



Isle au Haut Historical Society

Number 2

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2019 IAHHS Annual Report

Kris Carlson-Lewis, our secretary, has a deep interest in genealogy and oral history. Last summer Kris completed an interview with Parker Waite who was instrumental in the planning and laying of the power cable from Stonington to Isle au Haut. This and many other interviews can be read and listened to [here](#) thanks to the work of Stew Foelix. A partial excerpt from Parker Waite's interview is our lead article in this, our second Newsletter.

Kris also has assembled some genealogical summaries of past island residents, primarily those during the 1800's such as Theresa Damon, the Hamiltons, Bowens, Grants, Carltons, and Merchants to name a few.

Your Isle au Haut Historical Society met three times over this past summer. The meetings are open to all and everyone is welcome. The minutes of those meetings can be viewed on the town's website: <http://www.isleauhautmaine.us/historical-society-meeting-minutes/>

We had three presentations last summer:

On August 2, Jeff Runge spoke on Climate and the Decline of the Right Whales in the Gulf of Maine; August 8, Bob Gerber presented on Special Places Off-Trail in Acadia National Park of Isle au Haut and August 24, Kathie Fiveash spoke about her experiences some years ago teaching a series of grant funded projects on ecology at the Isle au Haut school. All of the talks were well attended.

The IAHHS Summer Talks will continue in 2020, tentatively with four presentations. Sometime in late July, the photographer Peter Ralston will speak on Climate Change and his recent trip though the Northwest Passage. In August, we will perhaps have three talks: Kris Carlson-Lewis share her research on an historical topic of interest related to Isle au Haut; Tim Vallilee speak on his Nightly Fishing Report and the work he has done with the young people of Isle au Haut; and on August 20, Glen Mittelhauser will share his work in creating The Maine Bird Atlas. Glen is the executive director of the [Maine Natural History Observatory](#).

Our planned visit last August to the [Great Cranberry Island Historical Society](#) was canceled due to repairs to the Sunbeam but has been rescheduled for August 2020. If you are interested in joining our Historical Society's visit to GCI, please attend our first meeting July 16, at 10 AM in the Town Hall or send us an email at IsleauHautHistory@gmail.com.

We continue to seek new members and greater participation in our little society. All are welcome. We are beginning to search in earnest for a more permanent home for our collections, currently crammed into several file cabinets in the Town Hall. A donation of a small parcel of land appropriately located would be a great step in that direction.

Tom Guglielmo, Acting President

Parker Waite Oral History

Historical Society Oral History Interviews – Below is an excerpt from one of our recently released oral history interviews featuring Parker Waite, a resident of Isle au Haut in the late 1970's. The entire interview can be heard at the IAHS website: <http://www.isleauhauthistory.com/OralHistory.htm>



Parker: The other glitch that was written about in the article was static electricity.

I had never considered I had seven miles of a conductor that we were splicing together and that it would generate static electricity. We were off of Flake Island and for some reason, I ended up touching the neutral and positive together and I was standing in a puddle of water on Bill's boat, the *Nana*. I had the exposed piece of cable onboard which ran all the way back to Stonington. I got nailed by the seven miles of static electricity. It blew me off my feet. Now static electricity doesn't have any amps in it and that's what hurts people. So, I wasn't damaged by it but I certainly was shocked by it.

I am sure there were a bunch of other glitches that I don't recall now. There were a whole bunch of ancillary or fringe stories that were occasioned by what it was I was trying to do.

Kris: I think we have answered most of the questions, all but the last one.

Parker: Did you have any inkling or idea as to how long the cable would last? Yeah. If we got ten years of out of this, we were lucky. It ended up the cable cost \$90,000. We didn't end up spending \$110,000 dollars so that other twenty grand got plowed into a fund to replace the cable which the company has. Plus, I went to the Public Utilities Commission and got the rate structured so there was a certain percentage set aside with every bill for a replacement fund in the following years. I had no idea what it would cost to replace. I knew it was going to have to be replaced and I guessed ten years. Am I surprised?

It's overwhelming to me and I am really proud of it. I am really cognizant of how lucky we all are that it has lasted that long. And it is certainly not something I did. There is some other factor at play in the fact that it has lasted. Cables don't normally last that long that I am aware of.

Kris: Hasn't it been like thirty-five years now?

