

The Newsletter of the Tremont Historical Society

Vol. 18, No. 1

Winter 2015

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.

REMEMBER THESE?

In our last issue we shared this picture of two stalwart gentlemen of Gott's Island at a long-ago time, having come ashore near the Pool with their especially lovely peapods. Notice the fellow on the right, who very possibly made a habit of rowing in the push rather than pull mode—my guess is that his back is toward her stern. In the left-hand peapod you can be sure which end is the stern, because in the end to the right there is a seat-back for the lucky person who gets to be the passenger while the other one does the work!

Looking at these fine craft, can you wonder why Ruth Moore asked Cliff Rich to build her one? It is even possible that one of the two men in this picture might have been her father or an uncle or grandfather. Have you heard this story enough times, or can you stand one more version from someone who tells it at a drop of the hat?



Viola Banson Watson Collection

RUTH MOORE'S PEAPOD

You see, Ruth was working in California winters, so like a lot of folks she would dream of the next summer's fun, while packing up to leave in the Fall. So she stopped in at Cliff Rich's shop at Bernard Corner and asked him to build her a peapod, over the winter. Cliff, being a naturally philosophical and conversational soul, asked, "Well, Ruth, how are you plannin' to use that peapod?"

"Well," said Ruth, "I like to row around the shore and maybe do a bit of hand-linin' when I take a notion to have fish for supper. All the men-folks in my family did that and I don't see why I can't. Then, so I can go to the harbor for supplies, I think I'll get a small outboard motor in case the row home looks kind of long and rough."

"Oh, now wait a minute, Ruth," said Cliff. "Don't you know you can't put an outboard motor on a double-ended boat? There's no place to clamp it!"

"Oh yes, there is," said Ruth, "I've seen folks put a small cross-bar on so it sticks out one side far enough to clamp a small motor."

Says Cliff, "Well, yes, I guess you can do that—but do you know how gaummy it is to get back there in the stern-sheets of a pick-ed boat like that, to pour gas into that tank or get the thing started? She'll be so tittlish she might even throw you overboard. What you need, Ruth, is a skiff. She'll have lots of room to clamp on the motor and she's steady when you need to work back there. She'll carry more people or freight without losin' too much freeboard. My advice to you is, let me build you a skiff."

"No, Cliff," says Ruth, "My mind is made up. I know all your arguments but what I want is a peapod. Now will you build me one this winter, or won't you?"

"Oh, all right, if you're sure. Come get her when you get back," concluded Cliff, sounding more than a little grumpy to have someone refuse his advice.

Come spring when Ruth got back from California, when she came to Cliff's shop, she found he'd built her—a skiff. "Some day you'll thank me, Ruth," was all he'd say about it. And—one day, she did.

Family lore tells us that Ruth thought this story just as amusing as it is to you and me, and that she truly loved that skiff and used her with great satisfaction for many years.

Now, what comes next will maybe surprise you. Bud Trask, brother to our beloved Muriel Trask Davisson, has had that old skiff in his possession for quite a while. Being a spare-time boat builder himself, he'd planned to fix her up as a tribute to both his Aunt Ruth (known as "Uppy" in the family) and Cliff Rich, whose descendants have been some of the finest boatbuilders on this island. But time and reality caught up with Bud, so he offered her to the Tremont Historical Society. The Board accepted the gift, and at once arranged a long-term verbal agreement with Cliff's grandson, Chummy, to repair her at least enough to serve as a display for our visitors to the Bass Harbor Country Store Museum.



George "Bud" Trask photo

Here's a family picture, from the days when Bud's kids were young and he had inherited the skiff. Notice the outboard motor, an old British Seagull. And look how many kinds are aboard, as well as the dog!

John MacDuffie

P.S. When Ruth's Peapod (!) was delivered by Bud Trask to Chummy's shop just recently, you are going to be spared a look at the pictures of her condition after many years of neglect. Suffice it to say that she will be repaired enough so you can look at her in all her graceful and functional glory. The THS Board has arranged that funds will be put in Chummy's hands to make that possible. And along with the Kellam Dory "BLB" that was also built by Cliff and restored by Chummy, she will be on view at the Museum this summer (with any luck.)

ANOTHER PEAPOD STORY

As we studied the various old pictures we've received from several donors recently, we found one of the Bass Harbor Head Light Station which includes a boathouse perched on the rocks below and to the west of the tower and keeper's house.



