

Mussel Ridge News

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“The Boats of Ash Point, Maine”

by Carolyn Meserve Philbrook



Harrison Curtis at Ballyhac early 1900s

As I was browsing through some old family pictures, I came across this one of my great grandfather, Harrison Curtis. Looking at the boat he was rowing, my thoughts went back to an article I read on “The Boats of Ash Point” by Alfred Brooks. This article was printed in the *American Neptune*, a quarterly Journal of Maritime History in 1942.

In the article he goes into great detail on boats built between the late 1800s and early 1900s. Some very familiar names in this article are; Luther, Alvin and George Hurd, Bobby Heard, Freeman, Allie, Oliver and Paris Ratcliff, John MacDonald, Tim Crowley, and Elmer Witham.

Harrison Curtis (1856-1926) would have been using these boats or built them himself. He was a blacksmith on High Island as well as a pilot bringing stone carrying schooners in and out of the Mussel Ridge Islands. He would board the ships off Whitehead and bring them up the “Weskeag” River to Hudson’s Wharf. He also sailed double ender whaleboats, ferrying workers to and from the island quarries to the mainland. He lived his entire life on the “Keag” river at Ballyhac.

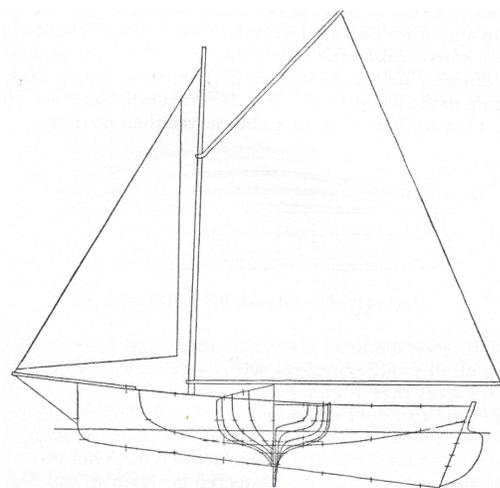
Some interesting history can be found in the article. The men made their own sails and the women joined in. They had to make a trip to Rockland by horse and team to purchase canvas. The women used their sewing machines to accomplish this task with the men supervising! The men then finished up the sails with grommets made from twine. Boat building was done in the winter season.

The Ratcliffs built double-enders on the “Keag” river. This reminds me of what Harrison Curtis is rowing in the photo. They say the Ratcliff sloops were far superior to the Friendship Sloops. Quality was very important to them.

There were four types of boats used in this area at this time: the fisherman’s dory, the double-ender, the wherry and the small sloop. They also had weir dories which were about 25’ long. A weir dory is seen in this video taken at Ballyhac in 1949 <https://youtu.be/mtF9yHpy6ko>.

Two different styles of rowing occurred on these boats. Sitting down or pulling face aft, which they used for long trips; and standing up pushing face forward, which they used for lobstering.

The only man I remember that they mentioned in the article is Arthur Brown. He lived back from the road in a house before you get to the Ash Point Cemetery. When I knew him he was using a gasoline lobster boat though. Arthur was a grandson to Bobby Heard. He had a small sailing wherry. It was a lap strake boat. I cannot find this article online but if anyone is interested in reading it, I do have a copy that Ed Coffin gave the MRHS.



Alvin Hurd's sloop

Veteran's Day

A Mother's Day of Deliverance - December 1, 1969



Recently, I was reading some old family letters my Great Grandmother had written to her future daughter in law (my grandmother H. Emily Weeks) and one letter in particular stood out. Her son (my grandfather J. Rodney Weeks) had just joined the U.S. Army and was training to go overseas as a newly commissioned 2nd Lieutenant to fight in the trenches in France during WWI. The letter read in part:

"My Dear Emily:

Ash Point, Maine

August 4, 1917

Your nice long letter was received last week. I am always so glad to hear from you. You should think I was relieved to get Rodney's telegram that he is OK, but none of my friends have much patience with me now because I feel so strongly about having Rodney go off to war; but I notice none of my friends have sons of draft age and most all have daughters. It does not seem to me you would be so patriotic if you had a son to march into almost certain death. I am sure there are mothers who feel the Country is first and are reconciled to give up their "only" for it, but I just can't bring myself to do it".