Parker: Thirty some years. '83 was when we turned it on, 34 years I guess.

Kris: That's quite impressive. Well, we are all grateful that it has lasted this long. I know as they go forward into looking into solar or...it's been a godsend all these years to this community. Hopefully, something similar will come out of the current project.

NOTE: More pictures and story of Parker Waite can be found on The Island Institute's Island Journal:

<http://www.islandjournal.com/article/diy-approach-linked-isle-au-haut-grid/>



Russ & his crew had loaded 7 reels of cable aboard that barge up in Penobscot at his place along the outflow of the Penobscot River. The photo was taken in Stonington as we pulled away from what at the time was the Cannery Pier now the Boat Company. You can see the cable spooling off the barge into the water guided by Russ's Crew. 2 hours and 15 minutes later we were touching land below the school house on Isle au Haut.
Left to right: Russ Devereux, unknown, unknown, Dennis Farnham, Mel Brown

That Thing

Harold VanDoren

Y'know, I never used to have a pickup truck. To be sure, many times I could have used one. Instead, most of my cars ended up with broken windows, flattened tires, ripped headliners and squashed roof racks from carrying oversized and overweight loads. Having a pickup truck would have been a handy thing. But, with a wife and three daughters, a station wagon was a lot handier, so that's the way it was.

About ten years ago, though, my truckless status ended when an ICDC charity auction was held on the Island. Bob Olney generously donated his '54 Chevrolet pickup and brought it over from Kimball's to be put up for bid. It sat waiting in the field above Kennedy's boathouse, bright red, in very nice condition. I've always liked old Chevys and my wife, Ruthie, saw my eyes light up as we looked it over.

"Is this something you want? she asked, smiling.

"I think she's a beauty," I enthused.

At the auction, she raised her paddle high, made the winning bid and that is how we became happy pickup owners.

We named the truck "Cherrystone," had a lot of fun driving her in Fourth of July parades and it was a welcome change to haul stuff around without staving something up. But, a few years later, we were obliged to make the hardest decision of our lives and move off the Island. We were going to another island, Lopez, in the State of Washington. We barged Cherrystone up to Stonington, but I believed that driving thirty-four hundred miles in highway traffic and crossing the Continental Divide might be asking a little too much of her. While I dithered over hiring a car hauler, Murray, a guy who had been lusting after her made a good offer, and at length I gave in and my first pickup was sold.

But, Cherrystone had spoiled me, and I wanted to have another old truck. So, in Washington, I started looking on line and in the newspapers for a substitute. After a month of futile searching, I was pretty discouraged. Everything listed was either really costly or in pieces or both. I began to wish I hadn't sold Cherrystone. Then, one morning on the local bulletin board, a 1946 GMC ½ ton pickup was offered. And, only two miles away! From a couple of photographs, it looked interesting, a lot like a late '30's truck, with headlight shells set on the fenders, running boards, a tilt-out windshield and distinctive "art-deco" styling.

After calling to make sure it was still available, I decided to go have a look see and Ruthie came along. We drove under a canopy of Douglas fir trees down a pleasant, winding dirt road. As it opened up into a clearing, we were taken aback by the extent of visible chaos. Dominating the entry was a decrepit old launch blocked up on stands in front of a large, ramshackle shed. Cluttered around were rusting, derelict wood-working machines – a massive band saw, planer and drill press. Further back, there were storage buildings overflowing with parts and pieces of many different mechanical objects, some recognizable, some not. Scattered throughout the area were better than half a dozen vehicles, some very old, others more modern, but all appearing to need repairs.

"Looks like an old boatyard. Or, is it a junkyard? Are you sure about this?" asked Ruthie, showing some scepticism.

"Now, hold on, let's give it a chance," I urged, patiently.

We got out of our car and as we approached, the owner saw us and came out of his house. "Where's your truck that's for sale?" I asked. "Over there," he pointed, "It's the one with the hood up." Ruthie took one look, turned on her heel and started to walk towards home.





“That thing is a wreck,” she yelled over her shoulder. “Whatever do you want it for?”

Well. This was certainly very different from how she had felt about Cherrystone. Although I was surprised by her unexpected vehemence, I decided to hold my ground. I introduced myself to the owner, Jay, and we shook hands. I wanted at least to hear the engine run, maybe take the truck for a test drive.

