

Mussel Ridge News

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Summer 2025

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Owls Head Lighthouse History

We celebrate this year the bicentennial of Owls Head Light Station, its noble essence, since the site is all that remains of its realized 1825 conception. Petitioners to the administration of John Quincy Adams were rewarded by the young nation's authorization of a guide beacon to help mariners bound for the Shore Village of Thomaston on Owls Head Harbor as Rockland was then known. Construction of the first tower, on acreage transferred by the Merriman family memorialized by the adjacent cemetery, was completed using rubblestone found nearby, and Isaac Stearns, for an annual salary of \$350, lit the first lamp in the fall of that year to begin a story that continues today.

An eighty-foot promontory in prospect from the Gulf of Maine offered the ideal location for this purpose, though less clear is its naming. Some say Owls Head derives from an indigenous Penobscot term for the area, others that it was bestowed by explorers such as Champlain or Weymouth in the early 1600s for what they saw in passing, whether actual birds or a supposed rock formation on the bare cliff. What is known is that a seam of limestone from Thomaston to Camden was discovered in the late 1700s, which provided a spur to subsequent quarrying just as consequent significant commercial shipping traffic did to the need for a navigational aid at this location.

Typical lamps of the era were shallow pans with multiple wicks fueled by whale oil and having mirrors or polished metal reflectors to enhance visibility of their light. Attending to all of this, the budding government had instituted a whole new agency of professional minders in the public interest. Over time, numerous entries in the local keepers' logs attest to the progressive deterioration of the initial stonework structures in their care. As a result, in use today is the much-improved 1852 replacement tower, twenty-nine feet of imported masonry construction recognized on the National Register of Historic Places in 1978, and the current house rebuilt for the keeper and his family dates to 1854. Two years later, the lantern room installation of a Fresnel lens from France was historically momentous as the culmination of world lighthouse optic technology reached Owls Head.

Ever since the Lighthouse of Alexandria, one of the seven wonders of the ancient world, lighthouses have towered in imagination for their altruistic practicality and revered symbolism. Worth mentioning in this regard is the contribution made by Augustin Jean Fresnel (say fraynell). In his twenties in the 1820s, this brilliant French physicist envisioned lenses of a never-surpassed design that two Paris manufacturers no longer existing distributed to lighthouses world-wide. Eight of them, including the fourth-order, mid-range workhorse at Owls Head, are still in service on the Maine coast. Otherwise, exquisite in every way, such originals are apt to be featured museum exhibits, most-admired being those largest, of the first order, which can be assemblies of glass and brass twelve feet tall weighing tons.

By the middle of the nineteenth century, with its new lens, Owls Head saw the conversion from scarce and expensive whale oil fuel to liquefied lard, briefly, then to kerosene until the 1920s when the station was electrified. The brick shed still in place had been mandated in 1894 for safe kerosene storage given its volatility. Access to the tower was improved incrementally, the stairway even enclosed once, covered bridge-like, before its extensive upkeep was deemed prohibitive. The modern ramp from the dwelling to the tower is an inclined walkway with sixty-two steps, enough to give pause for reflection on



the daunting responsibility and dedication of those engaged in the service of keeping the lights. In 1939, jurisdiction for such endeavor shifted from an independent agency to the Coast Guard. Ongoing, too, were trials of sound devices for activation in fog, various bells and horns operated by hand, the tide, and electricity automatically. The latest innovation to the signature twin horn-blasts at twenty-second intervals is their timed initiation remotely for an hour by anyone with a radio.

The last Coast Guard Lightkeeper at Owls Head, Malcolm Rouse, was reassigned in 1989, and, upon the retirement of Dr. Sally Snowman from Boston Light in 2023, all U.S. lighthouses became fully automated. Until expensive code issues arose, the keeper's house continued to be used as a residence for personnel of Rockland Station. Then and to the present, the American Lighthouse Foundation (ALF) negotiated a lease to headquarter there and assume responsibility for all aspects of maintenance at Owls Head Light Station except for the lens and light itself which remain on the Coast Guard list of active aids to navigation. In 2010, the Foundation exhausted a grant of \$80,000 to restore the tower after twenty years of deferred maintenance in its mission to preserve for posterity the dozen New England lights within its purview. The season, weather, and volunteer availability permitting, buildings of the station are open to the public. There is a fitting close to this tale of service. Partnering with the National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration, ALF has a newly added radio relay device in the tower that alerts ships to the presence of whales tracking in the vicinity, part of the system intended to prevent collisions at sea, an effort to save creatures once exploited by the same enterprise.

