

South Bristol Historical Society

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Newsletter

South Bristol, Maine 04568

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Fall 2004

Historical Society News

Norman A. Hamlin Named Honorary Life Member

On September 16, 2004, Norman A. Hamlin was elected an Honorary Life Member of the Society, in recognition of his outstanding contribution to the preservation of the history of South Bristol as first president of the Thompson Ice House Preservation Corporation. In this role, Norm was instrumental in making possible the restoration of the Thompson Ice House and the establishment at the ice house site



of the Amthor Stone Welter Outdoor Museum and the Thompson Ice Harvesting Museum.

In 1987, a group led by the late Erica Welter asked him to consider chairing a non-profit group to save the ice house which was by then beginning to fall apart. Having just retired as Professor of Naval Architecture at the Webb Institute of Naval Architecture, Norm was ready for a new challenge. The first task of the TIHPC under Norm's leadership was to raise \$120,000 in order to restore the building, bulkhead and ice ramp. That was accomplished, and the Winter Ice Harvest became a reality. On a late February day, the South Bristol community turns out to watch and to help cut ice from the pond using traditional methods, then see it hauled up the ice ramp into the ice house and packed in sawdust for use the next summer.

The other annual event inaugurated under Norm's direction is the Ice Cream Social in July when the ice cut in February is used to make home-made ice cream. Hundreds of people come to taste the results, look in at the stored ice, and enjoy the museum and displays. These activities serve to keep the skills of old-time ice harvesting and storage alive, helping to bring to life an industry that was once a major source of income for the people of South Bristol.

Norm continues to serve as President of the TIHPC, assuring that the programs continue and that a strong corps of volunteers remains active and committed.

SBHS Programs 2004

SBHS Historian **Dave Andrews** provided the bookends for a successful series of programs, starting off in April with a visit to the "Main" cemetery, and closing the season in October with a truly grand finale, "Heyday of the Hotels in South Bristol - 1914" There was standing room only in the Rutherford Library meeting room for the October slide show and talk. Dave presented the same program to a Senior College class as part of the "Our Town" series coordinated by SBHS member **Emily McKenzie**. A few copies of the excellent hand-out Dave prepared to supplement his talk are available at the SBHS museum.

In place of a regular meeting in May, Jo Radner, a well-known oral history consultant, presented a story-telling performance and an oral history workshop. The Old Bristol Historical Society co-sponsored these events and joined in our successful grant application to the Maine Humanities Council for funding. SBHS is grateful to the Union Church for the use of its community room for these sessions.

Both the July and August meetings featured historic locations as well as special speakers. In July, the Annual Meeting was held in the 1904 clubhouse of the Christmas Cove Improvement Association, known as the "Casino," thanks to the generosity of the CCIA. Author William Bunting (*A Day's Work, An Eye for the Coast*) told how he came to collect old photos and write about the ways in which Mainers made a living a hundred years ago, along with fascinating slides from that collection. Fortunately the old Casino had plenty of space for the more than 65 attendees.

Then in August, members **Rick Prescott** and his wife **Julie** welcomed SBHS to the Union Hall, restored by Rick and lived in by the family during the summer. Rick kept an overflow crowd of more than 100 enthralled as he told of the history and design of the beautiful one-design sailboats that have long graced the coast around Boothbay Harbor and South Bristol. The portable public address system purchased by SBHS with some of the proceeds of sale of *Down on the Island, Up on the Main* enabled everyone to hear the presentation and produced an excellent tape of Rick's talk.

Ruthie Clark organized the SBHS participation in the Thompson Ice House Ice Cream Social in early July, featuring a demonstration of pottery-making complete with hands-on instruction.

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Tentative plans for 2005 programs are being made and include another cemetery study and visit, a program on native Americans of this area and on Damariscotta River shipbuilding. Your suggestions for topics and speakers would be most helpful, so please call Dave Andrews (644-8537) with your ideas.

Down on the Island, Up on the Main Is Headed for the Airwaves

When Rob Rosenthal, Radio Program Director at the Salt Institute for Documentary Studies in Portland, read **Ellen Vincent's** book, he was immediately struck by the lyrical nature of the book's narrative, saying that "*Down on the Island* sings with the voices of mid-coast Mainers telling the history of their town, and by extension, the history of Maine." He recognized that life in South Bristol is a microcosm of the story of the Maine Coast, a story that is infrequently told on radio.

