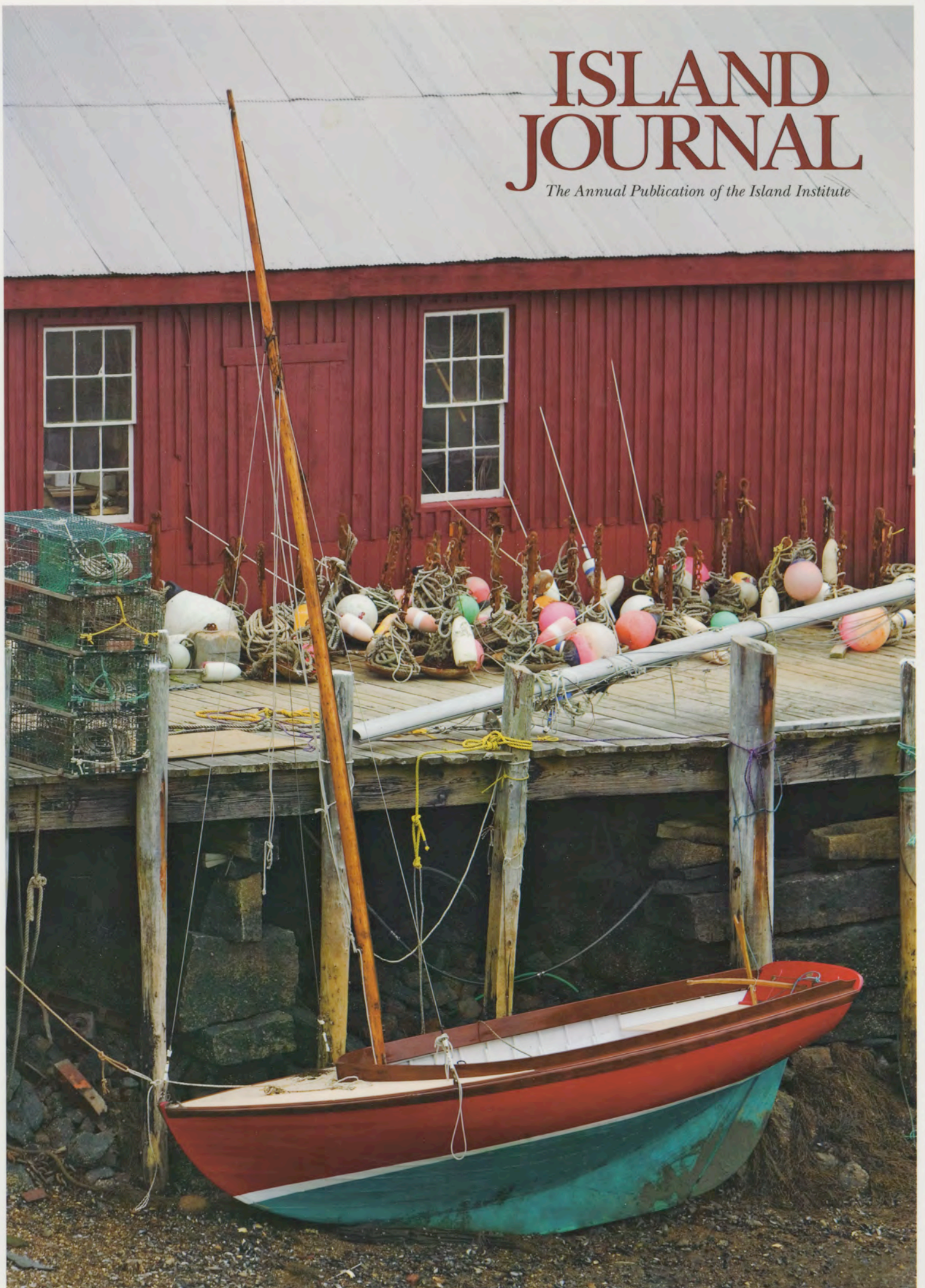


ISLAND JOURNAL

The Annual Publication of the Island Institute





Peter Ralston



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Sustaining the Islands and Communities of the Gulf of Maine

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Peter Ralston

TO OUR READERS

Islands are all about access, literal and otherwise. Separated from everywhere else by water, island residents maintain access via a variety of boats, ships, ferries, airplanes and the occasional bridge. Vibrant island communities depend on reasonable access to survive, and when it is denied for some reason—when the authorities reduce or eliminate ferry service, when the Postal Service stops delivering mail, when air service goes away because it's unprofitable, when a landowner shuts off a traditional route to the shore—the affected island communities are inevitably diminished. And conversely, as everyone knows, too much access can do even more damage to these fragile places.

We tend to think of island boundaries as hard and fast—described by the seemingly immutable edge between water and rock. But island boundaries can be more like semi-permeable membranes. Sometimes new people and new ideas cross an island boundary and fully enter a living community; other times, there's resistance. It's hard to predict.

This year *Island Journal* considers access in a variety of contexts. We ponder the steady erosion of access to the working waterfronts where generations of Maine people

have approached the sea to earn their livelihoods. We explore the rich resources of the island libraries that offer information on a scale undreamed-of when many of them were established a century ago. We take note of efforts to gain genetic knowledge from the sea.

This year two stories pose questions islanders (and would-be islanders) have asked themselves for generations: Can someone who's not island-born be "accepted" into an island community? And how do native-born islanders, as they reach adulthood, make the choice to stay or go? Metaphorically at least, the questions are as much about access as the more literal ones, such as how we will reach Matinicus if the planes don't fly.

For more than 20 years *Island Journal* has probed the island psyche, teasing out its myriad modes of expression. Again and again, this unique publication asks the big questions—Who's an islander? What's "islandness"? Why are islands different from other places? One thing keeps getting clearer: the answers are important, but asking the questions is even more so.

The Editors

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From sandlot to semi-pro, baseball flourished on Vinalhaven in the past. Now a revival is under way.

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At heart, Monhegan photographer Tom Martin is still a kid in the woods with a magnifying glass.

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THE COMING OF
THE DIGITAL AGE

Since last year's publication of *Holding Ground* I have converted to digital photography, and this *Journal* is the first in which my digital work appears. I want to acknowledge the encouragement I have received from a few very special friends in making this leap possible. Peggy and Dick Kremenz of Criehaven were directly responsible for getting me to pick up these new cameras and start photographing again, with a renewed eye and appetite. George Moss of North Haven has been a patient mentor as I have flailed my way up multiple learning curves. Taking up this new technology holds real promise for—among other things—improved reproduction in this publication, and I merely begin to thank these friends by dedicating the *Island Journal's* enhanced dedication to graphic excellence to them.

Peter Ralston, Art Director

Cover: *North Haven*, Peter Ralston

The Destination of Species page 44

The SORCERER II global microbial sampling expedition is the first major scientific ocean cruise of the Genomic Age

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The Tropical Lobster Coast page 48

Belizean lobstermen are, in many ways, following in Maine's footsteps.

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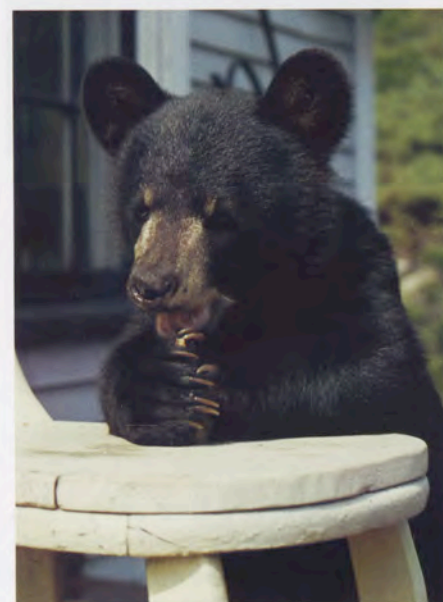
To the uninitiated, the vast spiritual subway system that runs under this granite island is unimaginable.

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In the 1950s, Chebeague residents tried to get the state to build them a bridge and failed. Today they're glad it didn't work out.

By Elizabeth Howe



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For artist Bo Bartlett, Wheaton Island induces "a constant awakening state of contemplation."

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Europeans first visited the Georges Islands four centuries ago. What they saw then is different now—but some things haven't changed.

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FROM THE HELM



Peter Ralston

A FAILURE OF IMAGINATION

PHILIP W. CONKLING

You don't have to look very far afield to view the fate of most island communities off our country's coasts. The culture of one independent island community after another, from Florida to New England and from the San Juans to Santa Catalina, has been punctured or broken. In a manner analogous to the incalculable number of biological extinctions that have occurred on islands, a vast number of indigenous island communities around the globe have gone extinct—and many of them in this country during the last 50 years.

The dynamic is always the same. Seasonal tourism—beginning as a harmless idyll in the sun—is followed by the first buds of residential development that brings visitors who are initially a boon to isolated communities thanks to the extra dollars and fellowship they bring. The original visitors, who usually deeply admire and respect island ways, bring back stories of a way of life where everything is still connected; where everyone still knows everyone else (and usually too much for

their own good); where views of a sunrise or a sunset over immaculately sparkling waters from a white-doweled porch powerfully recharge one's tired imagination. The back-home neighbors of these first island visitors who mourn the passing of their own small-town life decide to visit their neighbors the following summer.

Then a few entrepreneurial islanders become real estate brokers. And why not? Locally owned waterfront houses and properties that have languished on the market begin to sell for unimaginable prices, and then a few years later look like steals. So more go on the market, for even higher prices, and they too sell. Island fishermen, particularly those looking to retire after a life at sea and who are handy at everything, become caretakers. Their wives become laundresses and house cleaners and their sons and daughters follow in their footsteps. A few good island cooks open restaurants. Everyone's earning more money than last year—sometimes enough for a winter trip to Disneyland or Disney World.

But soon, darker realities begin to taint paradise. Fishermen are discouraged from piling messy, smelly gear along the waterfront. Those in the booming service economy, particularly younger couples, can no longer afford island property. The cost of service jobs begins to spiral upward; seasonal residents who used to pay next to nothing to get the water turned on and off now pay rates that they might expect to pay in Manhattan. Resentments build between islanders and summer people; tempers can flare; “summah people; some ahn’t.”

A few islands are “saved.” Santa Catalina Island off Santa Barbara becomes a Nature Conservancy preserve. Cumberland Island, one of the Georgia sea islands, where islanders developed unique methods of growing cotton and indigo in the poor sandy soils, becomes a national park, off-limits to all but a few who get reservations six months in advance.

But most islands are simply swallowed whole, like exceptionally sweet oysters. Route One bridge innovations break the spine of conch culture in the Florida Keys. Bridges are built to innumerable other barrier islands where cheek-by-jowl beachfront cottage culture extinguishes local fishing towns. Daufuskie Island, where black islanders still spoke their own African dialect of Gullah into the 1980s, becomes a golfing community. The culture of Martha’s Vineyard and Nantucket more closely resembles Greenwich and the Upper East Side of Manhattan than Falmouth or New Bedford.

What fools would think this dynamic can be challenged? To begin with, of course, most of the 4,300 or so year-round islanders of Maine dare to think this way. But aren’t they too unsophisticated, too naive to read the handwriting on the wall, ask the sophisticates from away.

I don’t think so. Perhaps the most compelling reason we can hope to escape the fate of so many other island communities is that their powerful negative examples starkly confront us. The Maine coast and islands have developed more slowly than most other coastlines. Warmer waters and sandy shores are a bigger draw than hobbling across stones and mussel shells into character-building water. And a lucky thing, too.

Other island communities did not act in time to save themselves because they didn’t know any better; they didn’t see they had any real choices, and the processes of destruction were subtle and seemingly ineluctable. They believed, like the rest of the country, almost religiously in “progress.” And they didn’t total their losses until it was too late. These losses amount, more than anything else, to a failure of imagination.

I think we know more now; I think we question the notion of progress more. I think in Maine we are even more steeped in the politics of local control. I think the techniques of managing growth are more numerous and more accepted. And finally, for the past two decades, Maine’s islands (and working waterfronts) have witnessed an

unprecedented boom in lobster harvests that has allowed many local families to hold on to waterfront access longer than anywhere else in the country, and to earn previously unimaginable livings. But we cannot depend on this kind of luck forever: lobster harvests are cyclic, like everything in nature; they will decline.

In the long run Maine’s island and working waterfront communities cannot be sustained without collective effort and action. We can create a future different from what the country’s other island communities have suffered, if and only if we are all (or mostly all) pulling in the same direction: native and newcomer, clammer and cottager. We need each other’s skills and perspectives. And we must realize that if we divide against ourselves and pull in different directions . . . well, nature abhors a vacuum; opportunists love them.

One particularly hopeful initiative is the Working Waterfront Coalition, a Maine-grown effort the Island Institute has helped coordinate. The coalition is focused on preserving access for commercial fishermen, boatbuilders and aquaculture enterprises through a variety of approaches—including a statewide referendum to give fishermen a current use tax break, a bond issue to provide matching funds to acquire key parcels, a common definition and a map of just where the rapidly disappearing working waterfronts are. The coalition has grown to 100 organizations and individuals and has attracted support and backing from the governor, leading legislators and many town selectmen. It’s what we’d call a good start.

Most of all, to “save” the Maine coast, we need vision and confidence in ourselves to create an alternative future, or alternative futures. We must begin to dream bigger dreams of saving not just individual islands or undeveloped parcels of shoreline, but whole communities of working harbors and boats that comprise the other half of Maine’s greatest coastal legacy. We must build new partnerships between fishermen and yachtsmen, between conservationists and town fathers. Money is not the only—or even the biggest—problem. By working together, we can develop the funding strategies to maintain our storied sense of place in our towns and harbors.

But can we maintain our exquisite balance between summer and winter? Can we conjure up a collective dream of a future that maintains the best of our present circumstances, that respects the past and its traditions of comity and proportion—its vernacular architecture, maritime and otherwise, that resists the powerful temptations of an illusory sense of “progress”?

I think we can; but our immediate challenge is the “vision thing.” We cannot and must not let our imaginations fail.

“We can create a future different from what the country’s other island communities have suffered, if and only if we are all (or mostly all) pulling in the same direction: native and newcomer, clammer and cottager.”

Philip W. Conkling is president of the Island Institute.



All along the Maine coast, "for sale" signs carry an ominous message: the accessible waterfront we have known for generations is under siege and could soon become a thing of the past.

HANGING ON

In the midst of a coastal real estate boom, only ingenuity will preserve fishermen's access to the shore



BY STEVE CARTWRIGHT

PHOTOGRAPHY BY PETER RALSTON

On Horse Point in Port Clyde, a third-generation lobsterman sold his house and wharf to a Washington, D.C., couple for a second home. Another Horse Point house is on the market for \$1 million, and the lobsterman's shack on the lot is advertised as a "studio."

Such conversions, typical on the Maine coast, are not a new phenomenon, and as real estate sells for higher and higher prices, the landscape, seascape and character of the coast is changing. High-end real estate conversions are shrinking and squeezing access for commercial fishermen. Some have formed co-ops or pooled money to buy and share a pier. Some just hang on.

Are "people from away" really the problem here? At a meeting last year on a proposed land bank for the town of St. George (Port Clyde is part of St. George), the man who bought the Horse Point house and wharf stood up and admitted he was the kind of guy locals were complaining about.



Southwest Harbor

John McIlwain drew some sympathetic laughter for his candor, and then he made a plea for protecting public access to the sea for the fishermen and for everyone. A senior fellow at Washington's Urban Land Institute, an agency that encourages responsible development to meet people's needs, he said the coast from Maine to Florida is being snatched up by affluent baby boomers, and paying \$1 million for a waterfront home in Maine is cheap compared to prices on Cape Cod.

McIlwain and his wife, Wende, bought their property from Alton Hupper, whose grandfather built the house in the 1880s. "We're very lucky; we were the ones who could afford to buy it," said McIlwain, adding that they bought the place in 1997, before prices went sky-high. Shortly after they bought it L.L.Bean heiress Linda Bean said she had thought of buying it for a guesthouse.

For now, Port Clyde, one of Maine's busiest fishing ports, has adequate access to boats and wharves through a co-op and several commercial piers. But if owners sell or if the co-op disbands, what then? Perhaps, suggested McIlwain, St. George could buy some waterfront and lease it to lobstermen and other fishermen. Lobstering remains strong in the Midcoast, and McIlwain—supported by marine biologists—believes low fish stocks for other species will eventually rebound, bringing back Maine's depleted fishing fleet as they do.

Alton Hupper, widowed and living away from the sea in Warren, said he fished 50 years but never made enough to retire until he sold his Horse Point home. "It got so you couldn't afford it," he said. For years taxes on the place he grew up in were manageable. "But you can't own anything on the shore now. The tourists have got it all," he said. "There are more and more people, and there's less and less land."

McIlwain called fishermen "a very independent group of people, deeply devoted to their perception of private property rights. But they're coming to recognize the value of cooperation, that they're all in it together." The St. George land bank, which would make use of a real estate transfer tax to raise money to acquire public access, would require legislative approval before it could be set up. It's a concept that has been successful in Nantucket and Martha's Vineyard, among other places.

St. George harbormaster David Schmanska said he has heard real estate brokers recommend that whatever value the town puts on your property, triple it, and make that your price. Sometimes buyers bid up the sale even higher than the asking price. "The price of real estate has gone bonkers," Schmanska said.

The town's demographics reflect the real estate boom; 60 percent of St. George is now owned by seasonal residents. In winter, "you



Portland

can drive around and see how many driveways are unplowed,” Schmanska said. There are few starter homes left, and the town has no public fish pier. But fishing is still the heart of the community, he believes. A committee is studying various options for access. “The granite quarries are gone. This town is here because of the fishery.”

St. George isn’t the only place considering how to save working waterfront. Since it came together in 2003 with a dozen people, the Working Waterfront Coalition has expanded to 100 members ranging from state officials to the Maine Lobstermen’s Association, Fishermen’s Wives, Maine Aquaculture Association and the Island Institute. The coalition is looking at several ways to help fishermen preserve access, said the Island Institute’s Rob Snyder.

One way is to expand the state’s “circuit-breaker,” which makes property taxes more affordable to lower-income residents. Another idea is for the state to develop a “current use” policy, whereby shorefront properties used for commercial fishing would be given a tax break comparable to those for working forests and farms.

Another option, one stirring some excitement, is creation of a \$20 million state fund that would be used to help fishermen bridge the gap between asking prices for shore property and wharves, and their collective ability to pay. Such a fund would come from a bond

needing legislative as well as popular approval through a referendum.

“The market pressures on the shorefront are real, and are only going to get worse,” said David Etnier, former legislator, former fisherman and currently deputy commissioner of the Department of Marine Resources. “The state can only do so much. Maine is a home-rule state,” he cautioned. But he said tax breaks plus a working waterfront access fund could be part of the solution. Etnier himself lives on the water in Harpswell in a house his artist father built in 1948. Ten percent of Harpswell’s population has a clamming, lobstering or groundfishing license.

In Cundy’s Harbor—part of Harpswell—several fishermen are working to purchase Holbrook’s Wharf from its Cape Cod owners, and local fishermen have a state planning grant. They’re working with the Trust for Public Land, a national conservation agency. Land conservation can dovetail with fishing, as when the York Land Trust worked with local fishermen to preserve one of the last waterfront access points in York, raising \$450,000 to match the fishermen’s \$300,000. The Island Institute’s Snyder points to York as an example of a coordinated effort to preserve working waterfront even where the financial challenge is daunting.

Jim Connors, a waterfront coalition member and senior planner with the state’s Coastal Program, called the real estate boom “a tidal

“Sometimes buyers bid up the sale even higher than the asking price. The price of real estate has gone bonkers.”



Stonington

“Ten percent of Harpswell’s population has a clamming, lobstering or groundfishing license.”

wave coming at us.” He believes a combination of local zoning, state funding and help from conservation groups can save at least some access points. In downeast Jonesboro, the Great Auk Land Trust worked with a property owner and town officials to establish a permanent right-of-way to the Chandler River, a traditional clamming and worm digging area. The walking-only access wouldn’t have been created without a willing landowner.

Connors believes the coalition should focus on the fishing industry. Some water-dependent businesses, such as marinas and yacht yards, seem quite capable of competing economically, and Connors sees no need for subsidy there.

Jonathan Wood of Edgecomb bought a 200-year-old house despite neighbors’ warnings that worm diggers walked right past it to get to their boats, and parked their vehicles on the lawn. Because of that, the selling price was discounted—or, as Wood put it, “affordable.” Rather than kick diggers off his Cross Point land, Wood called a meeting and agreed to create a permanent, deeded right-of-way along one edge of his property. He built a six-car lot and diggers pay him a fee to park there. A designer of underwater research and aquaculture equipment, Wood said, “The guys who make a living off the water really should have first crack at it. These guys were digging

worms before any summer houses were built—if you make a deal that works for everybody, they police it. The only downside is, I don’t have complete and utter privacy. But these are good guys; I know them. They work hard for a living,” Wood said.

In East Boothbay, fishermen lost a bid to buy the last remaining wharf and a small parcel of land in sheltered, deepwater Little River. The price was \$1.2 million. Rachel Tibbetts, sternperson with her lobstering husband, Gary, said their group raised \$825,000 with help from Boothbay Region Land Trust, but a New Jersey couple bought the property first. The new owners want to buy and ship lobsters, but have not offered the use of their wharf to local fishermen.

“It’s happening too fast,” said Rachel Tibbetts. She has watched as houses are built on nearly every possible waterfront lot in her town. “How beautiful it was,” she said.

In Southport, fishermen were able to convince 96-year-old Eliot Winslow, patriarch of a tugboat business, to sell Robinson’s Wharf to them instead of selling to a wealthy Californian. Fishermen now run a market and restaurant at the pier. On the Sheepscot River, a former Westport Island boatyard was purchased a few years ago by 16 lobstermen who needed access. They formed North End Co-op, helped by Coastal Enterprises Incorporated.



Georges River

rated, an economic development agency with a \$300,000 waterfront loan fund. Point East, the business organization that bought the site of the former Maine Yankee nuclear power plant in Wiscasset, has promised Ferry Landing to local fishermen.

Eliza Bailey of Thomaston, former head of the Georges River Land Trust and a former real estate broker, understands the pressures on the coast. She believes many vacation home buyers are seeking refuge from crowds, traffic and the stress of their jobs. She also sees dwindling opportunities for fishermen, and she favors balanced growth. "It won't happen by itself," she said. "The state needs to take a look at what really is a precious resource."

Last year the Maine legislature failed to renew funding for the popular Land for Maine's Future program, which ran out of money. This year, Maine governor John E. Baldacci has proposed borrowing \$50 million to revive the program, which has protected coastal and inland properties from development and guaranteed public access. Land for Maine's Future has saved some working farms, but has so far not been involved in preserving working waterfront.

In Waldoboro, where clamming is a \$1 million business, generations of local people have dug the mudflats of the Medomak River.

Yet even here, upriver from Muscongus Bay, the shoreline is changing. An investment banker purchased an entire point of land and built a \$4 million vacation house, boathouse and pier. Today the estate on Havener Point lies across a cove from Gross Neck, where some of the town's lowest-income fishing families live, back from the waterfront: the old and the new, cheek by jowl. As the town's second-largest taxpayer, its owner is topped only by Osram Sylvania, a plant expected to move overseas in the fall of 2005.

New residents are turning the lobster coast into the gold coast. Can the old ways be preserved? It will take a lot of teamwork to make that happen.

A freelance journalist living in Waldoboro, Steve Cartwright contributes regularly to Island Institute publications.

STRIKING A BALANCE

We used to say that the Maine coast, 250 miles as the crow flies downwind from Kittery to Eastport, was “about 3,000 miles long,” an almost unlimited length of coast for a lobsterman, clammer or worm digger to find a place to launch a skiff and get out on the water or flats to make a living. If you followed the computer mapping revolution of the last half decade, you would learn that Maine’s saltwater coastline is actually 7,004 miles long—about twice what everyone had once thought. You’d think no one could ever really have a problem getting to the water. But you’d be wrong.



Courtesy David Beal

Abel's boatyard in Somes Sound was bought by a private owner to keep it a working waterfront when the previous owner wanted to sell.



Peter Ralston (2)

Betsy Wyeth (seated) with Allen Island fishermen.

To begin with, not every mile of coastline is created equal. From a fisherman’s point of view, a true working waterfront requires a protected harbor where you can bring in a boat, off-load, work on your gear and then moor your vessel without it (and you) getting pounded to bits. There are about 145 protected harbors along the Maine coast and islands where commercial quantities of fish and shellfish are landed. That sounds like an abundance of harbors, and certainly it is—one of Maine’s greatest treasures and source of our true wealth, both in the past and presently.

But not all parts of a protected harbor are created equal. The most productive parts of a harbor require what fishermen call “all-tide” access—where you can land a boat and your catch regardless of the state of the moon and tides. Lots of areas of protected harbors “shoal out” into mudflats where you have to time your arrivals and departures around the 12-hour tidal cycle. If you have, say, just two hours



The wharf on Allen Island that Betsy Wyeth has leased to six fishermen for commercial operations.

of tide to work with—an hour on either side of high water—that means you have 10 hours a day when you can't land, a situation that is simply not commercially feasible.

Fishermen have to put up with a lot of hassle around the tides in the best of circumstances. But if you have any less than half the tide to work with—that is, four to five feet of water at the shore at mid-tide—you are at a huge competitive disadvantage and your enterprise cannot thrive, perhaps not even survive. Beyond the limits of shoal water at low tide, a working waterfront is further limited by the additional requirements of a commercial wharf that is itself connected to public roads and the distribution networks.

When you consider all these limiting factors, supporters of working waterfront estimate that along Maine's 7,004 miles of saltwater coastline, perhaps a total of 25 or 30 miles actually have the necessary conditions. Seen in this light, working waterfronts are among Maine's scarcest resources. When a single wharf with all-tide access in a harbor changes hands and becomes a seasonal recreational wharf, it can mean that a half-dozen fishermen must find another, usually crowded wharf—or find something else to do.

SO HOW TO RESPOND?

