

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: Muriel Davisson, President; Charles Liebow, Vice President; Pattie Tierney, Secretary; John MacDuffie, Treasurer. The Newsletter is mailed to members and contributors. Extra copies are available. Newsletter Editor is John MacDuffie.

WHAT IS IT?



Hundreds of Museum visitors have glanced above the door of the “Bank” as we call it, after looking at the Hoosier Hutch, Harriet’s Wedding Dress, Harriet’s Husband’s Uniform Jacket, the Flapper Dress, and a variety of home implements and tools—to see the item pictured here. Its caption challenges them to figure out what this thing is. As we “docent” at the Museum, we often hear animated conversations amongst the visitors as they try to come up with a suitable description. Often they turn to us, thinking we can give them the answer. But the “Mystery Tool” designation means that we don’t know either! What do you think? Please tell us! Send a note to our Bass Harbor address, or email us at redhousemaine@gmail.com.

WHILE WE'RE AT IT



Here is the Benson Homestead, probably as long ago as 1900. A close neighbor to what we now know as F.W. Thurston Co. and Lobster Pound restaurant in Bernard, it was built very soon after 1800, and at the time was the only structure on the shores of Bass Harbor. The story told by neighbor Harvey Kelley Sr. who was a Benson descendant was this: Capt. Benjamin Benson Sr. built his home in that early time and painted it a light color so that it could not be missed by people in vessels sailing past the harbor, heading east or west along the coast of MDI. In those days paint could be created by digging a clay called ochre from various shore areas nearby. Two varieties of ochre were to be found: yellow and red. One mixed the ochre with oil and a serviceable paint was made. Capt. Benson apparently liked both colors, because the two sides—east and south—of the house that faced the sea were painted yellow to make it a landmark easily seen. The shore side—north and west—walls were painted red. This writer thinks he really liked red so was not content to paint the whole house yellow! Or maybe the yellow ochre supply ran out and there was red in abundance.

The small house in the foreground houses the well (not the outhouse.) Inside there was a wooden windlass with a rope wrapped around a slatted drum. On one end of the rope was a hook for a pail. On the other end was a large round stone with an iron eyebolt inserted. This acted as a counterweight to make it easy to haul pails of water to the surface. The stone still exists, sitting on the hearth of the fireplace inside the Benson Homestead (which the MacDuffie family has repainted and dubbed Red House for an obvious reason!) The well still serves the house (used by only one family nowadays;) in olden times, we are told, as many as a dozen families were served by this wonderful resource.



Further tales told to the MacDuffies by Harvey Kelley described the hospitality of the Bensons, who welcomed, housed and fed various travelers by sea who came into Bass Harbor. The main part of the house held a large common room rimmed by a small formal parlor and two tiny bedrooms. A cramped front hallway led to very steep stairs to the second storey where another open area was bordered by four even smaller bedrooms hardly larger than prison cells. The ell contained a huge fireplace with Dutch oven and served as kitchen and dining area. Pictures of the homestead show evidence of chicken coops and an outhouse, but no barn or workshop or wood shed. Yet a good-sized family grew up here, the last of whose members were three daughters who never married but sustained the family by caring for the very young and the very old, and at the end were alone in the old place in the early 20th century. They were supported by the more responsible and compassionate family members who had left for homes of their own.

This was found in the Benson Homestead when the MacDuffies moved in for their first summer, June 1939. It is clearly a “grown” item, not a “made” one. Picture a small tree with six limbs sprouting in a very geometrical pattern from the trunk. Notice the angle from the trunk in which the limbs grew out. Cut the trunk a couple of inches below the limb rack and carve the stub attractively. Measure a foot or so above the limbs and cut the trunk. Then peel the bark, carve sharpened ends on the limbs, bore a hole in the top—and suspend this attractive thing from the ceiling where you can hang herbs or mittens to dry, or hats as the MacDuffies do today.



