

South Bristol Historical Society

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Newsletter

South Bristol, Maine 04568

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Fall 2011

Let's Celebrate the Swing Bridge

As we prepare to say goodbye to this old friend, let's salute her long life! There will be a festive event at the S Road School next August to celebrate our historic swing bridge, which has connected the island to the mainland for so long and been not only a thoroughfare for cars and a familiar feature of the passage for boats, but a favorite photo opportunity for tourists and a picturesque center of the community for over 80 years. As we go to press, the State is planning to seek bids for the new bridge in June 2012, and construction could start as soon as next August.

In preparation for this celebration, we are asking the community to help us gather artifacts pertaining to the bridge. Photographs, paintings, videos, stories and anecdotes, memories (amusing and otherwise), poems and songs, will all be welcome. Comb your attic and your memory for appropriate items and tales, or create some original visual representation that we can display next summer - there's plenty of time. Does anyone remember the building of the current bridge? As a kid, did you ride on the bridge when it was in operation? Did you ever urgently need to cross the bridge when it was stuck open? What's the funniest thing you can remember about the bridge?

A list of bridge tenders is being

compiled, as well as an update of the history of the bridges that have connected Rutherford Island to the mainland for almost 120 years. Do you have any documentation to help these efforts?

If you or your neighbors have a memory to share, or anything to loan or donate to the Society for this fond farewell, please get in touch with any officer or trustee of the Historical Society, email us at SBHistorical@gmail.com, or leave a message at 207-315-0558.

This will be an event in which we hope the whole community will participate. Let's swing!



The swing bridge at the Gut, 2004. Photo courtesy R. Zach

South Bristol Artists - Then and Now

On August 19th and 20th sunshine flooded through the large windows of the S Road School to illuminate the artistic talent of South Bristol residents, both past and present. Chalkboards, chairs and desks became easels to display oil paintings, water colors and calligraphy. Tables and window sills sported jewelry, wood carvings and hand-painted tiles. Quilts, crewel work and other fabric art adorned the walls. A large mural by South Bristol school students depicted well known town buildings of today and yesteryear.

The list of today's South Bristol artists who participated includes some whose names are easily recognized and others who are less well-known but talented and interesting in

their own right. The show included creations by Tom Block, Edmund Collens, Steve Busch, Kat Farrin, Cynthia Garrels, Duncan Halm, Sam Hamlin, Consuelo Hanks, Ted Hanks, Marlene Hosey, Nancy Houseworth, Betty Humphries, Burke Johnson, Sally Loughridge, Patrick McCarthy, Dick Miller, Kay Miller, Michele Moran, Sheila Morell, Maude Olsen, Joan Post, Diane Prescott, Susan Bartlett Rice, Gina Riddiford, Joyce Scott, Tenley Seiders, Priscilla Smith, Don Thompson and Joy Vaughn.

A variety of art work from years gone by was shown, illustrating the talent of South Bristol residents. Among those whose works were included were: Clarence Collens, Marj

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Important – new SBHS email and telephone – SBHistorical@gmail.com 207-315-0558

South Bristol Artists - Then and Nowcontinued from front page

Farrin, Wilfred Hamlin, Mansfield Hunt, Martha Marden King, Audrey Maxcy, Ralph R. Norwood, Willard Metcalf, Everett A. Poole, Ted Prescott, Arletta Rice, Jane Sewall, Kathleen Thorpe and Mattie Whittemore.

Many thanks to all the contributors who shared their work with the more than 150 people who stopped by to enjoy the remarkable talent of our local artists as well as

the restoration of the S Road School. Special thanks also go to **Cathy Stockwell, Cynthia Garrels, Donna Plummer, Polly Ulin, Genie Cole** and **Carolyn McKeon** for organizing, setting up and tending the two-day event. The art exhibit was a wonderful way both to honor our artisans and to encourage the community to visit one of our historical landmarks.

Welcome Another Historic Structure - the Smokehouse

The small building with a dark roof just to the right of the bridge in the photo on page one is the smokehouse believed to have been used originally by Irving Clifford and by Henry Jones to smoke fish with wood smoke from a cast iron stove. It can also be seen in this old post card image, in the foreground at the water's edge. In more recent years, many South Bristol residents smoked fish there in much the same manner. When the State required that it be removed from its location at the Gut, bridge tender **Craig Plummer** moved the building to his property on the S Road. There the tradition was continued by Craig and others.