We need state and matching local funds to help purchase easements or title to maintain working access. We need state and local tax policies that recognize the public benefit of maintaining busy commercial properties around increasingly gentrified harbors. We need to develop new tools, including zoning regulations that preserve existing working



Jeff Dworsky

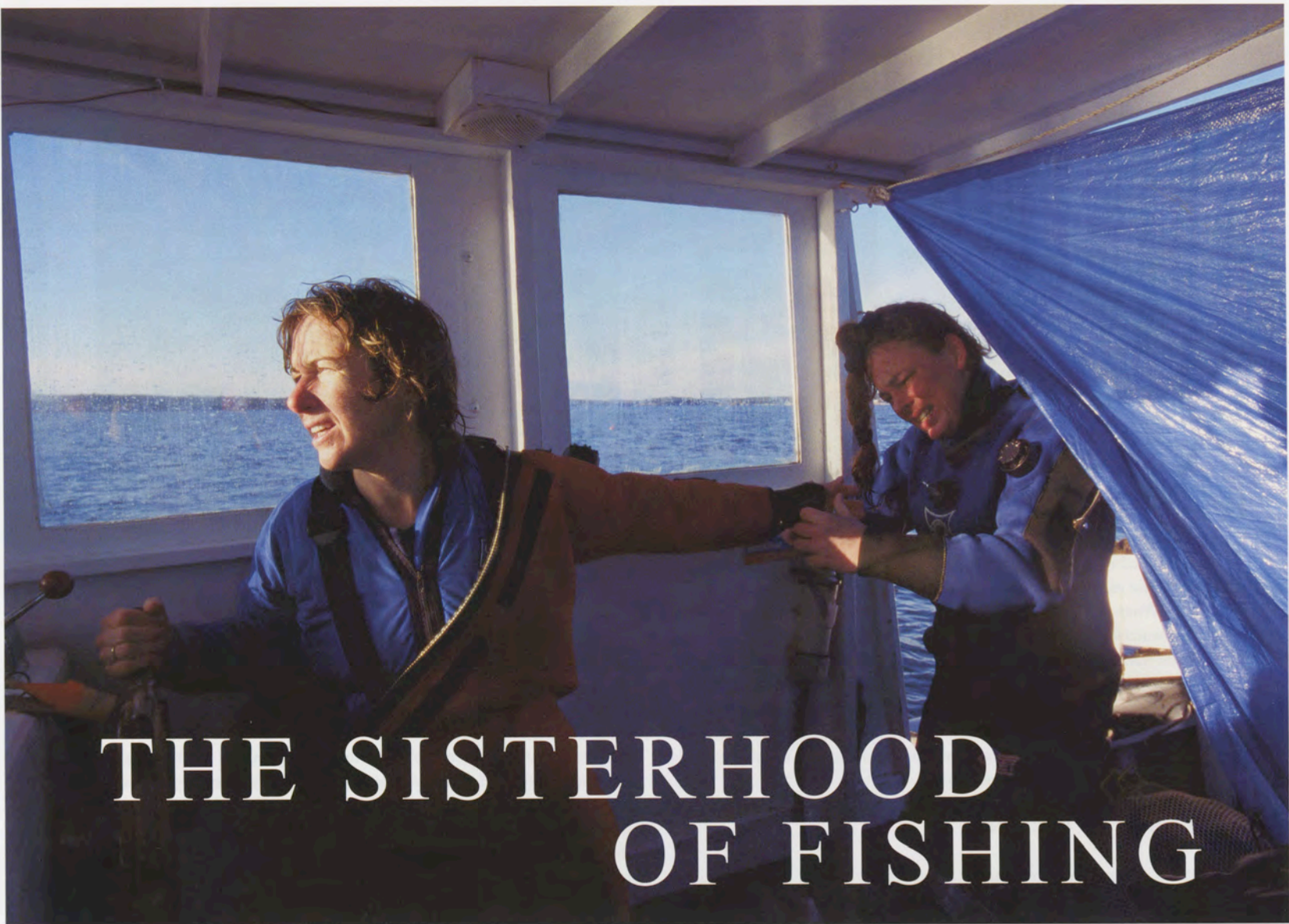
A private wharf on Stonington's waterfront that the summer owners have agreed to keep open for fishermen.

waterfronts. Local land trusts need to see that working waterfront areas, although they are not “undeveloped wild shorelines,” are nevertheless integral parts of a community's cultural resources that cry out for protection.

But the most potent potential tool may prove to be the enlightened self-interest of seasonal property owners who own key pieces of working waterfronts. A few such individuals have—for a combination of altruistic, communitarian and private reasons—entered into agreements with fishermen to preserve access in exchange for keeping an eye on such properties or to maintain the delicate balance of summer and year-round uses of the waterfront.

Philip W. Conkling





THE SISTERHOOD OF FISHING

Linda Gardiner and Cathy Lewis of Boothbay, the last two women sea urchin divers in Maine, on one of their last trips together. Their sternman, Erin Small, also happens to be a woman.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY BRITTA-LENA LASKO

Since ancient times women have occupied limited roles and spaces in fishing culture. They have provided inspirations for ship names and elaborate boat carvings, and they have been the muses behind many tattoos adorning the arms of men who work at sea. Women and their children have provided motivation for their husbands to return safely from dangerous fishing trips. Today these traditions are changing.

For two years I scoured the coast of Maine in search of women who work in the industry. I set out to interview and photograph each woman and document a way of life that is not well known, even in parts of New England. I met dozens of women who are redefining the definition of “fisherman,” making great contributions to the industry, and who are simply at ease in a traditionally male-dominated industry.

In spite of popular belief, many of the women in the industry do not forsake their feminine interests and continue to wear jewelry or makeup on the job. They love their jobs and hope to continue to work into old age. Many sit on committees and work to enact rules and regulations that help to protect their fisheries. These efforts guarantee that they will be able to continue to work for as long as they choose, and that their own children will be able to fish if they want to. Some of these women represent the fourth or fifth generation in their families to be involved in the Maine fishing industry.

Undeniably, women are making great contributions to Maine fishing and will continue to do so in years to come.

*A graduate of Bowdoin College, **Britta-Lena Lasko** lives in Newcastle, Maine.*



Jennifer Elderkin-Wickline of Southport Island, lobsterman and owner of PAT'S GIRL.



Julie Soper of Harpswell, owner of Mill Ledge Seafood, a commercial seafood-buying business she started when her husband, an urchin diver, could not find a place to sell his urchins.



Nora Warren of Vinalhaven, manager of the Vinalhaven Fisherman's Co-op. A former sternman on a lobster boat, she also worked on a purse seiner.



Hannah Russell of Franklin is a seaweed grader, buyer and post-harvest production supervisor at Maine Coast Sea Vegetables.



Allyson Jordan of Portland manages her mother's two groundfishing boats, THERESA & ALLYSON and JAMIE & ASHLEY. She also sells the catch at the Portland Fish Exchange, and manages the family businesses: Jordan Marine, Jordan Maritime Industries and Fishing Vessel Repair.



Dixie Ward



Maggie Terry of Portland is the only female fish buyer at the Portland Fish Exchange. She owns Solar Seafood, a whole-fish buying company, and Free Range Fish and Lobster, a retail seafood business.



Dixie Ward of Harpswell and her daughter, Daisy. Dixie sterns on her husband's lobster boat and works as a commercial clam digger. Daisy has been out on the flats with her mother since she was an infant.



Kim Fischer of Cape Elizabeth sterns with her husband on the KIMBERLY J. She also rescues and cares for stray cats on the wharf in Portland where they dock their boat.



Kathy Clemons of Harpswell sterns on her husband's lobster boat, MEAN KATHLEEN. Sometimes she sells her husband's catch at the Brunswick Farmer's Market.



HEIRS OF MISS ALICE

In island libraries, personalities are as critical as the books

CHERIE GALYEAN

It is a cold day in December, one of the first true winter-cold days on the coast. There is a chill in the Islesford Library that the Monitor heater can't quite remove, but the small rooms still feel cozy. The library space consists of three small, interconnected rooms off of the island's Neighborhood House. A huge old desk dominates the first room, a large wooden table covered in books and magazines takes up most of the second, and the third has a series of alcoves formed by bookshelves, with one lone computer tucked in the corner. But the overwhelming impression is books. Books line the walls in floor-to-ceiling shelves, cover the librarian's desk in the entry room and are displayed on every available surface.



Business in the children's section of Long Island's new library is brisk.

Nancy Noble

Alice L. Pendleton, who started Islesboro's first public library in 1902.



Islesford librarian Cindy Thomas reads to schoolchildren on their weekly visit to the library.

“Libraries are increasingly becoming community centers. This is the one institution that serves people regardless of socioeconomic background, regardless of education, from birth to death. No other institution does that.”

—Linda Lord, Deputy State Librarian

BUILDING FOR CHANGING TIMES

Over the last few years, islands have seen a building boom in their libraries. Changing library use, aging buildings and the introduction of computers to island libraries have caused a space crunch in what generally are very small buildings. Some islands restore older buildings, some start anew. But all projects require the two things that islands have most of: intensive community support and involvement, and time.

Long Island recently completed its new library building, which is actually an addition to the current school. Because the island lacked a winterized community building, it was important to the library committee to create a space not only for books, but also for community events and artwork. Still, the priority was moving the library out of its original space: the basement of the school. Cramped, cold, lightless and generally unpleasant, only the most determined readers would venture into this space, which clearly was not meeting the needs of the community.

Fund-raising and planning began in the winter of 2000, with a \$35,000 planning grant from MBNA. Librarian Nancy Jordan calls this grant the “kick in the butt” the library committee needed to get the project going. That summer, islanders started fund-raising in earnest—not an easy job for a \$900,000 project. It took two years of work, both through grants and donations from the community, before construction could begin, and then two years of construction before the space was finished enough to move the library. Today, the space is warm and bright. Attached to the library are a community area that has already seen potluck suppers and a gallery where several exhibitions by island artists have been held.

Librarian Cindy Thomas is talking to a young mother about snowsuits and the best way to keep mittens on a baby. The baby in question is crawling around on the floor, leaving said mittens and a sock trailing behind. There is pounding above from workers who are repairing the long-neglected Neighborhood House roof. The schoolteacher calls. Because of a troublesome furnace, the heat is out at the school again. Can the kids come work in the library for the afternoon? Soon the library is alive with the children from the island's one-room school who fill the small space. Cindy starts calling through the mild chaos. "Are you done with that book? Do you want to renew it?" She knows what every child is reading, has read and should read next.

Islands can be lonely places. Because there is often a lack of communal space, residents can find it difficult to find places to meet and interact in the small daily ways that mainlanders take for granted. The post office is one such place. Church can be another. But hands

down, one of the most important places on an island is the library, which can serve as community center, information exchange, meeting space and occasionally a schoolhouse.

Maine has a rich library tradition that reflects the growth of the public library in New England in general. At the end of the 19th century, wealthy Americans, the most famous of whom was Andrew Carnegie, gave millions of dollars to build libraries all across the country. This philanthropy lit public interest in free public libraries, and the institutions began appearing on the landscape, reflecting a new belief in free education and in the availability of information for all.

In 1854 Maine passed a law permitting taxation in support of public library construction. Between then and 1920, 113 library buildings were erected (almost half of the 274 public libraries in Maine today), marking a significant turning point in culture and public education in the state. Islands were included in this building boom,



Nancy Noble

Long Island's new library resulted from years of effort.

Another island that recently reached the end of its building project is Swan's. Formerly housed in a building by the ferry terminal, the Swan's library got a boost in 1991 when an old schoolhouse on the island, owned by playwright and poet Virgil Geddes and his wife Minna, was left to the Swan's Educational Society, the library's overseeing authority. Immediately, citizens began planning to restore the aging school building and turn it into a new library space, while maintaining a sense of history. (Originally one of three village schools on the island, the building had been closed during school consolidation in 1954.) Hence, the wall directly above the librarian's wireless networked computer is covered with old chalk writing on peeling blackboard paint—past meets present.

Restoring the old building to its full glory required a huge amount of time, money and energy. It took five years just to prepare the building so the library could be moved from its old home. Then work continued with painting, shelving and the completion of an upstairs reading room. In 2004, 13 years and \$300,000 after first receiving the building, the library was considered finished. Tasks remain—setting up the archival room for research, resurfacing the

driveway and parking lot, and putting in a new septic system—but the project is essentially complete. Friends of the Library raised the funds for the project through appeals and the help of several foundations, including those established by the Cabot and Rockefeller families.

One more island is beginning to look ahead at the renovation challenge. The Vinalhaven library, still in its original 1907 Carnegie-funded building, is bursting at the seams. After years of planning, the library received town permission to move ahead with an addition. The new space will allow for more reading and computer space as well as a children's room, a young adult room and a long-awaited precious commodity: a bathroom. Fund-raising has begun on the nearly \$1 million project, and library trustees hope to be able to dedicate the addition when they celebrate the one-hundredth anniversary of the building in 2007.

C. G.



Nancy Noble

A reader enjoys the new children's area in the new Long Island Library.

including at least one Carnegie library on Vinalhaven. In addition to Vinalhaven, the island libraries started during this time include those on Cliff, Islesford and Islesboro. Other island libraries, including those on Swan's, Long, Frenchboro and Great Cranberry, are more recent.

Island librarians have risen to the challenging task of keeping their libraries running, making minimal amounts of money (sometimes none) and running libraries on extremely tight budgets. Islesford librarian Thomas recalled one year when she almost didn't have enough money to pay herself her twice-yearly salary. "I really thought that I would have to skip paying myself," she said, "but right before it was due someone made a donation to the library, and I was able to cover the check." But because island libraries are usually run primarily by one person, the job allows for freedom that mainland librarians would envy. "One of the most interesting things about these small libraries," says Benita Davis, the Northeastern Library District Regional Consultant for the state of Maine, "is how they reflect the personality of the librarian. Their passion and fire drives the development of the library."

The library on Islesford is an excellent example of an old library kept relevant by the force of personality. When the Islesford Neighborhood House was built in 1913, the planners included a small room off the side of the building to serve as the island's library. Over the years people would just drop off their books at the end of the summer. "There were just piles and piles of books stacked up against the walls. I don't think they were in any kind of order," Thomas says. Things remained in this state until 1984, when to this chaos came Jane O'Donnell, a summer resident who was a member of the Neighborhood House board. "She knew that I was working in the library over on Great Cranberry," said Thomas, "and she asked if I would be willing to work here as well."

Together the two women tackled the piles of old books, trying to make a functioning library out of the space. "I just wanted to make a

space where people could be entertained, and where we could encourage kids to read," says Thomas. It came time to purchase new books, and O'Donnell told Thomas that she could purchase new children's books. "She told me I could have \$60," says Thomas, smiling, "and that if I managed to spend \$60 on children's books, then I could have more." Asked how many books she bought with her \$60, she laughs. "I'm not sure. Four or five? Not many."

It wasn't long before they outgrew the original 1913 space. In 1989 the first addition, a small room with windows to let in the light, was designed and built by islander Chris Wriggins. "It's just such a warm space," says Thomas, and it is, with white walls and rich wood trim and shelving. Just nine years later, in 1998, a second addition was put on the back of the first, and now holds the adult fiction section. When this addition was being built, O'Donnell, who had moved off the island and would die shortly afterwards, wrote to Thomas. "She thanked me for looking forward, when so many others were looking backwards."

Indeed, the Islesford Library does a little of both. While the additions and the book displays lend an up-to-date feel, tradition has a firm place as well. The heavily carved wooden desk in the entry room is the original library desk, and some old books from the original library still line the top stacks. Everywhere, plaques commemorate islanders who have donated their vision to making this library succeed. One in the children's section honors artist, children's author and Islesford resident Ashley Bryan; the beautiful large windows are in memory of Ira Spurling; a marker in the first addition names Chris Wriggins, the designer and builder. And a plaque in a doorway is in memory of O'Donnell, of whom Thomas says, "Jane did a great thing, starting this. If she hadn't, no one else would have. I am lucky to have been a part of it."

While the Islesford Library is an excellent example of a library reinvented for modern times, the Alice L. Pendleton Library on Islesboro shows how a library can become intertwined with the community. Inhabiting the same building that was built for it in 1917, the library blends tradition with new technology, all in a dual mission to bring information to those who need it while serving as a community meeting space. "Islesboro doesn't have a community center, so the library serves as one," explains librarian Linda Graf.

Although the current library building has been around since 1917, there actually has been a library on Islesboro since 1902. Started by Alice L. Pendleton, an island resident and trained librarian, the original library was in a small house owned by her father. Within a few years, the community outgrew the space, and the current stone library was built. "It was built by people on the island," says Graf. "People will still come in and tell me their grandfather helped build the fireplace." In fact, when a library has been around for over a century, it becomes a deeply ingrained part of the community. A portrait and sculpture of Miss Alice, as she was known, decorate the library. "There are still connections," says Graf. "When we had our centennial celebration in 2002, there were members of the Pendleton family here. And one of the young girls looked just like Alice Pendleton."

Just as the Islesford Library reflects Cindy Thomas's maternal feeling, the Pendleton Library reflects Linda Graf's professional but low-key and warm personality. When asked how she views the library, Graf starts by responding professionally. "We promote reading and provide information for anyone at no cost, no fees." As the conversation develops, however, her tone shifts to the less-tangible benefits that a library can bring to a community. "People meet here to talk; on Sundays we have a fire and cookies. We run programs through the winter, including a book club. For St. Patrick's Day last year we did readings, shared poems, music and stories, sang Irish songs. It was an old-fashioned get-together." Graf explains, "We provide a warm place to gather. On Islesboro, we have no central anything." The library becomes that place mainlanders take for granted, —somewhere to meet and greet.

Graf points to an interesting feature of island libraries: how extensive their collections are in relation to their small populations. “Our collection is surprisingly large. People don’t expect such a big library. The isolation of an island spurs the need for more resources. You can’t go to the next town or the bookstore; we are the only game in town.” Many island libraries depend heavily on interlibrary loans from larger libraries to supplement their collections, but the fact remains that for most island residents, what is available to them is what’s available in the library. Swan’s Island librarian Candi Joyce agrees, saying, “People are amazed at what we have available.”

The advent of technology in the last decade has helped considerably in making information available to islanders. The Internet, reference materials on CD-ROM, and state-provided research databases have helped enormously in keeping islanders up-to-date and connected. Deputy State Librarian Linda Lord insists, “It seems more critical every year that citizens are more informed. If we can’t inform everyone, we become an elitist society. With MARVEL (the state-provided research databases), a person in the smallest library can reach articles as much as someone in New York.”

Swan’s Island Library is an institution that hopes to capitalize on technology to bring in patrons. Begun in the 1960s, the library was formerly housed in a building down by the ferry terminal. In 1991, Virgil and Minna Geddes left their house, a former schoolhouse, to the Swan’s Educational Society, the organization that oversees the library. After years of renovation (see p. 22), Swan’s librarian Candi Joyce is ready to emphasize what the library can offer the community. “I think that people here are just not used to having a library available to them,” she says. “Once they come in, people are amazed at what we have.” The addition of extra computers in an upstairs room and a wireless connection helps islanders capitalize on the benefits of technology, making it easier to connect with the world outside. The new building has positioned Swan’s Island’s Library to be an important resource for residents.

The importance of the library setting cannot be overemphasized. Until this year, the Long Island Library was crammed into a tiny room in the school’s basement. Through tremendous effort on the part of islanders, over \$875,000 was raised through grants and donations to build an addition to the school, to hold the library and a new community center. Since the addition was completed, summer circulation has grown to two and a half times what it was. “People were spellbound when they first walked in,” says librarian Nancy Jordan. “This summer, our children’s programming could happen in the library instead of outside. [The new library] was very well received.” A new community room off the library has already been used for potlucks and the school’s Christmas pageant. The gallery space has had multiple exhibits by local artists—the first time that there has been a place on the island to display art. Still, Jordan is concerned with a problem that many island librarians face: the difference between their summer and winter populations. Despite the summer popularity, “Year-round residents are taking longer to make it part of their daily routine.”

Swan’s librarian Candi Joyce agrees. “During the summer we can have 40 to 60 people a day, and during the winter, we are lucky if one or two people come in,” she says. Part of this is attributable to the dra-



Ruth Westphal, Great Cranberry Island’s librarian.

matic population changes between summer and winter on islands. As Nancy Jordan observes, “We may only have five people come in during an afternoon, but that is five out of 200 people. In Portland they might have 50 people, but it’s 50 out of 60,000.” But there are other reasons why year-round islanders don’t patronize the library to the same extent that summer residents do.

“I think that it is just more difficult for year-round residents to get to the library,” explains Jordan. “People who commute are gone from the island from 6:45 in the morning until 6:45 in the evening. When they get home, they are concerned with getting dinner and other things. We are trying to schedule around it, but it is a problem.” Jordan also explains that summer residents are different in their approach to reading. “They are on vacation,” she says, “And reading is

much more a priority. It’s not that the islanders aren’t readers. Every time people are on the ferry they are reading.” For the Long Island Library, the closeness to Portland is another problem. “Many people will go to the Portland library,” says Jordan, “and not think of coming here.”

Since completing the renovation, Joyce has also been working hard to bring in more year-round residents. “I want it to be a place for year-round residents to come for a variety of reasons. I think islanders in general are used to being quite independent; if they want a book, they buy it, not borrow one from the library.” To overcome this trend, Joyce is “trying to provide a variety of activities and access, so people know it’s just a place to come.” This includes movie nights, installing wireless Internet service, and providing meeting space for groups as diverse as the Food Co-op, Adult Education and a yoga class. She is starting to see success. “The kids who are coming in more now are those who started by coming to our storytime.” But she admits that this particular problem is “a hard nut to crack.”

Perhaps the best solution to library usage is patience. Linda Graf at the Pendleton Library on Islesboro feels that her year-round community is very supportive. “People come down to read the paper here and see people, instead of staying home,” explains Graf. “We try to make it feel like home.” This comfort level that Graf mentions is exactly what one finds in Islesford as well. Instead of fretting about the noise the schoolchildren bring to the library, Cindy Thomas feels lucky that they come on a weekly basis.

The word “lucky” comes up a lot when Thomas talks about the library. She feels lucky to have the space she has, lucky to have a brand new program starting for the preschoolers on the island, and lucky to have volunteers helping her with programs and helping to extend her hours in the summer. Most island librarians share this feeling: that they have the chance to offer something tangible and important to island sustainability.

Later, after my visit with her, Thomas calls with one last story. “There was a mother in with her two-year-old, checking out some storybooks. They were walking around naming things, and the mother pointed to me and said, ‘What’s her name?’ The little girl looked up at me and said, ‘Book.’”

A former Island Institute Fellow on Vinalhaven, Cherie Galyean is now Grants Writer for the Island Institute.



PLAY BALL!

From sandlot to semi-pro, baseball flourished on Vinalhaven in the past; now a revival is underway

Photographs provided by the Vinalhaven Historical Society (6)



The Vinalhaven Reds, a semi-pro team from 1901–1902.

HARRY GRATWICK

For residents of a cold-weather state, Mainers have played a lot of baseball. The Baseball Hall of Fame lists 69 major leaguers who were born in Maine. Summer leagues thrive all over the state, and Bangor has hosted the last two American Legion World Series. John Winkin, the legendary coach at the University of Maine, put the state on the collegiate baseball map by leading the Black Bears to the College World Series six times from 1975 to 1996. Louis Sockalexis, a Penobscot Indian, became the first Native American to play professional baseball at the major league level. He played with Cleveland from 1897 to 1899. His brief but brilliant career inspired the nickname “Indians,” which the Cleveland team still uses today.



“The Vinalhaven Reds played two games a week from mid-June to Labor Day. When there was a home game, stores on Main Street closed, and the quarries and fish factories were practically deserted.”

Island baseball in Maine, specifically on Vinalhaven, has its own rich tradition. Even nearby Hurricane Island had a team. In the late 19th century, Vinalhaven was a prosperous island community of 2,800 people, about twice the number of year-round residents living there today. The Bodwell Granite Company was the largest granite company in the United States, and the Lane and Libby Fisheries was doing a booming business. Baseball flourished at the high school level.

Initially the Vinalhaven team was composed of outstanding players from previous high school teams, although gradually the hometown boys were dropped and semiprofessional players from out of town were added. The Vinalhaven Reds played two games a week from mid-June to Labor Day. When there was a home game, stores on Main Street closed, and the quarries and fish factories were practically deserted. The fans' dedication to the Reds knew no bounds. They followed the team everywhere. In 1904, returning from a game against Belfast with a boatload of spectators, the steamer CASTINE broke her steering cable, following which the captain got disoriented in a thick fog off Islesboro. There was no food or drink on board, and 135 people spent a long, cheerless night anchored near Islesboro before the CASTINE crept toward Carver's Harbor the next morning. It arrived just in time to hear the 7 a.m. whistle summoning people to work. Alas, after winning the Knox County pennant in 1904, the Reds, indeed the whole league, were dissolved, having become too expensive an operation.

Bill “Dasher” Murray was born on Vinalhaven in 1893, and to date is the only big league ballplayer the island has produced. Murray played at Brown University (a college powerhouse in those days), and in 1916 and 1917 was an infielder for the Washington Senators in the American League. In 1916 he played under the fictitious name of “Leonard” since he had not yet graduated from college. Murray enlisted in the army at the end of the 1917 season, the United States having just entered World War I. When he returned from the war, the



1934
 TOP: ROBERT STAPLES, MAURICE TEELE, DOUG GILCHRIST, ALLAN MIDDLETON, BILL YOUNG, HORATIO TORFASON, BERNARD (TIM) ERICKSON
 BOTTOM: ELMER COOMBS, ED WOODCOCK, HERB PATRICK (COACH), CHARLES BAUM IVAN NICKERSON, BILL WAHLMAN, HOLLIS AREY

Senators offered him a contract, but he opted for Harvard Law School. Baseball was in his blood, however, and in 1922 he accepted a job as the coach at Boston University. He is hailed as the coach who discovered future Hall of Fame catcher Mickey Cochrane.

For the first half of the 20th century, baseball was the sport for Vinalhaven boys and young men. Almost any fairly level plot of land relatively free of rocks, trees and frog ponds was considered suitable for the pickup games that thrived all over the island. The high school team won four straight Knox & Lincoln League championships from 1931 to 1934, and two more in 1938 and '39. Allan Middleton (VHS '34) was the star pitcher for the 1931–34 teams and was signed by the Red Sox when he graduated. He worked his way up through their farm system before joining the Air Force at the start of World War II. Middleton was the first islander to be killed in the war when his plane was shot down in January 1943 over North Africa. Allan Middleton's baseball heroics inspired a whole generation of Vinalhaven athletes, including Albert "Brud" Carver (VHS '46), who remembers him as a "hard-throwing, fluid left-hander."

One of the results of the Depression on Vinalhaven was the improvement of the playing field by the WPA in the 1930s. It is known today as "the old ball ground." Harold "Ducky" Haskell (VHS '40) recalls: "The field had stands for several hundred people along the baselines, as well as dressing rooms, and a public address system. We were our own groundskeepers. We hauled in sawdust, then rolled and raked the field Sunday mornings. [Blue laws prohibited Sunday games before 1 p.m.] We even put in tidal gates along the third-base

"Allan Middleton (VHS '34) was the star pitcher for the 1931–34 teams and was signed by the Red Sox when he graduated . . . Middleton was the first islander to be killed in the war when his plane was shot down in January 1943 over North Africa."



“The field had stands for several hundred people along the baselines as well as dressing rooms and a public address system. . . . We even put in tidal gates along the third-base line so the field wouldn’t flood at high tide.”

line so the field wouldn’t flood at high tide.” The field has produced its share of stories, including the time when, as Annette Philbrook (VHS ’53) remembers, “Someone tried to hang himself in the clubhouse.” Today the “old ball ground” is used for winter skating parties, since environmental regulations prohibit damming up what has become a protected wetland.

From the 1930s to 1956, the Vinalhaven Chiefs were the town’s semi-pro team. The Chiefs had nice uniforms and warm-up jackets paid for by local businessmen. According to Val “Buzz” Young (VHS ’53), being asked to play for the Chiefs was a “big deal” for a high school kid in the 1950s. Brud Carver, who played first and pitched for the Chiefs in the ’40s and ’50s, recalls teams coming from as far away as Augusta and Lewiston. “We liked playing teams from away. They were exhausted before we even started. We would pass the hat and split the take with them. We usually just about broke even.”

One of the highlights of Vinalhaven baseball during this period was the night game the Chiefs played against a strong team from Warren on August 3, 1949. Portable lights were brought over from Rockland and set up along the baselines. To quote from Ivan Calderwood’s account of the game: “Now remember, these two teams had never played under lights, never caught a ball as it appeared from the sky at night. They played like old pros. Those boys out on the field would pick those flies out of the sky like picking apples from a tree. What a thrill it was when Clyde [Bickford] belted a home run to win the game. It surely was a night of nights. Like the Red Sox playing the Yankees.” Some things never change.

Buzz Young recalls the impact World War II had on Vinalhaven baseball. “Mainland teams were reluctant to cross the bay to play us because they were afraid of German submarines lurking in the area. The subs would surface in the fog off Seal Island and we could hear them recharging their batteries.” Transportation from the island to the mainland was equally difficult because the regular ferries were taken by the navy for use as troop transports, leaving intrepid lobstermen’s boats as the main source of transportation.

