

South Bristol Historical Society

Est. 1998

Newsletter

South Bristol, Maine 04568

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SBHS News

“Far-Out Island” – Population 75

A very enjoyable evening is guaranteed when author **Eva Murray** visits SBHS on **Wednesday, June 19**.

Author of two books about living on a Maine island and a regular columnist for ten Maine publications, she moved to Matinicus (an Abenaki word meaning “far-out island”) in 1987 to teach in the one-room school. Two years later she married the island electrician and stayed to raise a family there. Over the years she has started a small bakery, become an emergency medical technician, taken on a number of roles in municipal government and volunteer organizations, and started the community’s recycling program.



Eva Murray on Matinicus

Eva’s first book, *Well Out to Sea—Year-round on Matinicus Island* is a collection of short essays and articles focusing on life and work on one of Maine’s remote islands. Her second book, *Island Schoolhouse—One room for all* is an exploration of Maine’s still-functioning one-room public schools. Having been a one-room school teacher, the parent of island students, district bookkeeper and island school board member, Eva writes about these tiny schools with an insider’s perspective. Hearing her stories will bring our own one-room S Road schoolhouse to life! Be sure to join us June 19 at 7:30 in the community hall at the Union Church.

Honoring South Bristol Veterans

You may remember the photograph in our spring 2012 newsletter showing South Bristol men in their World War II uniforms at the dedication of a large plaque in front of what is now the SBHS building. Attempts to locate the plaque have failed and we believe it no longer exists. Sparked by that old photograph and the research done for the *Fabulous Forties* program, Trustee **Carol Kelsey** is leading a project to create an honor roll which would name all South Bristol veterans who served in the United States armed forces from the time South Bristol

became a town in 1915 to date.

South Bristol has memorials honoring those who died in WW I and II - one in front of the Union Church and one on Route 129 at Christmas Cove - and there is an Honor Roll of those who served in WW I in Town Hall - but nothing to honor *all* who served in those wars or since. The first step is to identify the South Bristol residents who served in the armed forces from 1915 to the present - not an easy task! Carol has been combing through old records and dusty documents and has created a preliminary list, but could use your help. Please send names of anyone who resided in South Bristol at the time of enlistment in any branch of the military from 1915 on, whether living or deceased, to Carol Kelsey (ckelsey@tidewater.net) or call 207-315-0558 and leave a message with the name of the person and the approximate time of his or her service.

Our hope is that this Honor Roll can be dedicated during the Town’s 2015 Centennial celebration. We welcome your suggestions about its form and location.

Brochures! Brochures! Hot off the Press!

First to come off the press is a brochure created by the Pemaquid Peninsula Heritage Group to identify points of historical interest on Pemaquid peninsula, including a detailed map. PPHG is a collaborative group of historical organizations from the towns of Bremen, Bristol and South Bristol and this brochure is its first joint project. This comprehensive “tour guide” listing buildings, parks, trails, cemeteries and more is the result of the dedicated efforts of Phil Averill who spearheaded the organization of PPHG.

Next in line to be published is a new SBHS brochure with updated text, photographs and map. SBHS Secretary **Deb Storch** has been working on this redesign and expects the new brochures to be available this summer.

Finally, the “History of the Town of South Bristol” included in this newsletter will be reprinted as a handout at a later date. SBHS Trustee **Polly Ulin** started with the town history that appeared in the Comprehensive Plan Committee’s 2010 report, made modifications and additions, and enhanced it with photographs to tell the story of the town’s beginnings and growth. This new version is now on the town website (townofsouthbristol.com) and on the SBHS website (southbristolhistoricalsociety.org).

These publications will be available at all SBHS programs and events as well as at local businesses.

On the Internet—SBHS and the South Bristol School!