After Craig's death, it became necessary to remove the smokehouse once again. In the spring of 2011, bridge tender **Mark Page** asked SBHS trustee **Nat Hammond** if the Historical Society would be interested in it. The answer was definitely 'yes,' and when the Selectmen were asked if the building could be placed on the S Road School property, they approved the idea with enthusiasm. The Society gratefully accepted Brandon (Craig's brother) Plummer's gift of this building which so many residents remember fondly. Thanks to **Ken Lincoln, Mike Nyboe, Todd Lincoln** and **Toby Plummer**, the smokehouse now sits at the edge of the woods on the S Road School site.

SBHS is eager to learn more about the smokehouse. If you have a smokehouse story to tell, know when it was built and by whom, or are interested in helping put it to use again, please contact SBHS at 207-315-0558 or SBHistorical@gmail.com.

To give us a start on gathering those stories, South Bristol resident **Gladden Schrock** jotted down some of his recollections of "smoke-house days":

"The smoke-house was already long in place and much used when I first landed in town in the early Sixties. It sat east of the bridge-house, was owned (and ministered) by Henry Jones, with whom I fished for several decades, and who talked often of fish being similarly smoked on Damariscove, where he lived as a child. The Tunney's of course rented the upstairs of Henry's net shed; and the old fish market, which was gone by the time I arrived, had been in the northern section of the first floor of that net shed.

The smoke-house got moved a few times, which we did because the shore to the east behind it had somewhat eroded away; and once again (early Seventies) when we built a launching slip between Henry's net shed and the



The smokehouse, where it was located mid-twentieth century, from an Eastern Illustrated postcard.

bridge house, allowing dories and seine boats to be launched into the East Gut.

During the Sixties and Seventies, the wharf behind Henry's net shed was something of a local gathering place, with old tossed-out arm chairs stashed there overlooking the Gut, and where we all often sat and talked casually together of an evening, waiting for the late-evening search for herring to begin. Mulling the Pleiades, we called it.

Smoking fish: Primarily it was done with alewives (spring run), and then again with sardines (stop-seined herring) in September, if / as / when we caught them. The fish would be soaked in heavy brine overnight in large plastic tubs, then strung on ¼-inch dowels of 30-inch length, carved to a point at one end so they could easily be run first through the gills and then out the mouth of each fish, with as many as several dozen fish strung on each dowel. (No 'wire hooks' at all were used, as the current smoke house door note suggested might have been the case). In fact I spotted one of the dowels which still remains in the smoke-house. By memory, I estimate there were upwards of a hundred dowels in use at the height of it. When fully strung with fish, each dowel would then be hung neatly aloft in the smoke-house, resting upon and between those 2X3's that can still be seen. Care was taken that they be spaced just right, so that the smoke had equal access to every fish.

Henry preferred green alder for burning in the small unvented cast iron wood stove, which was placed in the

center-back of the smokehouse. He'd keep the stove severely choked to maximize the production of smoke, but also to make sure that the temperature was held down inside the smoke-house, lest the fish overheat and go bad. I remember taking Henry up to Junior Farrin's to gather 3-to-5-inch diameter alder wood for the stove, which we'd then cut into usable lengths and stack behind the smoke-house. Henry primarily was the one to tend the fire, splitting the alder for stoking (a hatchet and chopping block stayed in the open behind the smoke-house), but Roy Vose also sometimes tended the stove. Roy, a half-blooded American Indian, was our spotter pilot for herring. Roy for years lived aboard his boat, moored at Henry's float just East of the net shed. Dennis Farrin also at times had a hand in over-seeing the smoking process, as I recall. The stove had to be checked every couple hours.

The stringing of fish in prep of a smoke often became a community venture, with half a dozen volunteers sitting

around the brine vats, stringing six or seven bushels of fish. Henry preferred six-inch herring (for the fall smoking); and for the spring alewife run, we'd string whatever alewives were available, often caught by gill nets set especially for them. When the smoking was done, once again the smoke-house became a celebratory community gathering-place, people coming together freely to eat the fish, and to even sometimes take a mess home. Everyone in town was aware and alert when the smoking got underway, the prime signal of course being the smudged smoke of the fire itself, which escaped through a small upper smoke-house vent, scenting the air throughout the village.

When the smoke-house was fully freighted with fish, its entire upper area brimmed with dozens of rows of dowels, from which the carefully-spaced strung fish were artfully hung. A remarkable sight. " *Gladden Schrock*

See back page for latest smokehouse news!