With Ellen's approval and that of SBHS as publisher of the book, Rob is planning to produce a radio program to bring the pages of the book alive in sound, "with the stunning voices of individuals who have lived it." If all goes as Rob hopes, WMPG, the non-profit, non-commercial, community radio station at the University of Southern Maine, will produce a half hour program drawing from recorded interviews with "South Bristol's most prominent tradition bearers," to be heard on several occasions in the summer of 2005. Stay tuned for more details in the spring newsletter.

Officers and Trustees

The following officers and trustees were elected at the July Annual Meeting:

President: Ellen Wells

Vice President: Gordon Claar

Treasurer: William Glendinning

Secretary: Gail Seiders

Historian: David Andrews

Trustees elected for three-year terms:

William Kelsey

Eugenie Cole

Trustees continuing in office:

Ruthie Clark (1 year remaining)

Larry Kelsey (2 years remaining)

Nat Hammond (2 years remaining)

As this newsletter was going to print, we received the sad news that Rick Prescott had lost his battle with cancer, passing away on November 10. His courage in making the August presentation just hours after undergoing chemotherapy and his joy in being able to share his knowledge and enthusiasm are gifts that will never be forgotten.

And by the way, Ellen's book continues to garner rave reviews. In the Autumn 2004 issue of *Main Boats & Harbors* magazine, reviewer Elizabeth Peavey said, "Town histories don't always have broad appeal. Sure they're fascinating for residents and history buffs, but, frankly, some of them can be something of a snooze. Not so with Ellen Vincent's *Down on the Island, Up on the Main*. The voices and stories are so vividly brought to life that this fine and handsome book is less about a specific place—South Bristol—than it is a lovely (and loving) portrayal of a lost way of life on the Maine coast, one that will engage any reader.

Genealogy Update

SBHS Trustee **Larry Kelsey** has installed "Family Tree Maker" on the SBHS computer, complete with the extensive files he compiled while delving into the Kelsey family tree. A few of the hundreds of family names which appear are Alley, Anderson, Bennett, Brewer, Clark, Currier, Davis, Eugley, Fossett, Foster, Gamage, Goudy, Kelsey, McClintock, McFarland, Oliver, Otis, Page, Plummer, Poole, Reed, Rice, Seiders, Sproul, Thompson, Thorpe, and Tibbetts. A simple "click" on one of them will bring you to a page on which you may find such information as spouse, children, parents, birth dates, marriage dates, etc. If you have information to fill in any blanks, that can be done. Every little bit of data helps make these records more useful to others. Come down on a winter Sunday afternoon between 2 and 4 pm and have a look, or call Larry Kelsey (644-8544) to set up a time to explore this resource.

Several SBHS members attended the informative sessions on genealogy sponsored by the Old Bristol Historical Society held on three Sunday afternoons in October. Plans are underway to start a "Genealogy Club," an informal group designed to share genealogical know-how and information, with lots of encouragement for those just starting out on their ancestral search. SBHS members will be welcomed. For more information, contact Hazel Genther 677-2108, Kay Hannah 563-8300, or Larry Kelsey.

Larry is also working on a detailed survey of the cemeteries in South Bristol, and will donate to SBHS the results in the form of a booklet for each cemetery. More on this in the Spring newsletter.

Newspaper Readers Wanted!

A notebook filled with old newspaper clippings about local people and events is often one of the most popular items at a historical society. News clips about South Bristol today will create such a treasure trove for our children and grandchildren in years to come. Another newspaper feature of great importance is the obituary section where information about family connections can be found. When filed in alphabetical order, these notices can

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be most helpful to folks tracing their family background.

Do you regularly read the Lincoln County News or the Lincoln County Weekly? Would you be willing to clip out articles about events and people in South Bristol? Would you clip obituaries of present or former South Bristol residents or their relatives?

Please call Ellen Wells (644-1584) or Carolyn Kelsey (563-2498) for more details and to volunteer.

Winter Afternoon Workshops at SBHS

Members with local winter addresses recently received a flyer announcing informal winter afternoon workshops at SBHS. Starting with Thursday November 18 and Thursday December 2 from 1 to 3 pm, anyone with a few free hours and an interest in local history will have a chance to help in many ways; organizing and preserving our photo collection (putting photos in archival sleeves, identifying places and people), clipping newspapers for South Bristol stories and obituaries, helping catalogue books and artifacts, indexing the numerous notebooks and other collections. There will be hot tea and coffee to ward off the chill. If there is enough interest, more ses-

sions will be scheduled for winter 2005. Come join us, or please call Ellen Wells (644-1584) or Eugenie Cole (563-8221) for more information about these and future get-togethers.