After a lapse of 14 years, the 1953 high school team won the Knox-Lincoln County championship. Following an opening game loss

VINALHAVEN BABE RUTH 2003



to Camden, the team won the rest of its games. In the following years, however, fewer and fewer boys came out for the team, until the sport was discontinued after the 1959 season. Young men were leaving the island to work on the mainland. Basketball was becoming increasingly popular, and by the late 1950s there were the distractions of television. My own experience with Vinalhaven baseball coincided with the decline of the sport on the island. I played a few games with the Chiefs in 1956. It was to be the last year of their existence, but we didn't know it at the time. Once the Chiefs disbanded, the stands around the old ball ground began to crumble. Eventually the field itself was off-limits to baseball because of environmental regulations.

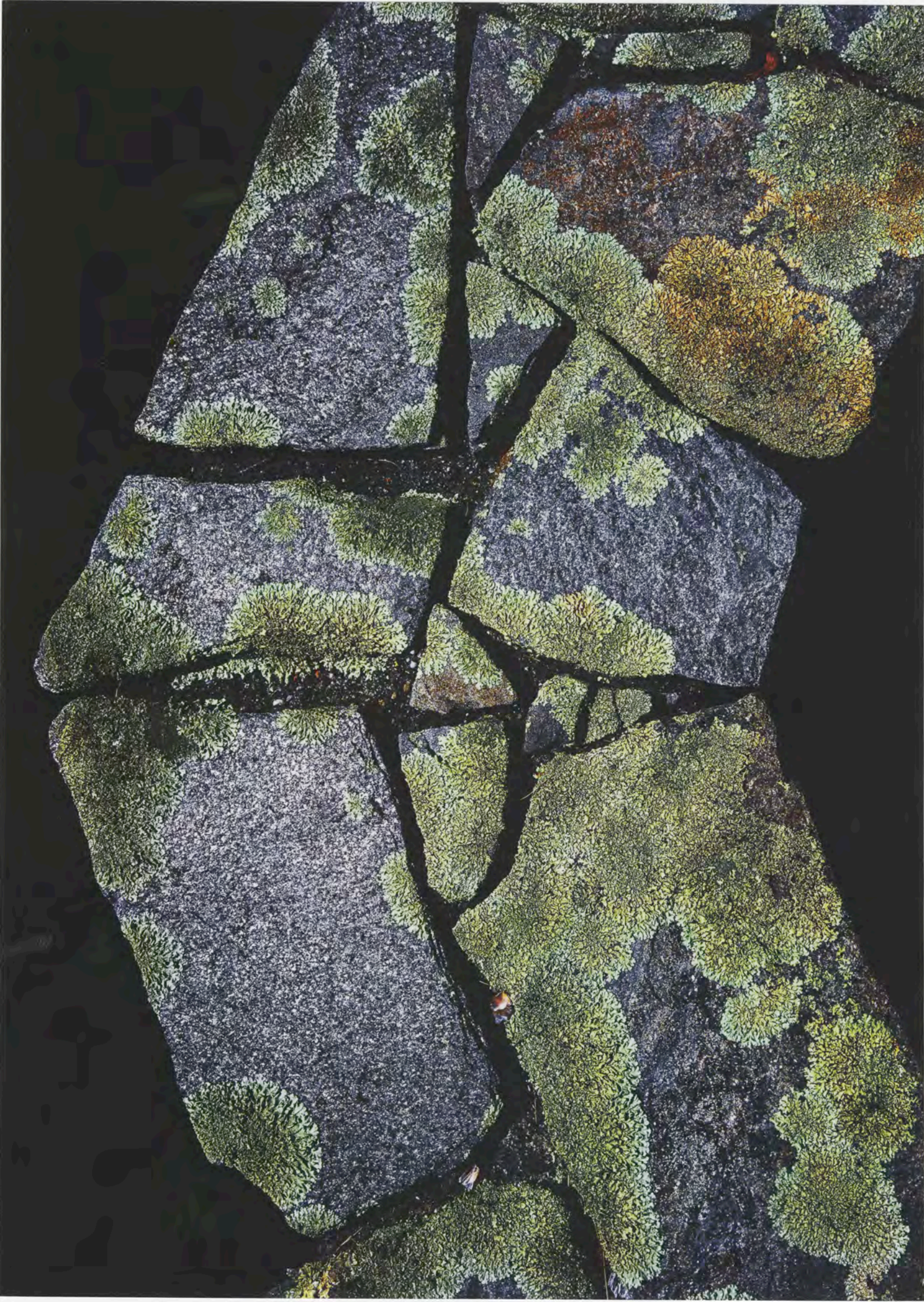
For the next 40 years there were sporadic attempts to resume baseball on Vinalhaven that came to naught. Finally in 1998, Steve Ames and Duey Sanborn were able to launch a Little League program that has taken off in the last seven years. "We knew the interest was there. It was just a question of organizing the kids," said Ames. Interest in the sport has grown to the point where a Babe Ruth team was formed in 2003, and the high school fielded a team in the spring of 2005.

"Baseball Returns to Island in a Big Way," read the June 5, 2003 headline in the *Rockland Courier-Gazette*. Currently the Little League team plays its games in Rockland and practices on the meadows of Charlotte Goodhue's farm. The 2004 Babe Ruth team played its home games on the recently completed field behind the new school and received a lot of attention in the local press. "Everyone is up for baseball and for seeing that these kids have some of the same opportunities the kids on the mainland have," says Jim Conlan, manager of the Babe Ruth team. "The reemergence of baseball on the island is good to see because it was an important sport here for so long. People here remember playing or watching games on the old ball field. Having baseball on the island again will bring out the fans, and that will be a great thing to see."

*Bottom Row: Greg Carter (Coach), Sam Rosen, Oakley Jackson, Raleigh Wadsworth. Ethan Watt, Ethan Warren, James Jones
Top Row: Jerry Doughty (Coach), Chris Sawyer, Shawn David, Orren Swears, Johnny McCarthy, Niall Conlan, Philip Hopkins, Jim Conlan (Manager). Missing from picture: Dusty Hufsey, Pat Gasperini, Randy Pitts*

"Once the Chiefs disbanded, the stands around the old ball ground began to crumble. Eventually the field itself was off-limits to baseball because of environmental regulations."

Recently retired from teaching in Philadelphia, Harry Gratwick is a longtime summer resident of Vinalhaven.



FOUNDATION

Where do accident stories begin?

CHRISTINA MARSDEN GILLIS

That first summer, we didn't particularly notice the old foundation behind our house. We were new to the island, renting Elling Aannastad's small cottage, the "box on the rocks" that sat squat on the ledges at the furthest eastern edge of the land. From our little house we didn't look back toward the rectangle of stone and the path that led to the village a mile away. The sea, pounding the granite just yards in front of us, was so much more compelling.

We knew, only in the way that one knows certain facts, that the foundation stones, blocks of pink granite now marked with yellow-gold lichens, were all that remained of a house that had burned to the ground in the winter of 1926.

The house had belonged to Miss Elizabeth Peterson, originally from Lansdowne, Pennsylvania. We knew that Miss Peterson had died in the fire.



John Gillis

“The grave, the cemetery, the island are all coterminous, all bounded in some way. They contain memory, they are the vessels of stories, they connect stories.”

The history was already old in 1964. The foundation, an empty granite rectangle, one of several on the island, had become a quiet ghost sharing with us a border between the land and the sea, known and unknown. Not recognizing that margin, we didn't ask the ghost to speak. No one knows how Miss Peterson came to die in the fire that wintry night. We surmise: perhaps a stroke or a heart attack and a fatal fall while holding a lantern. It seems plausible. It suffices. It's all we can know. This is the way of all such deaths, all accidents.

Accidents, sudden happenings with powerful effects, ultimately defy narrative explanation. Twenty-seven years after our summer in the box on the rocks, we lost our younger son, Benjamin, when a large vulture-like bird hit the plane he was flying near the Masai Mara game park in East Africa. “My son was killed by a bird,” I might say. But the statement, startling and unreal, is inadequate, even foreign, to the freight it bears. The event belongs to a place that imagination cannot penetrate. With no real story, we have only an outline, a trace: an inexplicable event that stands strangely alone.

So I return, years later, to Miss Peterson's story. It is my surrogate story, similarly incomplete; and I am drawn to it despite the danger that it will take over. If I can grasp, even fabricate, some of that story, I think, then I might achieve some control over the one I really want to be able to tell and to know.

Miss Peterson's story belongs to a place I have known for almost 40 summers of my life. It's a Maine story, an island narrative, supposedly contained like the speck of rockbound land that is the island itself. I think of the fire enveloping Miss Peterson's house by the granite ledges at Gotts Island, Maine, in 1926. In that vision I see the flames rising from a ruined plane in a perpetually grassy place thousands of miles away.

There is no stone in that African plain, no granite to mark the spot. I know that place only in the photographs I took there as a tourist two years before my son's death. But the island—Miss Peterson's island, our island—is a place of stone markers that are at least partially readable. We brought Ben's ashes from a savannah in Africa to a grave in the white-fenced square of the island cemetery. On an island bounded by stone, we marked our son's grave with a small rectangular slab of granite.

The grave, the cemetery, the island are all coterminous, all bounded in some way. They contain memory, they are the vessels of stories, they connect stories. But anyone who speaks of the "tyranny of completeness" on islands is wrong: even here, we can only attempt completion. An accident report, a newspaper feature, a novel—all are partial stories, spaces defined by the structure of a narrative whose real content remains an emptiness. Ben's death taught me that knowing means filling in as best one can, accepting truth in fragments. The foundation stones that mark the remains of Miss Peterson's house do not speak after all. Whatever voice they have must be ours.

But these thoughts were to come only years later. That first summer we had other things on our minds. My husband was drafting his Ph.D. dissertation; I was occupied with the enormity of the sea, the danger it posed to my first child, then 14 months old, the challenge of transporting a summer's worth of books and groceries by wheelbarrow down a mile of rut-riven path. When the fogs of early summer finally cleared, I hung out my son's diapers near the granite blocks that marked the foundation wall. I saw the low wall as simply a demarcation between the human space and the huge natural ledges adjacent to it. There was a kind of safety in that wall, but I did not then imagine the house or the woman who had inhabited it.

The next year, now expecting a second child, the son whose ashes we would bury 26 years later beneath that flat granite rectangle, we bought the old Moore family house in what was once the village on the western side of the island. In a sense the Moore house embodied the village itself: within its precincts the history of the old island culture still breathed. We left the "box on the rocks" to other renters, and ultimately a new owner, who added a pitched roof that rendered that house no longer a box. Other people's laundry would be hung to dry near Miss Peterson's foundation. Our family, ultimately four, became part of the old village, removed from the ledges, salt spray, and pounding sea. We took a route that Miss Elizabeth Peterson, more than 70 years earlier, had renounced.

Perhaps Miss Peterson's story, her decision to build her house at the far eastern point of the island, is about renunciation. But what, then, was renounced? Questions like this beg answers, motivate other people's stories. The local poet and novelist Ruth Moore, who grew up in the house I now own and left her papers and photograph album to yellow and molder in the attic, wrote about Miss Peterson's decision in a 1950s novel called *Speak to the Winds*. So did my neighbor Ted Holmes, who was born in 1910; he came to Gotts Island as a summer visitor as a boy and remembers going to parties Miss Peterson held for the island children. That was long before Ted grew up to become the professor of English at the University of Maine who taught writing to Stephen King, Maine's master of gothic.

Perhaps she was a recluse; perhaps because of some physical deformity she wished to live beyond the village ("She was very ugly," one report says); or perhaps, as Moore surmises in her novel, Miss Peterson simply wanted to see "the sea [spread out] from rocks to sky." Her decision may have been not so much a renunciation of the village as a seeking of space for herself.

If neither Ruth nor Ted, local chroniclers of the island, had the answer about Miss Peterson, the same was true for a writer who came in the summer of 1926 to cover the story of the fire for *The Boston Globe*. "I have met a number of Gotts Island women, and found them a fine intelligent lot; they are descendants of early pioneer settlers whose stock has by no means run out in quality at least," the writer starts out. The voice is confident, cheerful, authoritative. She has no inkling that when she follows Miss Peterson's path out to the eastern point of the island, a mile away from the village, she will reach an edge, a boundary of the known.

I know that path, that slightly rising curve just before one arrives at Miss Peterson's site. I see that writer, perhaps with notebook in hand, the book already containing the village women's comments, coming around that curve, past the place where the lichens and upland cranberries now cling to mossy rock. She has made this trip, probably from Boston to Bar Harbor, she has hired a boatman, climbed the hill to the village, walked the path to the easternmost point of the island—all for a story contained, silently, in "some stones outlining the foundation of a house, and the stump of a chimney."

I imagine all of this. Perhaps the reporter took another way to Miss Peterson's house, approached it not by the direct route through the center of the island but by the path around southern neck cove. Let me return to what I know. Miss Peterson's house was certainly real. I mean real in the sense of walls, a roof (gambrel), windows, a garden. There's even a photograph of the house on the back cover of *Speak to the Winds*. But in the book jacket photograph, Miss Peterson's house, gray and strong as it is, looks oddly out of place in its rocky setting by the sea. It looks like a house that should have been built on any street, in any normal town of the period. It would have been more appropriate if built in the village on the west side of the island, even though its curved roofline would have been at odds with the sharply angled mid-19th-century houses that cluster around the white rectangle of the cemetery.

The what-was and what-is do not seem to fit. The house is an anomaly, remote, like history that cannot be re-created. The foundation is the real now. As the years after Ben's death marched by, I was drawn increasingly to those stony imprints that are the markers of depopulated places like the Maine offshore islands, signifiers of emptiness that exert their own particular force, drawing us in and defying explanation all at the same time. It's as if these stone footprints were meant to stand alone, meant to continue long after wood and beam have burned, rotted, or fallen under the weight of winter snow.

Empty foundations mark stories about transformation, about endings. They signal places left behind by changing economies and demographics. Miss Peterson's death in the fire at Gotts Island happened at the very time that the island was on its way to depopulation and desertion. Only a few of the original village houses would remain standing, in strange juxtaposition to the markers of those that have disappeared. And they are particularly compelling, these markers. We come upon them in unexpected places: in glades, fields and forest. A new break in the woods will reveal a wall we have not seen before. We follow the stones, become enmeshed in a hopeless thicket, retreat to the open field by the sea. The square foundation is so at odds with the irregular boundaries of the island itself, the granite slabs that seem so ageless, so resistant to change. Turning the imagination inward, the sparse stony traces of houses long gone serve not so much aesthetics as need. The foundation of Miss Peterson's house renders the actual house less concrete, even when I have seen its photograph, when I have read a



Peter Rakston

diary account by a man who had tea with Miss Peterson there, when I know that a real house burned to the ground, its owner perishing in the flames.

But the foundation markers, even if partially filled now with straggly spruce or summer grasses, remain essentially empty and unyielding. What do I know of an event that took place at the edge of the granite rocks at Gotts Island 76 years ago, or of one that occurred on Christmas Day on a grassy plain in Africa halfway round the world? I have an accident report for the latter. The large bird that came through the windscreen of the plane killed my son, the pilot, instantly and sent the aircraft, with its eight other passengers, falling to their deaths in the resulting fire. I know they left Mombasa that morning, on a regular trip to one of the game park lodges in the interior. I know it is not uncommon for vulture-like birds to be in the vicinity of the park lodges.

But where do accident stories begin? Which facts are relevant? I know (because it's recorded in a book on Gotts Island summer families by my neighbor, Rita Kenway) that Miss Peterson's route to the house at Gotts Island began in Philadelphia, where her family had been well established from early in the 19th century. I discover in the *Dictionary of National Biography* that the Petersons were a publishing family, producing *Peterson's Magazine*, which in 1864 was the largest-selling ladies magazine in North America, as well as the *Saturday Evening Post*. I look up *Peterson's Magazine* on microfilm for the years 1870–1900; I find essays and fiction that seem strangely at odds with the image of a lone woman pushing a wheelbarrow to a solitary house by the sea.

I begin to see Miss Peterson as a woman of the margin, this summer person from the Philadelphia suburb of Lansdowne who, to the wonder of everyone, built her house on the granite rock far from the village, and then, in just as startling a manner, chose to remain all year round in that house. The year came when Miss Peterson did not return to Lansdowne at the end of the summer. With that defining moment, Miss Peterson achieved a status for which there was no name.

Even if I accept the incomplete, I want to name things, to put people and places in categories. Stories are supposed to have facts. There were only two categories of persons on Gotts Island: local people whose families had been there through the 19th century, and summer people. Miss Peterson came as a summer person and then fell into a category of her own. She founded an Episcopal church on the island; and surely aware of those sixth-century followers of St. Columba's ministry centered on the Scottish island of Iona, those monks whose lives were defined by the isolation of rocky eruptions, cells, caves, and lands barren of vegetation, surely aware of those connections with salt and rock, she named her church St. Columba's.

The first service at St. Columba's Episcopal Mission Church, built just at the edge of the village, was held on September 17, 1916; the space was consecrated on August 6 of the next year. The ceremony required for the consecration must have taken some time to arrange; three bishops of the Episcopal Church came, one account says. Miss Peterson sewed the altar cloths and curtains by hand with fine stitches. She took charge of the furnishing. She probably contributed flowers from her Gotts Island garden, just as she had for St. John the Evangelist back in Lansdowne in 1906. And she persuaded a certain number of Gotts Island Methodists to become Episcopalians.

But details are still elusive. I do not find Miss Peterson's name in the island cemetery. Nor do I see it in the account books kept by Philip Moore, the novelist's father, postmaster and keeper of the village store once located adjacent to the woodshed in the house I now own. My Gotts Island house is a receptacle of the past, replete with the objects of years long gone: the years of the island community that disappeared finally in the late 1920s, Miss Peterson's years, my own family's years. Surely Elizabeth Peterson's name was once marked on one of the postal slots that remain in the cubicle that was Philip's post office, but it has disappeared along with most of the others once visible there. I know the other names. They have a reality either etched by Philip in the spidery handwriting learned at the business college in Bangor or carved, literally, in stone and bound by the cemetery fence. I hear their voices, I hear the voices of my own two boys who in the 1970s were thrilled to have the remains of a real store to play in; but I cannot hear Miss Peterson's Philadelphia accents.

Voices, heard or not heard, voices heard only in memory—all are important to the story I want to tell. I hear Benjamin's good-bye when he set off from the Cozy Cove Restaurant in Southwest Harbor to begin the trip that would take him back to Africa; I hear his voice in the last phone conversation from Mombasa the night before he died—Christmas morning in California. We cling to such memories, to all the details we have of the life that led to that savannah in East Africa. I need the details that are encapsulated in memory, there to be invoked, re-worked, re-lived, albeit in new forms. The details give me the beginning and middle of a narrative of a life. It is the ending that eludes: the fact that cannot be accommodated into what has preceded it.

So I return once again to beginnings. My son went to Kenya because he did not want the ordinary. In his early twenties, he wanted what others might call "experience." He loved to fly, and he flew in East Africa. I expect that Miss Peterson loved Gotts Island. I see her as part of a gentle exodus, beginning in the mid-19th century, of those who discovered Mount Desert Island and came back, summer after summer. For some, and seemingly a proportionately large number of single women, the journey led further, out to the off-shore islands. So they came, Miss Elizabeth Peterson, Miss Lucia Leffingwell, Miss Caroline Holmes. They built their houses or refurbished extant buildings, they established—as we still do—summer-time relationships with the local people, and then they returned on Labor Day to homes in Philadelphia or Boston. But Miss Peterson stayed on. That was the crucial difference, the distinguishing fact. She eschewed the village that hugged the quieter, safer, western shore of the island to build her house on the rocks by the open sea—and to die in the fire that engulfed the house in the winter of 1926.

The villagers at the westerly side of the island did not even see the flames in that dark, dark, sky of a Maine winter. Vacancy marked the space between the gray house and the village. It is as if Miss Peterson's path traversed uncharted territory. We are not talking about real distance here. A mile is not far, even in bad weather on a dark night. But one mile can be like 5,000. The point is that the villagers at the western side of the island, an island that measures only "one mile across and three miles round" but was already into a process of

depopulation, these villagers who would soon leave themselves, did not even know of the fire that took Miss Peterson's life.

I tried to imagine the exact moment of my son's death on another continent. I remember hearing a clock tick when I picked up the phone to receive the call that came through from Africa at 2 a.m., California time. I needed to imagine that moment of death in a time zone eleven hours ahead of my own. Temporal and spatial distance conflate. It would have been late in the evening of what was still Christmas Day in California. My husband and I had gone to bed early. We must have been asleep when our son died. So the moment of the call became the reality, the moment of knowledge checked out on a clock. This was the moment that became part of me, marking off a "before" and an "after" in my life. Time was my witness. If there were actual witnesses of that accident in Kenya, they are not mentioned in the accident report. If they exist at all, they are remote.

The witnesses to the fire that killed Miss Peterson were similarly distant: a lighthouse keeper on Great Duck Island (I cite Kenway's history again here) and the men at a remote radio transmitter site at Seawall, on the mainland, who reported seeing not the familiar light in Miss Peterson's upstairs seaward window, but sheets of flame leaping upward. Between the conflagration that took Miss Peterson's life and the witnesses lay two miles of ink-black water.

The village learned of the event the next day. I think of that moment of discovery. How different from a phone call in the night it must have been. Two Gotts Island men are on their way to the neighboring Duck Island to water their sheep pastured there. It is midwinter. I imagine the cold crispness of that morning, a flint-blue sea. The men sail out of the outer pool on the village side of the island, they round Ram Island—actually a part of Gotts at low tide—and continue eastward toward Duck. They come around past the Burnham cottage, boarded and locked for the winter, and approach Miss Peterson's house on the far eastern point. They look to the tall gray house they know as a familiar landmark. And in that instant they see that the house is gone, leaving only still-smoking remains and the stone foundation that is still there.

The land grows over quickly on the island. In what remains of the village, we beat back the fir and spruce that try to take over our field and the scrawny remains of Philip Moore's orchard; stalks of brilliant fireweed cover completely what I remember as the ruins of St. Columba's, Miss Peterson's church; my neighbor who cares for the island cemetery has sent me a photograph of the wildflowers that appear each spring around Ben's grave. And at the other end of the island, at the rocky eastern point, Miss Peterson's once cultivated roses continue in increasing abundance their relentless march to the place where soil gives way to granite. Only the rectangle of stone remains in place, keeping watch, year after year, over the sea, dark ledges, sky.

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REALLY SEEING

At heart, Monhegan photographer Tom Martin is still a kid in the woods with a magnifying glass

SUSAN HAND SHETTERLY

Walking the main road south through town, you might start at a booming voice, turn toward Fish Beach and catch sight of a white-haired, thickset man on the second-story porch of one of the old Monhegan fish houses. He's calling out to a neighbor as he tips back in his chair. A pair of binoculars hangs from a strap around his neck. A spotting scope on a tripod is aimed at the green wire lobster traps stacked on the grass at either side of the truck ruts going up to the house. Small birds hop in the ruts and through the traps. The man reaches into a bag

beside the chair and flings a handful of seed at them. There's a sudden lift: a white-throated sparrow, a song sparrow, a clay-colored sparrow, two white-crowned sparrows, a dickcissel, an indigo bunting. The birds quickly settle back, weaving in and out of the mesh. Above the gable of the house a falcon falls through the air and rises again and cuts out over Manana Island.

And you walk on. But the scene stays: the fish house looking just like a Robert Henri oil painting, the man with the big voice and all those birds.



Tulip bud, cross section

“I’m exploring all the time,
looking at stuff nobody else
looks at. Well, everybody looks
but nobody sees much.”

The man is Tom Martin, born Tom Yanchunas in 1921. His photography of the natural world, which has appeared in many places, including the Peterson and Audubon bird guides, Time-Life Books, *American Birds*, and in gallery and museum shows, is highly regarded for its beauty and up-close accuracy. This is his 50th year on Monhegan, a small, abundant place that has become, over time, his laboratory. He stays for a month every spring and again in the fall.

We’re sitting inside the fish house at the big kitchen table. Parts of flowers and seedpods and lenses sprawl before us. Josephine, Tom Martin’s wife, moves around the crowded room, joining in the conversation now and then. His Nikon single-lens reflex camera mounted on a tripod points at the north window. Outside, wind is slapping spring rain against the windows. The propane heater glows. Pots and pans hang from the ceiling rafters. A sharp-shinned hawk’s wings and tail, a blue heron’s wings, and an assortment of other feathers lie stacked on a small table by the front door. “People on the island bring me things,” Martin says.

“You know, that yard in front of the house is one of the best birding spots on the whole eastern seaboard in the spring and fall. I use about a half a ton of birdseed and a case and a half of oranges for the orioles. I spent my boyhood with a magnifying glass,” he continues. “I grew up in the woods from third grade on—all by myself in summer—exploring the world without any help from anybody. Just my own curiosity. This has carried on through my life. I’m exploring all the time, looking at stuff nobody else looks at. Well, everybody looks but nobody sees much.”

Martin’s father was a hardworking barber of Lithuanian descent (“a good, good man,” is how Martin remembers him), who, with his wife, raised a family in the coal country of Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania, during the Depression. “I was ingrained with how to make do, how to enjoy what you have without spending money,” he explains. A man of thoroughly contemporary vision, whose work offers evidence of orderly structure in an otherwise chaotic world,

Martin, with his big voice and relentless energy, might seem at first a throwback to an earlier time. A 1930s labor organizer, perhaps. Or a backroom big-city politician. But his choice has been to pursue the intricate, often reclusive beauty of nature, and the passion and delight he brings to his work, at 83, is still that of a kid in the woods with a magnifying glass.

He gets up from the table, opens the refrigerator, and takes out of the freezer an eastern kingbird. This dead bird is so thin we can feel its breastbone like a knife. But what Martin wants to show me is the red flame of feathers on the top of its head. A startling red flash, it lies hidden within the dark gray plumage. “Hardly anyone ever sees this,” he tells me.

“I still like to photograph birds, but now it’s the parts of the birds that are interesting. I like to show the barbs on the tail feathers of the chimney swift, for example. Nobody sees that. If anybody is interested in birds and they see the chimney swift, they should see the barbs, too,” he says. His photographs of the feathers, the bills, and the eyes of birds bring them implausibly close, and they become, at once, intimate and archetypal.

There are different ways of seeing—really seeing. One is the sort that Annie Dillard, among others, has written about, where you teach yourself to be still and wait for what might come to you. In this state of mind, as the poet Philip Booth wrote, you must “expect nothing always.” The other is Tom Martin’s way: he goes out in active, anticipatory pursuit. When looking for plants, he says, “What you need to take with you are a magnifying glass, a single-edge razor blade, your eyes and your brain.” Today he has come back with dandelions. “The dandelion is so common that nobody looks at it. But it’s a fascinating, fascinating plant.” With a razor he cuts a cross section of an unopened flower bud. “Now look at this,” he tells me.

“There are the cylinders with little bull’s-eyes growing in the middle of them. Can you see that? The bull’s-eye is the pistil. The cylinder—or sheath—is like a barrel full of pollen. The pistil pushes itself up through that sheath and it automatically pollinates itself by the time it hits the air. The stigma is shaped like a ram’s horn when it comes out. And it’s self-pollinating. That’s why the dandelion has a hundred percent seed production. It doesn’t need the bees.” Martin reaches over and picks up a dandelion seed head. “There’s a function here,” he continues, “dandelions open to bloom, then close, then they have to open again to disperse the seeds.” He takes the razor and slices lengthwise through the seed head. “These filaments inside have already elongated. And the pappus (the white bristles at the top of the filament) are pushing up. When the seed head opens every one of these hairs go 90 degrees. Like this,” he bends the fingers of his hands outward. “And it makes that ball,” he says.

“Take the reproductive organs of a flower and magnify them 50 or 100 times. That stuff is so beautiful!”