Viola Benson Watson Collection

Here we see not one but two peapods on the ways, ready to be launched into those turbulent waters where Bass Harbor Bar stretches across from Gott's Island to the mouth of Bass Harbor. You can see that they are ruggedly and heavily built, compared to the graceful craft pictured in our earlier photo. Many of the elders among residents of Bernard and Bass Harbor have remembered seeing this boathouse and peapods, back when we were a lot younger. And, we have wondered what there is to be known about them, especially as there were in every part of MDI in that era numerous craftsmen who would be capable of building such craft which were clearly an essential part of the life-saving equipment at a light station where vessels would be passing frequently, sometimes in need of help from a small boat and crew.



The inquiry began when several Board members spoke of the peapod which was on display on the grounds at the lighthouse in recent years when the public has been invited to explore certain areas and see that astounding view (especially when tide is running against wind across the bar after a breezy spell.) We decided that this craft ought to be somewhere now that she had disappeared from that spot. Questions revealed that she was stored near the SWH base, and pictures were snapped. To shorten this story quite a lot, we decided to learn what we could about this boat, and open a conversation with the local Coast Guard officials to see if we might receive her as a gift or a loan for the purpose of preservation.

After several delays we heard that this peapod had disappeared from her local storage area. At last we were able to learn that she has been loaned by the Coast Guard to the Kennebunkport Conservation Trust and is down there now (as shown above.) They are working with the Landing Boat School to see if the School will take on the task of rebuilding her to the point where she can be put on display at the main building of the Goat Island Lighthouse. This organization is most interested in learning what we know about the boat, and they are happy to keep in touch with us as things develop. +++

WHAT DID WE LEARN?

Well, a retired CG man from the SWH station, George Gilpin, said he remembered that the Southwest Boat Corp. on Clark's Point might have built several of these peapods for the Coast Guard. Ralph Stanley (our revered Historian) said he had seen their ad requesting bids to build a group of them; he decided not to bid, as he had too much to do and he had heard government work tends to involve a lot of red tape. He said he heard later that SW Boat did sign a contract, but could not quite deliver them all on time so subcontracted with Ronald Rich to build a few of them. (Ronald, of course, was one of Cliff Rich's three sons who built boats, the three being Roger, Bobby, and Ronald. Ronald's shop was on the Clark Point Road just beyond the village shops, on the right.)

At some point Chuck Liebow (our intrepid Vice President and web-site guru) sent some photos of the peapod to Ralph, asking if Ralph had anything else to add from his examination of her style of construction. Here were his questions:

“Ralph, what do you think of construction details? Built here or away?

[She has a] stem with forefoot, heavy keel at least three inches, stem breasthook is heavy and let in `round the first timber...”

Ralph replied as follows:

“Chuck, if this boat is fastened with copper rivets, it was probably built at Curtis Bay, Maryland. I think those built at Southwest Boat and by Ronald Rich were fastened with Everdur screws. It looks like some rust in the stem. Perhaps refastened with galvanized steel. They were all built from the same plans.”

These are the kinds of conversations that e-mail lets us share with each other and other interested parties, on any one of a gazillion topics that exist in people's heads and memories, regarding boats!

A later inquiry to Chummy Rich, who examined the pod to see if she was restorable, revealed that he knew she could not have been built by his Uncle Ronald, as she had all kinds of iron fastenings in her, and Ronald would never do that!

Now finally, all this has opened up a conversation with various CG officials about our request to open the Lighthouse and Keeper's House (Now no longer occupied by CG personal) as part of the Centennial Celebration of Acadia National Park in 2016. There is a display of priceless photos from the lighthouse's history which have been hanging in the entryway to the light tower. Someone of higher rank is arranging to have these copied at high resolution so that they can be part of our collection.

So stay tuned; look for news of the Ruth Moore skiff in our possession, soon to be seen locally; watch for reports of the restoration of the lighthouse peapod by our friends in Kennebunkport, which might come back to us someday; and watch for plans which will be forming around the centennial celebration, when we hope to host open house visiting inside the buildings there on Bass Harbor Head.

Watch also for the possible development of a shelter for our boats on display at the Country Store Museum. This project may well involve a modest fund-raising effort, and perhaps a call for “barn-raising” assistance from among our handy and experienced members and friends. +++



Do You Remember?