Every Wednesday afternoon from October to February, SBHS members **Carolyn McKeon**, **Donna Plummer** and **Ellen Wells** joined teacher Jason Bigonia's 5th and 6th graders as the students selected, scanned and wrote about images telling the story of South Bristol's history from its separation from Bristol to the present day. To see the results of many hours of work by students and SBHS, sit down at your computer and type MaineMemory.net in your browser window to reach the Maine Memory Network home page. Then look for the "keyword(s)" window on the right (below an image titled "Explore the Collections"), type in "South Bristol" and click on "Search." When you reach the "Search results" page, click on "View All" and you will see some thirty images from South Bristol's history, each one selected and scanned by students. The students also made notes of what they thought was important or interesting about each image, and SBHS members used those notes to write the descriptions you will see if you click on an image.

Supported by a grant to SBHS from the Maine Historical Society's Community Mobilization Program, this work is the first step toward creation of an online exhibit. Next, the students will select a number of the images for a "Then and Now" series and take photos of the same sites today, showing how the Town has changed – or not changed – over the years. The images already online will be grouped into slide-shows around four topics closely related to the reasons for separation from Bristol: bridges and roads; the working waterfront; 'Summer Business'; and schools. We hope to complete this work by the end of the school year as a prelude to South Bristol's 2015 Centennial.

Preview of This Season's Events

The regular SBHS program night will now be the third **WEDNESDAY** of the month at 7:30 PM. We hope that this change will eliminate some conflicts with other meetings on Thursday night and enable more people to attend!

Our season begins with the annual cemetery visit on Saturday, **May 18th** at 9 AM. The **Kings Colony Cemetery**, also known as the Thompson Cemetery, has some of the oldest graves in South Bristol but is not often visited. It has also become quite overgrown, so after viewing the graves, some of us will stay on to clear brush and remove vines. If you can spare an hour or two, bring some yard clean-up tools and join in. We will meet in the Rutherford Library parking lot at 9:00 and proceed to the cemetery which is located at the end of Sloop Nellie Road. If the weather interferes, we will try again Saturday, June 1.

The first program night will be Wednesday, **June 19th** when **Eva Murray**, a year-round resident of Matinicus Island and author of many articles and two books, will speak about island life and one room schoolhouses at 7:30 at the Parish Hall (see related article). The SBHS Annual Meeting and election of officers and trustees will begin at 7:00 PM on Wednesday, **July 17th** at the Parish Hall, followed at 7:30 by a speaker to be announced. The S Road School will host our **Let's Do Lunch!** event from 10 AM to 4 PM on Saturday, **August 17th**. (see related article).

September is the month for **Oysters & Mussels & Clams - Oh My!** Join us for a talk about marine aquaculture – and some samples, we hope - on Wednesday, **September 18th** at the Parish Hall beginning at 7:30 PM. Our final program will be the traditional movie/video night, complete with freshly made popcorn, on **October 16th** at 7:30.

Let's Do Lunch!

This year's S Road School event on **August 17** will bring back gastronomical memories of South Bristol—sandwich shops, soda fountains, candy counters, lobster pounds, grocery stores, the dining rooms of the tourist hotels, the Tea House, Bob's Lunch, to name a few. Photographs and histories of local eateries and food-related businesses will be complemented by displays of early church cookbooks, teas sets, menus, Postmaster Wayne B's vintage lunch boxes, and more.

Of course there will be samples! Try a tea sandwich at the Tea House or a drink from the soda fountain. Decorate your own mini-cupcake with a choice of frostings and toppings at the Sweet Shoppe. Watch children choose old-fashioned treats at the Penny Candy Store with pennies they will receive at the door.

If you would like to share your photographs, cookbooks, menus, signs, tea sets, or other items that bring back memories of the foods of yesteryear, or would like to help with preparing and setting up the displays, contact any SBHS member, call 207-315-0558 or email sbhistorical@gmail.com.



Bob's Lunch - an early snack shop

History of the Town of South Bristol

South Bristol has evolved and changed over more than five centuries. Before the arrival of Europeans in the late 15th century, the Pemaquid Peninsula, the shore of Johns Bay, the islands, and the Damariscotta River were used extensively by Native Americans, as is evident by numerous shell middens and prehistoric archeological sites. The mouth of the Pemaquid River was the site of a major Native American settlement, and the South Bristol “Gut” was part of the important inside passage for Native American travels. Another passage, evidenced by shell middens, was the short portage between Seal Cove on the Damariscotta River and Poorhouse Cove on Johns Bay.