Meanwhile, Not So Far Offshore



A gentleman named Lewis Freeman Gott, born in 1857, grew up on Gott's Island, part of a large family. Here he is at left (possibly), having a gam near the Gott's Island Pool, with (possibly) neighbor Mont Gott, each the proud owner of a lovely peapod of the sort which inspired Ruth Moore to order one from renowned builder at Bernard, Cliff Rich. These were in the earlier days of his manhood. He married the former Vesta Murphy on Nov. 4, 1892; a clipping from the Bar Harbor Record told of the wedding at the home of the bride, where it is stated that 40 people were in attendance. They moved to Bernard later, where he and a man named Maddocks built a three-story house at the very end of what is now called Steamboat Wharf Road. At some point in following years he and Vesta ran this large house as a summer hotel. When their only daughter Violet was married there in 1915, it was reported that 90 people were present! The groom was Richard Jackson, whose family operated a grocery business at the Old Red Store on the corner of Steamboat Wharf, Rice and Bernard Roads. The business was later moved to Southwest Harbor in the building near the Masonic Hall where Sips Restaurant is found today. Jackson's Market was a fixture there on Clark Point Rd. for many decades.

It has not been easy to find the kind of information about Capt. Gott's life that we would wish to share with you. Among questions not yet answered are: When did he and Vesta move from Gott's to Bernard? Was it when the community began to falter as fewer and fewer children were born and educated on the island? Did he aspire to bigger and better things than lobstering and farming on a very small scale? Was Vesta's life plan more expansive as well?



Photo by Viola Benson Watson

Capt. Freeman Gott was a fisherman whose sturdy Friendship Sloop was broad and heavy and handsome for the tough work of hauling traps or trawls under sail. But Capt. Gott had another side to his personality and purpose. He longed for a speedy and graceful vessel that might bring him into the company of summer people who in his lifetime were more and more numerous in local waters. Capt. Gott was a skillful builder of wooden boats among his other talents. (One newspaper item reported that he built not one but two pleasure craft for President Eliot of Harvard College!) In time he designed and built a lovely, slender, nimble vessel which he named *Merry Wings*. She knew no heavy spars and sails, no stink of salt lobster bait in her bilges. She was a chariot to carry her owner and skipper to another world, where strategy and sea-sense might speed her to the finish line while other yachts were left far behind.



Photo by Viola Benson Watson

An early race she won, in 1902, was one of several contests arranged by the Bar Harbor Board of Trade (Today would that be translated Chamber of Commerce?) Here is the opening short paragraph found in the *Bar Harbor Record*:

**Board of Trade Regatta
Good Races in Which Speedy Boats Compete
for Handsome Trophies**

The third annual regatta held under the auspices of the Bar Harbor Board of Trade was sailed off on Monday, Sept. 1. The day was a fine one for the contests, and considerable interest was taken in the races. A slight fog hung over the water in the early part of the day but that wore off, and the weather was very suitable for the regatta.

Class F was for sloops under 32 feet owned by residents of the State of Maine, old style build. Club topsails, spinnakers and balloon jibs barred in this race. The first prize was \$100, the second prize \$50 and the third \$25. There were five boats to start in this class, which was won by the Merry Wing.

Though the Bar Harbor Yacht Club had been organized in 1885, neither Northeast Harbor nor Southwest Harbor provided sailboat races at this time. But to the west, over in Eggemoggin Reach, some opportunities for racing were to be found. We have incomplete records of this activity, but have recently discovered three of the trophies Capt. Freeman Gott won against groups of yachtsmen over to the west'ard. We share a picture of these trophies which you may see when you visit the Museum.



The large Eagle Island cup was retired in 1916 after *Merry Wings* won it the third time. The other cups were won in the Bucks Harbor Regatta, in 1913 for a second place, and in 1914 a first place. There are more cups in the *Merry Wings* collection in the possession of Carolyn "Callie" Kelley Gothard of Bernard.