Mostly absent from this account, focused on the physical place, is the human dimension of the lore. Here, like a chart, are facts and figures of an entity in time. No more are there redundancies common and essential in the vibrancy of a past maritime world at the southwest corner of Penobscot Bay, only the last and lonely 1,000-watt bulb in a Maine lighthouse. Almost sadly, Owls Head Light is a steady, white beacon shining a hundred feet above mean high tide, 24/7, and visible from the waterside on a clear night sixteen nautical miles, your basic welcoming yard light on a pole --the difference, a horn--and GPS ascendant. Gone and unmet are the worthy stories peopling another beauty found here that merit and await their own champion. Meanwhile, contrarily in buoying happiness, the site, shared as a Maine state park, continues to exert its magnetism on human hearts, now drawing streams of land-based visitors from all around the globe, amazed by its own sake.


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ANNUAL COMMUNITY PICNIC – FOUNDING DAY – 2025

By: Rodney B. Weeks

It seems today that we just don't see our friends and neighbors as often as we would like. So it always comes as a pleasant surprise to me when I unexpectedly bump into someone at Wal-Mart that I haven't seen for months and I get the chance to get caught up.

In the past, attending "coffee hour" after church was a good time to get caught up with your friends and neighbors but it is no secret that church attendance has fallen off dramatically in recent years. I can remember in the 1950s and 1960's, summer time was the time when the famous baked bean community suppers were held. Every woman would bring their very best entrée or desert to the Owls Head Central School for everyone to enjoy and a real sense of community was enjoyed by all over great homemade food.

Today it seems that everyone is just too busy to set aside the time for these types of communal gatherings which is why I feel it is so important that everyone should try to attend the Annual Founders Day Community Picnic in July. We still offer baked beans (Thank you Maynard & Norma Stanley), hamburgers and hot dogs, but many bring their best food creations for everyone to enjoy. This event was originally sponsored by just the Mussel Ridge Historical Society, but today we have been joined by the Town, the Owls Head Village Library, the Owls Head Volunteer Fire Department, Garden Club and many others. It is a great way to meet new friends and catch up with your neighbors as the following pictures show – Hope to see you next year:

Thank you to all those who volunteered!

The cooks. Photo by Cristina Alden



Under the big Silver Maple Tree
Photo by Cristina Alden



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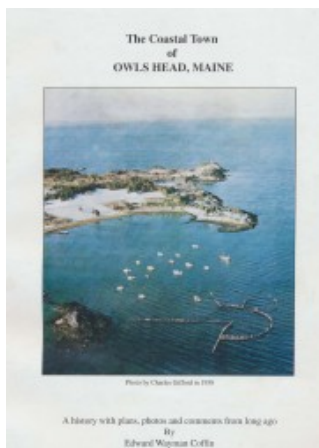
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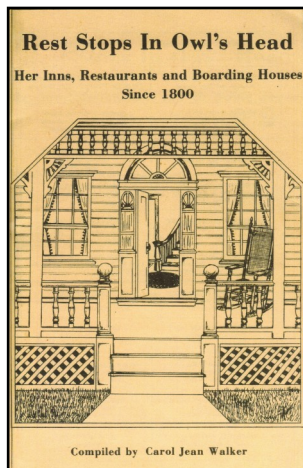




**\$36 - The Coastal Town of
Owls Head, ME
by Edward W. Coffin**



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\$49- 1873 of Owls Head canvas



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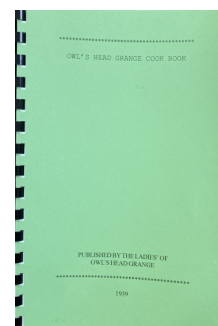
Slate Coasters \$7 or 4 for \$25