Explorers arrived on the midcoast during the early 1500s. One such exploration is that of Giovanni da Verrazzano, who recorded trading with Indians in 1528 at Small Point, a few miles west of South Bristol, and then sailing among the islands and sheltered harbors northeast of there on his way back to France.[1] By that time fishing trips from Europe to the northeast coast of North America were regular occurrences.

During the early 1600s, Englishman John Smith explored and mapped much of the coast of what is now Maine.[2] Legend has it that he spent Christmas of 1614 anchored in the well protected harbor of Christmas Cove on Rutherford Island, thus giving the cove its name. However, Capt. Smith could not have been here for Christmas, since his 1614 voyage lasted only from April until October of that year, when he arrived back in England.[3] The same schedule is described by Rowe [4] who also states that the voyages were intended to encourage colonization.

Europeans came regularly to the area in the late 16th and early 17th centuries to fish and explore the coast. These early settlers were farmers, fishermen, and traders. The “Gut” and east side of the Damariscotta River, which would become South Bristol, had scattered residents by the late 17th century. Pemaquid, with its fort, was a frontier marking the border between the English and French dominions. Friction between the English, French, and Native Americans caused a series of wars that devastated the area and resulted in the abandonment of the peninsula in the 1680s.

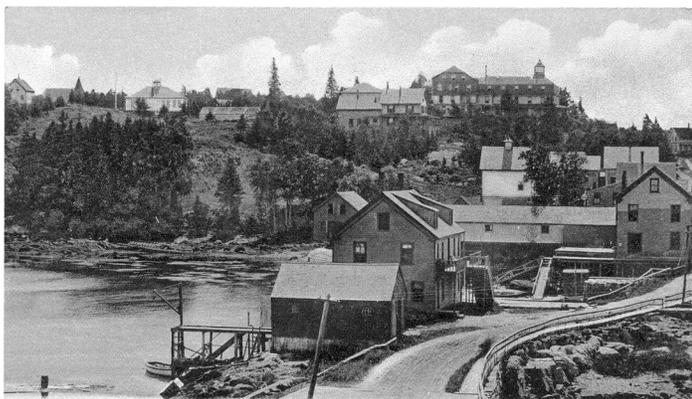
Resettlement of the peninsula did not occur until the 1730s when Scotch-Irish families were brought to the mid-coast region by Colonel David Dunbar under an English Royal mandate. Walpole, on the Damariscotta River; Harrington, at the head of Johns Bay; and Pemaquid Village were the first settled areas. In this second wave the settlers were farmers and woodsmen. They created homesteads from the forested land and exported timber, stone, bricks, and hay. Several Walpole families became wealthy as traders and large land owners. After weathering further Indian wars in the mid-1700s, the area grew and prospered with many of the forefathers of well-known South Bristol families arriving in the latter part of the 18th century.

In 1765, Bristol became one of the earliest incorporated towns in the Province of Maine, then part of Massachusetts. The growing communities needed gathering places for religious services and town meetings. In 1772, Meeting Houses were built in Walpole, Harrington, and Round Pond. The Walpole and Harrington meetinghouses survive today, used for special events and open to the public. Bristol was involved in the Revolutionary War with soldiers defending the local coast and participating in battles around Boston.

By the start of the 19th century, Walpole was the economic and population center of the east side of the Damariscotta River. At the same time, serious problems with land ownership surfaced. Claiming property ownership under 17th century Indian deeds and Royal land grants, heirs of earlier proprietors sought to force the current “squatters” either to pay dearly for, or to vacate, their hard-won and valuable farms. To quell rising violence, the Massachusetts authorities settled land claims in favor of the “squatters.”

The economic disaster of the War of 1812 damaged the trading economy of the Damariscotta River communities and resulted in much hardship in Walpole. By the time of Maine’s statehood in 1820 as half of the Missouri Compromise, fishing, both near- and off-shore, was starting to become an important economic force on the Bristol peninsula. The rise of South Bristol village and Rutherford Island as a population center dates from that time. With the

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A view of South Bristol village, circa 1912, with the Summit House Hotel high on the hill.



