

South Bristol Historical Society

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Newsletter

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Historical Society News

Ellen Vincent

Ellen Vincent, author of *Down on the Island, Up on the Main: A Recollected History of South Bristol, Maine*, honorary citizen of the Town of South Bristol and a founder of SBHS passed away Feb. 24 from breast cancer. Born in Washington, D.C. in 1949, Ellen grew up in a Maryland suburb outside of Washington, D.C., and graduated from high school in 1967. She received a B.A. in art education from the University of Maryland at College Park in 1971, and a Masters of Fine Arts from George Washington University in 1973. She began her academic career at the Maryland College of Art and Design and in 1989 moved to Milwaukee and the Milwaukee Institute of Art and Design where she was Professor of Art until illness kept her from the classroom this past year.

Ellen was the catalyst for a group of townspeople interested in local history to carry out the idea of a historical society, leading to the formation of SBHS in 1998. She took great pride in the success of the Society from its very beginning, contributing photographs, stories, ideas and expertise – but most of all she gave inspiration.

The story of how Ellen came to South Bristol and of how her visits to flea markets and the random family photos found there turned into a major art-and-oral history project is well known to South Bristol. Most of you will remember August 2003 and the showing of “Down on the Island, up on the Main” in South Bristol; many were reminded of old times, places and faces, others read about them for the first time. Everyone left with pride and a renewed sense of what this town of South Bristol is all about. At the reception celebrating the show and the publication of the book by the same name, the Selectmen presented Ellen with a plaque naming her an honorary citizen of South Bristol, “in



recognition of her work gathering and preserving the history of our Town.” Working with Ellen to create and publish the book was an unparalleled confidence-building experience for a fledgling organization. The book has created opportunities for SBHS that most small town historical societies would never have.

In the introduction to *Down on the Island*, Ellen wrote: “This book is merely a stage in a work-in-progress, carried on by all of us in the South Bristol Historical Society. It is my fondest hope that the work will continue, and that it will serve as an inspiration for other communities to preserve their own history.” Your Board of Trustees remains committed to giving life to Ellen’s dream and counts on your continuing support in this endeavor.

Schoolhouse Restoration Project Gets Underway

The possibility of restoring the Schoolhouse on the S Road (known as the Roosevelt School while it was in operation) has been a recurring item on the SBHS agenda for some time. An initial estimate for structural work was obtained in the fall of 2005; a small group of former students and other interested people visited the school in 2006 and added memories and lots of enthusiasm; August Avantage’s summer intern project brought together much previously scattered information which he presented to the Society in October 2006; at a meeting in January 2007, South Bristol School principal Scott White expressed his enthusiasm and offered to lead a group of students to help with the restoration work. Most recently, the 2007 Annual Town Meeting gave the project a boost when it approved starting a reserve fund for the schoolhouse restoration with a \$2,500 appropriation. As soon as additional estimates are received, SBHS Board members will draft and submit requests for funds from charitable foundations.

The most important factor in this endeavor, however, is the interest and support of individuals and families who care about the preservation of an important piece of South Bristol history. A special Reunion at the schoolhouse on June 16th at 2pm will gather together many who attended school there and will provide an opportunity for the rest of the community to see the inside of the building while listening in on the reminiscing and story-telling that will no doubt take place. Then, since the plan is to restore the school to the way it was in the 1930’s, author Tom Hanna (*Shoutin’ into the Fog; Growing up on Maine’s Ragged Edge*) will remind us of what life was like at that

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time as he shares his memories of growing up on Georgetown Island in the depression. Details of the restoration project, including the costs of repairing the building and of furnishing the schoolroom, will be explained, and suggestions for ways to meet funding goals welcomed.

As we said in this Newsletter last spring, "This will be a huge project, requiring SBHS to raise substantial sums for physical restoration and to gather as much information and as many artifacts as possible to tell the story of the last one-room schoolhouse in town not converted to other use. We urge everyone to scour their attics and basements for items associated with the schoolhouse: for example, school text books, notebooks, projects, class photos. Most important of all, search your memories for tales about the school and its teachers." And, bring what you find in your attic and in your memory to the Schoolhouse on the S Road on June 16th.