SBHS News Notes

South Bristol School connects with SBHS: The SBHS museum was a busy place when South Bristol School's 7th and 8th graders, led by teacher Jason Bigonia, arrived recently to research South Bristol population trends and economic activities from 1915 to the present. A few weeks later, the 5th and 6th graders, again led by Mr. Bigonia, arrived to gather facts and photos for this year's "quest," a sort of scavenger hunt which covered the area from the SB school up to Union Church and everything in between. SBHS members enjoyed searching out useful documents and photos, making good use of our computer database for leads. Students were assigned certain areas and certain buildings to research, including the school itself, Harborside, Osier's building, the swing bridge, the old high school, the Co-op, Gamage Shipyard, the Island Cemetery, and Union Church.

The very next week the 1st and 2nd graders walked with their teacher, Ms. Nichols, to the S Road School to experience lessons taught in that historic one room schoolhouse - with no running water, no computers and no TV. We are pleased to report the acquisition of one twenty-first century piece of equipment: the school house is now equipped with a composting toilet, and though it looks somewhat incongruous in the 'privy' space, it functions well and is very environmentally friendly!

The Civil War and South Bristol: Thanks to **Carolyn McKeon** for spearheading our Civil War programming this past summer. The fascinating exhibit Carolyn prepared, highlighting the South Bristol men who served and their families, remains on display at SBHS. Programs led by **Dave Andrews**, author **Tom DesJardins** and **Stan Wells** provided a broad picture of how South Bristol participated in and was affected by the War. A special visit from **Gary Pitcher** and **Mary Jane McLoon**, experienced Civil War re-enactors brought the hardships and fortitude of the soldier to life.

History is Now: An important on-going SBHS project about which few are aware is the gathering of "current his-

tory" about South Bristol and its people as it appears in the *Lincoln County News*. For several years our Winter Wednesday afternoon volunteers, led by **Genie Cole** and **Gail Seiders**, have been making photocopies of those articles and filing them in notebooks organized by year and topic. These notebooks, which will be treasure troves of information in future years, would not be possible unless someone was willing to scan the LCN each week and clip every article or obituary that mentions a South Bristol place, person or organization. For four years **Donna Plummer** was that person, and last year **Ann Doyle** took over the task. To all of them - clippers, copiers and filers - a big thank-you on behalf of future historians!

And don't forget, every **Wednesday afternoon** from 1-3pm from October through March (except just before Thanksgiving and around Christmas) the SBHS building is open and humming with activity as three to five or more members work on the many tasks required to make sure our collection is safe and accessible to the public. No training or special skills required—come join us!

Officers and Trustees: At the 2011 Annual Meeting new trustees **Warren Storch** and **Deb Storch** were elected and Nat Hammond, Carolyn McKeon and Donna Plummer were re-elected to three year terms. They join trustees continuing in office Charles Beaudette, Eugenie Cole, Cynthia Garrels, Larry Kelsey, Sylvia Greene, Polly Ulin and Gail Seiders. The officers serving the second year of a two year terms are President, Ellen Wells; Vice President, Cathy Stockwell; Treasurer, Cotton Damon; and Historian David Andrews. Shortly after the Annual Meeting, secretary **Michele Christensen** confirmed that her re-location to Florida made it necessary for her to retire as secretary. The Board at its September meeting expressed its appreciation to Michele for her fine work over the past several years; her helpful and concise minutes as well as her participation in board discussions will be missed. We are happy to report that new trustee **Deb Storch** is willing to serve, and was elected secretary at the same meeting.

Meet Samuel A. Miles and Family - Part II

The Spring 2011 Newsletter began the story of Sam Miles and family by introducing Sam, his wife Maud Mary and adopted son Arthur, outlining his successful career as a leader in the marketing of the automobile, and describing his life on the estate he built in South Bristol. Based on research done by Stan and Ellen Wells over several years, in places from South Bristol to New York City and finally in Asheville, North Carolina (with Virginia Saunders, Miles' only living grandchild), this issue continues the story, introducing Isabel R. Miles and the summer camp at the Miles Estate. The final installment, "The Wills and Memorials" will appear in a subsequent issue. If you missed Part I or would like another copy, please contact SBHS at SBHistorical@gmail.com.