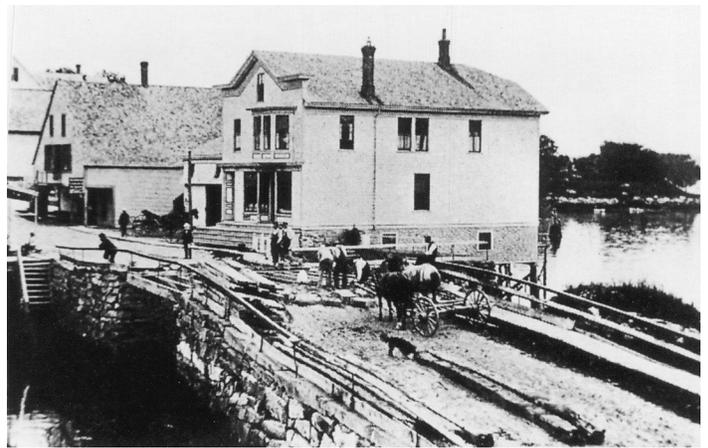
One of the many vessels in the South Bristol fishing fleet, drying nets at the Gut.

waning of timber and farming exports, fishing and boat building became the prominent occupations of South Bristol residents. While subsistence farming was still practiced in Walpole, fishermen made up a large percentage of the population at Clarks Cove, South Bristol, and Rutherford Island. South Bristol had several small fishing fleets and dried fish exporters. The Town also provided many seamen for the larger fishing fleets of Boothbay and Southport and had family ties to the Gloucester fishing industry. Ship and boat building had become an important business in the community by the 1850s.

The Bristol peninsula sent its quota of men to the Civil War. Men from South Bristol were represented in several well-known regiments, including the 20th Maine of Gettysburg fame. The Union Navy had many South Bristol seamen. The post Civil War depression was off-set on the Bristol peninsula by the boom of the menhaden, or pogey, fishery. These oily fish were abundant during the 1870s, and the mid-coast of Maine was the center of the fishery. South Bristol had three factories converting menhaden to valuable oil and fish meal. Many of the finer houses in South Bristol village date from this time of prosperity.

With the collapse of the pogey fishery by 1880, the area suffered difficult economic times. The slow exodus of families to the west increased in the 1880s, and the Bristol area population fell. Farming, fishing, and boat building continued, and commercial ice harvesting and exporting took place at Clarks Cove. However, with improved transportation, including steamships, small river steamboats, and trains, summer tourists were becoming more important to the mid-coast. In 1897, the Union Church was built, but it was not until 1903 that it became organized as a congregation with its first minister, Reverend C. Wellington Rogers.[5]

Starting with a summer colony on Inner Heron Island in the 1890s, Christmas Cove, South Bristol, and Clarks Cove were welcoming summer visitors to hotels, boarding houses, and tea rooms by 1900. The construction of shore cottages soon led to a full-fledged summer colony centered on



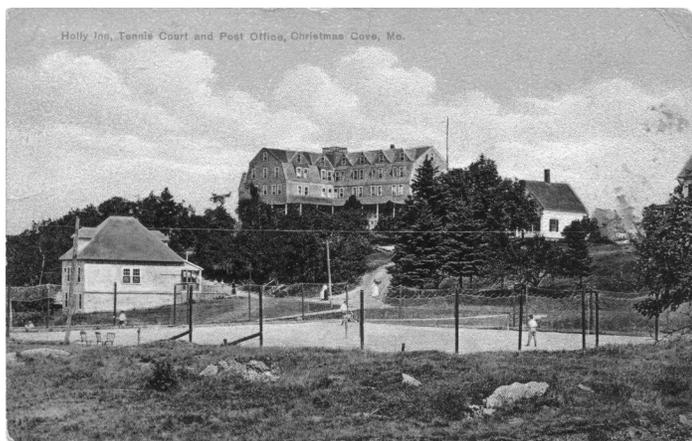
The wooden bridge over the Gut being repaired.

