



# OLD BRISTOL HISTORICAL SOCIETY

An Occasional Newsletter of the Society - Spring 2015

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## Presidents' Remarks to the Membership of the Old Bristol Historical Society

Here we are in Bristol's Sestercentennial Year! It's been 250 years since Bristol, including Bremen, South Bristol, and parts of Damariscotta and Nobleboro, was organized as a town! When we think back to what Old Bristol was like in 1765 and compare it to 2015, we feel the effects of time. So much has changed and yet we're not only a beautiful town on the coast of Maine, but also, still a dynamic town.

Our Program Chair, Robert Ives, has secured special speakers for our summer programs, 3 of which will be presented at Lighthouse Park. They will convey what life was like here in 1765 and even in the years before, when Native Americans cared for the land. We'll learn what industries and endeavors held sway in the following century from Josh Hanna's new book and lecture, and what can be gleaned from a diary about life on a Bristol farm. We'll further review history through music and song through the years! In the meantime, we hope you'll enjoy reading Pete Hope's article in this issue. (Continued on page 2)

## Digital Images Archive

Recognizing the need to preserve Bristol's visual history, the Preservation and Access Committee is excited to announce the launch of a new initiative to create a Digital Images Archive. The committee, led in the project by professional archivist and board member Chuck Rand, will be soliciting community members for permission to scan photographs from their personal collections. Each digital image will carry with it the name of the contributor. The result of this collective effort, if participation is high, will be an amazing collection of old Bristol images organized on a searchable database. The committee plans to make this archive available through the Bristol Area Library and eventually hopes to provide online access. If you have any photos that you would like to have scanned and added to the archive, please contact Chuck at 207-553-0034.



## Old Bristol Historical Society Officers and Directors July 2014 - July 2015

1,2 Co-Presidents	<b>Pete and Kay Hannah</b>	9 - Director	<b>A. J. Lockhart</b>
3 - Vice President	<b>Wayne Chadwick</b>	10 - Director	<b>Belinda Osier</b>
4 - Secretary	<b>Debbie Mikulak</b>	11 - Director	<b>Mollie Perley</b>
5 - Treasurer	<b>Don Means</b>	12 - Director	<b>Daniel C. Purdy, Esq.</b>
6 - Director	<b>Larry Hayter</b>	13 - Director	<b>Chuck Rand</b>
7 - Director	<b>Rev. Robert Ives</b>	14 - Director	<b>Kathy Wright</b>
8 - Director	<b>David Kolodin</b>		

## **Presidents' Message** (Continued from page 1)

Please join us this year as OBHS has more than our usual events. Our Clean-up Morning and Cook-out at McKinley School will be accompanied by one of several bake sales which Kathy Wright, our Events Coordinator, is organizing in addition to a June 26-27 Antique Sale, a fund-raising social supper and a tea. Mollie Perley is developing ideas for t-shirts, bags, or similar items for sale, and we will have a busy booth at Old Bristol Days followed on the Sunday by photo-viewing with the public at McKinley School.

This summer we complete our service as your co-presidents. With the enthusiasm of the general public and firm support of the Board of Directors, this has been a very satisfying and enjoyable time for us as we've seen our programs well attended, our membership bounce back, McKinley School building improvements, the development of our social media (website, Face Book presence, and recently Maine Memory.com), inroads made with our youth, and the beginnings of some important preservation efforts.

Our wishes for the society forthcoming are for these efforts to continue and especially for appropriate storage space to be found for our town's historical documents and photo records in need of a secure home. Thank you to all for your much-appreciated support. Upon election at our Annual Meeting on July 31, you will be well-served by the new presidents, who we wish a most rewarding tenure.

Special thanks go to: Pete Hope and Phyllis Lockhart Ives for their fascinating articles in this issue, Paul and Carol Ring who have formulated the past 8 issues of our newsletter and Margaret Hayter for her help with membership and mailing.