Membership

A warm welcome and much appreciation to three new Life Members: **James Nelson, Mr. and Mrs. George Schreiber, Mr. and Mrs. John Rounds.** And thanks to our 17 sustaining members, and to several others who included contributions with their membership dues. We need, and appreciate all the support.

This summer we were able to keep the SBHS building open for two hours on Saturdays, Sundays and Wednesdays, more open hours than ever before. We couldn't have done it with the help of members **Annie Rice, Bob Clark, Ruthie Clark, Mike Hunt, Penny Mardoian, Thelma House, John Rounds, Lois Drukker, Stan Wells** and **Kay Arsem** who were on hand to welcome visitors to the museum and genealogy research area. Special thanks to Ruthie Clark who organized the effort.

Have you ever wondered just what caused the people in what is now known as South Bristol to separate from the town of Bristol? Some of the answers appear in the petition that follows, as submitted to the state legislature prior to its vote in 1915 to approve the separation.

To the Members of the Legislature of
The State of Maine.

A PETITION for the division of the town of Bristol and some of the reasons therefor.

By the People of South Bristol, Christmas Cove and the vicinity.

To the Members of the Legislature of the State of Maine:

The map attached shows the town of Bristol, Maine. It shows also a line running north from the head of the Eastern Cove of John's River to the Damariscotta River Road, and thence westerly to the river.

The people living to the west and south of the line described ask to be set off from the Town of Bristol and incorporated into a new town, to be called South Bristol. Their request is based on the following, among other, reasons:

Size of the Town Prevents Proper Attention.

Bristol is 15 miles long, exclusive of islands, and about 8 miles wide, also exclusive of islands; consequently, its size, combined with lack of transportation facilities, makes it difficult and perhaps impossible for the

Selectmen to treat all parts of the town alike. South Bristol has suffered by reason of the size of the town.

The People of South Bristol Are Practically Disfranchised.

South Bristol is nine miles from the town house of Bristol Mills. To get to the town meeting a resident of South Bristol must travel nine miles, and a resident of Christmas Cove, ten miles, over roads which are frequently almost impassable. There is no other way. If all the teams in South Bristol were used they could carry only one-quarter of the votes. A team can make only one trip and sometimes not that.

Fellow Townsmen Are Strangers To Each Other.

We are nine miles from Bristol Mills, ten miles from New Harbor and twelve miles from round Pond – all vil-

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lages of the Town of Bristol. Our interests are entirely different to theirs. In the northern part the people are engaged principally in farming. In our part, their occupation is fishing and "summer business," so called.

The peninsulas, bays, and islands in the south are attractive to people seeking summer homes and vacations, but we are dependent for success largely upon the condition of the roads.

Our Roads Are Not Roads At all.

They are the next thing to plowed fields.

Warrants for town meetings and other gatherings are posted at Bristol Mills, Round Pond, and New Harbor. Occasionally a notice is posted at South Bristol, due to the kindness of some person who may happen to come down from the northern part of the town. Ordinarily, the nearest notice given the people at South Bristol is nine miles away, and as we have no business relations with the other parts of the town, we do not receive proper notice of town meetings.

The Bristol High School Building Is Nine Miles from South Bristol.

There is no place in the vicinity of the High School to board scholars and it is too far to transport them backward and forward. There is no way to reach the High School except by road – consequently, South Bristol scholars are obliged to go out of town to attend High School. They either go backward and forward by boat (30 miles daily) or board at Damariscotta. In either case, the parents are required to pay for their tuition, transportation, and board, despite the fact that they are taxed for the support of the Bristol High School, which it is impossible for them to use.

We Are Obligated to Appeal To the County Commissioners.

The roads in the South Bristol section are bad and sometimes almost impassable, and in places positively dangerous. Requests for proper protection of the embankments near the Holly Inn at Christmas Cove, around the head of Christmas Cove and along the road eastward from the head of the Cove, have had no result.

It has been necessary to ask the County Commissioners to examine some of the roads before the Selectmen could be induced to cause them to be repaired.

The South Bristol section has not had its fair share of the money raised by the town for highway improvement.

Such work as is done is usually done in the fall, after the summer visitors have gone, and therefore at a time when the improvements are of the least possible value to us. As we dependent largely upon summer visitors, we feel that the roads should be improved in the spring time, before the arrival of the summer visitors.