SBHS News Briefs

"**Portraits of South Bristol**," photos taken by Ann Hillis in the late '60's and the '70's brought back many memories of people and places when different groups of images from the collection were shown in July and September of 2006 and March of 2007. ...**Twelve panels** of stories and memories from Ellen Vincent's amazing exhibit "**Down on the Island, Up on the Main**" were enthusiastically welcomed

at a faculty workshop on oral history at the Warren Community School - Dave Andrews, Cotton Damon, Nat Hammond, and Stan Wells helped transport and set up the easels and panels.... **Sales** of Lannie Warner's ***The Families and their Houses: South Bristol, Maine*** have been excellent, thanks in no small part to Harborside, Island Grocery and Walpole Barn who have sold books without keeping a percentage. The cost of production has been recovered and profits are beginning to mount up. If you don't have your copy yet, send an email, call, or write SBHS and order one.... A **comprehensive and helpful report** has been received from **archival consultants** Ron Kley and Jane Radcliffe who came to us as a result of a successful grant application to **Maine State Archives Historical Collections Grant Program**, prepared by Carolyn McKeon. Now the real work of cataloguing our entire collection begins! ... **Winter weather** was no obstacle to our **Thursday afternoon** "work crew" made up of Michele Christensen, Genie Cole, Cotton Damon, Carolyn McKeon, Amy Poole, Donna Plummer, and Gail Seiders.... **Thanks** to Michele also for the tri-fold display boards now in use to show more of Ann Hillis' "**Portraits of South Bristol**."... **Work sessions** are scheduled for April 14 and 28 to **repair significant damage** to the ceiling and one wall of the SBHS building caused by one of this winter's wild rain and wind storms. Call 644-1234 if you can help for a few hours and we will get back to you with details.

School Days - Excerpts from interviews with Sarah Emery

In March and April of 1975, Richard Hawkins, then the principal of the South Bristol School, interviewed Sarah Emery. They spoke of her days as a young girl attending the Roosevelt School in the late 1890's and of later years when she was the teacher there. Town records indicate that she was teaching at the Roosevelt School on the S Road when South Bristol became a town in 1915. She taught at the Schoolhouse until 1935, returning to South Bristol in 1945 to teach at the Gladstone School for many more years.

The following passages are quoted from the transcript of the 1975 interview.

Christmas at the Roosevelt School on the S Road:

"Oh yes! The schoolhouse was crowded. And it was before electricity you know. Long before electricity, the tarred roads, anything. I think the town bought a kindergarten table, you know a little low one. I think they bought that for me. I know I asked for it. And I didn't want a great big tree, you know; because it would be kind of hard to take care of. So we used the table that was for little folks which was so high. The children,...I told them how it must be pretty ...and they would bring the tree and I guess some of

them had a fixture for the bottom of it. And we would put it right on this table. Then, they didn't have as many ornaments, no electric light ornaments. Well, I wouldn't want them anyway because I would be afraid of them, I mean I didn't want the responsibility. So sometimes someone would string a load of cranberries.... They had this tin foil, the kind on the string, and this was red and green, and the wooden balls, and of course a star for the top, and an angel or two. .. Money was scarce; these children didn't have any extra money. So some of them would string popcorn. You know there is quite a trick to stringing popcorn. I never had very good luck, but you have to pop it and let it set so it would get soft. ... A lady in New York used to



Sarah Emery at her retirement reception in 19xx.

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send me ten dollars ... It was someone that was interested in the school and used to visit when she was here. So I could buy quite a lot of presents....I thought we've got to have a Santa Claus suit. Well, if you got to have one, you've got to buy it, so I bought one and it was cute. And we had Herbert Thompson's grandfather, he lived over here, for the Santa Claus. He was lovely....He would take presents off the tree and I would have three or four children pass them around. Oh, they loved it!...every little while he would sniff and say something about 'that coffee' and how he was waiting for it. ...and when everything was stripped off the tree, why we would all set down and have coffee and cake....

The water bucket:

"Oh that old water bucket. Well, I'm not sure but I used to take a jar of water for myself. I didn't think much of that bucket. The children were used to it, the children didn't seem to mind. They filled the water bucket. That's what they had been accustomed to, you know. That water bucket was supposed to be filled in the morning and at noon time."

The flag:

"Now another thing there ought to be a flag on the point of that schoolhouse. There wasn't a pole. You know where

the schoolhouse goes up into a point? Well, the flag went right up there. The rope, the coils, the fixtures were right on the schoolhouse. I don't know that I assigned any particular person for that duty. Because sometimes unless there was some boy large enough, but I was always afraid it wouldn't be right, but still I used to let them try to put it up. And sometime I would forget at night, and I would start for home and look and see Old Glory flying. Sarah would have to go back and take Old Glory in."

Desks:

They (the desks) faced the door. I think there were four rows with two in the row...You would have quite low ones for the little ones. But they were nailed down, you couldn't move them and two in a seat...I think there was a partition between so that I had my books on one side and hers were on the other.... The ink well was in the middle. And there was never any ink in it. We couldn't afford to have ink.

Taking care of the building:

"Now the building. I had to do the sweeping and dusting like that. And I used to have one of the older girls help me and I gave them, I don't know how many there were, for the time they helped I gave them sterling silver coins...In the winter my father most of the time would start the fire...