After reading these lines it struck me that this letter could have easily been written 25 years later by Emily to her newly engaged daughter in law (my mother) when she sent her only son, my father, (James H. Weeks) off to France in WWII. My mother told me that the only way she and her future mother in law, Emily, got through those times, worrying about my father while he was overseas, was she would meet up with a group of other fiancés and their future mothers in law at the Copper Kettle in Rockland once a week to have tea, talk and most importantly to read to each other letters that one of them may have received from one of their sons or fiancés. It didn't matter if the letter was written by a boy who wasn't in the same theatre of war as your fiancé. It just was nice hearing from someone who was safe so you knew that fiancé or mother was going to rest easy for another week until everyone met again.

The Copper Kettle had a small restaurant on the main floor and rooms upstairs to rent to people who were just passing through town. It was owned by Hervey Clifford Allen and Beulah Helen Allen and it was a popular gathering place, mostly for women, who shopped in town from 1911 until 1959. It stood on Union Street between School and Limerock streets until 1960 when it was torn down to make way for the new Maine National Bank building (now the First National Bank).

Service in the military has been a long tradition in my family and when my war came along (Vietnam) it was my mother's turn to worry once again, this time not as a fiancé, but as a mother of three sons who were of draft age. Even though she



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The Copper Kettle - pictured are Beulah Allen, Patricia Allen Huntley, Christine Huntley

felt the same way as my father did about the war (“my country right or wrong”) I know she harbored the same feelings as expressed in my Great grandmother’s letter 50 years before. She was fearful and reluctant to have any of her sons volunteer for any of the armed forces. Every night when Walter Cronkite came on the television to report the war news, my mother would get up and quietly slip into the kitchen to prepare dinner. We lived just outside of Detroit then and there was no Copper Kettle nearby for her to seek support.

Then on **December 1, 1969**, her day of deliverance came. The federal government instituted the First Draft Lottery since WWII for

boys born between 1944 and 1950 for the war in Vietnam. This First Draft Lottery picked up my older brother and me in the first round. (My younger brother was picked up in the Second Draft Lottery held two years later). As we sat around the television that night, I think for a moment my mother was back at the Copper Kettle in 1944-45 waiting for some good news to be read. The announcer then began to read off the birth dates. September 14th was the first date called and assigned draft #1. Then another man picked out the next date and it went on like that until all 366 birth dates had been read. Each time a new birth date was read you could hear either a gasp of relief or a sigh of despair coming from the live audience. It was a long tedious process and gut-wrenching to watch.

My birth date came up first. All those men born on April 5th between 1944 and 1950 were assigned draft #269. My mother had to wait almost another 30 minutes until my older brother’s number came up at #303. By this time, all of us in the living room were exhausted. As soon as my brother’s number was read, my father got up and quickly turned off the television. In his mind there was no further reason to watch the rest of the program. I remember I turned to say something to my mother, but I stopped. She just sat there, stunned, with tears in her eyes. Both her boys were safe for now. Then without a word, she got up and quietly went into the kitchen to prepare dinner. Her days of worry were over.

Epilogue: As it turned out my older brother graduated from Maine Maritime Academy in June of 1969 and made several trips to Vietnam delivering war supplies as a Merchant Marine, fortunately without any serious incident. The lottery got up to #195 and all of my friends who had a number less than that went to Vietnam along with all of my friends who had graduated from college and who had lost their student deferments. I graduated from college in June of 1972, lost my student deferment, but was not called to service solely because of my high lottery number. The Vietnam War was over for the United States one year later in 1973.