When I ask him about his life in photography, he says, “We photographers don’t create anything. All we can do is record what we see. It takes time. You don’t do this kind of photography in two or three minutes. It takes me an hour sometimes just to make a setup. However, there’s hardly any spoilage because it’s so deliberate. I’m a lucky person. I have a technical, analytical mind, and good hands able to make equipment to solve mechanical problems ... and I see patterns in everything.

“I was a steel-rule die maker by trade,” he says. “A die maker is a crazy guy. We are the guts of the factory.” The skills he applies to his photography he polished over his working life by designing fancy packaging for perfumes and cosmetics. He created the pilot dies—the original forms of wood and steel—the blueprints for the parts that went into the machines that mass-produced the final products. To be a steel-rule die maker takes not only imagination, but a grasp of space and curve and line and fold and how they work together.

“I ran a city-block factory in Manhattan. Fortunately or unfortunately, I was never motivated to make money with the photography.



Blue Grosbeak, wing detail

I’m self-educated. I’m an autodidact. I can go any way the wind blows. I’m not smart, believe me. But I’m curious. And I read. And if you can read, you can learn anything.”

In 1942, he enlisted in the navy. Instead of being trained as a sailor, Martin was sent to the National Naval Medical Hospital in Bethesda, Maryland, and trained as a research laboratory technician. He learned medical entomology, and was posted to New Guinea to work on identifying tropical epidemics that plagued the troops. “A great place,” he says of New Guinea. “I enjoyed every minute of it. Plants, insects, reptiles—but hardly any birds because they eat them.”

He first visited Monhegan in 1954 with his first wife, Irene. Because she liked birds, they bought themselves binoculars before they came. That year, he wandered all over the island photographing mushrooms and mosses and anything else that caught his eye.

“We were staying up at Marion Cundy’s house. She was taking in people then. And I put out seeds there and we started seeing some birds. We were just novice birders.”

When he returned to Manhattan and told friends, one of whom was a bird illustrator, what he had seen on Monhegan, they told him, “You can’t be seeing things like that.”

“They are not common birds. They are not supposed to be here,” he says. “So I borrowed a friend’s 400-millimeter lens. I made a gunstock. I took pictures of these things. Well, once you start taking pictures of birds, you get addicted. It’s a challenge. Finally I honed the thing down. I got a technique down. I got very acceptable pictures of Harris’s sparrows, indigo buntings, orchard orioles, clay-colored sparrows, Gambel’s white-crowned sparrows. A friend got in touch with the editor of *American Birds*, and he looks at the pictures and he tells me, ‘You could have taken these anywhere.’ ”



Spatulate Sundew



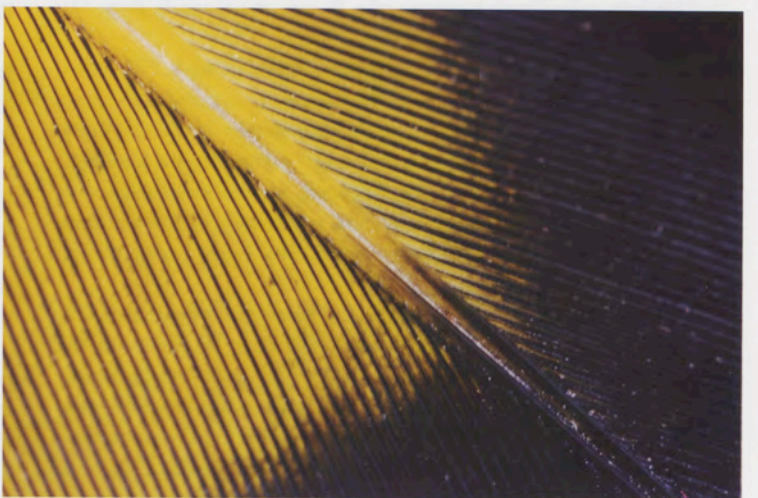
Spotted Jewel Weed



Rosa Rugosa, section detail



Cedar Waxwing, detail



Flicker, tail feather detail



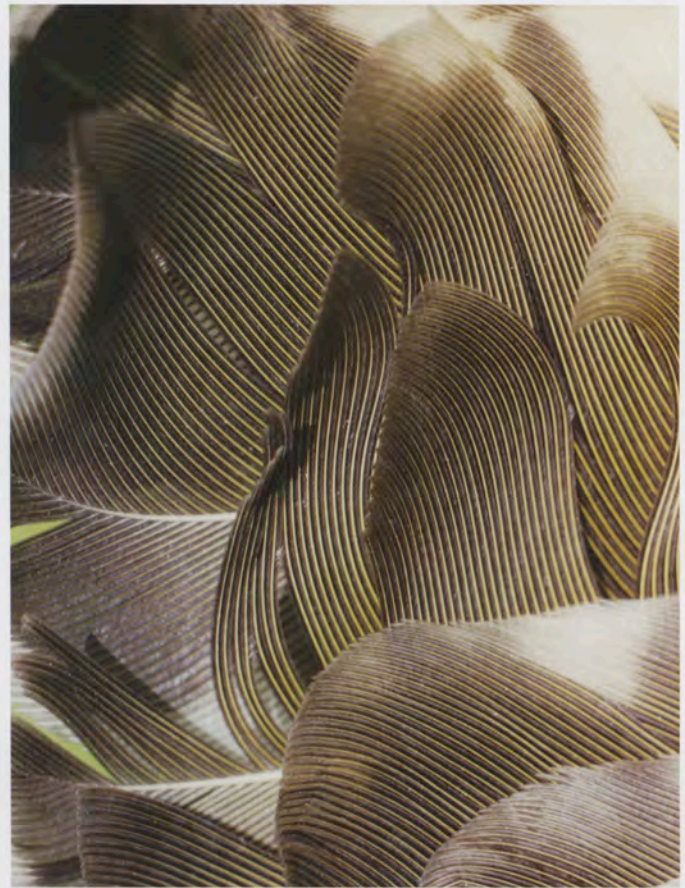
One-Flowered Pyrola

“You see, I take the birds up close and don’t stop the lens down. The background gets washed out. No branches coming out of the birds’ heads or anything. So I thanked him and I left. Then he calls me up and says, ‘Look, I got verification from people who know you.’”

Two of the photographs eventually became covers for *American Birds*. Martin made his own tripod so that he could set it firmly anywhere on the rocky landscape of Monhegan. He sometimes uses a double-track bellows on his camera, a leather accordion piece that takes a lens at the front, giving him freedom and flexibility of focus. And he has his tricks: backlighting with an old truck mirror, copper tubing attached to the bellows to hold the subject matter steady, plasticine modeling clay to hold the subject firm.

In those first years on the island, he used to take his lunch out to the Long Swamp Trail and sit and watch warblers. He saw Wilson’s, black-throated blues, parulas, blackburnians, yellow-rumps (which Martin still calls “myrtles”), magnolias, Canadas, black and whites, yellows, bay-breasteds, chestnut-sided and Nashvilles. A lot of them. But over the many seasons that followed, he has seen the species and the numbers of birds change on the island, and, in general, go down. On most visits, he worked with bird-banders Albert and Eva Schnitzer, his good friends. “There’d be so many myrtle warblers and purple finches we’d stop banding them after we reached 5,000, and they’d still be hanging from the trees. We used to have Arctic and Three-toed woodpeckers. I haven’t seen them in 38 years. This island used to be crawling with white-winged and red crossbills. They’re here now, but not like before. However, there are birds we see with regularity that we didn’t see. We see red-bellied woodpeckers. We have mockingbirds wintering here. We have blue-gray gnatcatchers.”

The reasons for these changes are most likely due to changes in climate and to alterations on the mainland. Yet, an island habitat is one of the most fragile. A few people clearing out a couple of trees or a patch of tangled alders on a jut of land that is only seven-tenths of a mile wide and 1.7 miles long may disrupt a small area, but they create certain impact. In a place this small, it is not hard to believe that every tree and bush counts.



Flicker, shoulder detail

“Tell me what you see when you look down at this,” Martin says, handing me a magnifying glass. “That’s the female flower on the spruce tree—you see the whole pattern in there, like the whole spruce tree in that single flower. Bring it right up. Bring it up to your eye. And see this? It’s the terminal end of a spruce branch.” Martin cuts through it. “See the needles now? They’re square. And you can see the pattern, the Fibonacci Theory of Spirals, right there. You go from the top: 1, 2, 3, 5, 8, 13. Same on the dandelion. Same on the sunflower. They don’t write about this stuff the way they used to anymore. You have to pick up the textbook, *The Taxonomy of Flowering Plants*, by Arthur Monard Johnson. It goes back to the 1930s. I picked one up at a used bookstore, and that’s what got me excited. He had cross sections of plants—artists’ renderings—and I said to myself, ‘Man, that’s the way to look at these things!’

“It’s a world of discovery,” he says. “Last year I’m seeing things that took me into a different tangent and I’m getting different kinds of pictures. It never occurred to me to look into Jerusalem artichokes and then come in here and with surgical forceps take the reproductive organs out of the flower and magnify them a hundred times. It’s like a fairy land in there.”

He lays his hands flat on the kitchen table and shakes his head.

“People ask me, ‘What’s left to photograph? You’ve been coming here for 50 years. You must have everything photographed.’ But every time I come, it’s something different. Most people think they’ve seen everything. It’s so sad. When I’ve seen everything, I want to die.” He turns to the north window, still spattered with a light rain. In the wet yard next door a Canada goose is grazing on new shoots of bright green grass.

“I don’t want to reach that point where I’ve seen everything,” he says.

Susan Hand Shetterly lives and writes in Surry, Maine.

THE DESTINATION OF SPECIES

The SORCERER II global microbial sampling expedition is the first major scientific ocean cruise of the Genomic Age

DAVID CONOVER

A vessel sailed quietly into Blue Hill Bay two summers ago. Four tanned crew lounged on its teak deck. A man with piercing blue eyes relaxed near the helm, sipping from a cool glass. To a working lobster boat off nearby Swan's Island, the vessel would have appeared to be a 95-foot ultra-modern sailing yacht on a pleasure cruise, which it was. Less visibly, this vessel was also on a fishing expedition of its own, scooping up millions of creatures from the Gulf of Maine with every cast of its custom-designed nets.

The catch of this unusual fishing vessel was not organized by a sternman nor sent to a processing plant with lines of white-coated workers holding filet knives. This vessel was not fishing for the table, but rather catching ocean microbes. The white-coated workers processing this fisherman's catch worked in a \$50 million lab, tending robots and some of the world's most powerful private supercomputers. This vessel was looking for information, for genetic clues within these microbes that might unveil planetary mysteries of the air we breathe, the climate and the fuel we could burn to power our cars and heat our homes. These clues might also offer insight into the origin and destination of species.



"I'M NOT AFRAID TO TAKE RISKS"

To some, he is the most controversial scientist of our time. When he proposed cracking the human genetic code in months instead of years, J. Craig Venter was labeled rebellious, stubborn, hard-charging and brash. He then led a privately funded effort to harness the computer horsepower of the Information Age to a radical lab technique for identifying genes, called whole genome shotgun sequencing. The subsequent accomplishment of his team was massive.

Grudgingly, even his sharpest critics have come to appreciate this extraordinary genius and his ever-expanding list of contributions to the understanding of life. As Venter himself puts it, "I'm not afraid to take risks. I said at the beginning that either this would be one of the most spectacular success stories in history or the biggest flameout. I've been worried at every stage of my life since Vietnam that I would die before I accomplished what I wanted to."

At 58, Craig Venter is definitely not done yet. Now he is adapting his formidable scientific tools to understanding the gene pool of entire environments, starting with the ocean. For the past two years, Venter and his crew on board SORCERER II have been fishing for the tiny organisms that drift among our islands and throughout the oceans of our world. From their stop in Maine in 2003, they have traveled south to the Panama Canal, then to the Galapagos Islands, and on to Australia where they now continue to sample. SORCERER II's collection technique is quite simple. Every 200 miles the crew pumps in enough seawater from the surface to fill a 50-gallon container on deck. Immediately, the water is run through a succession of filters. When the container is empty, the filter paper is removed, labeled and placed in one of the extra freezers on board, awaiting the next shipment back to the lab. After sequencing and annotation, the findings are published and placed in the public domain for anyone to access and use. Meanwhile, SORCERER II proceeds to the next sampling site under wind power, says Venter, "because sailing is a magical experience and it takes you to another world."

OCEAN MICROBES

Ocean microbes are quite plentiful and easy to catch. Any net will do, big or small, even the cup of your hand. Most of us might know them as bacteria or viruses. Some play a role in human diseases like SARS and AIDS, but for the most part, microbes serve to support human lives rather than destroy them. Microbes are everywhere. They exist on land, in the sea, in the air and underground. Each microbe is a chemist, and many are capable of performing chemical transformations far more sophisticated than those the best human chemists can synthesize. Millions exist within each one of us, helping to regulate the chemistry on our skin and within our eyes, mouth and stomach. They're also largely responsible for the big chemical cycles on the planet, providing at least half the oxygen we breathe and cleaning half the carbon dioxide we release. They provide much of the food we eat. In a very big way, they are the planet's biological and survival safety net. In stark terms, life on the planet would do just fine if the humans disappeared—but if something happened to the microbes, we'd all be in trouble.



Craig Venter led a privately funded, radical effort to identify genes for sequencing.

Despite this ultimate dependency, we're clueless when it comes to 99 percent of the microbes that live in the sea. We don't know their ecology. We don't even know who they are! "Every large drop of seawater has about a million bacteria and over ten million viruses in it," says Venter, "and until recently, this life has been almost completely unknowable." Ocean microbes are everywhere, yet completely invisible to the human eye, like distant galaxies. The analogy is not inaccurate. The quantity of microbes is estimated at 100 million times the number of known stars in the sky, representing as much as 70 percent of the biomass of life on earth. Ironically, they are far less understood than the stars. We've never had the tools to identify them, nor found a common language to understand them. In a sense it's like knowing that your household depends on an invisible housemate who does most of the vital chores, and you cannot find nor talk with him. Why do we know so little? Ocean bacteria are extremely difficult to culture and keep alive in a lab, which unfortunately has been the only way to isolate, identify and study them.

Several years ago, new genetic tools arrived. A marine biologist named Ed DeLong joined others from the Monterey Bay Research Institute and began searching their bay for very specific types of genes and the microbes that contain them. The tools they used isolated genetic information. This information revealed the specific chemistry that the microbes were genetically coded to perform, with big hints of identity and function in the marine ecosystem. Remarkably, the new genetic tools did not require that the microbes be alive! DeLong isolated one type of creature previously thought to exist only in deep sea vents, archaea, and determined it might make up as much as 20 percent of the living cells near the surface of the sea. He also found bacteria called SAR86 that was coded to create and use light-sensing pigments very similar to those contained with the human eye. No chlorophyll is involved. This evidence that a previously unknown marine microbe was using a new method to harness sunlight suggested that a whole lot more life was out there in the world's oceans making use of the sun than was previously understood by oceanographers. Ever since, it's been a succession of new microbial discoveries and an accelerating drama with one emerging and disorienting conclusion.

The food we eat doesn't come from the planetary grocery store where we thought we shopped. The air we breathe doesn't come from the great carbon dioxide-oxygen cycle we thought it did. Strange new heroes were starting to emerge within Earth's food/air/energy cycle: bacterial microbes. Lots of them. And that is what J. Craig Venter is now after.



WHOLE GENOME SHOTGUN SEQUENCING

Unlike DeLong's approach of isolating a microbe by casting a narrowly focused genetic fishing net, Venter is casting a much broader net over entire microbial communities. He is using a modified version of the same radical whole genome shotgun sequencing technique his team used with the human genome. Rather than isolating all the DNA strands from a specific part of a single genome, Venter takes all the DNA strands and then fragments them. Gene fragments are identified, then reassembled using powerful algorithms and computer processors. Whereas DeLong was trying to catch a specific microbial "island," Venter has set off to catch whole microbial "archipelagoes," worldwide.

Before passing through the waters of the Gulf of Maine, Venter teamed up with researchers from the Bermuda Biological Station for Research and applied his method to the waters of the Sargasso Sea. Like the Gulf of Maine, this area of the ocean is considered a sea within a sea, though it is defined on all sides by strong currents rather than by land. Unlike the Gulf of Maine, the Sargasso is considered nutrient-poor, a biological desert.

For Venter's purposes, this made it an ideal place to fine-tune his approach. He did not expect to find much microbial life, nor much diversity. With the Sargasso samples, Venter did refine his method. And within them, he did find the same gene that DeLong had discovered, the gene that coded for light-sensing pigments. He also found a mind-boggling 800 other varieties of genes that also had the same capacity. And these are just the genes connected to sensing light. He found evidence of 20,000 new ways that microbes can work their transformational magic and turn sunlight into hydrogen.

This Sargasso Sea, it turned out, was no biological desert. This was a vast bacterial-viral soup! Altogether, Venter's team found 1.2 million new genes. The number of new genes is astounding, given that an individual human being only has about 25,000 genes and so much of life shares similar genes.

For those of us accustomed to understanding and grouping life according to species, Venter's Sargasso findings are startling. He did find DeLong's SAR86 bacteria. He also found 1,800 new species of other marine microbes. Let's put this discovery into the context of the history of oceanographic exploration. The first major ocean expedition was that of the CHALLENGER in 1872. Over a period of three years, those aboard the CHALLENGER systematically sampled the world's oceans, discovering its deepest canyon, its mid-Atlantic ridge and thousands of its unseen life forms. Altogether, CHALLENGER collected 4,717 new species in the 68,890 nautical miles the expedition covered. SORCERER II found almost half as many new species within a few dozen miles of what had been thought to be a biological desert. "We were blown away," Venter recalled early in his sampling work. "This single experiment could be the largest-ever species-discovery project."

Two years have passed since Venter took his samples from the Gulf of Maine. Sequencing of those samples awaits funding, but

sequencing work has begun on other distinctive sites: the Gulf Stream; the freshwaters of Lake Gatun in the Panama Canal; the shallow seafloor vents north of Galapagos; mangroves; brackish pools and the cold oxygenated waters of the open Pacific. Analysis and annotation of these samples is ongoing. Preliminary results show the total gene count is fast approaching eight million, within nearly 85 percent of each regional sampling site possessing its own unique and distinct genes. Microbial life and function appear to vary enormously, depending on where in the ocean the genes were found.

THE DESTINATION OF SPECIES

The sea has known its share of restless mavericks. Once upon a time, these figures roamed the oceans seeking foreign lands and treasure for themselves or their sovereigns. The knowledge they gained ruptured world markets and upset empires, challenged popular beliefs and steered the course of history into regions unimagined. The early Norse crossed the North Atlantic, followed by the Basque, the French and the British. The 1821 voyage of the BEAGLE took Charles Darwin to islands that opened his eyes to the secrets of evolution.

HUMAN GENOME AND ISLANDER STUDIES

What is a genome? An individual person's genome is the total of his/her inheritable information—all that genetic stuff inside each of us that comes from our mothers and fathers and who knows where else. Our own distinctive genome is that which makes us genetically different from other people. Collectively, humans share our species genome, the human genome. This is the inheritable information that makes humans different from lobsters, dogs and hake.

Your inheritable information is kept inside almost every cell of your body. Imagine that your genome consists of metaphorical boxes, arranged in a series according to descending size. Each box nests within another. The labels of the boxes, from large to small, would read in this order: cells, chromosomes, genes and DNA. Your genome is the whole shebang. In their first draft sequence of the human genome, Craig Venter's team began with the smallest box, the DNA. They identified and positioned most of the three billion base pair "boxes" of DNA and found where they fit inside the next largest boxes, the genes. They found that the human genome has about 30,000 genes (recently lowered to 25,000 upon completion of sequencing work by the Human Genome Project). They positioned these genes inside 23 pairs of chromosomes, the next largest box. Chromosomes then fit inside the next largest box, each cell inside the human body (except the red blood cells).

Sequencing the human genome is one of the big discoveries of the last century, setting up most of the big questions in the field of human biology for the next century.

Almost everyone who tries to explain how knowledge of a genome is used ends up with a metaphor of one sort or another. The President of the United States described it as "... the most wondrous map ever created." The analogy to a geographical map or chart is a pretty good one. Both a chart and a genome

In its own way, Craig Venter's voyage of discovery is leading the way to eventual new applications for human life. Will it be possible to mimic or synthesize the living chemistry of those microbes he has discovered via their genes? Can we harness new processes that will turn sunlight into hydrogen, and fuel tomorrow's hydrogen economy with low-cost, low-impact and sustainably produced hydrogen? The U.S. Department of Energy is a supporter of the SORCERER II voyage.



Will it be possible to monitor the microbes of the sea and improve our abilities to predict changes of El Nino, of the weather, of the global environment? Donald Kennedy, editor and chief of *Science*, lists the voyage as one of the top science stories of the year. Will it be possible to construct industrial-scale plants that use microbial chemistry to remove, rather than add, carbon dioxide to the planet's atmosphere? Those studying the consequences of our vast experiment with planetary climate change are watching closely.

Perhaps the most engaging of Venter's findings have to do with the age-old mysteries of where humans come from and where we're headed. What is our destination? Venter has a gene-centric, rather than species-centric, perspective. His approach makes sense when you live and work with the constant awareness that we're all awash in a giant

gene pool, and when you know full well that much of life on the planet shares many of the same genes.

Much of the human genome existed long before the first human being. Once Venter completed sequencing the human genome, he realized that to understand ourselves we really needed to understand the genomes of all the other creatures in the environment. We're 98 percent similar to the chimpanzee, and share a majority of genes with most mammals. Much of

life draws on the community pool of genes. In a gene-centric view, each individual organism or species serves simply to transport and perhaps slightly alter the set of genes in its possession, but eventually these genes pass on to someone else.

The pool is what matters. Comparing similar and different genes across species lines is what reveals the big questions; why was gene "x" conserved over so many species for so long a time? Why was it so important for life? In the end, the destination of "species" may be that it withers away as a biological construct. A new gene-centric understanding of biology has appeared.

David Conover is a filmmaker based in Camden, Maine.

map identify and locate features of interest. A chart deals with features like coastlines, buoys and soundings. A genome map identifies and locates genetic features like genes and chromosomes. Prior to the arrival of the human genome map, a researcher interested in the genetic aspect of human disease or development had to identify and locate any genes involved in their specific inquiry. Often this would take months and much of their grant money. And even after all that work, they weren't always sure they had the big picture. Now that a definitive sequence of the human genome is available, they just check the map. The work that once took months, now takes minutes.

ISLANDER STUDIES

If a researcher's interest is tracking common human diseases through the generations, this map might reveal which gene or group of genes is associated with which diseases. The experiment might look at a relatively stable and structured population that does not have a lot of arrivals and departures, and a good genealogical record that tells which families suffered from which diseases.



Isolated island communities are promising sites for this kind of study, and this work is already well under way on the island country of Iceland, where community records exist from the 10th-century days of early Viking settlement. Many of the country's 275,000 residents agreed to be genotyped by an Icelandic company called DeCode, which then sequenced and recorded sections of each person's genome.

The early findings are fascinating, relating to disease and—unexpectedly—patterns of human migration. Unsurprisingly, 80 percent of Icelandic men had genetic roots in Norway, whereas a surprising 50 percent of Icelandic women have Celtic roots. Viking men appeared to

have stopped in Ireland to pick up Irish women. Once the island's population had settled, it became possible to connect genome to location on an even finer geographical basis. DeCode researchers divided the island into 11 regions. Using existing census and parish records, they found that Icelanders born between 1850 and 1875 lived in the same region as the five previous generations of their ancestors. With this knowledge base, DeCode then selected and observed 40 sections of each islander's genome to see if each person known to come from the same region also shared common sections of their genome. They did. People had stayed in one region of the island long enough to develop a genetic signature! Now it is possible to locate a surprisingly precise island origin of each Icelander based solely on their genomic information, even if genealogical information for that person does not exist.

As to disease, early signs show that women on the south coast commonly suffer from breast cancer, and that people on the southeast coast frequently suffer from schizophrenia. An association with a specific gene or group of genes for either breast cancer or schizophrenia has not yet been established in the Iceland studies, though research work on these diseases elsewhere in the world have begun to draw such links. The Iceland island study certainly promises to yield more insight in this area.

THE FUTURE

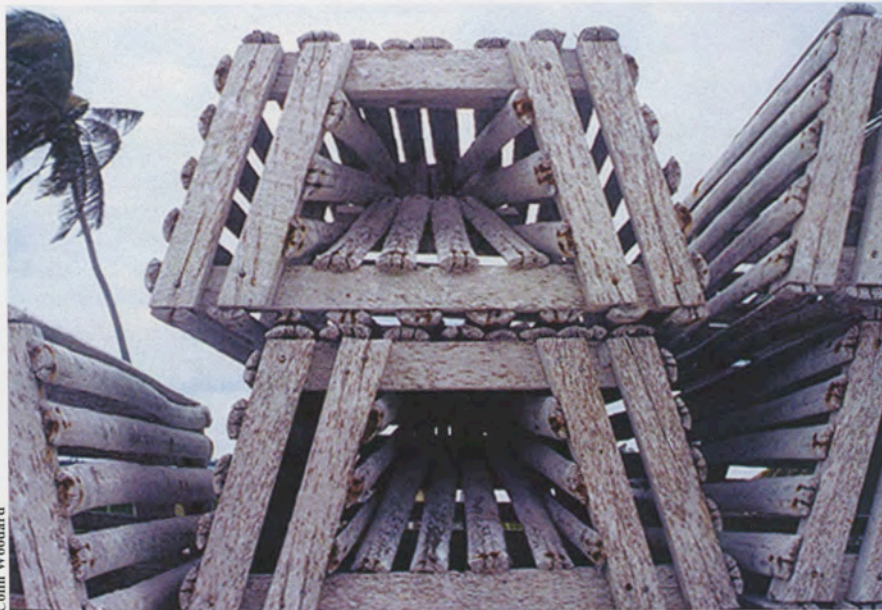
Knowing our own genome, we'll know what part of our health is most at risk and warrants the most attention. We'll know specific results that any drug will have for each of us. No longer will we be taking drugs produced for the "average" human. We'll be able to predict drug side effects with great accuracy. Geneticists expect that within ten years the full sequencing of a human being will cost less than a thousand dollars and take less than a few weeks.

D.C.

THE TROPICAL LOBSTER COAST

Belizean lobstermen are, in many ways, following in Maine's footsteps

COLIN WOODARD



Colin Woodard

Belizean traps are based on a 1930s design from the Canadian Maritime Provinces.

The Caribbean spiny lobster, a clawless, tropical cousin of the American lobster, has long inhabited the waters of Northern Belize, a tiny Central American nation that is home to the second-longest coral reef system in the world. Elderly residents of the low, sandy islands that perch atop the Belize Barrier Reef say the bottom of the sea used to turn red with migrating lobsters, which they scooped into their boats with hand nets. Even today lobster is Belize's most important inshore

fishery, and the shallow waters around Caye Caulker, Ambergris Caye, and other northern islands provide the lion's share of the catch.

At the height of the eight-month lobster season, the stacks of flat-topped wooden traps vanish from the sides of Caye Caulker's sandy footpaths, and lobster dishes reappear on the menus of the island's expanding bevy of tourist restaurants. Small aircraft take off regularly on the island's narrow airstrip, their holds loaded with freshly caught lobsters bound for Belize City, where the lobsters are processed and frozen for transport to Red Lobster restaurants across North America.



Jim Cust



Traditionally, Belizean lobstermen worked from wooden sailboats. Today, outboard motors are the rule.

Christian Fevrier

Lobsters are everywhere, and thousands of traps are in the water, but take a ride around the island and you won't see a single pot buoy. Ask a local fisherman how he finds his traps and you may get a quizzical look. "You can see them on the bottom," one says with a hearty laugh. "Why would you waste good money on lines and buoys?"