Capt. Gott did not save *Merry Wings* for sailing races against the summer people. On one occasion it is reported that he brought Dr. Tapley somewhere during a gale. One imagines the good doctor who practiced many years at McKinley was carried under sail to one of the islands where there was a life to be saved. Another time, the Bar Harbor Record described a mishap when Capt. Gott came to Black Island. While making a landing in *Merry Wings* she ran afoul of a guy wire from a derrick to the breakwater. This caused her to pay off and strike the breakwater, snapping her bowsprit. Since there was an active quarry operated by a community of up to 100 resident workers on Black Island at the time, one imagines there was some equally important errand to bring her there, where a lot of ocean surge and tidal swirl could make landings under sail a challenge to the most skillful skipper.

The best-known photographic record of the career of this multi-faceted man is the famous picture below, showing the launch of *Merry Wings* from the space between the office and the bait shed of the Watson wharf (now Thurston's) in Bernard. The extremely steep angle of this launching platform would suggest that she might well have impersonated a submarine during her first contact with the water. Yet, can we not imagine her builder remarking, "Well, I guess she'll need to get a little wet so she can swell, won't she?"



Our esteemed Historian, Ralph Stanley, when queried about Capt. Gott and *Merry Wings*, replied as follows with characteristic brevity, "The *Merry Wings* was a centerboard sloop. The Gott's Island fishermen favored centerboard, shoal draft sloops so they could get into the Pool."

Just to be sure that this remark from Ralph is understood clearly, take a look at the following picture of the Gott's Island Pool. Clearly, any boat entering there, and surely any boat moored, must be of shoal draft and capable of sitting upright on the bottom when the tide is out.



from Southwest Harbor Public Library

Editor's Note

Now with a red face and itchy scalp I must confess to a grievous error, committed to print in an earlier issue of this Newsletter, no less, and on the same subject treated here.

In the Summer Issue of 2012 I printed a picture of a handsome keel sloop, grounded out alongside the Benson wharf in Bernard. I said she was Merry Wings, built and sailed to victory in many races by Capt. Lewis Freeman Gott. At the time no reader, including our beloved Historian Ralph Stanley, noticed the misnomer and called me on it. As you have been reading, Merry Wings was a shoal draft centerboard sloop boat, designed and built by a Gott's Island man who would have known the need to provide for her access to special places like the Pool as pictured above. I'm assuming he also knew that a centerboard sloop of the right design would be very fast.

The famous picture we have shared of a sloop being launched off Watson's Wharf shows us clearly that she has no keel. A close examination also reveals that she has a spoon bow, not a clipper bow. The picture of her under sail with Capt. Gott at the helm confirms this. Mea culpa, say I.

John MacDuffie

Tremont Third Grade Visits Museum

By Kathie Pratt

The Tremont Historical Society had some very special guests in October. Mrs. Adler's 3rd grade class from Tremont Consolidated School came on a field trip to the Country Store Museum as part of their social studies curriculum, the study of Mount Desert Island. On hand were docents Nan Lincoln, Pattie Tierney, and Kathie Pratt to show them around and impart some local lore.

A dozen children spilled off the bus and into the museum, noisy and excited by the shelves and original store display cases, full of curious artifacts from long ago days. They had a scavenger hunt to find items that a child their age might have used when playing, such as a wooden sled, porcelain dolls, and toy trains, or when helping with household chores, like the butter churn or axes. Several of these children have deep family roots in the community and are descendants of the very people who used these toys and tools. Every article in the museum's collection was used in Tremont, or donated by Tremont families.

Most of the visit was filled with their happy chatter, but you could have heard a pin drop when Pattie Tierney mesmerized the class with the true tale of the 1922 bank robbery, escape by boat, and eventual apprehension of the culprits. At that time the Richardson Store housed a bank and post office. The night watchman at the Underwood Sardine Cannery across the street heard the robbers, and sounded the factory whistle to alert the authorities.

Nan Lincoln told them about the days when the building had become home to the Historical Society, and she ran the store and sold penny candy. Penny candy is a fond childhood memory that today's children know little about. Candy costs well over a dollar these days!