Pete and Kay Hannah

### **Kenneth Coombs, OBHS Honorary Director, Historic Resource Survey**



In the passing of Kenneth E. Coombs on February 9 at the age of 90, the OBHS lost one of its earliest and most important members. A retired architect, who moved with his wife to Bristol in 1982, Ken was an active community member and served as Chairman of the Planning Board for the town of Bristol a number of years. He was a member of the OBHS Board of Directors from 2005 to 2013 and was awarded an Honorary Directorship in 2013.

Among Ken's greatest contributions to the society was his leadership of our Historic Resource Survey for which his architectural skills in surveying and map experience of historical sites were invaluable. He meticulously sited on U.S. Geographical Survey maps all of the historically targeted homes in Round Pond Village and outlying roads, including to Chamberlain. With Rose Marie Ballard, he helped prepare the survey report for the Maine Historic Preservation Commission where it awaits further development. Ken's enthusiasm for this project and the society in general were greatly appreciated.

## Five Generations - and Then Some by Phyllis Lockhart Ives

From top left, youngest to oldest: Mildred Sproul Condon in the arms of her mother, Susan Wells Sproul; Nellie Fossett Wells; Mary Ann Coombs Fossett and Hannah Sproul Coombs. (Digital retouch by Howard Hollis for the Harrington Meeting House collection.)

As a child in the 1950s, I, along with my siblings, always looked forward to coming to Pemaquid. No summer camps for us! Instead we made the 10-15 hour drive from New Jersey to Pemaquid to spend vacation with my grandparents who lived at Sproul Farm on the Pemaquid Harbor Road. We could hardly contain ourselves when we turned onto the Harbor Road, knowing we were almost there! To this day, after 60 years and living here for more than 12 years, I still feel a little thrill every time I make that turn. Almost home!



I remember my grandmother, Amy Sproul Lockhart, showing me a photograph of the 5 generations of women in her family who were all alive at the same time. Taken about 1880, the youngest in the photo was her older sister, Mildred. Holding Mildred was her mother, Susan Wells Sproul. To the right in the picture stands Susan's mother, Nellie Fossett Wells. Seated in front of Nellie is her mother, Mary Ann Coombs Fossett. And seated next to Mary Ann is her mother, Hannah Sproul Coombs. What follows is what I have been able to learn about their stories.

**Hannah Sproul Coombs** (1785-1882, 97 yrs) was born in a log cabin in Pemaquid to James Sproul, Jr. and Mary Greenlaw Sproul, located on the land that would later be home to her great-great-great-great-granddaughter (me!). Her father was a Revolutionary War soldier who was the grandson of James Sproul, a native of County Antrim, Ireland and the first of the name to come to Pemaquid in 1727. Hannah married Captain Samuel Coombs who was great-great-great-grandson of Anthony (Antoine) Coombs who escaped from France at the age of about 18 circa 1660. His family lived in the Aquitaine region of France and father wanted him to become a priest. He became greatly disillusioned by the gross differential between preaching and practice of the Catholic clergy, and he realized he would rather be a heretic than a hypocrite. His mother helped him escape as his imperious father would have killed him. He ended up in Wells, Maine apprenticed, then heir to a wealthy blacksmith there. Hannah was mother of Mary Ann.

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## **Five Generations - and Then Some** (Continued from page 3)

**Mary Ann Coombs Fossett** (Nov 16, 1812-June, 30, 1903, 90 yrs) married Richard Fossett (1811-1881) in September 1834. Together, they build the Fossett Farm House on Old County Road which is now home to the Carpenters Boat Shop. Mary Ann and Richard had 5 children, the eldest was Nellie.

**Nellie Bryant Fossett Wells** (April 21, 1835-Sept 13, 1914, 79 yrs) was married November 3, 1853 to Captain Marshall Morrill Wells (May 1828-March 20, 1872). They built a home and lived in Pemaquid Falls (owned later by Miriam Wallace, a great granddaughter). Marshall worked his way up from cabin boy to sea captain. They sailed around the world in the Nellie B with their eldest child, Susan, returning to Maine in about 1860 when she was 5 years old. Nellie's younger brother Jasper built the white farm house on Old County Road which was purchased in 1979 by Bobby and Ruth Ives to start the Carpenter's Boat Shop. Nellie and Marshall had four children, the oldest of whom was Susan.

