through the woods. Hoping that this meant only a late autumn harvest of deadwood, Vernon passed through the gap. Though he felt some irritation at it still being open, he postponed restoration of the fence and followed the traces. Under the trees, the cold was sharp but stimulating. Walking quickly, he soon began to catch an irregular mumble of voices ahead, varied by gruff laughter and the clink of metal. With so little wind in the grove, the doctor was not aware of smoke until he had nearly reached the group of men.

There were six of them, all fishermen except Dan, who was evidently directing operations. On the crown of the promontory, a few trees had been cut to clear a space, and several stumps, bored and primed with oil, were burning reluctantly. A rusty steel drum contained a livelier fire, near which Dan and another stood. While Vernon approached, the latter gave up his place to a third man and resumed work with the others in a shallow rectangular trench, outlined by stakes and cords. The dull sun glimmered on marks left in the frozen soil by pick and bar. It was bitter hard work, and the four in the trench were half hidden by the cloud of their own breath. At one corner, not yet dug, the blade of a broken spade appeared, thrust in deep.

With curiosity helping to hide his disappointment, the doctor made his way to Summerlee and the rude stove. One by one, the men paused in their work, breathing heavily. They all nodded slightly, but none spoke.

“Hard weather for this, Dan; what’s your hurry?” inquired Vernon, jocularly. The old man’s bushy gray brows gradually straightened, and his mouth relaxed into what passed for a smile, with him.

“Oh, guess we just feel like it. Fishin’s no good anyway, much. Let’s get on with it, boys.”

Picks thudded and shovels scraped again, promptly. Vernon shook his head in admiration of such diligence. Then, struck by a belated thought, he said,

“Hope I’m not intruding, Dan. I’ve always had a lot of pleasure, walking out here, you know.”

“I know.”

“Well, not knowing what was going on here, today ...” Vernon stopped, sensing no encouragement.

“Mmmm?” Dan was taciturn, even for Maine.

“This will be a fine cabin for Danny’s boys. Best site on the harbor, I think.”

“Ayuh? What cabin?” The old man glanced at a heap of iron-hard clods and shovels. When a guffaw came from one of the men in the trench, Vernon turned to go. He had moved off a few yards when Dan spoke to him, quite mildly.

“From here on, come any time you want to, Doc. But just ask me first.”

Without turning, Vernon nodded and gestured slightly, as understanding. A moment later, there came a sharp snap as Dan, in swinging round, kicked off a corner stake. The old man bawled and danced

and spouted oaths like pistol shots, while all hands stopped work to laugh at him. The doctor suppressed a reflex smile and walked slowly away.

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If you think the plot is developing on several fronts, just wait until we bring you the third installment! Art Kellam was a brilliant man, no doubt about it. Ed.



Viola Benson Watson photo

Here is another great old photo from the Watson Collection. It would appear to be the wharf on the site now occupied by the Tremont Town Wharf in Bass Harbor.

The Editor now issues a challenge to the imaginations of readers. Study this photo with care. Consider various features that will show themselves. Wonder, and then 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?

You may possibly guess that the Editor, 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. So if you have ideas which might answer the questions above, please take a few moments and share them with me.

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Next issue I can promise you at least one response, for I have already received it. Let's get yours as well!

J. MacD., Ed

BOYS' CRUISE

Malcolm MacDuffie, Sr.

I suppose it is natural to look back upon the first cruise you ever took unsupervised by an elder as the best. But I am not sure but what an honest hindsight would confess that it was the most hair-raising. Certainly it was so with me, as it was so with my sons in their day. But, as the old salts used to say, “There’s a cherub up aloft that looks out for poor Jack...”

Charlie Grandgent’s father was a professor and mine was a teacher—both mighty smart men, and equally at home at the tiller and oar as in their classrooms. So we grew up together, summering at Southwest Harbor on Mount Desert, learning the art of the small boat by almost continual use and experiment, so that neither of us could remember learning to row or to reef a sail. Year by year the “bounds” increased—first to Fernald’s Cove, then to the mouth of Somes Sound inside Greening’s Island, then to the Cranberry Islands and finally to the Ducks.

After that there was nothing for it but to take a cruise to the “west’ard.” For this, there was no suitable family boat available. But at the end of the party-sailing season, after Labor Day, there were a number of Friendship sloops set free for a few weeks while their captains got their traps and gear ready for the Fall lobstering. What we always thought the best of these, the old *Columbia*, was engaged for a week at the munificent charter-price of twenty dollars. I was just fifteen. Charlie was a couple of years older and judged able to command the expedition and keep me out of mischief!