Indeed, in the shallow waters of Northern Belize, lobstermen really can spot their traps by looking at the bottom, eight to twelve feet down, and haul them up with a long-handled boat hook. Others dispense with traps altogether, laying out metal shades on the bottom instead. The lobsters crawl under the shades for shelter and fishermen—holding their breath—actually dive down to the bottom, lift the shade, and grab them with a small hook.

But despite differences in technique, climate, and geography, Belize's lobster fishery has surprising similarities to that of Maine a century ago, when tourism and commercial lobster fishing were but a few decades old and a virgin resource was beginning to show signs of stress.

Two centuries ago a Maine fisherman would have had a terrible time trying to sell a lobster. His neighbors didn't need any; they could send their kids out to wade along the shore, gaffing as many jumbos as the family could eat, and possibly a few extras for the hogs. There weren't any summer people around yet, and nobody had figured out how to get the lobsters to Boston or New York before they died, at which point the undersea bugs promptly putrefy. If a fisherman wanted to make a living, he concentrated on cod, mackerel and other fish that could be smoked or salted for long-distance transport.

But during the early 1800s, Bostonians and New Yorkers developed a taste for lobster that soon outstripped local supplies. Dealers looked longingly to Maine, knowing its cold, rocky shores were crowded with the tasty crustaceans and that good money could be made if only a way could be found to get them to market. Then some enterprising Connecticut traders came up with a solution: drill holes through your vessel's hull, flooding part of the cargo hold and turning the boat into a mobile lobster pound, or "smack." By the 1840s smack captains were plying the Maine coast, introducing fishermen to the lat-

est trap technology and begging them to concentrate their efforts on the humble lobster, offering all sorts of incentives to do so. Outside middlemen ushered Maine's commercial lobster fishery into being, and the advent of summer tourism after the Civil War fueled its expansion.

Something very similar happened in Belize in the first half of the 20th century. Old-timers remember when a Canadian businessman, Captain R. E. Foote, showed up in Caye Caulker's only village in the early 1930s bearing a wooden Maritimes lobster trap. Like their counterparts in Maine, Caulker fishermen were skeptical at first: lobster was considered a food of last resort on the island, and even when they invested the time to carry their catch to Belize City, they were often forced to leave hundreds of unsold lobsters to rot in the sun. Fishing for grouper and snapper was the only way to make any money, and even that didn't pay very well. But Foote showed them how to use his strange wooden lobster traps, and promised to buy as many as they caught at well above the usual asking price of 50 cents a sack. Soon Foote's little lobster cannery was awash in lobsters.

Foote's wooden trap design is still in use today, with a number of Belizean modifications. The basic frame is made from mahogany scraps procured from mainland sawmills, but the funnel-shaped netting has been replaced with a ramp-like entrance made from laths fashioned from palmetto trees. The latter are harvested by fishermen during certain parts of the lunar cycle. "If it's cut in the right moon you could get two years out of it," explains fisherman Eloy Cuevas. "If you cut it on the wrong moon it won't last one season"—apparently because the water content of the tree changes.

Working from wooden sailboats, fishermen from Caulker and neighboring Ambergris Caye caught enormous quantities of lobster. Genaro Nunez started fishing in 1943, when he was just 13 years old, tending just five traps. The catch, he told a local reporter, was "overwhelming": a typical trip yielded over 250 lobsters, many of them weighing fifteen pounds or more. "Those," he later told the Ambergris newspaper, "were the good old days."

But while the catch was good, the prices the fishermen got for their catch were extremely low. Captain Foote's cannery went bust after just two seasons, and island fishermen were forced to sell to other foreign buyers for one or two U.S. cents per lobster. After World War II, demand for canned lobster grew dramatically, but the price buyers paid the fishermen remained extremely low. "We were doing all the work, but were hardly able to feed our families," recalls Caye Caulker fisherman Orlando Carrasco, who helped organize a successful lobstering cooperative on the island in the 1950s. The co-op, the first in the Caribbean, allowed the fishermen to bargain with buyers as a block, and greatly increased their earnings, allowing many to buy outboard skiffs and fish ever-larger numbers of traps. Other fishing villages followed suit, and the lobster catch expanded dramatically, from 200 to 300 metric tons annually in the early 1950s to over 1,000 metric tons in 1980.

Like their Maine counterparts, lobstermen in northern Belize claim exclusive trapping rights to particular sections of the seafloor. But while Mainers claim their lobstering territories on a harbor-by-harbor basis, Caulker and Ambergris fishermen each claim their own individual lobstering parcels. As they expanded their operations in the 1960s and '70s, lobstermen eventually divided up the entire fishable seafloor of northern Belize.

Some islanders' turf is divided into widely scattered parcels. Newcomers either have to inherit a territory from a relative, or must fish from informal camps on uninhabited islands far to the south where the lobster bottom remains unclaimed. Further afield, in southern Belize, lobstermen work in much deeper water and must use floats and lines to find their traps. "Everyone sets on top of each other, so everybody has their own float, marked or colored by the fisherman," says Cuevas, who fishes the barrier reef from Monkey River, a mainland village of 200 in southern Belize. The traps are baited with fish heads or cowhide (favored because it will last up to a week) and hauled every two to four days, depending on how many lobsters are around. "Sometimes we're fishing 70 or 80 feet of water, and we pull them all by hand," Cuevas says. "I never tried it, but some people use a tiny little twelve-volt winch; that's just too slow."

In the north, younger fishermen without lobster territories of their own have dispensed with traps altogether, and simply free-dive for lobsters on the reef. Using mask, fins, and a short gaff—scuba gear is illegal—they work from small wooden canoes and are not expected to honor trap territories. Divers who forage on the reefs often work in deeper water than the trap fishermen and have few conflicts with them. But others use artificial shelters made from zinc roofing, and



Colin Woodard

Eloy Cuevas baits his traps with fish heads or cowhide and hauls them every two to four days.

sometimes find that they have been overturned by the area's trap fishermen. "Some trap fishermen think the shades enhance their habitat by attracting lobsters to the area and will even put some out themselves," says Thomas D. King, an American anthropologist who wrote his dissertation on Belizean lobster fishing. "Others don't, and regard the divers as potential thieves who might be stealing from their traps." King, who interviewed and accompanied trappers during his research, says the shades attract a remarkable number of lobsters. "You take a hammer or small stick and lift a corner of the shade to see what's under there," he says. "Sometimes you have 20 or 30 lobsters and they're all trying to scurry away from you." The divers try to hook the crustaceans under their carapaces and drag them out while holding their breath. "You can only get two or three at a time, and at least a few of them are going to get away for sure."

But a lot of lobsters aren't getting away, and Belize, like Maine a century ago, is witnessing a decline in the size and abundance of lobsters. Scientists calculate that the lobster catch per unit of fishing effort is steadily declining and is now half its level of the mid-1960s, while overall landings have fallen by a third over the past 20 years. King says the biggest problem has been the taking of undersized lobsters for sale to local restaurants, an assessment seconded by many fishermen. King estimated in 1999 that Caye Caulker's restaurants alone were purchasing 63,000 to 125,000 undersized lobsters every year, even though there were only 15 on the island at the time and not all of them were buying shorts. There is little chance of getting caught; a recent report from the Belize fisheries department admits that "support and political will [to manage the fishery] has gradually degraded" and the country's current fiscal crisis has left the country's handful of wardens too short on fuel to regularly patrol marine protected areas.

If Maine is any guide, conservation may have to be learned the hard way. Maine fishermen regularly took undersized lobsters at the turn of the last century, breaking them up for bait or selling them to local restaurants and out-of-state lobster runners. (Violations were so serious in the early 1920s that state officials actually closed the Midcoast fishery for several weeks to protect small molting lobsters from poachers.) By most accounts, Maine's impressive conservation ethic was only adopted during the Great Depression, after both the lobsters and their market had crashed. On the Belizean coast, where fishing is often the only alternative to the tourism industry, one hopes it doesn't have to come to that.

"... despite differences in technique, climate, and geography, Belize's lobster fishery has surprising similarities to that of Maine a century ago, when tourism and commercial lobster fishing were but a few decades old and a virgin resource was beginning to show signs of stress."

Colin Woodard, a Portland-based journalist, is the author of The Lobster Coast: Rebels, Rusticators and the Struggle for a Forgotten Frontier (Penguin).

LEARNING KINDNESS



To the uninitiated, the vast spiritual subway system that runs under this granite island is unimaginable

The author, with Hope (left) and Oakley, 15 years ago

KAREN ROBERTS JACKSON

Many great gifts come with age and the passing of time: wisdom, introspection, hindsight, gratitude—but the best, I believe, is humility. Some people are naturally born to it. Some come to it kicking and screaming and life beats it into them with a thick stick. Now that I am in the current of the river called “middle age,” my own is slowly beginning to emerge. I have managed to avoid the big stick only by the good fortune of having entered an island community some 15 years ago.

For about the first ten years, whenever I wanted to voice an opinion at a meeting, or perhaps say a few words at a memorial service for an elderly friend, I would begin with something like, “I am not from here ...” or “I have not known this person as long as each of you... .” In attempting to be humble, I must have sounded like a neophyte at an AA meeting. I wanted to make it clear that I “knew my place,” but I never knew my place. Not realiz-

ing it, certainly not meaning to, my family and I reeked of the arrogance that many “from away” bring with them to these remote, insulated island communities.

When we came it was to settle on a smaller island, 20 minutes from the big island of Vinalhaven. We had no jobs, no money, no home, no family ties (ours hailing from far-away Florida and Kansas), and to the local community, surely, no sense. We arrived with four kids, one a three-month-old infant, and a tepee, in mid-August. We started right out by arrogantly, and necessarily, breaking the rules. We hand-carried, trip after trip until the ferry ramp threatened to rise, our tools, building supplies, ladders, kids’ wagons filled with our last garden’s produce, and our ragamuffin little crew. We looked like refugees. We thought we were cool. We were young, idealistic and full of ourselves, and that’s what we had to offer this community. We got our butts kicked, literally and figuratively.



We arrived in mid-August with four kids and a teepee.

Jobs are a tight commodity in a community of this size, doled out carefully and possessively. We were soon advancing cash on the Visa to pay the minimum payment on the Visa. Our boys were being chased home after school, had apples thrown at them, and were beaten up on occasion. We got the shop built by Thanksgiving, dismantled the teepee and scurried inside like fretful mice. We were burning green spruce and practically sitting on top of the woodstove. Hunters arrived by boat, had the audacity to walk across our land, and I was terrified of them. The cove froze over. After chopping through the ice from a dinghy, my husband would then spend another hour dismantling and defrosting the cooling system of our boat. Our family got tighter, and we got tougher. My husband has an old saying from his high school years: "Nothing to it but to do it..." It became our mantra.

Nonetheless, it was a series of many small kindnesses that pulled us through. I can't remember now if we applied for the free government food, or if a box was just handed to us, but we were soon bringing home the white rice, peanut butter, raisins and powdered milk doled out from the town office. Our "superior, moral" diet of a few months before would have had us raising our noses at such fare.

We were grateful for more than the sustenance, because it meant that the town wasn't going to let us just starve to death out here. If I was struggling along to the ferry with a baby on my back and a laundry sack in tow, inevitably someone would stop their car and insist I get in. The older children had warmed the hearts of a couple of women in town who ran a coffee shop, and I would often find them there after school, waiting for me to pick them up, doing their homework, warming their toes and sipping free hot chocolates. We made it through that first winter and by spring my husband, Mark, was offered a job at the local boatyard.

With his solid, Germanic, Midwestern work ethic, I credit Mark with gaining us our first acceptance on this working-class island. Previously in our marriage it was I who had joined the food co-op, or the babysitting co-op, or the nursery school board, and our circle of friends were other families like ours, other back-to-the-land wannabes. I could not really see where I fit in on the island, and I had my back up most of the time. To me, my husband was a cowboy, and he understood this Wild East culture. I vacillated between feeling self-conscious, inept and unwelcome. In my children's school setting I wanted to share my values, my great ideas, my children's hidden talents, not sell hot dogs in between basketball games. Feeling frustrated on many fronts, not the least of which was the island-to-island commute every day, I pulled my children out of school and took them home. I homeschooled them for the next nine years.

Looking back, I would immediately tell you that those were the best years of my life as a mother. Still, I was blind. Friends often tried to tell me that when the kids got older we would have to move into town, for their sake. "Like hell," I thought. We had everything we needed in each other and in our hand-built home. I went into town when necessary, picked up a few jobs here and there, shopped in the grocery store, and made small talk in the post office. I thought I had figured out the game of it all, how to just bob along on the surface. But, I would be lying if I did not admit to being dreadfully lonely. I am sure our children were too.

We were so wrapped up in our own little world that it was almost a shock when they began leaving home, for college, or travel, or adventures. I did not want to be isolated anymore. I wanted a real phone so they could call home, a computer so I could receive their e-mails. I wanted to be able to get off the rock if they needed me. My husband was offered a teaching job and our youngest son aspired to be a soccer star. He also did not want to be the only kid left stranded at home. We started moving in to town for the winters. I finally began to focus my attention on our community and was startled to find so many kind and caring individuals.

At first, I was a voyeur and every encounter either charmed me or made me want to write about it. I referred to people as "characters" and my interactions with them were "episodes" that I would play back in my mind as if I had been a fly on the wall. Detachment seemed to be the safest defense, a safe attitude to take. The point had been clearly driven home to me that we were not from here. But I was wrong in believing the myth that we never would be.



Oakley, Karen, Hope and Bambi

Courtesy of the Jackson family (5)



Bridget Besaw Gorman

Tristan and Hope



A new house, 2004

About the same time that we began to come in for the winters, it seemed that a big shift was rumbling within the community. The taxpayers and school board wrangled over for months, and finally went forward with, the building of a new, magnificent \$13 million school. Right on the heels of that, the town launched into a massive sewage treatment plant project, connecting a large portion of island resi-

dences, ending a long history of overboard sewage discharge. Both projects required a significant influx of mainland workers, big machinery and the dawn-till-dusk cacophony of blasting and drilling. For a fairly private, somewhat sleepy, definitely reserved small town, things suddenly felt frenetic. Alongside the physical violation of the town, the daytrippers and sightseers kept coming and coming in droves.

Along with these outward signs of “progress” came other issues. One group wanted to reclaim the old ball field, another wanted to restore the old Washington School and move the town offices. Two groups were meeting weekly on either side of the Mill Race Bridge, demonstrating for peace on one side and in support of our troops and president on the other. That February was February in all the worst ways, tensions were high, tempers testy. Many locals were feeling defensive, and the strangers in our midst often bore the brunt of it. The state was mandating the upgrade of the town’s comprehensive plan, and then came the punch to the gut—a revaluation of everyone’s real estate for tax purposes.

In advance of threatening higher taxes, waterfront property and heritage lands were put up for sale. All at once, the community that I had held at arm’s length, the neighbors I had judged to be narrow-minded and unaccepting, began engaging us in heady and heated conversation, asking not only our opinion, but our involvement. Against these common threats to our way of life, my own walls began to crumble.

Little by little I took peeks backstage in the community. I typed once in a while for *The Wind* (the local newspaper), volunteered at school, delivered Meals on Wheels for the elderly, joined the Garden Club and worked at the church. At first, still in my arrogance, I thought some of these dealings comical, and I still considered the people involved as characters in a made-for-TV movie. Inwardly I feared that they saw me in the same way. Over time I joined larger organizations, ones essential to the function of the island. The warp and weft of the fabric of this community were slowly revealed to me, the tenacity and perfect sense behind it no longer such comedy.

BEING AN ISLANDER AND THEREFORE DIFFERENT

Donna Miller Damon

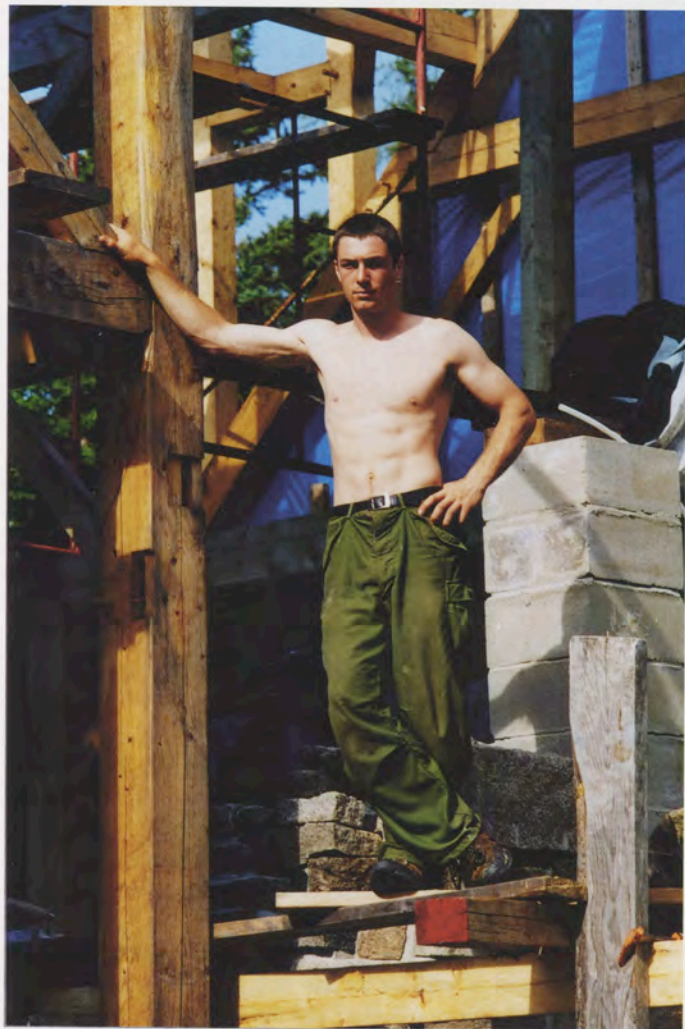
Deep in the woods on Chebeague Island, a small stream blocked by trees blown down during the fury of the 1950s hurricanes, created a tiny pond. Surrounded by decaying evergreens, the pond served as a secret garden for my friends and me. We took picnic lunches into the woods and spent the day. We quenched our thirst by drinking from recycled glass jars. My friends and I scrambled over blowdowns like monkeys in a rain forest. To this day we swear that we walked across trees that were forty feet in the air.



The author as a college student

Many of my childhood days were spent down on the shore, hunting for baby crabs or putting salt in holes in the mudflats to trick razor clams into thinking that the tide was coming in. We took my father's punt and rowed on whitecapped waves, forgetting the respect for the sea that our parents tried to ingrain in us. Escapades such as this provided more drama than *The Hardy Boys*, and the stories are frequently retold when two or more of us get together. The entire island was our playground; we did not need interactive video games because we learned early on how to create our own action-filled adventures.

We were happy and contented. And then, when I was 14, I had to leave the island to commute daily to high school on the mainland. Apprehensive at first, I was soon swept up in the whirlwind of school activities. Living on Chebeague was getting in the way. I soon realized that I was an anomaly. Teachers and students questioned me about island life, and frequently their questions were followed by negative comments. I began to sense that mainlanders thought of the island as quite apart from what they knew, and that islanders were what social scientists now refer to as "the other." I discovered that most people do not plan their lives around the tides and a boat schedule. I should have



Tristan

The inner workings, I was to learn—the vast spiritual subway system that runs under this granite island—is unimaginable to the uninitiated. The labor force, individual talents with a critical mix of hindsight and foresight, could serve as a model to whole nations. We boast an eldercare facility built on raffle tickets, auctions and bottle returns. Our fire department and ambulance are fully volunteer-staffed. Hand-sewn quilts are raffled to enlarge the library. Dinner theater raises money for the senior class trip. Parades are held; so are pageants, Christmas cantatas and talent shows. There are sports teams for children from grade school to high school, adult baseball and basketball, Girl Scouts, a knitting group that has been meeting for over 25 years. There are service clubs and civic committees in every shape and size. A land trust, a garden club, book clubs for teens and adults—I could go on, and on, and on.

In recent years my courage has grown and I have taken on a few large projects within the community. One of them is a harvest festival in late October. At the first one a year ago, I was literally moved to tears as the band struck up, the horses came trotting down the road, two clowns came waltzing up the driveway, and the fortune teller began to hang scarves around her booth. I had merely called up a few people I knew who had called up a few people they knew. It was like being allowed to choose the game, and all of your friends agreeing to

“We were so wrapped up in our own little world that it was almost a shock when they began leaving home, for college, or travel, or adventures.”

anticipated that this might be the case—after all, I had read more than one hundred teenage romances the year before. Not one book described the life of an island girl transplanted to the main shore. The formula plots of the books always featured a beautiful, smart, athletic girl who was either running for class president or the prom queen. Her dreams always came true. I didn't want to be left out of the running. I wanted to be like the heroines in the books. No one drilled them about where they lived. As a result Chebeague was no longer a small child's Shangri-la, but instead a barrier



Donna's island gang in the 1950s

to being the quintessential high school coed. As I spent more and more time on the mainland, I became less and less connected to the island. In fact, during my senior year, I spent 92 nights ashore!

When I left Chebeague to attend the University of Maine in Orono, I thought that my life would no longer be ruled by the boat schedule. I was wrong. Going home for the weekend meant leaving the campus before noon Friday and not arriving home until nearly noon on Saturday. I spent less than 24 hours on the island before I was headed back to school via three taxis, a boat and a bus. Hardly worth the effort, thought I. But I truly loved my family, so I continued to return, although infrequently.

After one of these grueling trips, I was sitting around a dorm room with a half-dozen friends grumbling about the inconveniences of island life. I forcefully stated that I hated living on Chebeague and would never go back there to live. My friends sat silently by as I continued to pontificate that raising children on an island was akin to child abuse! Suddenly a friend from Bath interrupted me. "You don't hate living on Chebeague," she said. "You don't hate living in a place that is so beautiful and has such wonderful people." How could she know that I wondered? "We can't wait to sit here every night and listen to your stories of growing up on the island," she continued. "Your tales of ringing the church bell, hanging devils' fiddles, putting

play. When I was a teenager I had a groovy black light poster of a bunch of busy elves painting a rainbow. It sounds corny, I know, but every volunteer effort I have been involved with on this island reminds me of that. The wheels start slowly, then they gather momentum, and the next thing you know money is being put forth, labor is being offered, followed by support, ideas, enthusiasm and a cleanup crew. Your greatest supporter turns out to be someone you didn't think you liked or someone you didn't think liked you. Someone you had had a miscommunication with ten years ago suddenly smiles at you and the glacier shifts.

While taking a walk one day I was comparing my community with my own far-flung family. Growing up I had an uncle who was a hoodlum. He shot out streetlights with a BB gun, had a mean motorcycle and got his girlfriend pregnant. We younger cousins adored him. Getting a ride on the back of Uncle Charlie's bike was better than heaven. I had an Aunt Lela who shaved herself bald so she could study the bumps on her head and would whip off her wig at the dinner table to scare us kids. Aunt Betty was a mermaid at Weeki Wachee Springs. Aunt Laura, the devout Catholic destined to join a convent, called one Christmas to announce that she had just eloped with a Jew, my Uncle Jon. And yet another good Catholic, my Aunt Rita, after having a long succession of miscarriages, took to raising litter after litter of weird lit-

on plays, camping on wilderness islands, eating lobsters for breakfast and all of the rest. You are so excited and so proud when you talk about your home, family, and all of the interesting people that you know. Where I live I couldn't tell you the names of more than a few adults and you can tell us about hundreds."

All of a sudden I felt like Wendy in *Peter Pan* when she was telling the Lost Boys stories that her mother told her. I thought for a minute and realized that many of my stories had come from my parents,

and some tales came from their parents before them. Suddenly I was that little girl again out in the blowdowns, only now I was looking for my lost youth. That encounter changed my life. My friend challenged me and forced me to delve deep within myself and remember who I really was. I was an islander, and I remembered an observation of Dorothy Simpson's: "There are some who cannot forget what their ancestors knew in this place, the remoteness, the silence, the imperviousness of the surrounding sea, the sense of being an islander and therefore different from all men."

At that moment I knew that I would return to live on Chebeague someday. In 1982 my husband and I moved into the house we (he) built on my family's land. When my daughter, Rachel, was three she asked me if it wouldn't be easier to live on the mainland, because we would not have to take the boat and walk to the car. "Not really," I answered. "It may be hard to fathom, but someday when you are older and have gone away for a while, you will understand."

Donna Miller Damon lives on Chebeague, which she represents on the Cumberland Town Council.

tle Chihuahuas. What are we, after all, as humans and communities, but a lively collection of our quirks?

Ours is not always a warm and fuzzy community. It can be hard and crusty and seemingly inhospitable. It can take a very long time before you feel accepted here, and you can worry about that acceptance until the cows come home. How will you recognize it if it happens? It will be in the seemingly little, day-to-day things. One day you won't have a dollar for a cup of coffee and the clerk will say, "That's okay, I'll put it on your tab." Or you will need a stamp and have the courage to count 37 pennies out of the penny jar at the post office. Maybe you will go sliding off the icy road and the next person along stops traffic and the one after that goes for a tow chain. Maybe you will be asked to bake something for the next bake sale.

There's a quotation I'm fond of, from a book called *The Places That Scare You: A Guide to Fearlessness in Difficult Times*, by Pema Chodron: "We always have a choice: we can let our lives harden us, or we can let them soften us and make us kinder." My crusty of community has made me want to be a kinder person. This humbling has only taken me 15 years. Sometimes I think I got off too easy.

Karen Roberts Jackson lives on Green's Island and Vinalhaven.



Mrs. Johnson MacCormack

MRS. ASHLEY JOHNSON: "You'd find a bridge would benefit the entire island. It'd bring new hope. There'd be an increase in both year-around and summer residents. It'd even enable high school pupils to go by school bus to Greely Institute in Cumberland Center."



Brewer Calder

JOHN H. CALDER, 31, road commissioner: "A bridge sure would come in mighty handy in bringing our road supplies from the mainland. We'd be able to go after these materials when we need them, and we'd save freight. I had to pay nearly \$16 to get a truck ferried here. A bridge also would provide us with better fire protection."

MRS. MINNIE DOUGHTY: "A bridge could be a wonderful improvement, if things were handled right and it brought good people here. I've lived on the island three-quarters of a century. I've seen its population decline. We don't even have as many summer visitors as in the old days."



Mrs. Doughty Leonard

CLIFFORD M. LEONARD, 45, grocer: "A bridge would put 45 on the map. Chebeague Island on the map. We're working with the Maine Development Commission now trying to bring small industries here. The island population has declined from 1,200 in 1910 to less than 300. Most men here are dependent on fishing which is seasonal. A bridge would help us in our attempt to bring new



Doughty Bowen

ARCHIE L. BOWEN, 63, mailman: "I haven't much time to mail delivered. Either way, I'm not fussy about the bridge. I don't know if it'd help or not. But I'd sure like to get off the island more often to visit my son, Dick, and his family on the Foreside. A bridge would help me do it."

WESLEY E. DOUGHTY, 25, fisherman: "A bridge would enable me to pick up extra work on the mainland during our slack fishing times. As it is now, traveling by boat to a job there isn't convenient. You have to remain in town. A bridge also would enable lobstermen to get their catches to market easier."



DRIVING ASHORE

In the 1950s, Chebeague residents tried to get the state to build them a bridge and failed; today they're glad it didn't work out

ELIZABETH HOWE

In the 1940s and '50s Chebeague, like most other year-round, "unconnected" islands off the Maine Coast, found itself drifting out of the state's social and economic mainstream. With a year-round population of around 300, Chebeague is the largest island in Casco Bay. It is closer to Yarmouth than to Portland and is actually a part of Cumberland.

After World War II many of the island boys who had served in the military didn't return to live on Chebeague. Some island girls married soldiers and moved off. The major economic activities, fishing and tourism, were in a period of change. Ferry service to the mainland was declining. Cumberland closed the island high school, and island teenagers had to go by ferry to Portland High. Mainland banks wouldn't lend money to build houses. There was a

widespread sense that Chebeague was in crisis. In order for the year-round community to survive, islanders felt, automobile access to and from the mainland was a necessity.