No part of the appropriation for State aid highways has ever been expended on the roads in or within 70 miles of South Bristol. It has been spent on the roads to Bristol Mills, Round Pond, and New Harbor, which are in consequence much better situated than we are in regard to highways.

A few years ago, the people of South Bristol and Christmas Cove petitioned the Selectmen for a change in the location of one of their principal roads. The Selectmen held a hearing, laid out a road, and submitted the question to the annual town meeting, which voted to raise \$175,000 to make the improvement. The following summer one of the Selectmen decided, without a hearing, that the alteration was unnecessary and the next town meeting voted to use the \$175,000 to pay outstanding orders. Without authority, they used the money for an entirely different purpose and the road remains to this day unchanged and most dangerous.

We Have No Sidewalks Other Parts of Town Have.

In 1911 the town voted to remove all wooden sidewalks and replace them with gravel or cement. The town officials caused the walks at South Bristol and Christmas Cove to be removed and they never been replaced. Even at the cemetery, it became necessary for the residents, by contribution and their own labor, to make the road and walk passable. In other parts of the town, despite the order of the annual meeting, the wooden sidewalks were allowed to remain.



The "notoriously dangerous" bridge as it looked around 1913.



The offending boardwalk can be seen in the lower left of this view looking north toward the bridge, also around 1913.

The Bridge at South Bristol Is Notoriously Dangerous.

It has been so recognized for the last seven years, and although frequent requests have been made, it has not been replaced.

The town has been obliged to settle two lawsuits for damages, one caused by defective sidewalks and the other by the notoriously dangerous bridge.

Appropriations for improvement of the town house, certain of the school houses and other improvements in other parts of the town have been largely overdrawn without authority, while in South Bristol the expenditure of money, properly appropriated, has been unduly delayed and sometimes diverted to other purposes.

The Proposed New Town.

Towns are created for the convenience of the inhabitants. They derive their existence from the will of the legislature and by it may be created or divided, or two or more may be joined. The legislature must determine what is for the best interest of the state and the people of the town. Whenever a portion of a town has a sufficient num-

ber of inhabitants and estates to maintain a town government in all its forms, and can be more conveniently governed as a separate town and its separation from the parent town will not cause too great loss or inconvenience to the parent town, it is their right and privilege to ask the legislature to incorporate them into a new town.

The Request for Division Is Practically Unanimous in the Section of Bristol.

South Bristol is larger than 150 towns and more valuable than 225 towns in Maine.

The valuation of the section which asks to be incorporated into a new town is about \$330,000. This is not a small valuation, for, as we have state above, 225 towns have a lower valuation.

The number of polls in South Bristol would be about 200. More than 150 towns have a smaller number.

Under the proposed division, a town house might be located at one of a great many points, within easy access of the road and of the river bank. We are a boating community and every voter in town could readily reach a

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Please note that if your name in the address box of this newsletter is circled in red, we have not yet received your 2004-2005 dues. A renewal slip is below, so please clip it and send in your dues as soon as possible.



Join the South Bristol Historical Society

2004-2005

Please print

Name: _____

Winter Address: _____

Town _____ State: _____ Zip: _____ Winter phone (____) _____

Summer Address: _____

Town _____ State: _____ Zip: _____ Summer phone (____) _____

E-mail _____@_____

Membership Categories: Please check one

Annual

Individual \$10.00 ☐

Couple/family \$20.00 ☐

Sustaining (Individual or Couple/family) \$40.00 ☐

Contribution \$_____ ☐

Life

Individual \$250.00 ☐

Couple/family \$350.00 ☐

Please mail form and check to: William Glendinning, Treasurer, PO Box 44, South Bristol, ME 04568

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town house so located.

We ask you to be present, if possible at the hearing of our petition for division before the legislative committee and learn in great detail than it is possible to set forth in this pamphlet, our reasons and arguments for this petition, and of our efforts to so arrange matters that the remainder of the town may not be seriously inconvenienced.

Committee of
Citizens of South Bristol and Christmas Cove
I. E. Tibbetts, Chairman

The first Board of Selectmen of South Bristol: (left to right) Wilbur Bearce, Frank B. Wells, and Robert M. Woodward. This photomontage was given to the town by Samuel A. Miles at the celebration held on August 30, 1918 at Centennial Hall to honor the new town. It now hangs in the meeting room of the new Town Hall.