“Can you start ‘er up, Jay?”

“She’s been setting for a spell... Might be I’ll have to prime her.” He fetched an ancient gallon can with a cork stopper. After dumping some gas into the carburetor, he inched out the choke and stomped on a floor pedal. The engine turned over slowly, coughed a couple of times and then started. Jay revved it up and settled it down to a rough idle. To my mechanic’s ear, the engine sounded okay, but I’d have to admit that it was the only part of the vehicle that seemed to be in half-decent shape. As I looked the truck over, it became obvious that it had not been out of the dooryard in months, maybe even years, and there was definitely not going to be any test drive. There were no working brakes, lights, or horn. The mufflers had holes, the passenger’s side door was jammed shut, the windshield locked open, side windows stuck down, rear window broken out, seats worn to the springs, rusted out holes in the cab and bed, running boards and fenders dented and loose, rear tires bald, the Brewster Green paint weathered to a lackluster shade... very easy to understand why Ruthie had immediately turned it down. You might well ask why I didn’t as well. The reasons: I liked its looks, even so, and already I had a vision of myself restoring this neglected GMC to pristine condition... a surviving truck to be proud of, to have fun with, as well as a pickup to use. I imagined driving it slowly over the Lopez Island’s roads, folks smiling and waving, old people remembering when they used to see it many years ago, amazed that it was running again. And, I was barely aware of an inexplicable, almost instinctive feeling that for some reason, I should buy this truck. *Am I imagining this? A need to justify a want?*

I thanked Jay, promising to “think about it,” and caught up with Ruthie. She got in and we returned home without speaking, neither of us desiring to talk about “that thing” in close quarters, tension steadily increasing between us.



A couple of days passed, highlighted by fierce and unresolved debates, punctuated by silences of mutual obstinacy. On a chilly October evening, I decided to go back alone to hear the engine run one more time, wanting to make a decision, one way or the other. Jay obligingly primed the carburetor again, started up the motor and it still sounded good. He invited me into his house where there was a nice fire going in the parlor stove. As we sat down at a coffee table across from each other, I soaked up the warmth, feeling lulled by the comfort into agreeableness. But, I began to bargain anyway, believing that Ruthie might be less opposed if I could get the price down.

“Jay, your truck is quite a lot rougher than it looked in the pictures,” I commented, as an opener.

“Oh, those were the only ones I had – they were taken several years ago,” he answered lightly. “Several,” all right... That’s a 1964 license plate!

“I don’t know,” I persisted, shaking my head. She’s in pretty tough shape now... How ’bout knocking off \$500?”

“There’s someone else that is also interested... Oh, really? He wants to take it away, but I’d like not to see it leave the island. It’s been down here for better’n twenty-five years. Got it from a pig farmer up in Whatnough County.” Lowering his voice to a confidential level, he intoned, “I think you’re the one that can do the work and if you’re very careful about it, I believe you can get that truck back on the road for about two hundred dollars.”

“Hmmm...Well... I dunno... I might get it back on the road, but I doubt I can keep it

there for that,” I drawled. “How ’bout four hundred off your price?”

Jay shook his head, looked down as if he were adding a column of figures, then looked up.

“I’d rather not, but to have it stay on the island, I’ll do it.”

So, now I was bound to my accepted offer, but as I made out a check, even in the room’s coziness, I felt a shiver of uncertainty. *Am I doing the right thing?*

“You know,” I offered, holding out the check, “If you’d rather sell it to someone else at your asking price, it’s okay by me.” Jay snatched that check as if it were a baton in a relay race. Right afterwards, his wife entered the room.

“I can’t tell you how glad I am to see that truck leave,” she exulted. I had to smother a laugh, tickled by Jay’s stony lack of response to her enthusiasm, and I caught him giving her a furtive warning look. But, recovering, he brought out a bottle and we had a nice drink of homemade brew to seal the deal.

I drove home in a hard cider haze, filled with conflicted emotions, talking myself into believing that I’d made a reasonable purchase. *After all, I do want that truck and I got it for \$400 less, right?* Still, I dreaded what

would happen when I would tell Ruthie. Like most couples, we had an unspoken agreement to consult each other when making any large purchase and I knew I had violated ours.

I came into the house and hung up my jacket, taking my time. Ruthie was sitting in the parlor, knitting peacefully. "Where've you been?" she asked.