CHEBEAGUE ORGANIZES TO GET A BRIDGE

Surprisingly, the solution to all these problems seemed to be close at hand, and Chebeague residents launched an extraordinary nine-year campaign to make it a reality. In 1955, Central Maine Power Company built a bridge from the mainland to Cousins Island in Yarmouth to serve its new power plant there. Once that bridge was built, it seemed possible to rebuild the existing causeway to Littlejohn Island, and to add a bridge and causeway out to Chebeague.

Then, the Chebeague residents who favored the bridge reasoned, additional businesses and even industry (the economic prize of this period) might locate on Chebeague. Island residents would be able to commute to jobs and school on the mainland. Summer people could drive right to the doors of their cottages. Local businesses would no longer be dependent on inadequate ferry service to bring customers and supplies.

Mrs. Ashley Johnson, an island resident, summed it up this way for the *Portland Evening Express* in March, 1955:

You'd find a bridge would benefit the entire island. It'd bring new hope. There'd be an increase in both year-round and summer residents. It'd even enable high school pupils to go by school bus to Greely Institute in Cumberland Center.

A bridge would be far too expensive for Cumberland to build, of course, but Deer Isle had gotten a bridge financed by a state bond issue and federal public works funds back in the 1930s. And Beals Island was in the process of asking the state legislature to authorize a bond issue for a bridge from Jonesport. Surely, proponents believed, Chebeague could make as good a case as Beals for a bridge.

The effort to get the state to build a bridge was led by four activists, two island businessmen and two retirees "from away." Howard Beehler was a retired watchmaking executive, and Herman Petterson was a retired doctor who had been recruited to provide medical services on the island. Roy Hill was a builder and the long-serving island selectman to the Town of Cumberland. Cliff Leonard was the owner, with his father, of one of Chebeague's several grocery stores.

These four made up the first Bridge Committee. They began to explore what the islanders needed to do to convince the state to fund and build a bridge. At the Cumberland Town Meeting they persuaded residents to pay for an engineering study by the Boston firm of Fay, Spofford and Thorndike. The study showed that a bridge and causeway system would cost \$3 million, and that with a \$1.25 one-way toll, the traffic generated would be enough to retire a bond issue for the project in 50 years.

Quite quickly, this proposal came to be supported by a majority of both the 120 year-round families and the 204 summer families on the island. Reasons for supporting the bridge varied. Existing island businesses needed a larger market, and a bridge would make obtaining supplies much more convenient. During the mid-1950s the island's lobstermen were joining the new Maine Lobstermen's Association in its efforts to

Solons Nearly Trapped On Chebeague Island

April 29, 1957
CHEBEAGUE ISLAND (AP) — Members of the legislative Committee on Highways visited Chebeague Thursday to see for themselves why the Casco Bay Island's people want a bridge-causeway to the mainland. Nature and Lady Luck teamed to do a propaganda job which, from the islanders' point of view couldn't have been bettered by the most expensive public relations campaign.

AFTER A TOUR of the big island in the school bus and a lobster luncheon at the consolidated school, the committee members went back to a pier to be ferried to the Falmouth mainland.

An unusually low tide left so little water alongside that the ferry couldn't dock. By twos and threes, the committee members were rowed out to the waiting power boat in a small punt.

When everyone was aboard, the ferry's engine balked temporarily and the vessel nosed into a mudbank, with the tide still ebbing.

A lobster boat hauled the ferry clear, the engine was restarted and the lawmakers got under way after a brief delay.

Accompanying the committee, headed by Sen. Carl M. Stipphen (R-Rockland), was Rep. Howard Call (R-Cumberland), sponsor of a legislative bill to finance a three million dollar project to tie the bay's largest island to the mainland.

It would be a toll bridge with a \$1.25 fee each way.

THE PLAN CALLS for about 3,800 feet of causeway from Chebeague toward Littlejohn Island, a 1,050 foot bridge across the deep water channel between the two islands, and replacement of the existing bridge between Littlejohn and Cousins islands with a causeway. There already is a bridge between Cousins and Yarmouth on the mainland.

About 300 persons live on

COMMITTEE MEMBERS with Stipphen were the House chairman, Rep. Benjamin A. Turner (R-Auburn), Sen. Murray W. Thurston (D-Bethel) and Reps. Benjamin S. Crockett (R-Freeport), Napoleon L. Nadeau (D-Biddeford), Herman P. Prue (D-Ashland) and Roy K. Dennison (R-East Machias). The committee clerk Mrs. Hope Deschehes, and Rep. Christopher Dumaine (R-Readfield) also made the trip.

Howard Beehler, chairman of the island's bridge committee, was joined in hosting the committee by Selectmen Henry Steinfield and Leroy H. Hill of Cumberland, and Dr. and Mrs. Herman C. Petterson.

Legislative Panel To Visit Chebeague

CUMBERLAND — The Legislative Highway Committee considering a bill providing for a bridge to Chebeague Island will visit the island next week.

Chairman Howard L. Beehler of the Chebeague Island Bridge Committee said the visit was arranged through Rep. Carl M. Stipphen (R-Rockland), the legislative group's chairman, and Rep. Howard Call (R-Cumberland).

The committee wants to tour the island and gather information before reporting on the bill introduced by Call, Beehler said.

The same group has visited sites of proposed bridges from Lubec to Campobello and a Belfast.

Also making the visit next Tuesday will be Department of Economic Development Commissioner Fred A. Clough Jr. and an aide, Richard A. Hebert.

Beehler said the visitors will be served lobster dinners as guests of his committee.

In 1959 a delegation of legislators was nearly trapped on Chebeague by a low tide.

break the wholesalers' control over the price of lobsters. In 1956 and 1957 they were involved in the MLA's ultimately unsuccessful "tie-up" strikes. The MLA also helped lobstermen establish co-ops so they could become their own dealers. But a co-op required access by truck. Chebeague's fishermen could have a co-op that would serve not only their island but also all the surrounding islands. Bridge access, they reasoned, would greatly increase the co-op's chances of success.

Some summer residents supported the bridge simply because it would make getting to Chebeague so much easier. Others were swayed by the arguments of year-round islanders that a bridge was necessary to the survival of the year-round community.

As the bridge campaign developed, the role of year-round supporters was to do the work of lobbying, going to legislative hearings, raising money, and later, gathering signatures on petitions. It was the job of the summer people to give money to enable the work to be done.

Not everyone on Chebeague wanted the bridge. About 30 percent of summer households feared it would make the island too accessible, easily inundated by riffraff and tourist-oriented businesses. The island's quiet beauty, they argued, would be destroyed. About 10 percent of the year-round residents saw that a bridge would irrevocably change the traditional economy and the island's close sense of community.

But Chebeague is a small island, and the weight of majority opinion in favor of the bridge largely silenced the opponents. Throughout the bridge effort, Chebeague presented what appeared to be a unified front to the outside world in support of the bridge.

POLITICS

Once the Bridge Committee had an engineering study showing that a bridge was feasible, it took its proposal to the Maine legislature. Getting the state to float bonds for a bridge required a two-thirds vote in each house and the governor's signature, followed by voter approval on a statewide ballot. There would have to be a campaign to get voters to accept it. The bridge supporters were encouraged when Beals Island's bridge bill passed both the legislature and the referendum vote in 1955, the first year the Chebeaguers tentatively approached lawmakers with their plan.

To strengthen its case the Bridge Committee recruited support from organizations such as the Yarmouth Chamber of Commerce and the Greater Portland Regional Planning Commission. The editorial board of the *Portland Press Herald* was in favor. Prior to each legislative session Howard Beehler went to talk to influential legislators about the importance of the bridge. Groups of legislators were invited for tours of Chebeague and plied with lobster dinners.

What the bridge supporters didn't realize, however, when they set off for Augusta was that they faced some political problems. For one thing, the Republican-dominated legislature was more responsive to rural northern and eastern areas of the state such as Beals Island than to urban areas such as Portland. The Republicans had dominated the state for 100



The proposed bridge (foreground) would have linked Littlejohn (center) and Chebeague with the mainland via Cousins Island.

years. The Democrats were the party only of the immigrant, Catholic working class of the state's manufacturing cities. At the time they were a weak minority, though in an upset Democrat Edmund Muskie had just won the governorship.

It was no accident that legislative malapportionment muted the voice of urban voters. A rural legislator represented about 2,500 people, while in a large city a legislator might represent 9,000. Chebeague was rural, and Chebeaguers themselves were likely all Republican, but they came from the wrong, most urban part of the state.

The bridge proposal also ran afoul of the State Highway Commission and the leaders of the state Senate. By the 1950s, America's love affair with cars had already led to a tremendous increase in highway spending. The National Defense Highway Act, creating the interstate highway system, was passed in 1956, and the construction of state toll roads like the Maine Turnpike was well under way already. These highways were paid for with tolls, federal money and state fuel taxes and fees that were constitutionally dedicated to highways. In Maine the State Highway Commission's budget, power and independence from the legislature was growing rapidly. The Commission's chairman, David Stevens, was opposed to projects like the bridges to Chebeague and Beals islands because they were an "end run" around the SHC. Delegations from both islands had gone directly to the legislature to ask for bond issues, challenging the SHC's increasingly tight control over the allocation of state highway funds.

Though Stevens was opposed to the Beals Island bridge, he had only been appointed SHC Chairman in 1953. When the Beals bill came up in 1955 he had apparently not consolidated his power sufficiently to mount an effective challenge to the northern legislators who supported it. By 1957, however, he was in a position to challenge such a project in the southwestern, urban part of the state.

When the Chebeague Bridge Committee went to the legislature its members were unaware of the SHC's opposition. Their defeat, first in 1955 and then by one vote in the Senate in the 1957 session, left them disappointed, but not without hope for the future. After all, in that same session the Penobscot Bay islands had gotten a bond issue for their ferry service. Still not understanding the SHC's role, the Bridge Committee was actually persuaded by the Senate leadership to ask the SHC to do its own study of the feasibility of the bridge. It was only when the SHC's negative evaluation of the bridge's prospects was released in November 1958 that the bridge supporters realized that the highway commission was their central opponent.

They fought hard again in the 1959 session. Again they lost, this time in part because of the emerging problems with the Beals Island bridge—problems the highway commission had predicted. Once that bridge opened in 1958, it was obvious that the tolls would not be enough to amortize the bonds. To make matters worse for Chebeague, the Beals Island residents came to the 1959 session to ask that the toll be reduced.

PETITION DRIVES

Chebeague might have given up after the 1959 session, but the ferry service in Casco Bay was getting worse, and the bridge seemed to be an even greater necessity. Casco Bay Lines was failing; between 1953 and 1962 the number of passengers carried annually to and from all the islands dropped from 139,000 to 71,000. Service was sometimes erratic. Necessary maintenance went undone. Fares went up. Competing "gypsy" ferries had been started, including one from Chebeague to Cousins Island, viewed as a stopgap measure until the bridge was built. In 1961 all the Casco Bay Lines wharves were condemned by the Public Utilities Commission and then repaired by the state. On Chebeague there was no CBL service that year from mid-August to December. The Chebeague high school students had been going in to Portland on the CBL. Now the Cumberland school district hired a boat to take them to Cousins Island, where they were met by a school bus and taken to Cumberland's Greely High School.

The bridge supporters kept trying. They had lost faith in the legislature, but had one other option—to try to put the bond issue on the ballot by collecting signatures on petitions. In effect, using the initiative was simply an extension of Chebeague's grassroots effort to get the bridge. If enough signatures were collected, and the legislature didn't pass the bill during the session, then the bond issue would still appear on the statewide ballot in November.

The initiative had not been widely used in Maine up to that point, and never for a bond issue. Though the bridge supporters didn't realize it initially, putting a bond issue on the ballot by petition was a fundamental challenge to the power of the legislature, and the Senate leadership took up the challenge.

For the petition drive the Bridge Committee was reorganized and enlarged to include a number of Portland businessmen who could help bring money and visibility to the effort. The owner of one of the island's inns, Robert Follette, was given the job of organizing the petition drive. Through the bitterly cold winter of 1960–61, 42 Chebeaguers went on 50 trips to the mainland to ask people to sign their petitions. They went in groups of four to six, sometimes going door to door, but more commonly setting up at shopping centers or large supermarkets where lots of people were coming and going. They went to Portland and South Portland, to Brunswick, Lewiston, Saco, Sanford and other towns within a day's drive of Portland. They were assisted by the Junior Chamber of Commerce, which collected signatures all over the state, especially on election day, for 10 cents per signature.



Islanders Heading For Augusta

Nearly 75 residents of Chebeague Island boarded buses this morning to lend support to a hearing in Augusta before the Legislative Highway Committee on the island's petition for a bridge-causeway link to the mainland. The Chebeague Island Bridge Association offered free bus transportation to and from Augusta to all islanders who wanted to attend. Chebeague residents want a causeway built between Cousins and Littlejohn islands and a combination toll causeway-bridge between Littlejohn and Chebeague. Cost of the project is estimated at nearly \$3,000,000. (By Staff Photographer Morrison)

On more than one occasion, delegations rode buses to Augusta to lobby for Chebeague's bridge.

The Bridge Committee needed 42,195 signatures. By February 1962 they had collected 52,000, which were proudly presented to the legislature. They celebrated. A month later, to their deep disappointment 13,000 signatures were found to be invalid, largely for technical reasons, so the petition effort had failed. And again the legislature refused to pass the bridge bill.

By this time the bridge supporters were used to defeat, and the reverses only seemed to make them more determined. In the fall of 1961 they fought, along with residents of the other Casco Bay islands, at a special legislative session to keep Casco Bay Lines from being given a monopoly on ferry service in the bay, and to set up a State Committee on Transportation Needs in Casco Bay. In November the Bridge Committee announced that it would be undertaking a second petition drive for the bridge.

By this time the bridge supporters had learned how to run a petition campaign. Though the target of 29,273 signatures was lower, the effort and intensity were higher than the previous drive. This time, 62 petitioners made an average of more than six trips per person. They traveled further afield. Again the Jaycees helped, at 10 cents a signature. On January 8, 1963, the petitions were turned over to the Secretary of State's office. On February 5, 34,183 were declared to be valid. The bond issue would go on the ballot whatever happened during the legislative session.

But the bridge supporters had underestimated the strength and determination of their opponents. The State Highway Commission was preparing a major challenge. And now the Senate leadership was deeply opposed to the

bridge. Like the highway commission they didn't like end runs, and didn't want citizens initiating bond issues by petition.

The SHC commissioned a new engineering study of the bridge that showed it would require a state subsidy of from \$6 to \$9 million over a 40-year period. And during the legislative session both the SHC and the Senate leaders mounted an effort to send the bill to the Supreme Judicial Court for an advisory opinion on the constitutionality of putting a bond issue on the ballot by petition. The Bridge Committee had been out-manuevered. The Supreme Judicial Court ruled on May 27 that putting a bond issue on the ballot by petition was unconstitutional, and all the

work of the petition drive was for naught.

The only remaining hope was that the legislature itself might put the bond issue on the ballot, by passing the bridge bill. Between the end of May and the end of the session on June 22, bridge supporters worked to find a way to get the two-thirds votes they needed in the House and Senate, and for once they got lucky. The Republican governor, John Reed, was trying to fund a large increase in state spending by proposing an increase in the sales tax from 3 to 4 percent. Opposed by conservative Republican legislators in northern Maine, he had to make deals with the Democrats and with Republicans from the Portland area. In one of these deals, bridge supporters traded their votes on the sales tax for the governor's and the leadership's help in passing the bridge bill.

Finally, after nine years of effort, the bridge bond issue would really be on the November ballot.

"HIGHWAY FUND ROBBERY"

Usually if bond issues made it to the ballot, they passed. But the deal between the governor and the bridge supporters hadn't included the acquiescence of the State Highway Commission. Officially neutral, the commission mobilized its private sector supporters in the Maine Good Roads Association—dubbed the "concrete boys" by one lobbyist—to lead the referendum campaign against the bridge. Their argument against the bridge was that it "would mean paying millions of dollars in unnecessary extra cost... [and] is without precedence in its magnitude of attempted 'Highway Fund Robbery.'"

Chebeague Island Bridge Bill *May 13* Should Be Approved By Senate *1957*

A project like a bridge and causeway connecting Chebeague Island to the mainland is the kind of thing which normally takes years and years of simmering before it is realized.

Yet a bill for a \$3 million bond issue, subject to referendum, has just passed a major test in the Maine house by a vote of 92 to 16 with passage for engrossment predicted for an early date. Ahead lie the booby-trapped purlieus of the Senate and the prospect that the immediate idea will meet its end there.

We submit that the scheme has enough merit to warrant favorable

action now, not least because of authoritative estimates, admittedly conservative, concerning feasible toll revenues. Its biggest feature, however, is what opening of the Chebeague Island area would mean to Greater Portland which in many respects is already suffering a shortage of land both for suburban residential and recreational development.

In other words there is no barrier, short of the usual one of getting used to a compelling new idea, to taking immediate action toward the needed bridge and causeway. We hope the Maine Senate sees the matter just this way.

A Portland newspaper editorialized in the bridge's favor in 1957.



Another Chebeague Bridge Bid Jan 9, 1963

Secretary of State Paul A. MacDonald officially receives petitions with 42,000 signatures for a referendum on a Chebeague Island bridge. If 29,273 or more are valid, Maine citizens will vote on the estimated \$3 million project to link the big island to the mainland. Two years ago, spon-

sors failed when 10,000 signatures were ruled invalid. Left to right are Robert E. Follette and Dr. Herman Petterson, Chebeague; MacDonald; Rep. Sanford Jack Prince, R-Harpswell, who will introduce a bill in the legislature; and Mortier D. Harris, Portland. (Kennebec Journal Photo)

AGAIN exerted all its Power in a desperate, indecent and irresponsible effort to AGAIN defeat the Bridge in the Legislature. In making their attack the Highway Commission rode roughshod over the will of 42,000 voters who had signed a petition for referendum. But this year, . . . the overbearing and boss-minded Highway Com-mission was badly beaten by decency and democracy . . . [I]rresponsible megalomania was badly beaten by COMMON SENSE AND DECENCY . . .

It all made good press in what was otherwise a boring campaign. But in the end, the bridge was defeated, 2 to 1. The further away a place was from Chebeague the more heavily it voted against the bridge. After the election the *Lewiston Daily Sun* editorialized:

The results of the voting on the bond issue for a bridge to link Chebeague Island to the mainland . . . is proof once again of the old adage that "You can fool some of the people all of the time, and all of the people some of the time. But you can't fool all of the people all of the time." . . . The \$3 million price tag on the bridge and causeway was an indefensible attempt to hoodwink the public.

Chebeague supporters made their case in the press, on the radio and through fliers distributed by the same people who had collected signatures on petitions. Chebeaguers were angry about the highway commission study of the cost of the bridge, and the Maine Good Roads Association's attacks based on it.

Lewis Ross, an island builder, wrote to the *Press Herald* that "The Good Roads Association is a small group of contractors, dealers in oil, tar and cement . . . who have consistently fought this bill with the help of the Highway Commission . . . Why should such a small group defy the 101st Legislature, Governor Reed and the 90,000 people who signed the petitions . . . Is it a squalid attack to satisfy personal prejudices and to reward special interests at the expense of the public welfare?" A handout from bridge supporters went farther:

Before going to the polls on November 5—YOU—as a voter of your state should know the real facts behind the struggle for the Chebeague Island TOLL Bridge . . . This year, the Highway Commission, the most powerful agency in the State,



Feb 25, 1959

Off To Augusta To Argue For Bridge T

Chebeague Islanders prepare to board a chartered bus here this morning for the trip to Augusta to plead for a bridge which will link their homes with the mainland. A delegation of 45 was scheduled to appear at the legislative hearing. In

center, wearing coat with fur collar, is Beehler, long a leader in the fight for the referendum for the proposed \$3,000,000 was defeated by one vote in the 1957 L (By Staff Photographer Roberts)

Another delegation rode to Augusta in 1959, as the legislature continued its deliberations.

THE AFTERMATH

Bridge supporters were crushed, while the minority of bridge opponents among the year-round and summer people were quietly relieved. Most Chebeaguers, however, seem to have accepted the verdict of the voters as final and legitimate.

There was one further effort by some of the bridge leaders to revive the issue in the 1965 legislature, which had been swept by the Democrats. A legislative study was commissioned and the strategy it proposed was to ask, not for state funding, but for federal money in order to build the bridge. This idea, typical of the 1960s, survived until 1970 when it was laid to rest by Chebeague's own residents. The death blow was a proposal to designate Chebeague as an economically depressed disaster area in order to make it eligible for federal funding.

The idea got under the skin of proud Chebeaguers. As Joan Robinson, wife of a lobsterman, wrote to the *Maine Sunday Telegram*:

You can't imagine the surprise and shock when I discovered my family and I were living so contentedly in a disaster area . . . I worked hard along with a lot of others during our bridge campaigns, but when we lost I came to regard it as a blessing in disguise.

TIME AND CHANGE

Several things had been happening since about 1960 to change Chebeaguers' minds about the bridge. The island was no longer drifting away from the economic and social mainstream because ferry access had improved significantly. Jasper Smith's "gypsy" ferry from Chebeague to Cousins Island took only 15 minutes and made Chebeaguers largely independent of the failing Casco Bay Lines. The story of how Smitty's water taxi became the Chebeague Transportation Company can't be told here, but it meant that longtime islanders adopted new patterns of going to the mainland, and new people began to move to Chebeague. Some of the newcomers were summer people who retired to the island; some commuted to the mainland to work. The new ferry re-oriented islanders away from downtown Portland toward the rapidly growing sub-urban areas of Falmouth, Cumberland and Yarmouth. This was not a car ferry, but islanders could have a car on the island and keep a "mainland" car in a parking lot on Cousins Island or—eventually—a big-

ger lot on U.S. Route 1 in Cumberland. The trip across was somewhat cumbersome, but once on the mainland, they could quickly get to the Falmouth Shopping Center or to I-295. The island's high school students, for their part, had been taking a boat to Cousins Island to get to school in Cumberland since 1961.

By the 1970s, too, attitudes about automobiles were beginning to change. People could see that in addition to extraordinary mobility, cars brought air pollution, wider roads, highways choked with traffic, acres of parking lots, ugly strip development and urban sprawl. Chebeague residents had watched the suburban development of Cousins Island after the CMP bridge was built in 1955, and the contrast with Chebeague's more rural character and traditional fishing economy was obvious.

For many of the people who continued to live on Chebeague, having a ferry that made getting to the island "fairly easy" but not "too easy" now seemed better than having a bridge. The not-too-easy service worked for a time to prevent rapid development, to keep property values moderate, to ensure the survival of the fishing and tourism economy and the maintenance of close community ties.

Today, if you talk to summer or year-round residents about a bridge to Chebeague, the common reaction is one of horror. The tables are turned: some still admit that they'd like a bridge, but the strong weight of majority opinion is against them, and they generally keep quiet. The possibility of a car ferry comes up occasionally in public meetings, but doesn't seem widely supported.

Today, being an unconnected island with a convenient but non-car ferry has cachet. Chebeague is definitely part of the mainstream. It attracts affluent people as both summer and year-round residents. As the baby boomers who summered on Chebeague retire, this trend is likely to continue. Since the 1990s house construction has proceeded at a brisk pace. Property values have risen sharply. Fishing and tourism are still mainstays of the economy, but some longtime year-round residents are being squeezed by the rising costs of living on the island. Now native Chebeaguers aren't worried anymore about the need for increased access to the mainland per se, but they are still concerned, as they were in the 1950s, with being able to attract working families who will help to keep Chebeague's economy and community diverse and thriving. For an unconnected island, it seems, balancing accessibility and community will always be a work in progress.

A Chebeague resident, Elizabeth Howe is writing a book on the bridge battle.



Bone (2000)

STILL POINT

For artist Bo Bartlett, Wheaton Island induces
“a constant awakening state of contemplation”

CARL LITTLE



Destin (1998)

Matinicus Isle: Its Story and Its People (1926), by Charles A. E. Long, opens with some geographic orientation. “Situated sixty miles east of Portland, eighteen miles south by east from Owl’s Head, and twenty miles out of Rockland by boat,” Long writes, “Matinicus is the largest of a small cluster of islands which guard the entrance to Penobscot Bay.” The historian delves into origins (*Matinicus* may derive from the Wawenock Indian word “Menasquesicook,” signifying “a collection of grassy islands”), physical and cultural terrain, and the inhabitants. An extensive genealogy represents nearly half the book.

When Charles McLane comes to describe Matinicus in *Islands of the Mid-Maine Coast: Blue Hill and Penobscot Bays* (1982), he defers to Long’s history, providing only a selection of “landmarks” of the island’s history to provide context for his descriptions of the group of smaller islands in the vicinity. (McLane also offers a wonderful vignette of a

trip he made in 1932 to Matinicus, the first Maine island he ever visited, aboard a sailboat captained by historian Samuel Eliot Morison).

Neither Long nor McLane make mention of any artists coming to the island, and for good reason: only a handful, it would seem, have made the voyage—unlike the steady stream that has traveled to Monhegan, itself remote, albeit much more accessible than Matinicus and more topographically dramatic. (Mount Ararat, the highest point on Matinicus, could not compete with Monhegan’s headlands.)

Until learning about Bo Bartlett, I had known of only two painters who had worked on Matinicus. During his last sojourn to Maine in 1916, George Bellows (1882–1925) briefly visited the island and nearby Cribhaven and painted several canvases, including *The Fish Wharf, Matinicus Island* (part of the Noyce bequest to the Farnsworth Art Museum). Christopher Huntington, a modern-day follower of Bellows, followed in the

master’s footsteps in the 1970s. No doubt there have been others, but the island holds no special place in the history of American art.

That may change, thanks to Bartlett’s compelling canvases. How did this son of the South find his way to the outer edge of Penobscot Bay? You have to go back a couple of decades to find the answer. And perhaps a bit of biography will further help to set the stage—for Matinicus and its companion, Wheaton Island, have served as the dramatic setting for some of Bartlett’s most remarkable paintings.

The artist was born James William Bartlett III in rural Columbus, Georgia, in 1955. His grandmother called him Jimbo, which his sister shortened to Bo. He remembers drawing at an early age. His earliest exposure to art came via paintings by Picasso, Rockwell and Wyeth, “artists popular enough to be part of the culture,” he told art historian Suzi Gablick in a 2002 interview.

Following high school, Bartlett went to Florence where he studied fresco painting



with Ben Long IV, a North Carolina artist. He traces his penchant for large-scale canvases to this early training. Mural work taught him how to plan for a painting: "You have to know exactly where everything is going to go," he explains. While it may take Bartlett years to map out a painting, when it comes to execution, he can often complete a canvas in a month to six weeks.

In 1975 the artist moved to Philadelphia where he attended the University of the Arts and the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts. He studied anatomy at the Philadelphia College of Osteopathic Medicine and Thomas Jefferson University. He also apprenticed under Nelson Shanks, a well-known portraitist who has painted Princess Diana, Luciano Pavarotti, Margaret Thatcher and other famous figures. In 1986 Bartlett took a slight tangent to earn a filmmaking degree from New York University (he often uses cinematic terms—framing, *mise-en-scène*—when speaking of his paintings).

Bartlett's connection to Maine began in the 1980s when a client from Cape Elizabeth purchased a painting. On a visit to deliver the work the painter discovered Prout's Neck. He fell in love with that stretch of rugged coast, known to so many art lovers through the canvases of Winslow Homer, and ended up returning every summer and fall with his family, painting at Prout's Neck and nearby Scarborough Beach.