Columbia was a thirty-five footer of nine foot beam, all inside ballasted with beach gravel on a draft of five feet. She had the characteristic gaff rig of her time and type—long, flat-top bowsprit steeved downward; and a rather heavy, solid stick, stepped well forward and steeved “over the bows.” We used to think this handsome, and that it gave an appearance of great power. The fact was, of course, that both bowsprit and mast were hauled further forward and down, year by year, by the bobstay turnbuckle in an effort to keep the jibstay taut. For she carried two headsails: a noble jib, hanked to the stay and trimmed with two sheets, and the “jumbo” that was the hall-mark of the Friendship sloop. This was an inner job set flying on a club which was tacked down to the stem-head with a strop and swivel about a third of the way aft from the forward end of the club. This was a powerful sail and, with the main, was used while “jogging” from trap to trap, or while setting trawls. It was common to see these sloops lying at a mooring with the mainsail set and loose-sheeted and the jumbo aback—held athwartships by a boathook with its point through the clew-grommet and the butt jammed under the traveler. She would always lie still this way.

Columbia, like her sisters, was simply rigged. Her mainsail was broad by modern standards, the boom extending six feet or so outboard with a couple of reef pennants ready rigged always. The gaff was long and rather low-peaked when it had settled awhile, but I remember well a lesson in sail-setting in which an agonized fisherman, ranging alongside in another sloop, hailed, “For God’s sake, peak her up, son!” With the sail luffed, the peak halyard used to be swayed up until you could see two or three “puckers” in the sail “in the wake of the throat.”

I wonder what today’s youngsters would make of an old packet like this! She had a short cuddy with about five feet of headroom, two lockers to sleep on and a galvanized bucket for a head. Under the companion ladder was a 3 horsepower Barker engine—a two-cycle, make-and-break creation whose

maker proudly advertised, "Often imitated, but never equaled." Maybe they were right, for it started with complete reliability and continued the same as long as wanted. But three horsepower for a sloop U.S. registered at five tons!



Photo by Viola Benson Watson

I can't remember much about the outfit with which we beat down the Western Way, lee-bowing an ebb tide that afternoon more than thirty years ago. I do remember the inevitable rubber boots and a bag of sweaters, an orange-crate of grub that included a mammoth boiled ham, and a canned-heat stove. There was also a supply of corn-cob pipes and some Mayo's cut plug, purloined at the last minute from my father's desk drawer! There were charts, too, and a reliable old Ritchie dory compass that belonged to the boat.

More by luck than good management we crossed Bass Harbor Bar on the slack tide and reached across Blue Hill Bay on the failing breeze, past the Ship and Barges, around Lamp Island and braced up for Mahoney's where the gulls and cormorants were just going to sleep. Here the little Barker had to be started and we worked into the mouth of Eggemoggin Reach. For some reason or other, Naskeag Harbor looked like a fine place to anchor, so we put in boldly, furling the sails as we went, the lad at the tiller making like an old-time fisherman acquainted with every nook and cranny whether by day or night. And it really was night now!

Now I wish I could recapture the sheer romance of the first anchorage, hanging the riding-light on the jumbo halyard and hearing in the distance the croak of a slow-flapping old heron as he made his night passage. And coming below to the light of a barn lantern to make great, thick ham sandwiches and boil water for coffee. I remember that on this night we tried out a "patent" of mine for the first and last time. Instantaneous coffee had just been marketed and I had prepared in advance a mixture based on one spoonful of coffee, two of sugar and one of powdered milk. The idea was that as you dissolved this stuff in boiling water you would have, without further ado, a cup of coffee with sugar and cream. I can only report that the resulting brew was unspeakable. Thanks to the inadequacy of the tiny canned heat stove, it

wasn't even a hot drink! But I can't say we were either disappointed or dashed in spirits. What's more, after a short struggle to stay awake and read lurid fiction, we stretched out on the bare boards with one blanket for cover and sweater for pillow and slept the sleep that is forty fathoms deep. +

My father was born in 1902, so this cruise would have taken place in 1917. Apparently he wrote this story sometime after 1947, when he was 45 or beyond—typical mid-life nostalgia, wouldn't you say? Another fragment of a story which I have mislaid at the moment tells of another cruise in another borrowed boat, which was a centerboard sloop intended for pleasure. He and his cruising companion had a wild sail across some part of Blue Hill Bay, with a brisk SW breeze following, someplace which they had not scouted out by chart. The story ends abruptly after the centerboard struck a ledge so hard that it shot up and came right through the cabin top, ripping out the bolt on which it pivoted and a piece of the centerboard box with it! The resulting void opened to the ocean quickly filled the bilges and rendered their fleet craft a sodden hulk. The boys survived unhurt, of course, because she was all wood and unsinkable. A lobsterman came by, took them aboard, and towed their derelict back to Bass Harbor for repairs. That story was told with rather less nostalgia and rather more realism! Ed.