Isabel R. Miles

Sam Miles and his wife, Maud Mary, had lived apart for many years before he began buying land in South Bristol, but they were never divorced. To everyone in South Bristol, Isabel R. Miles was Mrs. Samuel A. Miles, and very few knew they were not married. Not only did Miles introduce Isabel Ries (Reese) as his wife, but also referred to her in numerous legal documents as "his wife" and as "Mrs. Isabel R. Miles." An obituary published in the *New York Times* upon Miles' death reads "Samuel Arthur Miles of Christmas Cove, Me., beloved husband of Isabel R. Miles," and when she died on December 28, 1948, the *New York Times* obituary read "Isabel Reese, wife of the late Samuel A. Miles..." Little is known about her life before she came to Maine with Miles, but it is thought that she worked as secretary to Miles. A portrait of Isabel, identified as Isabel R. Miles, can be seen at the Miles Memorial Hospital in Damariscotta.

Some basic facts about Isabel Miles have been uncovered, primarily from census records. Her family name was almost certainly "Ries," though some records use the spelling "Reese." For example, the 1921 and 1923 passport applications filed by Miles include "my wife, Isabel Reese Miles." However, in a 1925 application Miles states that his wife's name is Isabel Ries Miles and that she was born June 2, 1876, in Birmingham, Alabama. However, census records prior to 1910 show no Ries or Reese family in Birmingham.

On the other hand, the 1880 census taken in Philadelphia includes Isabel Ries, born in June 1876, the seventh of eight children born to Charles and Pauline Ries. The same record shows that Charles and Pauline had emigrated from Germany and that their native tongue was Yiddish. Charles was a retail grocer, and, apparently after his death, Pauline took over the business as the 1900 census lists her as head of household and in the "grocery business." The household included daughter "Isabella," married daughter Bertha Weinberg and her daughter Paula, and another married daughter, Lillian Lemberg. Isabel's 1948 obituary states that she was the sister of Sarah Ellias, aunt of Charles J. and Helen Ellias, and of Esther and Pauline Jacobs and Lillian



Portrait of Isabel R. Miles, displayed in Miles Memorial Hospital next to a portrait of Sam Miles in similar style.

Lemberg. These names match names in the family of Charles and Pauline Ries. [see #11.2]

Regardless of the uncertainty surrounding the childhood and early years of Isabel Miles, all indications are that the relationship between her and Miles was close and loving. He called her "Bob" for some reason, and Miles' adopted son Arthur addressed her as "Mother Bob" in correspondence after Miles' death. That correspondence also indicates that Arthur and most likely Miles' wife Maud Mary were aware that Miles held Isabel out as his wife, and that they were distressed when a press release after his death contained information that seemed to suggest to the public that Isabel was not his widow. For many years after Miles' death, Isabel spent a great deal of time each year at the estate in South Bristol while also keeping a residence in New York City. She died on December 28, 1948, in New York.

The Camp at Little Harbor

Starting around 1920, Miles contracted with Leonard Tibbetts and Willard Thorpe to build a number of structures along the waterfront between Johns Bay and Little Harbor to accommodate a summer camp for needy children from the cities of Maine. Included were a superintendent's cottage, recreation and dining halls, dormitories and an infirmary. A swimming pool was created by building a dam at the northeast end of Little Harbor. Most of these structures still exist, now as private homes; the dam remains visible. In December of 1923, a corporation known as Miles' Little Harbor was formed for "benevolent and charitable objects." Its president and treasurer was S. A. Miles; along with Miles, Isabel R. Miles and Ensign Otis were named as "directors or trustees." Then in January of 1925, Miles conveyed the property on which the camp buildings stood to the charitable corporation "for such time as said premises shall be used for the benevolent and educational purposes set forth in the charter of said corporation; and it is expressly a condition of this deed that if the premises herein described shall at any time be used or occupied for purposes other than those so set forth, then said premises shall thereby forthwith revert to this Grantor, S. A. Miles ... to him, his heirs and assigns forever."