More of Maine opened up to Bartlett through his friendship with Andrew and Betsy Wyeth. He had originally sought out the famous painter at his winter home in Chadds Ford, Pennsylvania, but a proposed meeting fell through. Later, the two became acquainted when Bartlett was asked to direct *Andrew Wyeth: Self-Portrait—Snow Hill*, a documentary about the artist he so greatly admires. The film won a number of prizes.

The summer of 1995, Bartlett recalls, he was staying on Allen Island, owned by the Wyeths. Andrew was on shore—he had had a

hip replaced—so the young painter served as something of a "surrogate artist" for Betsy, setting up in the studio in a new barn. One crystal clear day, Bartlett asked his hostess about the islands in the distance, and she obligingly pointed out Monhegan, Teel, Vinalhaven, North Haven and others. When he inquired about a smudge barely visible on the horizon, she replied, "Ooh, that's Matinicus. Never go there."

Curiosity piqued, within a week Bartlett had arranged for a lobsterman to take him to the distant island, "to see just what was so forbidding," he recalls with a chuckle. He fell in love with the place and arranged for a summer rental. Eventually, he brought along art supplies and began to incorporate island motifs—and residents—in his paintings.

"Matinicus is the kind of place where people go and they either really get it or they don't," Bartlett states. "It's not your traditional vacationer's kind of island," he adds; "It's a real working lobsterman's island." Feeling at home in these remote surroundings, Bartlett completed paintings during his visits and made studies for others that were finished in his Philadelphia studio.

One of Bartlett's best-known canvases, the stunning *Leviathan* (2000), began on a long hike the artist took with his oldest son, Will, around Matinicus. Somewhere on the southwest side of the island they began to smell a terrible stench. Searching for its source, the pair discovered a 30-foot-long whale that had washed up on the shore and become stuck in a crevice in the rocks.

Bartlett had had an idea for a painting based on the biblical story of Jonah. ("Now the Lord had prepared a great fish to swallow up Jonah," reads the King James Bible version; "And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.") The artist wasn't sure how he would manage to make the image real and not completely surreal—to structure it so that the painting would be grounded in reality yet not lose its mystery.

After seeing the whale, the concept for the canvas began to unfold. Bartlett would show Jonah in the whale with a realistic scene going on around him. Two men, one of them wearing a University of Virginia T-shirt, cut away the blubber while others, a girl and a young boy, view the proceedings. Part of a lobster trap in the foreground adds to the realness. It took Bartlett a while to figure out how to reveal the figure within without the scene feeling, in his words, "so awkward that it would cause disbelief." In the end we accept the vision yet cannot help but be troubled by it.

Another memorable canvas, *Bone* (2000), which serves as the cover image for the catalogue for Bartlett's recent traveling retro-



Leviathan (2000)



Lifeboat (1998)



Assumption (2001)



Bo on Wheaton, self-portrait (2001)

“Further out than a mainland eye
can see, it lies hull-down in the mind,
an island that you reach for, hazed
in the lightest airs, somewhere offshore
until it lifts across, and off,
the flat blue curve far out: a landfall
wavering more in time than distance.”

Philip Booth, “Matinicus
68°55’W—43°52’N”

spective (its last stop was his alma mater, the Pennsylvania Academy), derives from the same whale encounter. The artist’s son had retrieved one of the leviathan’s mandibles, rinsed it off in the saltwater and carried it home as a kind of trophy. In the painting, Will, dressed in a simple white T-shirt and sweatpants, bears the long bone across the island ledge, with the sea and sky stretching out behind him.

One summer, Wheaton Island, a 10-acre island that, along with a breakwater constructed in 1911, helps protect Matinicus harbor (somewhat as the “nursling” Manana provides shelter for Monhegan), had a “for sale” sign on it. Will Bartlett, then in his early 20s, kayaked over to check it out. Reporting back, his advice was simple: “Dad, you have to get it.”

Bartlett and his wife, Melonie, rowed over to see for themselves. They walked around the island, ending up at the highest point where they took in the view. The painter recalls the scene: “She just looked at me and stuck out her hand, like for a shake, like it was a deal, and said, ‘Yes!’ ”

After finding out who owned Wheaton Island, Bartlett set about to purchase it.

Negotiations took a few years, but in the end the family took title. “You don’t really own an island,” the painter states. “You’re just a steward of it while you’re gifted with it, and you’re happy to be able to look after it.”

According to historian McLane, back in 1830 Wheaton boasted a general supply store run by longtime islander James Condon. In vintage photographs, fish shacks and docks line the shore. Today the Bartletts are the sole residents. They fixed up the two houses on the island, but had to take down an old barn. One of the houses, restored more or less as a guesthouse, serves as the artist’s studio. The artist uses both floors, as well as parts of the second house, keeping paintings going in different rooms.

Being on the island, Bartlett explains, offers a childlike reality. “Every experience is new; you’re constantly amazed by things,” he notes. He points to the ever-changing tide, the fog moving in and out, sometimes quite quickly (“One place can look like a completely different place in just a few minutes”). “You’re constantly being brought back to the moment,” he says with wonder. “It’s like a dream come true to be out in the North Atlantic like that.”

And you really are “out there.” Bartlett’s family refers to the eastern edge of Wheaton as “the Portugal side.” If one were to head straight out across the open sea, aiming between Matinicus Rock and Wooden Ball Island, the next landmass would be the Iberian Peninsula.

Just about every morning while on-island Bartlett goes out to paint his surroundings, either a small gouache study of one of the natural landmarks (such as the boulder in *Clairvoyance* (2003), or a drawing of one of the models he employs from Matinicus. These sessions in the early part of the day serve as warm-up exercises for the canvases he will work on later in the studio. Recently, Bartlett has been stapling canvas to larger portable plywood panels for plein-air painting. “They’re heavy,” he reports, “and sometimes it’s difficult to handle them in the wind and weather.”

Bartlett has turned to islanders to pose for the figures in a number of his canvases. Paintings like *Manasseh*, *Going Out* and *Assumption*, all from 2001, feature individuals the artist has come to know during his island residency. The last named painting shows a young woman, Sarah, holding her son, Navon, the two of them seated in the Bartlett family punt, suspended above the sea.

As the painter tells it, Sarah had come over to Wheaton to pose, but when she and her son returned to Matinicus, the tide was out and the dock too high to climb. Using a winch, some island lobstermen lifted them up in the boat onto the dock. The painting, owned by the New York art dealer Alan Stone (a summer resident of Mount Desert Island), displays a wonderful balance, both in its composition but also in the way it walks the line between real and surreal.

Bartlett is open about the art-historical references found in his work, be it the echo of Homer’s *Fog Warning* (1892) in his painting *Lifeboat* (1998) or the nod to John Singleton Copley’s well-known *Watson and the Shark* (1778) in *Leviathan*. “I use all of art history as a starting point and try to build on top of it in a new visual language,” the painter notes. Other layers come into play—literary, psychological, social, personal, political—all of them affecting one’s personal experience of the painting.

“I’m as big an [Andrew] Wyeth fan as there could possibly be,” Bartlett avers. “He’s able to break through reality in the visual



The Good Old Days (2000)

experience and make it more than reality,” the admiring artist states. He likens Wyeth’s process of translating experience into art as a kind of transubstantiation. “He’s really processing his life,” says Bartlett; “He’s used all of his ability to bring it into the world, and it takes your breath away.”

Another important artist in Bartlett’s pantheon is Balthus, the Swiss painter renowned for his psychologically and sexually charged figurative paintings, whose work the artist first viewed at the Venice Biennale while on a William Emlen Cresson Traveling Scholarship from the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts in 1980. “There is something both old and new about his paintings,” Bartlett states, an observation that could be applied to his own creations.

When this writer suggested that the wild-eyed, prophet-like man holding a rusted gaff in the painting *Manasseh* recalled some of the figures in Rockwell Kent’s art (such as Ahab in the illustrations for *Moby Dick*), Bartlett expressed his admiration for the painter who created some of his greatest canvases on Monhegan nearly a hundred years ago. “One would love to have one’s paintings remind someone of Rockwell Kent’s,” he said with genuine pleasure.

Bartlett’s show at the P•P•O•W. Gallery in New York City last year featured a new batch of paintings related to Matinicus and Wheaton. *Crossroad* (2003) shows an island girl, Emily Murray, daughter of Matinicus islanders Paul and Eva Murray, bearing a pail

of water barefoot down the island road, the island church over her right shoulder. (The Murrays are among the 35 year-round islanders; Eva writes a column about life on Matinicus for the *Village Soup* newspaper.) “Emily stood out there in the road in the late afternoon sunlight for days while I drew here,” Bartlett recalls. “I loved the subtle little action of her bringing this water toward us, the sense of duty and the intentness of her step. There’s a wonderful measured quality that is very rare in a child like that,” the artist notes. He finished the painting in his studio on Wheaton.

Bartlett has painted several self-portraits on the island, including the humorous *Chef* (2003), which shows the painter dressed in a cook’s outfit, wearing a “cumulus cloud” hat, with a lobster and a steaming pot set on a table near the sea. Another self-portrait, *Exile* (2003), relates to what Bartlett sometimes feels living away from culture. “I love being one with the rhythms of nature, controlled by the tides, going to bed when the sun sets, and waking up really early when the lobstermen are setting out.”

To be in nature, Bartlett says, “is a constant teaching lesson.” When he is on the island, away from the distractions of a culture he often disdains, he taps into what he calls “a constant awakening state of contemplation.” The self-portrait *Exile* relates to being “in the world but not of it.”

The title of Bartlett’s last show in New York is a famous image from “Burnt Norton,” the first of T. S. Eliot’s *Four Quarters*: “the still point of the turning world.” Matinicus is that “still point” where one can almost sense the motion of the turning globe. On that “landfall” that Philip Booth writes of, “waver-ing more in time than distance,” Bartlett has found the material for art that is resonant with myth and redolent of island Maine.

Carl Little has written extensively on Maine island artists. His latest book is The Art of Monhegan Island (Down East Books).



All photographs courtesy of James Rockefeller Jr.

THE BEAR THAT CAME TO DINNER

JAMES ROCKEFELLER JR.

Take an island off the coast of Maine. Add a young man, his bride and a small bear. Knowing how islands are a world unto themselves, that bears will be bears, that a lover's mental processes don't march to your everyday drummer, and it would not be rubber-banding the imagination to think that here are the ingredients for a story.

The coming of the bear to a Penobscot Bay Island was circuitous, man-induced as it was, with love thrown in. I was younger then. Hair grew where it no longer does and newsprint could be read with the naked eye.

It came to pass that I was bequeathed a special corner of Vinalhaven when a remarkable person left this world far too suddenly for another. Her "Only House" sat on a promontory commanding Hurricane Sound, an inland sea set with little islands so perfectly positioned as to be worthy of the painter's brush.



On the island, encounters with wild creatures were common.

To the north away from the sea the forest of pointed spruce ringed a tiny glade of grass and hawkweed, one apple and a pear. The house, big as a ship's cabin, nestled against a granite ledge, while to the east the grass and hawkweed flowed around the well and low outcropping ledges were bordered with juniper, huckleberry and bay before they were stopped by the forest once again. When the lobster boats had gone to rest the only noise was the occasional rap of a woodpecker, the errant cry of a gull, the haunting melody of the white-throated sparrow. A three-mile path threaded through forest, swamp and alders to the nearest road. One was alone with nature, birdsong and the sea.

This was the setting. Now to the bride. I found her one evening at the end of a long sea voyage. She was sitting under a turf roof in a log cabin perched high on the side of a Norwegian Valley. Her hair was fair, her face strong and smooth and warm as the sea-washed, sun-bathed ledges fronting "The Only House." Her eyes bespoke a Viking heritage and suggested a familiarity with mountains, the woods and the cradling of children and animals alike.

It had been two long years and many sea miles since I had seen The Only House. Yet with that first glimpse of her I placed her there, irrefutable as the tide. Looking astern

these many years I still remember our first conversation. To explain my beard and tan I told of sailing through the South Pacific on a Friendship Sloop. Liv (meaning "life" in Norwegian) in turn recounted how she had lived for a year in the Marquesas, and how her old friend, the cannibal, would wistfully feel her forearm, remarking, "The forearm of a woman is the most tasty. Firm. Not too fat. Tender as suckling pig." She laughed at how his rheumy eyes would fill with wistfulness.

I told her then of The Only House and of Peter the Deer who lived with me one summer. How he had a cowlick behind his head where the fur came together from all directions. How he could rotate his ears almost 180 degrees. How he would stand like a ballerina on his rear legs to nibble my earlobe without touching another part of my body. How I loved that deer. Together we put new sills under The Only House. Peter was enchanted with the hammer.

He would bang it on the ground or chew on the wooden handle when not butting me from behind to gain my attention until I had to saw off his spiked horns from sheer distress. His favorite food was Quaker Oats, and he once went to jail.

It was Liv's turn. "We had a wonderful bear in Canada at Little Norway during the war."

Liv's bear was named Peck. He also liked Quaker Oats but never went to jail. We parted that evening, not knowing a bear was coming to Vinalhaven, but certain that other things no less momentous had been unleashed. I returned to the U.S. after a two-year absence, but the broad Atlantic was no barrier to my thoughts of a blue-eyed girl living in a distant valley, who loved bears.

From then on time alternately stood still or raced ahead as several reunitions and separations made us realize that together we were one, and alone, deer and bears did not have the same allure.

Thus it came to pass in the late spring of 1954 that a plea went out from The Only House. "Liv! Stop. You are sorely needed. Stop. Marriage set for June. Stop. Only House waiting."

And it came to pass that the reply came back and it was positive. My stars were now aligned, irrevocably pointing to a certain garbage dump in Canada where bears were known to bat around tin cans at dusk. A wedding present! I needed a gift suitable for a Viking Queen.

Swift as the hour, I bid good-bye to the red squirrel scolding from the spruce, untied the punt from the pulley line, and rowed toward the distant point, bear-bound.



Peter the Deer, who helped with construction projects.

It is true. Confronted by love, barriers topple. Three days later a young man presented himself at the U.S. customs on the Canadian border with a cage on the backseat, and was queried, "What have you to declare?"

"One small bear."

"Value?"

"Five dollars."

The grizzled eyebrows arched and the uniform retreated into its ledgered lair to open a bible of sorts. I waited, wondering where bears came in the international order of things—somewhere between baskets, brandy, and brassieres, perhaps.

Customs returned. "Where are you taking the bear?"

"Vinalhaven. An island off the Maine coast."

His face was as inscrutable as a lobsterman eyeing a summer person's yacht. "Is the bear for resale? Zoo? Animal farm?"

"No! He's a wedding present. I'm to be married in a month."

His mustache twitched. "Son, if that's the case, bears are duty-free. Good thing you didn't choose diamonds."

There was a snarl from the backseat, accompanied by the sound of claws against wire.

I called the bear Johnnie. He was not a cuddly teddy. His baby fur was matted and scraggly. His eyes were right out of the deep woods, and considering his market price of a dollar a pound, his value lay only in the eyes of his beholder. He clawed, snarled and growled all the way to The Only House. Crossing on the Vinalhaven ferry, matrons clutched their children and the natives dropped into a hunting crouch. But I was young, in my own special world, and rowing up Hurricane Sound with Johnnie in the cage was truly a blissful moment. Even Johnnie momentarily forgot his bearish tantrums at the introduction to a world of water, floating objects and screaming gulls. The wedding gift was in hand. Now all that was wanting was the bride.

Johnnie and I were thrown together like two people cast adrift in a dory. Once a week I'd row after supplies; otherwise, there were just the lobster boats, once in a while the herring fishermen and always the gulls. Something had to give, and it was Johnnie. Like Peter the deer he discovered Quaker Oats. I became Father Oats. He graduated from a cage to a leash, then to no restraints. Handled at first with gloves, he soon came to tolerate my touch and then to have his belly scratched. His hair turned black and shiny. His muzzle went from being pointed like a

coon's to more that of a black Lab turned up at the end. He would stand on his hind legs to look around, and in very little time I considered him an endearing personality worthy of my bride. He would lie on his back amidst the Indian paintbrushes, clasp an errant daisy in his paws, delicately dismember it petal by petal, humming the while. He liked to hide in a tree and pounce when I walked near. Swimming was also an adventure, but I never did get him to retrieve. What was his was Johnnie's and he would brook no interference. However, he did like people as long as "people" were I. He was basically a shy soul, but there lurked a jealous streak, as we shall see.

The bear was now in place, somewhat domesticated. The place was in place and the bridegroom was pacing back and forth along the water's edge awaiting an arrival message from across the sea. It came one day via peapod with old Maynard standing up rowing not more than four strokes to the minute, smoke erupting from his pipe like exhaust from a one-lunger. He handed over the telegram and waited. Telegrams didn't grow on Vinalhaven trees back then. "Finally comin', ain't she? 'Bout time, before you wear a groove in that rock. What you going to do with the *bar* while you go for her up New York?"



The Only House had room for two people. Three was an intrusion.

What was I going to do with the “bar”? You couldn’t park Johnnie at a kennel, even if there was one, and he was not a house pet welcomed by your everyday, animal-loving neighbor. There was only one option—Keith. Keith had the same shape as a bear, walked like a bear—the only difference being was his honey came in a bottle. He was a plumber, part-time lobsterman, bon vivant, philosopher and wit. Keith was inventive. He had the first answering machine on the island. Its message was succinct: “Keith Carver. State your business!”

Because he had the answering machine he could lay up in his camp between jobs on a little island in sight of where I stood, do a little lobstering, drink a few red ones (S.S. Pierce Red Label) and think about things. The timing was perfect. Keith needed a reprieve. The week before he had fallen out of his boat. No enemy of comfort, Keith had mounted a swiveling office chair in his outboard skiff so everything was to hand. He could lobster, take refreshment and think about things with a simple rotating motion. He must have been rotating too fast, or perhaps the weight of his thoughts toppled him, for over he went. His ample proportions didn’t allow for an easy reentry, so there he lay, spouting water, grasping the gunwale, hollering for help. It so happened Sheila Perkins, my nearest neighbor, was out for a row. A

wee slip of a girl, she was, however, a mariner to the bone and resourceful in emergencies.

Unable to reunite Keith with his office chair despite their combined efforts, she took some pot warp, lashed him alongside, started the outboard, and beached him out on Strauson’s Point. He surely needed to caretake a bear to restore his image. Plan in hand, I gave some Quaker Oats to Johnnie to keep him from following, grabbed a “Red One” and rowed down the bay to Cranberry. Three hours later the deal was struck. It would require six Red Ones, 12 cans of sardines in mustard sauce and half a case of beans. Keith loftily said he would supply the Quaker Oats and perhaps throw in a herring or two.

I rushed down to meet Liv in New York, and before the lines were hardly secured to the quay, hurried her out to the suburban Connecticut town where my parents lived. There was no time to shilly-shally about getting married, what with the bear on Cranberry with Keith. The evident distrust they had for each other from first sight had been palpable. We sprinted to the town office for the appropriate paperwork. Here the clerk delivered a bomb. “It requires five days, sir, from the time you apply until a license can be issued.”

Five-day waiting period! My wedding present might be in serious trouble, compromised, even lost. “There must be a way around this,” I pleaded. “No way can we wait five days.”

The wretch placidly sucked her pencil. “Legally, you can apply for a waiver. But a word of warning: Judge Hershberg doesn’t make exceptions.”

Warning or not, an appointment granted, we rushed home so I could put on my \$15 suit bought in Fiji, then stopped by a shoe store on the way to the courthouse. My mother had told me the Judge was “old school.” The shoes might counterbalance the beard. The desk behind which he sat was large, the platform high. The judge himself was small, elderly, with eyes infinitely wise in the ways of mankind. I remember my new shoes squeaking as I shifted nervously before the bench.

“I understand you request a waiver of the waiting period?”

“Yes, Your Honor.”

“Reason?”

The owlsh eyes were neither kind nor unkind.

“I have a bear in Maine,” came blurring out. “Wedding present for my wife.”

The more I said the worse it sounded. Hershberg’s eyes never wavered, never gave a sign as I poured out the problems of bear-keeping. When I had done he turned to Liv. “Miss,” he said ever so softly, “I understand you come from Norway. In that country are bears an accepted wedding present?”

My bride smiled that smile of hers that made one feel bright and tingly. “Yes, Your

Honor. And the fault is mine. I made the mistake of telling this man that next to him I loved bears best."

The gavel rose to shoulder height and crashed down with astonishing force. "First-of-a-kind deserves a waiver! Plea granted! Next!"

We were married and off to Maine before the ink congealed. The Kittery Bridge never looked better. However, my fears were confirmed when we hit Hurricane Sound. Johnnie had escaped his Alcatraz of Cranberry Island. A trail of herring led from Keith's bait barrel to the shore. Liv's comment held little comfort. "There is always method in a bear's behavior. He misses you. Perhaps he will not go far."

She was right. Johnnie had swum from Cranberry to the shelving beach on Strauson's Point where Sheila had grounded out Keith. An island being what it is, word had spread quicker than plague, and a search party discovered Johnnie in a nearby raspberry patch. For the last 24 hours the good citizens had him tethered to a tree. He was most happy to see me but his elation stopped short of Liv. He allowed himself to be ensconced in the bow of the punt by Father Oats and he was content to have Father Oats pull smartly up the bay toward The Only House, but he pointedly ignored the soothing little bear noises of proffered friendship from the blue-eyed girl sitting in the stern sheets.

Drawing near home I saw the Billings Brothers of Stonington had set their herring twine by the wharf. Their boat was moored nearby. They waved us over.

"Got Johnnie back, I see." They dug each other in the ribs, grinning at a dubious bear who tolerated them more than other folks as they smelled strongly of fish and had been known to toss a few his way.

"And you finally got the Mrs." They welcomed her in such a way I could see she was touched. "Heard you were comin', ma'am. Not much doing the last two days, so we cooked you up a little something for your first night."

Winnie disappeared below and then re-emerged supporting a large round chocolate cake with soft white icing. Liv accepted it with Scandinavian graciousness. Johnnie wrinkled his snout, and we made for shore, warm inside. It was wonderful walking up the path to The Only House with my bride exclaiming how everything was as I said it was and even better. Johnnie shot up the lone apple tree to survey his old kingdom. I warned Liv not to let him in the house, unattended, even if he might deign to go in with her. Last time I had allowed him in he had made a bear scratching post out of the little horsehair



Not all the local wildlife was ill-behaved.

couch on the first floor when my back was turned. Liv was right. Bears were lovable but definitely from the deep woods.

Looking up the path to her new home, Liv sensed the personality of the place. Originally built as a one-story office for the manager of the granite quarry, it had been moved twice before nestling next to the whale-shaped ledge. With yet a different owner it had been jacked up to allow for the keeping of goats and chickens on the first floor. The tiny kitchen, sitting room and bedroom on the second floor were reached by outside steps leading onto a porch from which in turn you entered the kitchen. There was room for two people. Three was an intrusion. The original front door in the sitting room opened to the sea and a 10-foot drop. On it was a brass nameplate saying "Belle McCann" if you took the trouble to lean a ladder against the house and go up to read it. Kerosene lights handled the utilities. Water was hand-carried from the well. Spoilables were kept in the spring. Liv wanted the story behind each piece of furniture, the pictures, the bric-a-brac collected from several lives. However, dusk was only an hour away and I wished to show my bride the wonders that lay outside before retiring within for the wedding supper complete with cake.

Ceremoniously, I placed the Billings Brothers' gift on the pine drop-leaf kitchen table beside the window opening onto the porch. It was more than just a cake, representing as it did our union, the start of a lifetime together, coupled with a special welcome from the island so dear to me.

Johnnie was out back on the grass pretending to investigate an Indian paintbrush as we descended from the porch. I called for him to follow, for it was fun to have a bear for company on a walk. He always noticed things

not readily apparent to the human eye. He loved a ramble along the water's edge or through the woods. However, unlike himself, this time he continued to investigate the paintbrush even though I knew he preferred daisies. Oh well, I thought, he is just thankful to be home.

Liv and I had a wonderful ramble, Johnnie or no. We sat on the deep moss in the forest, explored the back cove, climbed atop the mountainous ledge and looked down Hurricane Sound at the setting sun. Finally, the ever-increasing whine of mosquitoes drove us homeward.

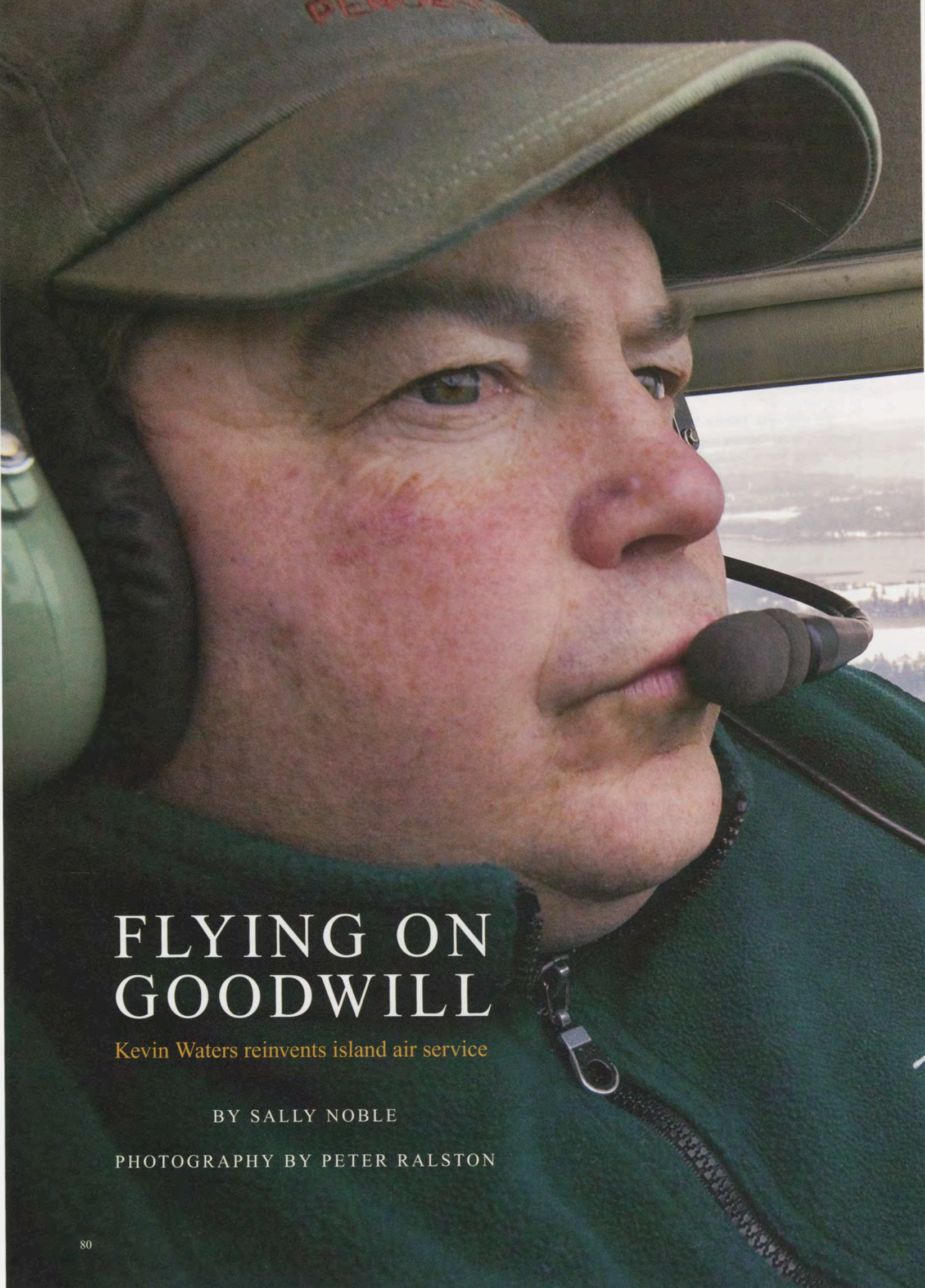
Arriving at The Only House, I called for Johnnie as we stopped at the well to pull up a bucket of water. But no black butterball came bounding to greet his Father Oats.