Christmas Cove. The Christmas Cove Improvement Association was founded in 1900 [6] and many shore estates date from this period. By the early 20th century, Christmas Cove had become a yachting destination. Providing services to summer visitors became, and has remained, a major element of the local economy.

Transportation continued to improve in the early decades of the 20th century with steamboat service to Damariscotta and the arrival of the automobile in 1911. By 1913, however, South Bristol residents were growing dissatisfied with local governance under the Town of Bristol. Among their complaints was the Town's failure to maintain the bridge, roads, and sidewalks in South Bristol; the unequal treatment of South Bristol's schools in comparison to those in Bristol; and the distance to the Bristol High School, which made it virtually unavailable to the tax payers of South Bristol. The result was a series of petitions from South Bristol residents to the state legislature seeking separation from the Town of Bristol. Finally in 1915, South Bristol became a separate town comprised of Walpole, Clarks Cove, South Bristol village, and Rutherford and Inner Heron islands.

Through World War I, the Great Depression, and World War II, the Town had numerous family farms, several boat builders, and a small fishing industry, along with the all-important "summer trade." The Harvey Gamage Shipyard, started in 1926, provided employment for many skilled boat builders, as did boatyards in East Boothbay. During World War II the Gamage yard built wooden minesweepers for the United States Navy. After the war, the Gamage yard put South Bristol on the map with construction of many large wooden fishing and sailing vessels. It was said that at one time half of the New Bedford, Massachusetts fishing fleet had been built in South Bristol.

The 1960s and 1970s saw the beginning of significant changes. Lobstering became the dominant fishery. Better roads allowed easier access to the Town, resulting in an increase in summer residences. Farming in the northern part of South Bristol declined, and more year-round residents were traveling out of town to work at places like Bath



The second Holly Inn at Christmas Cove, with the CClA's tennis courts in the foreground.

Iron Works. The Gamage Shipyard as a builder of wooden, and briefly steel, vessels came to an end in 1981. The Town became increasingly dependent on the stores and services of Damariscotta. Retirees made up a larger percentage of the Town's population, reflecting a regional trend.

While South Bristol's population grew overall, the number of children in the school system declined from 1950s levels. Shore front property, especially on Rutherford Island, became valuable and scarce. The Ira C. Darling Marine Center of the University of Maine opened in 1965 and has become an internationally recognized marine biology research center.

Today there are several remaining sites that give a glimpse into the early history of the Town. The Thompson Ice House is now a museum open to the public. Ice is still harvested from the adjacent pond every winter and stored in the ice house for summer use. Exhibits show the ice harvesting process and the tools used. The Walpole Meeting House is still used periodically for religious services, meetings, weddings, and musical performances. The site of the original Gamage Shipyard is now a marina with boat storage and a repair facility. Of the five schools that served the Town in the 19th century, the S Road School (c.1860 to 1943) remains. This one-room schoolhouse, called the Roosevelt School at the time it closed, has been restored to its appearance in the 1930s by the South Bristol Historical Society. It is open to the public. Private sites of historic significance include the Sproul Homestead and the Emily Means House, both on the National Register of Historic Sites along with the Walpole and Harrington meetinghouses and the Thompson Icehouse.

For more on the history of South Bristol, see Nelson W. Gamage, *A Short History of South Bristol, Maine* [7], presently out of print but available at the Rutherford Library and the South Bristol Historical Society; Ellen Vincent, *Down on the Island, Up on the Main* [8]; and H. Landon Warner, *A History of the Families and Their Houses*. [9] The South Bristol Historical Society located on Rutherford Island has extensive holdings open to the public and is on line at <http://www.southbristolhistoricalsociety.org/>.

References:

[1] Morrison, Samuel Eliot; *The European Discovery of North America: The northern voyages*; New York; Oxford University Press; 1971; pp. 308-9.
[2] Fischer, David Hackett; *Champlain's Dream*; New York; Simon & Schuster; 2008; p. 228.
[3] Burrage, Henry Sweetzer, D.D.; *The Beginnings of Colonial Maine: 1602-1658*; Portland, Maine; Marks Printing House; 1914; p. 131.
[4] Rowe, William Hutchison; *The Maritime History of Maine*; New York; W. W. Norton & Company; 1948; p. 21.
[5] Sewall, Jane; *The Marks that We Follow: A study of churches and religions of Mid-coast Maine*; unpub-

lished; 1978; available at South Bristol Historical Society.