Slaves in South Bristol?

by Dave Andrews, SBHS Historian

If you have visited the Walpole Meeting House you probably heard, like I did, that slaves sat in the oddly sloping benches around the balcony. Were there really slaves in South Bristol? The answer is probably yes, but not many.

Slavery came to an end in Massachusetts (remember Maine was part of the Bay State until 1820) about 1783. Before then, slaves made up only a very small percentage of the population of New England. Because slaves were expensive to buy and maintain, only the well-to-do could afford them. For example, when John North of St. George died in 1762, he was one of the wealthiest men in the mid-coast area with an estate worth 1,948 pounds. He owned one "Negro man named Esram" worth 40 pounds "with bedding and his cloths". Outside of property and money owed to him, Esram was Mr. North's most valuable asset. By way of comparison, one of his other assets, a cow, was worth only 4 pounds.

There were perhaps only 40 families living in what is today South Bristol in the mid 1770's. Most were pioneer settlers of limited means who neither needed nor could afford slaves. However, there were a few wealthier few men. Inventories of the estates of seven more well-to-do Bristol farmers, sea captains and traders, who died before 1783, are available in the Lincoln County probate records. These are William Huston (1762), Amos Goudy (1765), Captain John Lermond (1771), Samuel Borland (1773), William Miller (1773), Nathaniel Winslow (1779). The

The Remnant brought over	£ 306.12.8
One Horse 100/ Black Jacket & Breeches 20/-	6 0 0
One Shuffl. Wind Tent 20/-	1 0 0
One old Coat & breeches 10/-	0 12 0
Three Negroes	80 0 0
The Real Estate	333 6 8
1 Pair Sea Tonge	0 6 6
Two wheels of wrapping bars - 6/-	727 17 4
Lawful money	£ 728 3 4

The page in the Miller inventory listing "three Negroes" with a value of 80 English pounds.

estate values ranged from 728 pounds for Miller to poor Samuel Borland whose 482 pounds of debt exceeded his 424 pounds of assets.

Of the seven, only William Miller was a slave owner. Miller was a self-styled trader in Caribbean and European goods. His estate inventory includes a 97 ton sloop as well as farm equipment and animals. At the end of the list, just after "One old coat and breeches - 20 shillings" and "The Real Estate - 333 pounds" is the entry "Three negroes - 80 pounds." Miller lived in Clarks Cove, so even if his three Negroes remained in South Bristol after his death, they would likely have been seen in the Harrington Meeting House, not the Walpole Meeting House.

Could there have been other slaves in South Bristol in the 1770s? It's possible but they would have been few and far between. We know there were slaves in other parts of Bristol but, to date, nothing further has come to light about our side of the peninsula.

2007 PROGRAM SCHEDULE

SATURDAY, April 14 and **SATURDAY, April 28** – 9am to 3pm at SBHS. **Volunteer work sessions** to repair ceiling and wall damage from roof leak; please call Ellen Wells 644-1584 or Dave Andrews 644-8785 if you can help.

SATURDAY, April 21 - 9:00 am at the **UNION CHAPEL** in Walpole for coffee, tea and pastries. Larry Kelsey will provide introductory information and lead visits to the cemeteries at the Darling Center, Split Rock Road and Walpole Meeting House.

THURSDAY, May 17 – 7:30 pm; location to be announced, for South Bristol home **movie night**.

SATURDAY, June 16 – 2 to 4 pm at the **ROOSEVELT SCHOOL ON THE S ROAD**. **Reunion of former students**; talk by author **Tom Hanna** (*Shoutin' into the Fog; Growing Up on Maine's Ragged Edge*) on life in rural Maine during the depression; start of restoration project fund raising.

SUNDAY, July 1 or 8, to be announced – **Ice Cream Social** at the **Thompson Ice House**

THURSDAY, July 19 – 7:00 pm and 7:30 pm at the **UNION CHURCH COMMUNITY HALL**. 7:00 pm **Annual Meeting & election of trustees and officers**; 7:30 pm Guest speaker author **Neil Rolde** on his new book, *James G. Blaine, the Continental Liar from the State of Maine*.

THURSDAY, August 16 – 6:00 to 7:00 pm. Tentative program includes **WALPOLE MEETING HOUSE** open for visits prior to regular meeting at 7:30 pm at the **UNION CHURCH COMMUNITY HALL** when a program on the Walpole Meeting House and the Hunter family will be presented.

THURSDAY, September 20 – 7:30 pm at the new **RUTHERFORD LIBRARY**. **Cotton Damon** will tell the story of the **Islands of South Bristol**.

THURSDAY, October 18 – 7:30 pm at the new **RUTHERFORD LIBRARY**. **Dave Andrews** will report on his research into colonial South Bristol.