**Susan Wells Sproul** (1855-1929, 74 yrs) first married Lemuel Lewis who died at sea at age 29, no children. Her second marriage was about 1876 to Eugene Bradford Sproul, a farmer/carpenter/builder who inherited the Sproul Farm in Pemaquid from his parents, Hiram and Mary Smith Sproul. Susan and Eugene raised their 4 children, Mildred, Frank, Amy and Nellie, at the farm. It was a working farm until about 1925. Their grandchildren all remember riding wildly through the fields on Eugene's David, a beautiful black horse with a white blaze, who was a great favorite of all the children there for the summer. No documentation about how David felt about all this. Susan was a beautiful woman, but all of her photos have a look of deep sadness in her eyes. She died just a year after her husband Eugene accidentally blew himself up while lighting his pipe during a break from dynamiting tree stumps in a field.

**Mildred Cope Sproul Condon** (Feb. 24, 1878-June 16, 1961, 83 yrs) I remember Great Aunt Mildred very well. She was very warm and gentle with a wonderful chuckle, and was a font of knowledge about family history. She took me for a walk through the woods one day when I was about 10 and showed me a stone foundation which was the original farm, abandoned around 1860 when the current buildings were finished. Mildred's generation was the first to move away from the farm. She married Bernard Hayes Condon and raised their 3 surviving children in Roxbury, MA before retiring back to Pemaquid. Brother Frank married Mae Lockhart and worked as a dentist in Brockton, MA before retiring back to Pemaquid. Sister Amy married Alton Lockhart and moved to New York as a professor's wife until they retired back to Pemaquid. Sister Nellie moved to Boston, MA and headed up the Peabody Home for Crippled Children before she retired and split her time between Boston and Pemaquid.

Today, Mildred's great granddaughter and her husband are raising their family in that wonderful old farm with lots of support from Mildred's granddaughter up the hill. Frank Sproul's granddaughter gathers her children and grandchildren from across the country to Pemaquid every summer. Four of Amy Sproul's grandchildren now call Pemaquid Harbor Road home, and most of the others are working on it.

And so it goes. We are rooted in this extraordinary place.

## **The Birth of Bristol** by Pete Hope

On June 21, 2015 Bristol will be 250 years old. The area that became Bristol became a barren wasteland after the destruction of Fort William Henry in 1696. The origins of the town go back to 1729. Colonel David Dunbar was given a commission to establish the Colony of New Georgia east of the Kennebec. After construction of Fort Frederick on the footprint of Fort William, Dunbar laid out the settlements of Walpole, Harrington and Torrington in the Pemaquid Peninsula. (Torrington grew into the settlement of Broad Cove.) The northern boundary of these settlements was near the falls at present day Damariscotta Mills. The western boundary was the Damariscotta River and the eastern boundary was Muscongus Bay. Dunbar's settlers were tough, independent and land hungry Scotch-Irish from Northern Ireland. One family was that of James Sproul who settled in present day Pemaquid Harbor. Subsequent Scotch-Irish pioneers were the Fossett, Nickels and McFarland families, to name a few whose descendants are still here.

With the English capture of Quebec in 1759 a long period of French and Indian wars came to an end. The population east of the Kennebec had grown a lot and the huge county of Lincoln was established in 1760. Four towns in this part of the mid-coast were incorporated before Bristol. In November 1764 men from Walpole, Harrington and Broad Cove met to discuss establishing a new town. A committee was formed to petition the Massachusetts Bay General Court for the permission to incorporate. Elijah Packard was hired to do the survey.

On June 21, 1765 men met to incorporate the new town. Bristol included present day South Bristol, Damariscotta, Bremen and Bristol. The town records do not indicate when the name of Bristol was adopted but clearly someone knew the origins of Pemaquid in the 1620's, financed and supported by Aldworth and Elbridge, two Bristol (England) merchants. Many of the fishermen who had come here earlier and the settlers of Pemaquid had come from Bristol also.