"Well... I went over and bought the truck," I announced cautiously.

Ruthie put down her knitting and looked at me reproachfully. She very seldom used profanity but she did this time. "Damn that Jay for taking advantage of you! Damn it to hell, I'll bet I'm going to have to hire a wrecker to get rid of it," she stormed. She ignored my protests, assurances, and justifications, bringing me nearly to the abyss of self-doubt. Her ultimatum: "If you are going to bring that thing here, you have got to put it where the neighbors and I won't see it."

"Fine, I'll make sure you'll never know it's here," I agreed, overwhelmed by a mixture of shame and relief, defeated in victory.

Now, to be faithful to the truth, I need to concede that Ruthie had an additional, rock solid basis for her objections. A couple of weeks before we had gone to see the truck, I had had a prostate examination with "Doctor Bob," the island's GP.

"This is something none of us ever enjoy," he'd sighed, as he snapped on latex gloves. After sensitively probing the depths, he'd said quietly, "I think you may have cancer. We'll need to schedule a biopsy to be sure." Chilling words. Worrisome. In my overpowering desire to buy the truck, I had minimized the possibility because I did not want to believe it was true. Ruthie was quick to use this as an escape clause. When she saw Jay downtown, she strode up to him and made a pronouncement: "If he has cancer, this deal is off!"

He agreed. I did not.

A couple of weeks later, on a grey November afternoon, a new friend and fellow wrench-twister, Alwynn, kindly towed the pickup over to our house. "I can't back it up on this dolly – this is as close as I can get it," he apologized. Close as he could get it was squarely in the middle of the driveway. Ruthie had gone shopping and was due to return soon. I envisioned her entry blocked by "that thing" and a huge ensuing open air fracas. Alwynn had left, and now, somehow, I had to move the truck out of the driveway by myself, and fast. *Boy, I sure hope I can get this engine started. I don't think the battery is very strong.* I hurried to find a gas can, thinking it best to try Jay's proven strategy of priming the carburetor. I dumped in some gas, hit the starter and the motor fired then stalled.

Look at this mess I'm in! What am I going to do if it won't start? I don't even know if this truck can move under its own power! What if the clutch or transmission is stuck? What if Desperately, I yanked out the choke, pumping the accelerator pedal repeatedly.

The motor fired again, stuttered, and caught. Quickly, I jammed the stick shift into dual low, and when I let out the clutch, heavens be praised, the truck moved. By racing the engine, I managed to keep it running just long enough to charge into a woody little back corner of our lot.

Whoo-ee! It's out of Ruthie's way, but now, I've got to hide it. For the time being, I scrounged up an old drab looking tarp and threw it over the cab. Next day, I hurriedly tacked up a wooden fence that obscured the truck completely from the house. This satisfied the imposed conditions for us to achieve a peaceful armistice. Our truce was now workable, even if uneasy.

However, the doubts that Ruthie planted had taken root. Had my judgment been truly unsound? What if this pickup really was a wreck, only worth crushing for scrap? Worst of all, what if I did have a debilitating cancer? What then...?



Captain Samuel Turner and the Schooner Isabella

Kris Carlson-Lewis

Strolling along the main road of Isle au Haut, an old cemetery located in the meadow beside the thoroughfare beckons one to investigate who lies there. In one corner of the Turner cemetery stands the gravestone of Captain Samuel Turner, 1785–1837 and his wife, Hannah, 1791–1884.



According to *Hosmer's Historical Sketch of Deer Isle*, Samuel Turner hailed from Winterport, Maine and became a resident of Isle au Haut by the time of the 1810 U.S. Census.¹ The 1820 census included Samuel and his wife Hannah and four children with one adult engaged in commerce. The 1830 census shows the family dynamics changing with additional children.²

Hosmer commented that Samuel “was very well and favorably known in this vicinity for many years and was engaged in the freighting business, an occupation he followed for many years.”³ Locally, Samuel held an account at the Isle au Haut store.⁴ An entry for June 1, 1837, showed he bought supplies for the schooner *Isabella* prior to an upcoming coastal trip. A “Master’s List of Vessels Built and Owned in the Towns of Deer Isle, Stonington, Swan’s Island and Isle au Haut and Registered in the District of Castine, Maine” (contained in *Applebee’s List* held by the Deer Isle – Stonington Historical Society) includes Master Samuel Turner of Deer Isle with the Schooner Isabel in 1836.⁵