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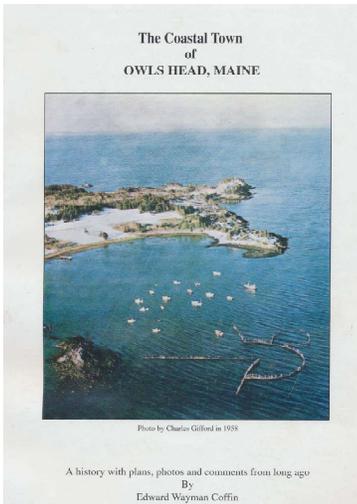


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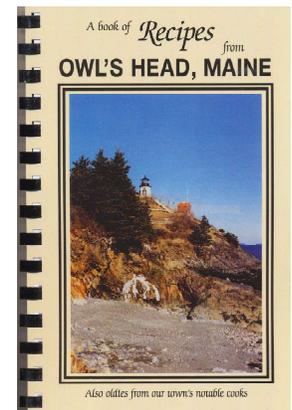


\$40 - 1873 of Owls Head canvas chart 16" x 20"

**\$32 - The Coastal Town of Owls Head, ME
by Edward Coffin**



\$100 - 1800s photo of Owls Head Light professionally printed 18" x 38"



**\$15 - Recipes
of Owls Head, Maine**

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Garden Snippets

What a year!! Besides all the covid stuff we all have to deal with, there was the drought, the election, and heaven knows what else. Thank goodness for our gardens. And who would have thought we'd still be doing gardening chores in the middle of November? Though I really did love those perfect Indian summer days.



But it really is time to put the gardens to bed, because we know that sooner or later—probably sooner—it really will be winter and we'd like to be ready. I remember always cutting perennials back, disposing of those cuttings, raking and disposing of leaves—so many leaves!

But I don't do any of that anymore and I'll tell you why.

Fallen leaves are the winter homes for the offspring of many creatures—butterfly and moth eggs, and various other critters. And the stems in perennials that remain standing offer homes to bee larva and other such insects. When we remove the leaves and plant stems, we are “murdering” all those creatures. Also, leaves make an excellent natural mulch for all of plant life. Look in the woods—Mother Nature uses the leaves to nurture the soil and plants that live there. She doesn't get rid of them at all. We can learn from her!!

It does seem strange to be raking all the leaves into the garden instead of out of it, but I believe that is the best thing for us to do. It does mean more clean up in the spring, but it sure makes it easier in the fall!

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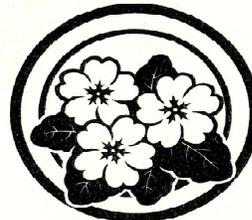


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____ I Would Like TO HELP Preserve the History of Owl's Head in the Following Ways

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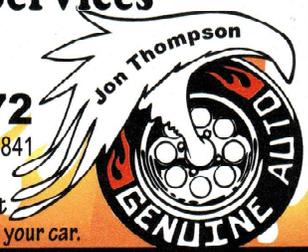
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Recipes from the Past

Dress up the turnip for Thanksgiving. This recipe is from our Owls Head Cookbook.

Finnish Turnip

- | | |
|--------------------------|------------------|
| 2 medium turnips | 1/2+ tsp. nutmeg |
| 1/4 cup dry bread crumbs | 1 tsp. salt |
| 1/4 cup milk | 2 eggs beaten |
| 1/2 cup sugar | 3T butter |

Cook, drain, and mash turnips well. Make paste of crumbs and milk. Combine all in buttered casserole. Bake 1 hour (covered) at 325 degrees.

Recipe from Jean Brooks



Edward Rowe Snow was famous for carrying on the tradition of the "Flying Santa" for over forty years (1936–1980). Every Christmas he would hire a small plane and drop wrapped gifts to the lighthouse keepers and their families. Owls Head lighthouse was one of his stops

Edward Rowe Snow, the Flying Santa
(ALF archives)



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