The first town meeting was held at the house of William Sproul on December 4, 1765. He was the son of James and had an inn on the East Branch of John's River. This was located on a bridle path to the Damariscotta River. (Sproul owned the eastern half of the Hope farm and the Winer/Lennox property.) It was recognized that the original survey which ended in Round Pond was in error because it omitted Broad Cove. This was corrected by a new survey in 1766.

Before the Revolution the town records reveal that there were usually two town meetings a year, in the spring and the fall. They were held all over town, including Richard Jones' saw mill in Bristol Mills and a school house in Walpole. The constable summoned citizens to the town meeting thusly: "We command in his Majesty's name to notify and warn all freeholders and others qualified to vote..." This was not a democracy. Those qualified to vote were male property owners, over 21, who had paid their ministerial and poll taxes. Until the town hired a minister the ministerial tax paid for itinerant ministers to preach.

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## **The Birth of Bristol** (Continued from page 5)

Each year selectmen and overseers of the highways were elected from each of the three districts. The importance of farming was indicated by the election of pound keepers (William Sproul was one for years.), and hog reeves. No matter what a man did for a living part of his sustenance was the family farm. Stray cattle and hogs were not conducive to gardens! Owners had to pay the pound keeper to get their livestock back. Hog reeves had the enviable job of rounding up stray hogs which I can assure you is no easy task. For years the town paid a bounty on wolves and occasionally on crows.

Other positions in town were assessors, a tax collector (he received a percentage of the taxes), surveyors of lumber, a sealer of leather, overseers of the fish (this was to manage the alewife run at Damariscotta Mills, the Pemaquid River and Muscongus Stream. Alewives were an important food source and widows to this day are entitled to a free bushel.) and a tythingman. The tythingman's main job was to oversee conduct on the Sabbath, particularly at church. He had a tything stick to poke unruly children or wake sleeping adults.

The importance of education was recognized right from the start and money was voted on yearly for each district. Another important issue was the support of the poor. Basically, Bristol voters didn't want to have town "charges." Indigents, including, at least once, an entire family were "warned" out of town. Generally, paupers were auctioned off. The low bidder took the person in and supported him or her for the year. Here are two interesting items from the town records. Elizabeth Trow became "...a town charge by having a black child." Does this mean that there were slaves or possibly a free black in Bristol before the Revolution? In 1786, in an issue that would resonate with conservatives today, the town voted "...to see what methods the town will take with the people who are able to work and yet get the town to support them." Poor farms became a remedy for poverty in the 19th and (early) 20th centuries.

In the early days of Bristol's existence the most contentious issue had to do whether to have one or three meeting houses. It went back and forth until 1772 with the majority voting one way and then a "decent" would overturn that vote. It appeared to be finally settled in 1771, to have one meeting house in Bristol Mills. The frame was constructed about where the grange hall is. But, lo and behold, there was yet another vote and this time final decent and meeting houses were erected in Walpole, Broad Cove (it is no longer there) and Harrington. The frame was pulled down and ox teams hauled the massive beams down the Hay Meadow Road, an ancient road, along the east side of Little Falls Brook and then across the Harrington Meadow Bridge (remains can still be seen near the Harrington Meeting House) to land that William Sproul had given to the town for a cemetery and meeting house. In 1772 the town voted to have a Presbyterian minister and to be under the Boston Presbytery. A committee was formed to find a minister and a Scotsman, Alexander McLean (McLain, no relation to today's Scotch-Irish descendants) was hired. He was installed at Sproul's Inn.

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## **The Birth of Bristol** (Continued from page 6)

The other important issue which continues to the present dealt with roads and bridges. At this time and well into the future the best transportation to Falmouth or Boston for goods or people was by sail. Even after roads were laid out travel was difficult, hard in the winter and nearly impossible in mud season. There were roads, bridle paths and blazed trails before 1765. Town records show that most town meetings dealt with the layout of proposed roads or the acceptance of completed roads. It was important for settlers to get to mill, market and meeting house.