In a Newsletter of 2008 I reprinted an article my Dad, Malcolm MacDuffie, wrote for the National Fisherman in which he remembered an old-time steam freighter, Mohawk, when she would make landfall at the Southwest Harbor sardine factory wharf which was in the location of today's Dysart's Marina—in about 1914 or so. The article was accompanied by an artist's rendering of Mohawk, which I assumed might have been a bit inaccurate, as artists' renderings can be. But in our most recent acquisition of old pictures, Chuck Liebow found the photo shown above, which looks as much like that drawing as one could imagine! It proves that my Dad really did have the kind of experience which he describes in this abbreviated version which I recall to you now.

Ed.

I remember one foggy day when you could just see the outlines of Black Ledge which guards the edge of the shoal part of the harbor. I was fooling around as usual when I heard a strange whistle signaling for a landing. It had a high, whining, slobbery voice, as if it were used but seldom and had a frog in its throat. (Much later, when my knowledge of the ways of steam had become more sophisticated, I realized the reason for this vocal weakness. Her fireman well knew that she was going to rest for a little, dockside, so he had knocked off work a bit early, with a consequent drop in steam pressure. One can fairly hear him mutter to himself, "Aw, to hell with this" as he drops his shovel and mops his brow with a murky sweat rag.)

But there was enough steam to give a distinctly irritable tone to that voice, like an old woman full of complaints and fed up with her lot. The *Mohawk*, for example, was born *Maggie Duncan*, and it was weary Maggie's way of saying, "Make a berth there; I don't care where, but make it quick! Here

I come, butt end foremost, and I ain't got scarcely the strength to stop!" You could see her loom up now, black and solid and uncertain in her gait, not a soul visible on deck. The only active, vigorous thing about her was the fine stream of rusty condenser water issuing from the outlet under her guards.

And this small boy stood on the cap-log alone, half hoping for the honor of receiving her heaving line, half fearing that he would never be strong enough or quick enough to haul up the heavy mooring hawser and get the bight over the piling before the unseen crew snubbed it over a bollard on the freight deck. But I needn't have worried. This wasn't the Eastern's smart paddler, *J.T. Morse*, or the Maine Central's *Norumbega*, always hustling to fulfill her mail contract.

Around the corner of the coal shed strolled an overalled teamster, hands in pockets. Here was no split-second, rat-tat-tat of heaving line coils falling on the wharf while bells tingled and paddles or screw churned up the suds and sent a surge among the crib-work. Instead, the hands came out of the pockets just in time to receive the bight of the hawser handed up from the forward freight gangway by a smutty-nosed individual attired above the airily hung pants in the upper, and one hopes the most soiled, half of a suit of long-johns.

About this time there came the faint, familiar sound of go-astern bells from the engine room. One waited in vain for the nervous teasing of a "jingler"; that was a luxury reserved for dashing passenger steamers whose "full speed" demand really meant something. With the old *Mohawk*, however, reverse called for an appreciable pause, as if the engines were meditating upon their past sins and reluctant to commit any future ones. Then there came a mild sort of whirlpool under her stern as the blades took hold, accompanied by a shuddering series of grunts as the big pistons rose and fell laboriously to "set her back."

You can bet I went aboard *Mohawk* as soon as she tied up. There I saw the towering "steeple" compound engine that had so dolorously complained at labor. For the uninitiated, a steeple compound is one arranged with the high-pressure cylinder over the low-pressure, one piston-rod traversing both. This was a splendid invention to save fore-and-aft space, (which, on these lake-type vessels with their engines crammed into the stern, was a consideration.) But their disadvantage was that they handled like a single-cylinder engine, having two "dead centers" for each piston stroke. The harried engineer had to be continually alert while maneuvering lest she stop on one of those helpless spots and be unable to start herself astern or ahead as called for. The scarred flanks of old Maine steamboats testified to fairly frequent mishaps of the sort.

As a small boy, I thought that *Mohawk's* crew resembled nothing so much as a gang of pirates. Certainly their ordinary conversation was as rich as limburger, and the forecabin in which they lived was dark, dismal and utterly primitive. There, as elsewhere aboard, the smell, odor or stench—I prefer the strongest word—was powerful. Basic to it was the flavor you used to detect aboard the oldest of the coasting schooners, retired from service and slowly expiring on some harbor mudflat. I think it was compounded of lamentable dry-rot and stagnant bilge-water. Added to that was a hint of open plumbing and a dash of the sweat of tired men and of unwashed unmentionables. A trifle, perhaps, of food sketchily refrigerated. Overlaid on these was the rich aroma of fish, in barrels and out of them, sardine oil, hot grease and soft-coal smoke.