Isabella, captained by Samuel, left New York Harbor that same year on October 25 with a load of assorted cargo bound for Wilmington, North Carolina. Only four days out, the schooner approached the notorious and dangerous coast of Nantucket Isle off Cape Cod, where the vessel capsized in a severe gale. The following 1837 excerpt from the Bangor Whig & Courier describes the mishap:⁶

The following account of the melancholy shipwreck of one of the vessels belonging in our bay, and the loss of lives on board, we take from the New York Courier & Enquirer. If the barque described by Mr. Henderson should be discovered in one of our ports, it would be difficult for the authorities on board to escape the operations of Lynch law..

Our news boat ECLIPSE came up last night, having boarded at 2 PM 25 miles east southeast of the Hook, the schooner FOREST DAVIS, of Friendship (Maine), 25 days from Eastport for New York, from which the following report was obtained. On the 21st of October, Nantucket South Shoals West by north 15 miles distant, in a very heavy sea, rolled away 20 feet of the foremast, also broke it off by the deck. Has since had strong northwest gales, and was driven off to the Gulf Stream. The 4th instant, Lat. 35 40, Long. 74 20, fell in with the wreck of the schooner ISABELLA, full of water, both masts and bowsprit gone. Took from her Mr. James Henderson of the Isle au Haut.

Mr. Henderson informs us that he sailed from New York about 25th of October, for Wilmington, NC in the schooner ISABELLA, Captain Samuel Turner, of the Isle au Haut, Maine, having on board Mr. Snow, of Bucksport, and Charles Lewis of Nealer, of Camden, cook a lad 15 years old. On the 4th day out, hove to under a close reefed foresail,

¹ George L. Hosmer, *An Historical Sketch of the Town of Deer Isle, Maine: with notices of its settlers and early inhabitants* (Boston: Stanley and Usher, 1886), pg. 189.

² 1820 U.S. Census, M33, roll 343, pg. 605 (image 18) and 1830 U.S. Census, M19, roll 47, pg. 132, FHL Film 9701, both for Deer Isle (Isle au Haut), Hancock County, Maine (Ancestry.com).

³ Hosmer, pg. 189.

⁴ Turner and Smith Deer Isle Store Ledger, 1833-1841, pg. 71 (holding of the Isle au Haut Historical Society, Turner Collections).

⁵ “Master’s List of Vessels Built and Owned in the Towns of Deer Isle, Stonington, Swan’s Island and Isle au Haut and Registered in the District of Castine, Maine,” *Applebee’s List*, no date (holding of the Deer Isle – Stonington Historical Society).

⁶ Untitled article, *Bangor Whig & Courier*, 21 Nov 1837, pg. 2 (credit to Jon Johansen, Penobscot Marine Museum Researcher in locating article).

blowing a gale from northwest, with snow, hail and rain; on the third night after they hove to, the sixth day out, then in the Gulf Stream, shipped two tremendous seas, which capsized the schooner; at the time all on board were in the cabin.

About an hour after, both masts broke off by the deck, when she righted, and Captain Turner, Mr. Snow and himself succeeded in gaining and lashing themselves to the quarter deck. The cook was drowned in the cabin, Mr. Snow was washed off fifteen minute after and was drowned; half an hour after, the captain was washed off and also drowned.

The gale continued twenty-four hours after they were capsized, and Mr. Henderson expected every minute to be washed off; the sea ran mountains high, and he could only catch his breath between the waves as they rolled over him. There was only ten feet of the quarter deck out of water. He had nothing to eat or drink the seven days he was on the wreck but a handful of hay.

On the first morning after he was capsized, he saw a brig pass about eight miles from the wreck. On the second day he saw a foretopsail schooner four miles off. On the third day, nothing. On the fourth, saw two fore and aft schooners four miles distant. On the fifth, about 2 PM, he saw a barque with painted ports, a small white streak below, black yards; the round house short and high, painted green; billet head painted white; foretopsail old, with several patches on it; her bowsprit steaved more than common. She ran down upon the wreck before the wind.