Cemeteries of Owls Head, Maine with genealogical notes 1791–2023

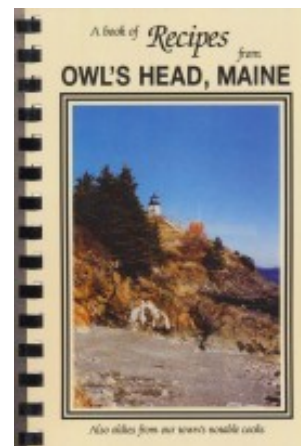


Compiled by Lea Carver
Edited by Heather Almquist
Owls Head Cemetery Committee, August 2023

**\$25 - Cemeteries of
Owls Head by Lea Carver**



**Owls Head Grange
Cookbook \$10**



**Recipes of Owl's Head, Maine
Cookbook \$15**



OUR ANTIQUE SEWING MACHINE



Wilson and Wheeler Sewing machine @1874

As we were dusting the furniture at the Old Homestead in preparation for the summer opening, we decided to investigate the ancient, rusted sewing machine that had been sitting for years in the living room. It is situated on a table with an attached sewing box, and the treadle underneath consists of foot-shaped pedals. I removed the wooden cover of the box and we discovered a medallion giving the name of the manufacturer: The Wheeler and Wilson Manufacturing Co., 625 Broadway, New York.

I googled this company to find more information about the origins of the machine. In Pittsfield MA, in 1847, Allen B. Wilson created the plans for what he thought was the first sewing machine, not realizing it had actually been invented a few years earlier. He made a prototype of a sewing machine, which he sold for \$200, and acquired a patent for it in 1850. The next year, Wilson met up with a business acquaintance, Nathaniel Wheeler, who asked Wilson to make 500 sewing machines for his business in Watertown, CT. By now, Wilson had acquired patents for improving his prototype, including the rotating hook and four-motion feed. The two friends were highly successful in their venture, and formed the Wheeler & Wilson Manufacturing

Company in 1853. Three years later, the growing company was moved to Bridgeport, CT, and by 1859, it was selling the most sewing machines in the country.

Following the deaths of Wilson and Wheeler in the late 1800's, Wheeler's son took over as the company's president. The Singer Corporation acquired the company in 1905, continuing to sell Wheeler & Wilson machines under the Singer name until 1913.

Wheeler's machine became famous; the Wheeler & Wilson Company won many Prize Medals at expositions in the US, Paris, London, and Vienna. Today, the antique machines are much sought after by avid collectors. People sell them on E Bay, and there is a Wheeler & Wilson sewing machine group on FaceBook.

To complete the search, I wanted to discover how old our machine is. Dating an antique Wheeler & Wilson machine is apparently difficult, partly because there were two sets of serial numbers. I found no number on our rusty machine, but I did find a picture online of a model looking exactly like ours, with the same treadle, table, side box, and medallion. It was Model number 1, serial number 1022374, manufactured around 1874. This means our machine is not among the oldest of the Wheeler and Wilson sewing machines. I would like to think, though, that somebody in Owl Head used our machine to make their clothes and curtains, perhaps someone who lived in the Old Homestead!

Gail Ladd

<https://connecticuthistory.org>

www.sewmuse.co.uk

<https://en.wikipedia.org>

Anyone remember this sign?

We are not sure where this was located in town, ideas are appreciated.

Ideas include the snowmobile club, a house near the village?? Thank you Greg for this remarkable sign. He thought maybe Ed Harriman might have painted it. He picked it up at a lawn sale.

Email us at history@musselridge.org

Greg Cline
donating this
sign to the
Mussel Ridge
Historical
Society





CELEBRATING 200 YEARS
OF THE
OWLS HEAD LIGHT STATION
1825-2025

Wednesday, September 10, 2025

Owls Head Lighthouse
186 Lighthouse Rd,
Owls Head 04854

Grave Stone Unveiling for Lighthouse Keeper
Captain Norwood - 11:45 am

Commemoration Ceremony & Birthday Cake - 12:30pm
Lighthouse Tours - 1pm to 4pm

Keeper's House Museum & Gift Shop
10am to 5pm



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Mussel Ridge Historical Society

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Name _____ Phone _____

Mailing Address _____ Town _____ Zip _____

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Our newsletter is sent to everyone on our email list and we don't share addresses with anyone.