Salvation Army Major Walter Phillips, of Portland, was deeply involved in the operation of the camp which was later called Miles' Christmas Cove Camp. When Miles Memorial Hospital was dedicated in August 1940, Major Phillips was the main speaker and devoted a long passage of his speech to extolling Miles for creating and operating the camp. He said, in part that "Mr. Miles was a man who

“Babe at Rest, and Going into Action”



Newspaper report of a visit to the Miles Estate by Babe Ruth and his wife, probably in the 1930's. The headline appears above. The text of the article reads, "Babe Ruth, the 'sultan of the swat,' at play in Maine between seasons. He's a guest at the South Bristol camp of Mrs. Samuel A. Miles of New York. [Photo left] The Babe and the Mrs. start out a-hunting on a brisk morning of late Fall. [Photo right] The Babe and his party rest before an open fire after a day's hunting. Seated at the left is Mrs. Miles, the hostess to the party, with Mrs. Charles J. Ellias of New York on the arm of the chair and Mr. Myron D. Kidder, formerly of Portland, standing behind them. At the right are the Babe and his wife."

maintained a high regard for human values, particularly in the lives of the youth of our land. He held to the view that the boy and girl should be given a good start in life by establishing within a good physical foundation, coupled with fundamental principles...With this conception, he created on the beautiful estate at Christmas Cove, a camp, where with Mrs. Miles, he played host during the summer months to hundreds of boys and girls selected from the homes of destitute families throughout the State of Maine."

An idea of the scope of the operation is evident in a letter written by Isabel Miles to Arthur Miles in the fall of 1932, after Miles' death. She had returned from England to Christmas Cove and carried on with the camp. She wrote: "The children were here actually 8 weeks, but the help about 11 weeks, with payroll for 13 people, & keep of course. They need the extra time to open & close the Camp. The Camp Director & wife only left this week. There were 417 children here, & 18,500 meals served. While Camp was in operation payroll, including help on house & grounds was about \$1,200 a month."

In addition to the more usual camp activities, Miles also arranged for celebrities to visit. Most famous of these was Babe Ruth, who apparently came to the camp several times. Arthur Miles was given a baseball signed by "the Babe" which is now in the possession of his daughter Virginia. Ruth also visited Clifton at other times. An Associated Press photo shows Ruth and his wife sitting in front of the fireplace at Clifton with Isabel Miles and her sister-in-law. In another photo taken at the same time, Ruth and his wife "start out a-hunting on a brisk morning of late Fall." Although the clipping is not dated, this visit apparently took place after Miles' death since the caption states that Ruth was a "guest at the South Bristol camp of Mrs. Samuel A. Miles of New York."

The actress Ruth Gordon, a popular stage actress in the 1920's and later an Oscar-winning movie actress, is also said to have entertained at the camp. She had come to Christmas Cove often as a child, staying first at the French or Brewer boarding house and later at the Holly Inn. She and her first husband Gregory Kelly had just finished a successful Broadway run in Booth Tarkington's *Seventeen* when they came to Christmas Cove in June 1919, staying first at the Thompson Inn, then at the Holly Inn. In her book *My Side: the Autobiography of Ruth Gordon*, she tells of an invitation to tea from Mrs. Miles, whom Gordon refers to as the "rich lady of Christmas Cove," and describes a 1922 trip to Europe with the Miles. On their return from that trip, Sam Miles invited Ruth and Gregory to stay with them at Christmas Cove, a visit which was cut short by the offer of roles in a Tarkington play in Cleveland. According to Gordon, when the Mileses first visited Maine, they had stayed at the Christmas Cove House.

Isabel Miles kept the Camp in operation until sometime in the late 1930's. In June 1940, the Camp property was conveyed to Isabel R. Miles, having reverted to the "heirs and assigns" of S. A. Miles because the Corporation had ceased to use the premises for any of the purposes mentioned in its Charter. Most of the buildings were later sold and converted to private homes.

Membership payment notice

Please note that if you find a membership renewal form enclosed with your Newsletter our records indicate that we have not received your 2011-2012 dues. We hope that you will take this opportunity to renew your membership—we value your support!

South Bristol Historical Society
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Big news from the smokehouse!

On the night of October 21, after being fed with green alder, the old wood stove started right up and billows of smoke rose up to the herring strung on wood dowels and laid across the beams above. Herring season was about to end, but David Osier had come up with four bushels full just in time! Ken Lincoln, Todd Lincoln, Toby Plummer and Dennis Farrin first soaked the fish in brine. Then, with help from Erick Sykes and Todd's grandson, Lincoln Ball, the fish were strung on wooden dowels provided by Tony McFarland. The crew kept the smoke rising day and night, and the fish were declared ready to eat by the following Friday. As five-year-old Lincoln said, "They smell bad, but they taste good!"



Saturday morning, October 22 - Ken Lincoln has just added more alder sticks to the fire, good and smokey.



The old wood stove is doing its job.



Almost ready to eat!