The sea smooth, about a four knot's breeze; unlashd himself, and expected that she intended to run so near that he could get on board; but when she came within three or four hundred yards, she hauled upon the wind and left him. There were ten men aft looking at him. He had a handkerchief tied to a board, which he waved to them, he also hailed her, but to no purpose. She was so near that he could see the hoops on the buckets that a man was painting on the round house. He took her to be a British barque, with little or no cargo in. Saw nothing on the 6th; that day he found a little hay which he ate, it being the first food since he was on the wreck.

On the 7th day, at 2 PM was taken off by Captain Davis, who treated him with the greatest kindness, and gave him his own bed to sleep on, for which he returns him his sincere thanks. Mr. Henderson has lost all his money and clothes, and has nothing but what he has on. He came up last night in our news boat, and is in a very feeble state. [Paragraph breaks added for readability.]

Sadly, Samuel did not live to see his children grow and prosper. The tragic shipwreck left his wife Hannah to finish raising their family alone. Erected in the Turner Cemetery on Isle au Haut, Samuel and Hannah's gravestone reads: "Capt. Samuel Turner, 11 Feb 1785–17 Oct 1837, Lost at Sea Ae 52y's 8m's 6d's" and "Hannah, his wife died May 5, 1884 Ae 93y's 13d's." As one meanders through the Turner Cemetery, gravestones of other Turner family members can be seen in their final resting places.

How Telephones Came to Isle Au Haut

Jeff Burke

"Isle Au Haut may be the last town in Maine, and possibly New England, to go without phone service." (Bill Black, Maine Public Advocates Office – November 15, 1988)

Back in 1986 when Judi and I arrived with our sixth-grader Matthew to open the inn at the lighthouse station, we were convinced the absence of telephones on the island promised a unique vacation experience for city folk. Sure enough, starting from opening day, starry-eyed seekers filled our beds every night seeking refuge from the ceaseless pursuit of their telephones. Here was serenity!

Not every islander shared that view. Over the decades Isle Au Haut had had many contentious and lengthy battles in its struggle to maintain a sustainable population: with the foundation of the National Park, with the creation of a public Town Landing, and – just a decade prior – with the establishment of a reliable electric power system. But few struggles have been as illustrative of the friction between the old and the new as the battle to establish telephone service. With a declining citizenship and the inherent obstacles of six miles of pitching seas and unaffordable technology, there were few methods of communication. For example, if there were a house aflame, someone would scamper up Mount Champlain and kindle a smoky fire. Likewise, once the church was built, the steeple bell also became a fire alarm. In 1942, with the assistance of Representative Margaret Chase

Smith – soon to become Senator – the townspeople made a concerted appeal to the Federal Government for help in creating telephone service. All to no avail.

Still, even in the 1980s many existing customs kept villagers sufficiently connected, and linked to the outside world. Most reliable were the mailboat and the Post Office. Daily mail service was dependable, although the Island held the dubious distinction of having its mail arrive a day later than every other town in the State, coming into Stonington on schedule, but not getting transferred to the mailboat until the following morning. On arrival at the Town Landing, Captain Buster Aldrich then trudged up to the parking lot with the mailbags where he had to wrestle open the rusty hood up of his old salt-scarred Pontiac and connect the battery cables, get the archaic monster chugging, then lurch his way the hundred yards across broken pavement to the Post Office (then housed in the front of the Island Store). Often he had to walk.

Postmistress Helen Barter kept a ratty wicker chair in the corner reserved for Buster. He would drop the mailbags, flop down in the chair, fire up his pipe and jabber about the weather while Helen got the outgoing mail ready to be carted off for the 8:00 AM boat departure. That ETD rarely happened. Instead, Buster lazed on his throne for as long as it took for his pipe to expire. Meanwhile, on the boat, passengers fretted and fumed about being late for doctor appointments or tight schedules to complete their off-island errands, including the requisite rush to the telephone booths over at Nat's newspaper or up to Connie's Restaurant. Additionally, for a reasonable charge the captains would deliver messages, shopping lists, pick up supplies or make deliveries.

For folks needing local island message service, the options were less formal. You could thumbtack a scrawled note and tack it on Helen's bulletin board. Often, those messages found their way into post office boxes. That ended abruptly one day when an official looking sign got posted on the Post Office wall: ALL MAIL MUST HAVE STAMP.

The first battery powered radios had come to the island in 1926. Although you could listen in on the scratchy news and entertainment programs, they provided no means to communicate with your neighbors. Having one of these luxuries was notable enough to be jotted down by the tax assessors, along with the family livestock and organ.