____ I Would Like TO HELP Preserve the History of Owl's Head in the Following Ways

____ Develop programs ____ Help with fundraising ____ Help on restoring the Homestead

____ Bring food for events or sales ____ Help with events

____ Staff the Homestead ____ I have pictures that could be scanned

____ Research. I am particularly interested in the following areas _____

Have talent/service I could donate _____

____ I would like to help in another way. (Please tell us how) _____

____ I have historical items I might like to donate or loan

____ I am joining the MRHS at the Following Level & My Check is Attached

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____ 1 Year Business Sustainer (\$250) ____ 1 Year Business Benefactor (\$750)

____ I am making a Tax Deductible Donation to the MRHS for _____ & My Check is Attached

I Would Like the Funds to go to the Following Area

____ General Operations ____ Mussel Ridge Learning Center

____ Old Homestead ____ As the MRHS thinks is best

Signature of Person Accepting the Form _____

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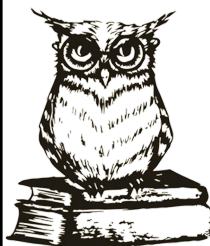
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Good-By to an Old Friend Irving “Mike” McConchie 1923- 2025



Irving “Mike” McConchie

Since our last Newsletter, The Mussel Ridge Historical Society has lost a wonderful and very supportive friend, Irving “Mike” McConchie, who passed away on August 1, 2025 at the age of 102.

Born in Ash Point, ME on February 7, 1923, Mike was the 3rd child of James Leroy McConchie and Florence Estelle [Witham] McConchie’s 5 children. [Athleen M. (Pease), Arnold L., Irving H. “Mike”, Madelyn “Maddie” (Benner) and Nathan W.]

His mother ran the Wellesley Inn on Ash Point from 1920 to 1933 and Mike had many fond memories helping out with the running of the inn and playing and catching lobsters off of Ash Point with his boyhood friends, Alvin McNeilly, Jim Weeks, and Paul Rackliff.

Mike attended Rockland High School where he excelled both academically and athletically, playing football with a passion. Mike attended Springfield College and later answered the call of duty by joining the U.S. Army Air Force for WWII. After the war Mike married Geraldine (Norton) McConchie and shared 69 years of marriage until her passing in 2016.

Mike earned his living as a commercial lobster fisherman fishing the waters off of Big Green Island and Penobscot Bay, but still had time to give back to his community by serving on the local school board and the Rockland City Council. He later served as a selectman for the town of Owls Head and was a member of the Board of Directors for Pen-Bay Hospital. He was a life-long member of the Kiwanis Club, the Masonic Temple and the Shriners.

Mike’s final effort to help the MRHS was writing an article for our Newsletter about his childhood memories of the people who lived in the Old Homestead a/k/a the “Jim

Mullens” place, which appeared on the front page of Issue #52 in the Fall of 2021. Mike enthusiastically supported our plans to build a new building to serve as a permanent home for our local history, memorabilia and family histories.

He will be sorely missed by all of us here at the MRHS and by all those who knew him.

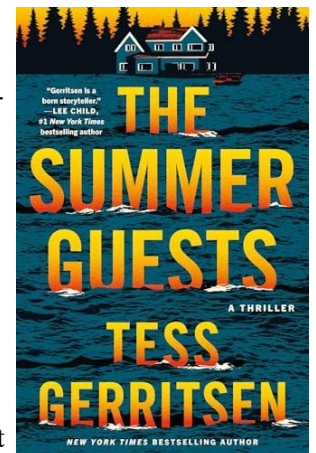
Book Review “Summer Guests,” Gerritsen-Style by Michelle Miller

If you enjoyed *The Spy Coast*, then you’ll probably like its sequel, *The Summer Guests: A Thriller*. I did.

Gerritsen reprises the Martini Club—Maggie Bird, Ben Diamond, Declan Rose, Lloyd and Ingrid Slocum—as well as several residents of Purity (a thinly veiled Camden), including (acting) Chief Jo Thibodeau, Luther Yount, and his granddaughter Callie. She provides frequent tie-ins to her first novel in this growing series of retired spook adventures, which I occasionally found repetitive, but she also develops the relationships among her characters, which I enjoyed. Narrowing the geographical scope of her story, Gerritsen forgoes the globetrotting of *The Spy Coast* and remains squarely in Maine, with place references that readers will recognize if they’ve spent time in the Pine Tree State.