Later, back at school, Kathie Pratt asked the class about their favorite items in the vast collection.

Mattie Yeo and **Peyton Hanson** liked the “super-duper cool” dollhouse because “it is homemade.”

Harmoni Bielak was fascinated with the spinning wheel and how “everything was done by hand.”

Parker Higgins noticed the old paper money from Hancock Bank and two-dollar bills, and “how different they are” from the federally minted money we use now.

Tristan Dunbar's favorite thing was the ornate red coffee grinder, which is taller than Tristan himself. He liked “the way it looks.”

Coe Thurston liked the old “muskets.” He stated that they “remind me of similar ones my father has.”

Noah Stanley liked them too, along with the bear trap. He is interested in “weapons and things that make loud noises.”

Jacob Holyoke concurred, saying, “old-school weapons and tools are fascinating to me.”

Rosie Ellis was quite taken with the old black typewriter, saying “I want it to be in the old days so I could do my homework on it.”

Ella Watson liked using the cancellation stamps in the West Tremont Post Office window and mailbox display, because it helped her “understand how they did things back then.”

Bronwyn Charrette and **Grace Clark** were enchanted with the horse-drawn sleigh. Bronwyn thinks “the seats are cushy” and Grace loves anything to do with horses. She “could imagine riding in it, back before there were cars.”

Experiential learning has a lasting impact. It is our hope that by visiting the museum, the youth of Tremont will come away with a better appreciation and understanding of their town's history and how the past shapes the present. When asked why it is important to learn about history, Ella said, “so you can grow up knowing what happened.” Bronwyn added that history “might effect the future,” as Grace nodded emphatically in agreement. Hope fulfilled.

We also hope that you, our readers, will come see the collection for yourselves when we reopen in the summer. Meanwhile, visit our web site for some interesting information!



Photos by Nan Lincoln

Some of Our Most Popular Books for Sale

Author	Title	Price	Plus 5.5% Tax
Peter Blanchard III	We Were an Island	\$27.95	29.54
W. R. Cheney	Penelope Down East	10.00	10.55
Christina Marsden Gillis	Writing on Stone	24.95	26.33
Christina Marsden Gillis	Where Edges Don't Hold	8.95	9.44
Ruth Gortner Grierson (text) & Richard Johnson (photos)	A is for Acadia	15.95	16.83
Nan Lincoln	The Summer of Cecily	18.95	20.00
Eleanor Mayo	Turn Home	16.95	17.88
Eleanor Mayo	October Fire	16.95	17.88
Ruth Moore	The Weir	14.95	15.78
Ruth Moore	Spoonhandle	13.95	14.78
Ruth Moore	Fire Balloon	15.00	15.83
Ruth Moore	Candlemas Bay	10.95	11.56
Ruth Moore	Speak to the Winds	15.00	15.83
Ruth Moore	Walk Down Main Street	8.95	9.44
Ruth Moore	The Tired Apple Tree (<i>poetry</i>)	8.50	8.97
Ruth Moore	Times Web	13.95	14.72
Paul S. Richardson	The Creation and Growth of Acadia National Park	29.95	31.60
Laurie Schreiber	Boat Building on MDI	21.99	23.20
Wendell Seavey	Working the Sea	16.95	17.88
Weslea Sidon	The Fool Sings (<i>poetry</i>)	---	16.00
Craig Milner & Ralph Stanley	Ralph Stanley: Tales of a Maine Boat Builder	24.95	26.33
Tremont School	Cookbook	---	10.00
Tremont Women's Club	Two Tall Tales	9.95	10.50
Thomas Vining	Cemeteries of Cranberry Isles and The Towns of Mount Desert Is.	---	35.00
Luann Yetter	Bar Harbor in the Roaring Twenties	21.99	23.20

Books may be ordered at our postal address

Please send a check for the price plus tax and add \$1 postage.

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 for the ensuing year..

Name(s) _____

Address _____

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

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
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