A few families even had magneto-cranking radiotelephones. Harold VanDoren recalls that Orville and Dot



Barter had one connected to the old Bill Robinson house (now the French's). Jack MacDonald had one, too. On the Point, Kennard Wakefield wired one up. Whenever the herring seine over at Head Harbor needed to be checked, Maurice Barter cranked up his unit to holler at Del to meet up. When setting the bugger up, Maurice had had to run the wire down to Rich's Cove, bellying his way under the road through the Bridge Hill culvert with the wire clamped in his jaws.

Later, citizen band radios (CBs) became a more refined option. Many fishing families had Motorola models handy on the kitchen table, as well as another on their boats. They would leave the things blaring 24/7 in case of a maritime emergency, or a plea to hitch a ride to Stonington, or a request to drop off the lunchbox Junior forgot to take to school, or to seek a cup of powered sugar to finish the frosting for Marlene's birthday cake. Here's how it worked: you would switch to channel 78, depress the button and speak, "You on there, Florence?" Then release the button to listen. Of course you had to be careful with what you said: everyone on the Gulf of Maine listened in on this open radio banter. In the 70s and 80s most CBs were replaced with more technically improved VHF units. Still, at best signals were often poor and sometimes non-existent.

For a truly good long distance signal, your best bet was to use Camden Marine. This was a major production, and very expensive. You had to start by radioing channel 16: "Camden Marine, Camden Marine, Camden Marine: this is Keepers House, WTU-9655." If you were lucky, Camden Marine would respond by telling you to switch to Channel 22 or 25, and then repeat the mantra. You would be put on a waiting list, listening in while faceless strangers babbled across the waters about their sailing misfortunes or how Auntie Lil was faring in the nursing home. Eventually, Camden Marine would call you back and patch your radio into a mainland hard-wired telephone, with your party anxiously waiting to talk to you, baffled by the mysterious frontier technology and worried sick that you might have expired while waiting.

Of course our guests at the inn had no experience with this kind of publicly exposed radio communication. We had one young wine-imbibing visitor from Minneapolis who had heard us call the mailboat on our kitchen radio, and later during dinner had pleaded with me to use the radio for a phone call. Despite misgivings about breaking tradition, I agreed to set him up on Camden Marine. When they called back with the connection, Judi traipsed into the dining room to fetch him. He rushed starry eyed and flushed by pinot noir into the busy kitchen and grabbed the microphone, scotched behind the Servel for a bit of privacy, and began cooing intimate messages to his honey, including the status of his physical excitement in hearing her sweet voice. Numb as a post, the young Romeo was oblivious to the fact that thousands of eavesdroppers all across Penobscot Bay were enjoying his explicit proclamations.

A last resort for any islander with an important mainland message to be delivered would be to board the mailboat for Stonington. Once ashore they would rush off to a pay phone booth. The cost to make a routine telephone call: an expensive round-trip boat fare and a day out of their life lost forever, in addition to the large handful of quarters.

So, if the island community were to survive and attract additional settlers (people who would expect the basic necessity of telephone service), most folks agreed that acquiring dependable, affordable, single-call telephone service was an absolute must. Nevertheless, resistance still reined from more than just the contrarian innkeepers

"Not in my backyard!" said one selectman.

"The ruination of the island!" said a summer lady.

"The destruction of my privacy!" said a reclusive fisherman.

"Everything that makes the island special lost forever!" said the distinguished professor from Boston.

Regardless of the ambivalence about the island losing its character, a group of Islanders led by Bud Blaisdell and Tina Tully scoured sources for any outfit capable of installing service. As I recall, at the time there was a situation where area-wide telephone service contracts were available, but only to companies that already offered service within those specific zones. Now, for companies without established service the possibility of bringing telephones to Isle au Haut was a way to get into the game. Several responded with generous offers. But within a year or so, the huge cost of capitalization and the probability of meager income caused their interest to evaporate.

Except for one. In 1987 Jeffrey Webber and his Island Telephone Company came up with a makeshift budget plan that the Island could actually afford. He was a Gyro Gearloose kind of guy (just the type who gets attracted to Isle Au Haut), and, just like that, the project was ready to roll! But with all the naysayers and the widespread ambivalence could it possibly still come to fruition?