There were four early, important town roads. The first road laid out by the overseers of the highways in 1766 went from Dee's Variety up to the Harrington Road and up Rt. 129 to Day's Cove in Damariscotta. These are rough directions of how this road was laid out. The description of this road is interesting because all the residents along it were named. The next year a road was laid out from Munroe Brook in Round Pond, down Rt. 32 to the Elliot Hill Road and across it to the Dump Road (Foster Road) and then up to Robert Given's mill on the Pemaquid River. In 1770 a road was built from the Four Corners to Amos Goudy's mill in Clark's Cove. The last road that I consider of the greatest importance was built for "...the convenience of the back settlers." Generally, this went from Fir Hollow up to an old road that went to Bristol Mills where Richard Jones had his mill.

By the time of the Revolution the town was well established but we must be aware that for most residents hard times were right around the corner.

### **Membership**

We invite you to become a member of OBHS. We also invite you to share your skills and interests to help us promote our local history. If you have ideas for potential events, speakers, or fundraising, please contact us or write on the back of your membership slip upon return. A sincere thank you for renewing or becoming a new member and lending your support! Your membership dues help significantly with our building maintenance and other expenses. **Thank you for dating the form for our record-keeping.**

#### **2015 OLD BRISTOL HISTORICAL SOCIETY MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION**

New\_\_\_\_\_ Renewal\_\_\_\_\_ Date:\_\_\_\_\_

Name\_\_\_\_\_

(Fill in address information only for a new member or changes.)

Address\_\_\_\_\_ Seasonal Address\_\_\_\_\_

E-mail \_\_\_\_\_ E-mail \_\_\_\_\_

Local Phone\_\_\_\_\_

Thank you for sending annual dues of \$10 Single or \$15 Family made out to: Old Bristol Historical Society  
Early Special by 1-1-2015: \$7 Single or \$12 Family P. O. Box 87  
Lifetime Membership: \$200 Single or Family Bristol, ME 04539

Tax-exempt under section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code  
Please remember that our continued efforts depend upon your generous support.

## OBHS Summer Calendar 2015

June 13 Sat. 9 -1 Clean-up Morning, Bake Sale, & Noon Cook-out at McKinley Sch.  
June 26-27 9:00 Antique Sale, Wright Barn & McKinley School, Pemaquid Falls  
June 28 Sun. 7:00 Program: Dr. Warren Riess, "Everyday Life in Bristol, 1765"  
Education Center, Pemaquid Lighthouse Park

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July 12 Sun. 7:00 Program: Dr. Neill De Paoli, "Native American History in Pemaquid,  
1600-1765" - Education Center, Pemaquid Lighthouse Park  
July 26 Sun. 7:00 Program: Castlebay: Historic Songs of Bristol---Harrington Meeting  
House, Pemaquid Historical Assoc. & Old Bristol Historical Soc.  
July 31 Fri. 5:30 Benefit Communal Supper for the Old Bristol Historical Society  
Willing Workers Hall, New Harbor  
6:30 Annual Meeting of the Old Bristol Historical Society  
Willing Workers Hall, New Harbor

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August 9 Sun. 7:00 Program: Josh Hanna, "A Bristol Century: Industrial, Commercial, &  
Communal Development on the Pemaquid Peninsula, 1815-1915"  
Learning Center, Pemaquid Lighthouse Park  
August 15 Sat. 9-5 Old Bristol Days Booth & Bake Sale, Old Fort Grounds  
16 Sun. 9-2 Old Bristol Days Booth  
Sun 2-4 Open House Photo Exhibit at McKinley School  
August 23 Sun. 7:00 Program: Belinda Osier, "Diaries of Daily Life: "The Hunter Family  
Diary, 1853-56," and diaries shared by local people, McKinley Sch.

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Sept. 13 Sun. 3:00 Afternoon Tea Benefit at McKinley School, Pemaquid Falls

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**P. O. Box 87**  
**Bristol, ME 04539**