[6] Wells, Stan and Ellen; *The Christmas Cove Improvement Association 1900 – 2000: A Centennial History*; South Bristol, Maine; Christmas Cove Improvement Association; 2000; p. 1.
[7] Gamage, Nelson W.; *A Short History of South Bristol Maine*; unpublished; no date; available at the Rutherford Library and the South Bristol Historical Society.
[8] Vincent, Ellen; *Down on the Island, Up on the Main*; South Bristol, Maine; South Bristol Historical Society; 2003.
[9] Warner, H. Landon; *A History of the Families and Their Houses*; *South Bristol Maine*; South Bristol, Maine; South Bristol Historical Society; 2006.

Editor's Note: This article is based on the town history that appeared in the Comprehensive Plan for South Bristol as proposed in 2010; thanks to Ken Maguire for helpful suggestions and references.

Notes from the Board of Trustees

The SBHS Board of Trustees has a full agenda at every meeting – program planning, decisions about special projects, financial reports, maintenance and use of the historic properties for which we are responsible, keeping track of our growing collections. For example, after valiant efforts to resuscitate the SBHS museum dehumidifier, which frosted up like the refrigerators of years ago, the Board approved \$250 for the purchase of a new model with a digital setting and humidity gauge so vital to the preservation of our collection. It is also MUCH quieter!

A contribution of \$300 to the cost of printing the PPHG 'historical tour' brochure described elsewhere in this newsletter was also approved at the last meeting. At the same session, in order to continue offering new and interesting programs, the board approved a modest annual speakers' budget of \$300. We do not expect to have to expend the whole amount each year, but it has become clear that many speakers require at least a travel allowance to come to South Bristol.

The Board is also considering what is likely to be a larger expense - an additional printing of Landon Warner's book, *A History of the Families and Their Houses: South Bristol, Maine*. Our inventory is down to less than 20 books and we may well want to have copies available for the Centennial in 2015.

We have begun the process of creating an email list of members so that we keep our members up-to-date with notices of new events, changes of date or time, or items of special interest between our bi-annual newsletters. We expect to send no more than 6 to 8 messages a year, and promise not to send membership dues notices! If you think we may not have your current email in our database, or do not want to be included on this list, please let us know. Send your information or request to sbhistorical@gmail.com, or call 2097-315-0558 and leave us a message.

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Keeping Track of New 'Old' Items

C o-president **Cathy Stockwell** has spent many hours over the last few years on the vital task of entering into our database the many wonderful items that have been donated to our museum. Each entry contains a brief description of the item including not only what it is, but who donated it, who appears in an image, the relevant time period, and its location in our files. As a result, questions about people, places and events often can be answered quickly, or displays for programs and events prepared. SBHS is grateful for all the interesting and important artifacts donated each year. The following are just a few of the many donations recently added to our database, and demonstrate the wide variety of items which make up our collection:

Three copper engraving plates made in 1914 for the engagement and marriage of Esther Carlson to Samuel King - donated by Todd Lincoln who found them in an old bottle dump on McFarlands Cove Road; blueprints of one of the minesweepers built by Gamage Boat Yard in 1941 - gift of Nat Hammond; a heavy wooden case with glass front in which are displayed a cross-section of heavy undersea cable and a 'key to the town of South Bristol' as well as 16mm film of Tracor operations - gift of Robert Nelson; a group of 10 photos of the Walpole Meeting House at vari-

ous times in its history - donated by Larry Reed on behalf of the old Walpole Meetinghouse; a treasure trove of photos, postcards, letters, genealogies - collected by Mansfield Hunt and donated by his estate; a transcript of Letty Searls Halmshaw's honeymoon diary written in 1918 as well as the scrapbook of a trip to Europe in the 1930's prepared by her husband, the Rev. Robert Halmshaw - gift of Suzanne and Charles Misner.



The sign on the right reads "Drugs, Ice Cream and Soda"