The answer became clear to me during a stop I made at the Post Office later that year. I collected my stuff from my cubbyhole and curled up in Buster's chair to peruse my junk mail and queries. Ginny MacDonald wandered in. She stood there twisting the dial on her box while chatting with Helen.

"Good Lord, Helen, I've had my fill and more of this telephone nonsense," she said.

"Ayah, some folks can't be satisfied with what God give us," complained the Postmistress from within her barred cage. Helen's loose dentures clicked like castanets whenever she spoke.

Ginny responded. "I don't know, Dear, but every bone in my body tells me it would be a fateful mistake. But I hear Maybelle is keen on keepin' up on young Lee out 'ta Idaho – she wants a telephone some wicked bad!"

"Ayah," clicks Helen.

"So . . . I 'spose if Maybelle wants one, who am I to stand in the way!"

The next summer on August 16, 1988, sixteen telephones were installed on the Island; the summer after that almost every other home followed suit. We never did get one at the lighthouse.

Some dots to connect...

Allen Myers

The Historical Society Archives in Revere Memorial Hall contain more than eighty cataloged folders of material relating directly to the church on the Island, organized a few years ago by Island Fellow Meghan Cooper.

Local Isle au Haut men built the church in 1856-57, but, as is often the case with the establishment of churches in those seemingly far-off times, women raised the money.

The founding energy for the church was provided by Lucretia Proctor Haskell Turner, a woman of considerable energy and vision. She gave the land on which the building stands, and she tirelessly traveled throughout downeast Maine and inland as far as Bangor, soliciting money for the church she envisioned.

Her grave marker, which stands in the town cemetery



by the edge of the Thorofare, is the only one of its kind on the Island: it is made of cast zinc, manufactured by the Monumental Bronze Company of Bridgeport, Connecticut—the original maker of such markers. It is “Cottage design” #283 in their catalog, with an “ashler” [= imitation stone] base. It was priced at \$95.00 in 1905, eleven years after she died, and must have represented a considerable portion of an island income.

Her husband, John Turner, had died some years earlier—unlike, curiously, most of the Turner men, who outlived their wives: possibly a testament to the rigors of life for women on an off-shore island—and his part of the grave marker faces south. Lucretia’s panel faces the road—the only grave marker in the cemetery so oriented—and gives her name as “Lucretia P. Haskell, wife of John Turner.” Her pride in her family name is obvious, and remembered in this grave marker in a small blow for recognizing women’s personhood.



The stained glass window in the church was given by Lucretia’s family in 1908, in commemoration of the church’s fiftieth year and in honor of her many roles in the life of the church. The window—manufacturer as yet unknown—was patterned on a painting by a German member of the Nazarene School of art, Bernhard Plockhorst. The painting was called “The Good Shepherd”, and was very popular as a subject for stained glass windows.

These bits of information are things to hang our historical hats on; dots that—as they accumulate through patient work of dedicated people over the course of years—can eventually be connected.

Island Folks



Brenda, Our Librarian.



The Brothers Palmier



Nancy and Bill



Dorothy and Rudy

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Page 1. Boom Beach looking NE, unusual fog offshore with vertical striations. 2019. Mary Fennell.

Page 2. Parker Waite, circa 1980's. Joan Tilney
Page 3. The laying of the cable, 1980's. Supplied by Parker Waite.
Page 3. Harold Van Doren and That Thing. 2018. Mary Fennell.
Page 4. Merchants Cove looking SW. 2019. Mary Fennell.
Page 5. Harold Van Doren. 1918. Mary Fennell.
Page 6. That Thing restored. 2019. Harold Van Doren.
Page 7. Grave of Captain Samuel Turner. 2019. John DeWitt.
Page 9. Small Cove between Merchants and Barred Harbor. 2019. Mary Fennell.
Page 11. Stain glass window in the IAH church. 2019. Allen Myers
Page 11. Grave of Lucretia Turner. 2019. Allen Myers
Page 12. Isle au Haut Folks. 2019. Mary Fennell.

Isle au Haut Historical Society

If you would like to be aware of our summer talks, upcoming events or make a comment about this Newsletter or anything else, the Isle au Haut Historical Society would love to hear from you. Please drop us a line at IsleauHautHistory@gmail.com. Thanks.

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