The premise of this new adventure turns on the Conovers, a wealthy family who has visited Maiden Pond since 1967, spending summers at their “camp,” an imposing house called Moonview. Reuniting to memorialize the deceased patriarch of the family, whose ashes travel in the trunk of the car tucked amidst their luggage, the Conovers arrive, and the mystery begins in earnest when Zoe disappears (not much of a spoiler—really).

Setting her story exclusively in Maine gives Gerritsen the opportunity to extol the beauty of Maine’s landscape. Readers are reminded of why so many flock to Maine to reconnect with the natural world. She also explores relations between Purity’s year-round inhabitants and their “summer guests,” which becomes one of the novel’s themes. However, Gerritsen deftly avoids totally demonizing people from away by nesting sympathetic and unsavory characters in both camps. Readers wind up judging Gerritsen’s characters more on their actions and motivations than on their points of origin. To rework one of Maine’s popular slogans, isn’t that “the way life should be”?



The Norwood Mystery

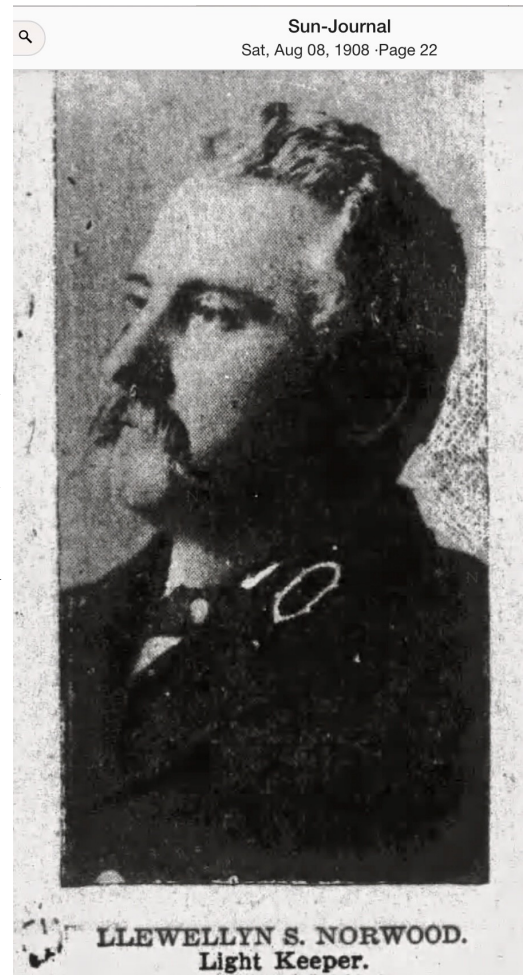
Captain Llewelyn S. Norwood died on duty 114 years ago while serving as Owls Head's lighthouse keeper on April 13, 1911. There is a mystery though regarding his final resting place.

As his obituary in the Courier Gazette mentions, he was interred in the nearby Merriman Cemetery due to impassible late winter roads. Burpee Funeral Home records verify his burial there but are maddeningly vague about his specific location within the cemetery. There seemed to be an expectation that he would eventually be removed to his family plot in Seal Cove on Mount Desert Island where his parents and other family members are buried. A brief mention in an Ellsworth newspaper in 1922 - 11 years after he died but shortly after his wife passed away - indicated that he would be disinterred and taken to Seal Cove. Yet there is absolutely no record of that having actually taken place. Neither the most likely funeral home in that area in business during that time nor his family's local church have any record of Captain Norwood being buried in Seal Cove. A recent visit to the Seal Cove Cemetery verified that there are no headstones for Captain Norwood or his wife Amanda although records indicated *she* is buried there.

Charles Chester was the keeper at Owls Head Light who replaced Captain Norwood and he was in service there from 1911 until 1923. During that time his daughter Catherine remembered visiting Captain Norwood's nearby gravesite. It seems Catherine and her father would have known if Captain Norwood had been disinterred in 1922. Years later she participated in a 1962 ceremony in which a plaque and flowers were placed on his (unmarked?) Owls Head grave.