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Remember that picture we shared last summer, saying the sloop grounded at Benson's wharf was Merry Wings, designed, built and sailed by Freeman Gott, and reputedly the fastest boat around? Well, here's another one of the Viola Benson Watson photos, but it is not the same boat, much as we might wish it to be! She's fine and nimble and clean and painted up like a yacht, but that other picture clearly showed a Friendship bow in a reverse curve up into the bowsprit, with trail-boards and all, while this one has a spoon bow. So we are waiting for someone very knowledgeable, like our revered Historian, Ralph Stanley, to help us decide which is Merry Wings. Ed.



Photo by Viola Benson Watson

Now at last we share what surely must be the piece de resistance of this pleasurable publication. With no attribution, no date, no location, our fine lady photographer has caught this lovely old coaster, sheets started, moving well, yawl-boat on the davits, perhaps on her way to pick up her usual varied cargo of fish, farm produce, building materials, or even coal or salt at various way-ports along the coast. How about crafting a story which could take its point of departure from this very scene?

While you're at it, give a thought to the fact that after World War II a man named Frank Swift saw a number of old vessels like this one, some in a lot worse shape, with no cargoes to pick up or deliver and no way to earn their keep. Maybe Swift had taken passage on one of these, and found it delightful to see how she swam along so quietly and so economically and so sturdily. Maybe the schoonermen would scoff at the notion, but Swift knew that "rusticators" would flock to enjoy inexpensive vacations aboard the windjammers of the Maine coast. And so they did, and still do, and hopefully always will.

I recommend two books for you to read, with endless pictures both old and recent:

From Mystic Seaport, "[Fly Rails and Flying Jibs](#)" coasting schooner photographs by Robert H.I. Goddard, by his children, Thomas and Caroline Goddard, with interpretive captions by Doug and Linda Lee of the windjammer Heritage.

And the first book listed below, by Capt. Ray Williamson of Maine Windjammer Cruises. Ed.

BOOKS FOR SALE!

<u>Author</u>	<u>Title</u>	<u>Price</u>	<u>Plus 5% Tax</u>
NEW!			
Capt. Ray Williamson	Maine Windjammer Cruises <i>Keeping the Tradition Alive</i>	48.00	50.40
	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.		
DVD			
Chummy Rich: Maine Boatbuilder	Members	14.95	15.70
	<i>The Building of Andromeda</i>		
Peter B. Blanchard III Photos by David Graham	We Were an Island <i>The Maine Life of Art & Nan Kellam</i>	27.95	29.35
Raymond C.S. Finney	Summers with Percy <i>A Biography of Percy Reed</i>	15.00	15.75
Dean Lunt	Hauling by Hand <i>History of Frenchboro</i>	25.00	26.25
Christina Gillis	Writing on Stone <i>Gott's Island</i>	24.95	26.20
Ruth Grierson (text) Richard Johnson (photos)	A is for Acadia	15.95	16.75
Wayne Libhart	The Jury is Out	10.00	10.50
	The Jury is Excused	14.95	15.70
Virginia Libhart	The Enchanted Land	8.95	9.40
	Carrie's Dream (ages 12-15)	8.95	9.40
	Carrie Makes Waves (ages 12-15)	8.95	9.40
	Makin' Do (ages 12-15)	8.95	9.40
Ruth Moore	The Weir	14.95	15.70
	Spoonhandle	13.95	14.65
	The Fire Balloon	15.00	15.75
	Candlemas Bay	10.95	11.50
	Speak to the Winds	10.95	11.50
	A Walk Down Main Street	10.95	11.50
	(NEW) Time's Web (<i>poems</i>)	13.95	14.65
<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 <i>Stories by Ruth Moore and Eleanor Mayo</i>	14.95	15.70
Sandy Phippen, Ed.	High Cloud- <i>Letters of Ruth Moore</i>	16.95	17.80

Paul S. Richardson	The Creation and Growth of Acadia National Park	29.95	31.45
Wendell Seavey	Working the Sea <i>Autobiographical</i>	15.95	16.75
Sheldon "Smitty" Smith	Memories of a Lifetime (poems)	10.00	10.50
Craig Milner & Ralph Stanley	Ralph Stanley: Tales of a Maine Boat Builder	24.95	26.20
Tremont Women's Club Muriel Trask Davisson, Ed.	Two Tall Tales	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.

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.

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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, 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)

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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Organization
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WINTER 2013 NEWSLETTER