I made no complaints of all this. To me, it was the very breath of romance. *Mohawk* made all the complaints that were called for, and I don't for a moment suppose that I have enumerated them all. For a while I used to watch the weary and disgruntled "pirates" unload barrels of cottonseed oil, in which sardines were then packed, and cases of empty sardine cans. Then she would load the recent output of the factory for the voyage to the westward. If the tide were high the freight-handlers wheeled their hand-trucks over a gangplank to the freight deck. At low tide *Mohawk's* cargo booms and steam winch came into play.

My puppy-dog curiosity and excitement about all this activity was usually brought to an end by my older sister being sent to fetch me to a meal, tripping daintily over the splintered planks of the wharf, disdainfully ignoring the somewhat raffish stares of the *Mohawk*'s hard-bitten gang.

Of course I would hurry back, resentful because I had been forced to fill the woodbox before taking myself off. And the berth would most likely be empty, the wharf deserted. Sometimes I caught a farewell glimpse of my old friend waddling and yawning her way along the Manset shore toward the Western Way. Again, she would be just gone, with maybe a smear of smoke over the land to show where she was plodding out past Long Ledge, or feebly contending with the tide on Bass Harbor Bar.

And I'd be left alone on the cap-log with nothing to do for the rest of the afternoon but to row my skiff from point to point along the cove, sounding my own bells, making my own landings and whooping with a wailing voice in imitation of *Mohawk*, last of the Maine coast steam tramps. +++

BOARD MEMBER ELAINE SMITH PASSES

Elaine R. Smith, 91, died Feb. 2, 2015 at Maine Coast Memorial Hospital surrounded by her family. She was born March 4, 1923 at home in Seal Cove, Maine, the daughter of Arthur H. and Lelia A. (Reed) Rumill.

Elaine grew up in Seal Cove, graduating from the South Seal Cove School, Pemetic High School, and the Bangor School of Commerce. Fifty years later, she received an honorary degree from Husson College, successor to the Bangor School of Commerce. During World War II she worked for the Department of the Navy in Washington, D.C., coming home to help her older sister, Theolyn, with her newborn baby, then returning to Washington to work for the U.S. Treasury Department.

On Aug. 15, 1944, she married Emery W. Smith. After the birth of her daughters, Elaine became leader of the Seaside 4-H Club and much later, a member of the Board of Directors of the Tremont Historical Society.

Elaine is survived by her children, Michael Smith; David Smith and his wife, Pamela; Gina Kilgore; Joanna Beal and her husband, Dwain; and Sylvia Porter and her husband, Jeffery; her sister, Ferne Leonard; her grandchildren, Anna Smith, Rebecca Smith, Stephen Smith and his wife, Caren, Lynn Piacentini, Tina Marie Rumpel, Leana Moffett, Gunther Moffett and Violet Moffett; her great-grandson, Daniel Wills; cousins and many nieces and nephews, especially Charlie Erskine and Howard Leonard. Elaine was predeceased by her husband, Emery W. Smith, and sisters, Theolyn Erskine, Lurlene Murphy, and Ava Gott.

A celebration of Elaine's life will be held in the spring. Gifts in her memory may be made to the Tremont Historical Society, P.O. Box 215, Bass Harbor, ME 04653.

MDI Islander

This Editor and Board President remembers Elaine fondly as a cheerful and helpful member of the Board, and as a frequent docent at the Museum during a number of summers. She engaged in a life-long custom of collecting historical notes and exhibits which she kept promising to put in order so that they could be of use to researchers who might come to us for information about our town in the early years, or for help in developing their family genealogies. We are hoping that her son Michael, our Board Treasurer, and other family members may be able to complete this task for the benefit of future generations.

John MacDuffie

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>	48.00	50.64
	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	15.77
	<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	29.49
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 Carrie's Dream (ages 12-15) Carrie Makes Waves (ages 12-15) Makin' Do (ages 12-15)	8.95 8.95 8.95 8.95	9.44 9.44 9.44 9.44
Ruth Moore	The Weir Spoonhandle The Fire Balloon Candlemas Bay Speak to the Winds A Walk Down Main Street (NEW) Time's Web (<i>poems</i>)	14.95 13.95 15.00 10.95 10.95 10.95 13.95	15.77 14.72 15.83 11.55 11.55 11.55 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 <i>Stories by Ruth Moore and Eleanor Mayo</i>	14.95	15.77

Sandy Phippen, Ed. Paul S. Richardson	High Cloud- <i>Letters of Ruth Moore</i> The Creation and Growth of Acadia National Park	16.95 29.95	17.88 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)

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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WINTER 2015 NEWSLETTER