One last bit of confounding information is that the gravestone conservation expert the Town hires each year, Joe Ferrannini, also dowses for graves. He dowsed at the Merriman Cemetery last September and feels certain Captain Norwood is not there.

We will likely never know for certain where Captain Norwood's grave is however both the Owls Head Cemetery Committee and American Lighthouse Foundation want to commemorate his 16 years of dedicated service at our lighthouse by providing him (and his wife) with memorial stone at the Merriman Cemetery at long last. The new stone, crafted by Wm. Dornan & Son in Thomaston and purchased by the American Lighthouse Foundation, will be soon installed by the Cemetery Committee.



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LOST TREASURES

By Rodney B. Weeks

As many of our regular readers know, The Mussel Ridge Historical Society is always looking for old photos and artifacts which document our collective past. Unfortunately, we are discovering many have just disappeared over time. I have personally written a couple of articles for this *Lost Treasures* column, over the past few years, but have not found as many treasures as I have hoped for. (*)

This year, Al Hooper came up to me at the Annual Community Picnic and asked if I knew anything about the whereabouts of a sports trophy that for years was on display in the Ash Point Central School. The trophy (and its accompanying plaque), commemorated the 1961 Owls Head school bus line 8th grade boys Championship Basketball team and it has gone missing. I told Mr. Hooper that I was not familiar with the trophy, but I promised I would do whatever I could to help him locate it.

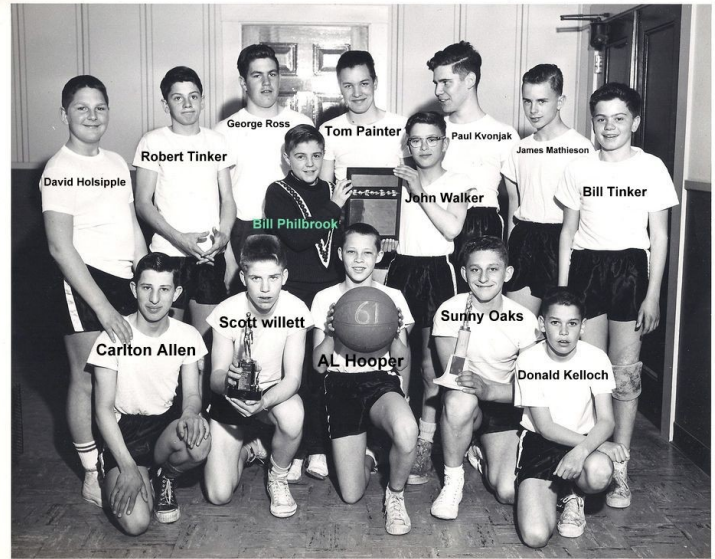
Fortunately for me, Al had two pictures of the missing trophy. One picture had the boys team photo with their trophy and the other picture had the girls cheerleaders team who cheered the boys on to victory. The best part is both photos had the names of the boys and girls and so I am hoping with this article, the people in the pictures may have a clue as to what happened to the trophies.

Before the Owls Head Central School was torn down, the MRHS was able to get the original trophy case but neither the trophies or plaque were in it.

If you have any information that could help us solve this mystery, please contact Al Hooper at ahoop8@cox.net or Rod Weeks at The Mussel Ridge Historical Society at ledgemere1@gmail.com

(*) I still have a BOLO (be on the lookout) for:

(1) The hand painted wood Honor Roll sign carved by Everett Blethen that hung in the Grange Hall for years, (2) A scrapbook entitled "A Story of Ash Point" by Ellena Fredette, (3) the wood sign "Wellesley" that hung on the side of the house/inn run by Florence McConchie and (4) the wood sign "Otis Villa" that hung above the front door at Alvin & May Hurd's home/inn. – Thanks - R.B. W.



Mussel Ridge Learning Center

Progress is being made. Insulation is done, now sheetrock hopefully very soon. A volunteer crew will be painting the interior. If you have painting experience we can use your help. This winter will be filled with moving in, organizing displays, photos, memorabilia, etc. Folks who have a love for history and would like to assist, send us an email history@musselridge.org.