Concerned, we climbed to the porch and started for the door. Immediately our eyes were drawn to the kitchen window. A great hole was torn in the screen, framing the surface of the table upon which but an hour before the wedding cake had so tenderly been set. A great chunk of the cake had been torn away. What was left no longer had the contour or consistency of its birthright. Rushing in, we spotted sticky paw marks crossing into the sitting room and then disappearing into the tiny bedroom.

"Johnnie!" I called, but there was no snuffling reply. We tiptoed to the bedroom door. In the dim light the bridal bed appeared untouched. However, on second glance the desecration came into focus. In the center of the white counterpane loomed a brown and steaming mound worthy of a far larger bear than Johnnie. My face must have shown anger and shock for Liv took my hand and squeezed it. "Don't be angry," she said simply. "Johnnie was just being a bear."

The tide has come and gone for four decades since that wedding night. The Bear is gone to some distant forest. Liv is gone. But The Only House still stands, and the voices of our children and our children's children now compete with the gulls, the screech of the osprey, and the sea against the shore. With the passing of time, The Only House has become an elixir of the good and beautiful, the wistful and sad, solitude and partnerships. Each visit is a rediscovery, a looking back and a pondering as to what lies ahead. Not all of us need a bear. But we all need an Only House, no matter the shape or place.

Jim Rockefeller lives in Camden and considers The Only House his spiritual home.




FLYING ON GOODWILL


Kevin Waters reinvents island air service

BY SALLY NOBLE

PHOTOGRAPHY BY PETER RALSTON



Lifting over fields of snowy pine trees on a surprisingly balmy February day, the ice chunks floating off the coastline of Owl's Head look like wedding confetti, sprinkled in the sunny blue water of Penobscot Bay below. Often characterized as a tad high-strung—particularly while strapped into small aircraft flying off to unpaved landing strips—I find myself serenely flying the 10-minute puddle jump to Vinalhaven. Inches from me in this cockpit is my trusty pilot, Kevin Waters, a big bear of a man who exudes a huggable air of slow-and-steady reassurance—it wasn't jarring, for example, when, in his pre-liftoff safety drill, he had vaguely waved at the “regular Mae West” life jackets stuffed somewhere near my right knee: “If necessary, just take one out of the bag and throw it over your shoulders,” he instructed.

 P/N: 1213400-200
M/DATE 7889



Delivering the morning mail, North Haven. The cookies were a surprise present to Island Air.

Come to think of it, as pilot of this cramped Cessna 206 Stationair (capable of carrying 1,200 pounds of mail or five passengers carrying 300 pounds of luggage, but definitely not both), the lumbering Waters becomes rather graceful shortly after takeoff, ascending smoothly in a matter of minutes. Perhaps it's his short, declarative remarks that come through particularly loud and clear on my bulky headset, pinned to my head since takeoff. "That's Monhegan in the distance, looking like a whale," he calmly observes.

There's something sweet about a man who suddenly starts an airline in the dead of winter, with no appreciable assets other than an enormous amount of goodwill from the people he services. Together with three equal partners, all of whom agreed not to pay themselves salaries, Kevin Waters is the most visible face of Penobscot Island Air, the fledgling airline company now regularly shuttling mail, freight and passengers between Knox County Airport and the islands of Matinicus, Vinalhaven, North Haven, Swan's and Criehaven. When Roland Lussier, new owner of Maine Atlantic Aviation, abruptly suspended service last December 13, saying that flying freight and about 6,800 people on and off these islands had put his balance sheet \$100,000 in the red two years running,

Waters, his former general manager, leased a plane and began taking reservations from his cell phone. Then he went after and won a temporary, six-month mail contract from the U.S. Postal Service in Rockland. Contracts with UPS and Federal Express business followed shortly thereafter. A first-year's insurance premium of \$13,000 was paid up front to Aviation Insurance Agency of Bedford, Massachusetts, and the little airline's most visible start-up capital was a grateful donation of \$17,000 from the residents of Matinicus.

"I told my wife, 'We don't have a hangar, we don't own an airplane, but we have the support of the people of the islands,'" boasts Waters, proud of the community spirit keeping him aloft.

Matinicus, for one, had been outraged when its lifeline was suddenly cut. The two dozen individuals who live on this remote island, 22 miles out at sea, depend on air service for delivery of routine groceries, mail and prescription drugs. The state ferry only travels out there once a month, for about an hour, depending on the tide, from November through April. When Maine Atlantic suspended service right before the holidays, not only Christmas presents were endangered, but also milk and fresh vegetables from Shaw's

supermarket, delivery of silk for one woman's scarf business, several Social Security checks and a diabetic's medication.

At the request of Bob Hastings, CEO of the Rockland-Thomaston Area Chamber of Commerce and Peter Ralston, executive vice president of the Island Institute, Roland Lussier agreed to a temporary, 90-day resumption of Maine Atlantic's air service while interested stakeholders came together to resolve operation issues. A series of meetings was held at the Island Institute; island representatives, state and federal officials and economic development interests met to help create long-term solutions to fundamental problems.

"My only interest in this whole thing is that it be done well and reasonably," states Lussier flatly. "Without significant changes to the way island flying is done, the problems that are inherent to flying to the islands are not going to go away. For example, the North Haven Witherspoon strip remains 200 feet too short for landings during the busy summer season; the 1,700-foot airstrip on Vinalhaven loses about 43 days a year to mud, and there's a sense of entitlement to daily air service that exists with the 20-odd people who live on Matinicus year-round."

The town offices of Matinicus, Vinalhaven and North Haven responded decis-



Waters (center) with Matinicus residents Sari and Vance Bunker.

ively—each one voted, respectively, to give exclusive landing rights to Waters, and by mid-February Penobscot Island Air had already leased a second Cessna 206 Stationair. Front-desk man Jim Nichols was putting a fresh coat of white paint on the airline's just-rented trailer headquarters, while Richard Wright, responsible for training and logistics, was busy negotiating a small-business plan with Verizon for the phone line just laid in the muddy ground from the trailer to the parking lot—all of this action, mind you, within shouting distance of Maine Atlantic Aviation, a fixed-base operation currently focused on sale of aviation fuel, aircraft maintenance and flight instruction. Don Campbell, on-ground logistics partner, was pacing the day I saw him; simply itching for imminent FAA approval of Penobscot's new flight manuals. He hoped to soon share some of Kevin's pilot responsibilities. A longtime pilot himself, Campbell sensed the air pressure changes indicative of an impending northeaster, particularly in his right ear.

Not just any seasoned pilot can land uneventfully on the airstrips on the islands of Penobscot Bay. Waters is proud of the fact that his aircraft is specifically rigged with Alaska modifications, meaning big tires and dual-puck brakes. A plane typically accustomed to landing on a long, smooth, paved runway would take a beating at any of the airstrips on Waters's route.

Dick Witherspoon, owner of a private grass landing strip on North Haven, well remembers the day, some four years ago, when a pilot came in too fast, hit the brakes and rolled off the end of the runway: his plane crossed the road, ending up in a field with its

nose stuck in the mud. To get this disaster off the island, the plane's wings were dismantled by mechanics and ferried back to Rockland by the ISLAND TRANSPORTER.

On North Haven, strike up a conversation about island air service these days and you immediately hit controversy over property rights. No one has yet figured out a way to lengthen the privately owned Witherspoon airstrip by 200 feet so planes meet insurance standards during the lucrative summer market. The Meigs family, which owns the adjacent property, remains steadfast in its refusal to allow small aircraft to potentially land so close to their summer residence. In the event of an emergency and during off-season months, Waters has permission to land on the 3,000-foot Watson strip, but it reverts to completely private use during the summer months,

which are the most lucrative time to be flying in passengers.

Ralston of the Island Institute explains that resolution of this ongoing problem is critical to the survival of any island commuter service, whoever the owner. "Just as Vinalhaven has done its strategic planning and soul searching and stepped up to the plate to ensure that Penobscot Island Air has every advantage possible as a new entity, it's time for the residents and greater community of North Haven to step up to the plate," he argues.

Every season brings new challenges to flying freight and passengers. On a warm, humid summer day, Waters typically worries about air density altitude, or maybe an early-morning fog that affects visibility but just might dissipate as the

day wears on. Dew on a grass strip anytime before 8:30 feels like ice, even to a plane with Alaska modifications. In the fall, weather changes come through quickly—a cold front rolls in with crosswinds, the day becomes blustery. Come winter, snowy ice on the runways must be diligently plowed. "Six inches of snow may not be a drag for a car, but for a plane, six inches of wet snow can be a lot of pressure on nose gear," notes Waters, who has by this time landed on Vinalhaven's 1,700-foot, stone-dust, crushed-rock strip. After a simple, swift landing, we sit still awhile, heads off.

After Maine Atlantic stopped serving this island, the town of Vinalhaven, along with those on Matinicus and North Haven, voted to give Waters exclusive landing rights. But in the case of Vinalhaven, the town also agreed to assume responsibility for maintenance. The community of 1,200 year-round residents now

RAPID SERVICE

"I had just purchased one of the new computer-based, chart-navigation systems for my boat and had a few problems with the flat-screen monitor for it," recalls Clayton Philbrook, a lobsterman on Matinicus. "So I called my wife, Wanda, on the VHF and told her to call the marine electronics shop where I had bought the computer and tell them to deliver me a new monitor to the airport, ASAP. When I got in from haul, the new monitor had been delivered to my wife and was waiting for me. Half an hour later, it was installed and the old one was ready to ship back to the mainland, where it was found to have a manufacturing defect—no charge for the new one and only \$8 for shipping the new one to me by what was then Telford Aviation, managed by Kevin [Waters], with no time lost."



Running an airline doesn't excuse Waters from the maintenance chores.

keeps a keen eye on 30-odd reflectors made of reflective tape, mounted on PVC piping lined up neatly 100 feet apart down the runway. The electricity powering Vinalhaven runs from a deteriorating underwater cable to the mainland, Waters informs me, and the night lights frequently fail, making these reflectors crucial to successful nighttime medical evacuations. On this unexpectedly warm day, an orange windsock in the distance indicates direction of a wind that Waters interprets to be light and variable—then he pauses to make mental note of puddles on the runway, because shortly after sunset he expects them to freeze, becoming treacherous.

Vinalhaven relies on whoever's flying island air service to provide anywhere from 60 to 65 emergency medical evacuations a year, according to Dinah Moyer, executive director of Island Community Medical Services. Penobscot Island Air's new rates are \$500 for a day flight, \$600 after dark, billable to most insurance companies. All sorts of safety concerns crop up after nightfall that any bush pilot doing a rescue operation must understand. Waters knows to inquire in advance about wandering deer and the random island teenager doing doughnuts on a dark, desolate runway.

In the true spirit of a community that pulls together in any crisis, Vinalhaven's fire department has been known to drive over and shine lights on the runway when the power fails—old-fashioned, but apparently effective in a pinch. Recently, when a 97-year-old island resident was diagnosed with pneumonia, within minutes her doctor arranged for

her to be transported to the mainland by Waters for admission to Pen Bay Medical Center; the woman was also blind and justifiably anxious, so Moyer flew to the mainland with her and the EMT, where she was transferred to the waiting Rockland Ambulance.

"A patient is often sent over to the mainland within 60 minutes of the call first coming in to Knox Dispatch, which is extraordinary considering all the coordination that is required," says Moyer.

With Waters it's not business, it's personal: "Kevin will do things like wear a pager, get hauled out of a wedding or a concert or something on the mainland to respond to a medical call on the island, without knowing anything about the call, if it's serious or not," says Eva Murray, town manager on Matinicus. "He comes out some years to the Matinicus Town Meeting, which is held on a Saturday night in mud season, and he gets very emotional trying to explain how he wants to provide better customer service. He doesn't act like it's just a job, just a business."

My return flight with Waters from Vinalhaven to Owl's Head runs about 10 minutes, far less time than the one-hour-and-fifteen-minute ferry that shuttles three times a day, round trip. After all this adventure, I find landing back on Runway 3-21 to be quite luxurious. Recently renovated for \$2.3 million, Runway 3-21 is the perfect example of the interdependence that exists between this small airport in Owl's Head and the islands of Penobscot Bay. When Maine Atlantic stopped island service on December 13, everyone with a vested interest in Knox County Airport

received something of a wake-up call. Only eligible to apply for up to \$1 million a year in FAA funds if the airport meets a prerequisite of handling 10,000 enplanements a year (my little trip counted as two enplanements, by the way), Knox County Airport has been relying on federal money from the FAA's Airport Improvement Program (AIP) since 1971, according to Jeff Northgraves, interim manager. And thanks to a new rule passed by Congress in June 2004, even more federal funding has become available to Knox County. "Part 139 has changed the way airports are governed, by lifting restriction to monies available only to airports with regularly scheduled commercial aircraft carrying a minimum of 31 passengers," explains Northgraves. "The National Traffic Air Safety Board had been pushing for this legislation to include smaller airports, maintaining that travelers should enjoy the same safety standards, wherever they fly."

THE BOTTOM LINE

Should those warm-hearted fellows with their leased Cessna, rented trailer headquarters and no hangar (yet)—the guys who just won the contracts to haul mail, Fed Ex, UPS and groceries to the islands—fail to get their operation off the ground, the airport stands to lose millions in federal grants. While ostensibly remaining impartial, Knox County Airport has waived its minimum standards for six months, while Waters finds hangar space—technically he should have .25 acres and 2,000 square feet of hangar space before taking reservations,



The crew, left to right: Don Campbell, Rich Wright, Jim Nichols, Kevin Waters.

but the airport decided to charge him only 13 cents per square foot for the trailer he's just rented, which comes out to be \$50 a month. Also, rather than charge Waters the usual 2-and-a-half percent of his gross to the county in fees, the county commissioners agreed to drop the rate to 1-and-three-fourths, with a plan to pay the difference in the future. "We're not holding him to the letter of our local documents, because they're under revision," explains Northgraves. "It just makes sense and gives me the time to rewrite the universal standards, which I was planning to do anyway, to open up the airport to other possibilities, as well."

A new federal grant program, the Small Community Air Service Development Program (SCASDP), could be used to improve island airports, and assuming it gets funded this year for an anticipated \$20 to \$35 million, Knox County has offered to work with the island communities to apply for 2006 grants—legally, the airport cannot apply directly for funding to improve the islands' private airstrips.

Several years ago, several officials from the Maine Department of Transportation flew to the islands to check out these runways. Marjorie Stratton, town manager on Vinalhaven, keeps a copy of David Nelson's 2002 report in her desk. In 2002, the state engineer found that the "runway was too narrow," "there were drainage problems" and that "trees and bushes create obstructions to the runway." Disappointedly, Stratton recalls a \$200,000 bond issue that might have funded transportation improvements to the islands of Vinalhaven and Matinicus, but that never made it out of the legislature.

"What really should happen on Vinalhaven is the height of the runway should come up about seven inches," fumes Waters—this being one topic that ruffles his easygoing feathers. "Right now the runway is lower than the sides, so when it rains, the whole runway acts like a ditch."

Furthermore, whenever it rains on Matinicus, it takes people with shovels, pickaxes and rakes to unclog the culverts and divert the little rivers that run on the airstrip, which is privately owned by actress Victoria

Holt. Unresolved maintenance issues like these, along with long-term capital concerns, are earnestly discussed by islanders now that everyone has suffered a substantial jolt in reality. Waters has repeatedly expressed confidence that the island communities will "step up to the plate" to provide what he needs. Bob Hastings of the Rockland-Thomaston Chamber of Commerce calls Penobscot Island Air a "glorified bush operator who definitely seems to have market support." The Island Institute's Ralston would agree: "Kevin Waters earned the respect of the islanders the hard way—by showing up and being part of the community."

"The islands were presented a clear and present danger to their lifeline," continues Ralston. "There must be heart and spirit in safely and faithfully servicing these islands—and that pretty much defines Kevin."

A Portland-based freelance writer, Sally Noble has written numerous stories about island air service and other topics for *The Working Waterfront*.

LIKE NOWHERE ELSE WE'VE BEEN

Europeans first visited the Georges Islands four centuries ago;
what they saw then is different now—but some things haven't changed

BY PHILIP CONKLING

PHOTOGRAPHY BY PETER RALSTON

On Easter Sunday in 1605, Captain George Waymouth and a complement of 28 men including the “gentleman” James Rosier, put to sea from Dartmouth, England, on a voyage of discovery to America. Rosier’s remarkable chronicle of Waymouth’s exploration of mid-coast Maine and its islands, published soon after their return in a booklet titled “A True Relation,” provides richly detailed descriptions of the ecology of the Gulf of Maine, its islands, coast and rivers along with descriptions of Native Americans.

At least a dozen other accounts of early English and French visits to the northeastern region of North America survive, including

Gosnold’s of 1602, Pring’s of 1603, Champlain’s of 1604 and Captain John Smith’s of 1614. But none are as comprehensive as Rosier’s. None provide such compelling descriptions of the natural history of the region, nor paint as sympathetic a portrait of the Native Americans—even though the Waymouth expedition kidnapped five Abenaki men shortly before it departed. Finally, none of the other accounts is as lyrically written: 400 years later, its vivid prose still makes for lively reading.

A granite cross on Allen Island marks the site of the first Anglican communion in the New World. It was erected a century ago.



1905

WAYNELL

1905





Perhaps 20 huge, ancient yellow birches are what remain of Allen's original forest. To Rosier, the trees he saw in 1605 were "very great and good."

Rosier's observations are the single best source of firsthand information on forest, wildlife and marine ecology of the Maine coast before European colonization. As such, Rosier's "A True Relation" provides a rare opportunity to view what species of birds and animals lived in these forests and what fish, shellfish and marine mammals swam in the pre-colonial sea. In this sense, "A True Relation" provides an invaluable measuring stick to gauge the changes in Maine's coastal ecology after European colonization began transforming its land and seascapes.

RESEARCH PLOTS

My own window on the importance of "A True Relation" opened in 1979 with an innocent transect across the southern part of Allen Island, six miles off Port Clyde. I had been hired by the U.S. Forest Service to collect baseline ecological data on islands off the Maine coast.

The leader of this project, Ray Leonard, was a grizzled Forest Service veteran with a love of sailing and his own 32-foot, cutter-rigged research vessel, SATORI, which was

much better appointed than a tent for supporting us in the field. Ray hired me because, as staff naturalist to the Hurricane Island Outward Bound School, I had been compiling a natural history guide to the 200 islands the school had permission to use as part of its educational programs. He wanted me to help him locate suitable islands for long-term research plots.

I had already explored the shores of 450-acre Allen Island since it was across the way from Burnt Island, where Outward Bound had a seasonal base. But I had never had time to venture into its interior when Ray and I decided Allen might be a suitable place to establish long-term forest plots. We anchored SATORI off the sandy beach between Burnt and Little Burnt Islands in a little cove that provides a bit of a lee there.

We beached Ray's dinghy in a narrow, rocky cove on the southeastern coast of Allen and scrambled up the slippery rocks. Almost as soon as we landed and ducked into the interior of Allen's remote southern end, we had a sense that we had found what we were looking for: a largely undisturbed forest assemblage.

The soil was springy underfoot with deep layers of decayed organic material from fallen trees that had moldered away. The wood fern beds were luxuriant and the white and red spruce trees were tall and stately. Except for old wind-thrown trees, there were no stumps—no sign of tree cutting was evident anywhere. Most importantly, there were a few scattered yellow birch trees—a species indicative of an old-growth forest—rather than the more characteristic white birch trees that colonize periodically disturbed areas on Maine islands.

When we crested the height of land along the spine of Allen's south end and headed to the far shore, we suddenly saw them, in a protected shallow ravine amid scattered old-growth red spruce: a dozen or so mammoth yellow birch trees, not toweringly tall, but nevertheless immense. Their gnarled trunks were between four and five feet in diameter at breast height, and their spreading branches gave them a drip line some 150 feet in diameter. The whole grove was not more than 20 acres in size. We had stumbled into a small piece of the forest primeval.

We knew this was the island where Waymouth and Rosier had landed in 1605. Later, when we began reading Rosier's descriptions, we immediately knew we had an incomparable view into how Maine's island ecology had changed over time. A journal entry from that visit tried to capture our sense of awe:

June 5, 1979

We pressed on further toward the wild south end and find huge fern glades, acres in extent, and looked back at our footpaths, which made little wakes in the pale green sea of waist-high ferns. Then we stumbled downhill into a grove of the most majestic trees I'd ever seen in my life. Huge craggy yellow birches 4 or 5 feet across in diameter spread up and down the slope. Massive drooping boughs hold up immense green crowns that grow into the light of spaces where 200-year-old spruce have fallen by the wayside. Perhaps 20 of these trees are scattered in among old spruce over the rolling 5-acre slope, but it's enough of a piece of original island forest to be like finding a treasure chest. Like time travel, it's a dream come true.

Rosier's "A True Relation" offered tantalizing bits of additional information and clues about precisely where the Waymouth expedition went as it explored the islands and mainland. We could not help but begin to make our own notes about which of Rosier's descriptions fit with our knowledge of particular local places.

Waymouth's voyage across the North Atlantic in ARCHANGEL lasted six weeks, during which the ship and crew constantly battled southerly winds that drove them north of their planned course along the 40th parallel. They made a landfall off of what was likely the outer shore of Cape Cod, perhaps the high sandy cliffs of Truro, but soundings proved these waters to be treacherously shallow, so they stood off from the land for another day trying again to make headway to the south. Finally, "in regard of our great want of water and wood (which was now spent), we much desired land, and therefore sought for it, where the wind would best suffer us to refresh ourselves."

During the next day they crossed the Gulf of Maine. But with "the sea high, and near night," they stood off until two o'clock the next morning. Then, standing in again, they sighted "a meane high land, it being but an Iland of some six miles in compasse" that

would prove to be Monhegan. There they took on wood and water, but their ship "rode too much open to the sea and winds," so they decided to search for a more secure anchorage. They "came along to the other islands more adjoining to the main, and in the rode directly with the mountains, about three leagues from the first island where we had anchored." This description fits well with anyone who has sailed from Monhegan toward the mainland through the broad sea channel marked by the southerly headlands of Allen and Burnt Islands, where the Camden Hills are neatly framed on the horizon in the distance.

After anchoring Waymouth went ashore, landing, it would appear, on the shores of Allen. Rosier also described "a little island adjoining," which would fit with the description of Benner Island a quarter of a mile away. The following day they donned their armor and with "fourteen shot and pikes we marched about and through part of two of the islands, the bigger of which we judged to be four or five miles in compass and a mile broad." The perimeter of Allen Island is actually 4.5 miles and about three-quarters of a mile in breadth at its widest point.

Ray Leonard and I used Rosier's account and began matching up his descriptions of the islands with what we knew of the anchorages, shores and forests of the Georges Islands region from our navigational charts. We knew we had found a trove of firsthand documentary evidence that could complement our tree cores, soil pits and maps.

"VERY GREAT AND GOOD"

After marching through and around the interior of Allen and Benner Islands, Rosier lists the trees they found there. Allen and Benner's trees included "Birch very tall and great, Beech, Ash, Maple, Spruce, Cherry-tree, Yew, Oke very great and good," and the "Firre-tree out of which issueth turpentine in so marvelous plenty and so sweet as our Surgeon and others affirmed they never saw so good in England."

Although Rosier does not give us a specific description of the yellow birch we found on the southern end of Allen, the giant trees we found in 1978 were definitely "very great and good." Rosier notes that the birch they observed are "very tall and great," but does not distinguish between white birch and yellow birch, both of which are commonly found in old-growth forests of Maine.

It seems likely that the "firre" Rosier describes was in fact pine, and almost certainly the stately white pine rather than balsam fir. Rosier records that "we pulled off much

gum congealed on the outside of the bark which smelled like Frankincense. This would be a great benefit for making tar and pitch." Foresters know that white pine is extremely resinous, substantially more so than balsam fir, and often exudes its pitch from wounds or openings in its bark—significant to sea captains like Waymouth since the Royal Navy was constantly on the lookout for supplies of naval stores to reduce wood rot aboard its ships. Balsam fir has small and insubstantial pitch pockets in its bark, but these do not generally form gum deposits like those on white pine.

"Oke," which Rosier variously describes as both "very great and good" and "of an excellent grain, straight and great timber," was, it seemed to us, most likely red oak, although occasionally white oak might have been found on the islands. It was clear to us that Rosier's mention of "Beech" was American beech, with which the British would be familiar from its similar English relative. "Ash" is also undoubtedly the white ash, which is the same genus of tree that the English had used for centuries to make their longbows.

The "maple" Rosier described from Allen and Benner, but not Monhegan, would have likely been the red maple rather than sugar or rock maple that requires deep, nutrient-rich soils not present on Maine islands.

The spruce that Rosier lists on both Allen and Burnt Islands would likely have been representatives of both red and white spruce that Ray and I found to be characteristic of old-growth island spruce forests today.

Today the species diversity on Monhegan and Allen is considerably less than described by Rosier. Monhegan's forests are dominated by spruce. Monhegan's Cathedral Woods is a stand of relatively old-growth red spruce in the central interior of the island that dates from approximately the end of the 19th century. With the exception of a few scattered individual trees, the white pines ("firre") that Rosier describes as a dominant feature of Monhegan's shorelines are notably absent. Missing also are Monhegan's beech and oak trees along the shore. Likewise within the present-day forests of Allen Island, it is rare to find oak, beech, white pine or ash. There are a few red maples, but not many on Allen. Ray and I found none on Benner Island.

There is a straightforward explanation for the disappearance of tree species from the islands' forests: Maine's island forests were repeatedly and heavily cut from the 18th century onward. Island forests were more easily accessible to coastwise trading vessels than almost any other forests of the region, and as such were more frequently and more heavily cut than other forests of the region.



"Then, standing in again, they sighted 'a meane high land, it being but an Iland of some six miles in compasse' that would prove to be Monhegan."

"FOWLES"

Rosier's first specific mention of the bird life on their voyage occurs the moment they step ashore on Allen Island, presumably at North Beach. There, he writes, were "very great egg shells bigger than goose eggs." Some have surmised these eggs to have been from the great auk. But as Ralph Palmer, the most careful student of the history of Maine birds, points out, two other Maine species, cranes and swans, also lay eggs larger than a goose, and Rosier lists both cranes and swans. Rosier also mentions that "on the shore of the little island adjoining," that is, Benner Island, "we spied cranes stalking on the shore . . . where we after saw they used to breed." Rosier clearly distinguishes between cranes and herons (which he called by their English common name, *Hernshaw*) in the list of "fowles" from his endnote, so it does not seem likely he confused these two species.

Regardless, Rosier's mention of cranes is startling. Rosier and Waymouth would have been familiar with cranes from a closely related species in Europe. But which crane did they observe on Benner Island's shore—the spectacular whooping crane or the smaller sandhill crane?

Although great auks, which Rosier called penguins, have the sad distinction of being the first species to have gone extinct in the New World, primarily on account of their flightlessness, they would likely have nested on the outermost, predator-free islands where puffins, razorbills and other members of the alcid family also nested. Near Allen those islands are Eastern Egg, Western Egg (where both Indians and early colonists collected seabird eggs, hence their name) and Shark Island. Great auks were a favorite food of the Indians and their bones appear in archaeological deposits.

Rosier also lists "Sharks" in his inventory of "fowles" they saw. Shark Island, off Allen's southwest headland, was undoubtedly named after the English terms for cormorant—either a "sharke" or "shape."

Compared with Rosier's descriptions and notes of the "fowles" they definitively observed or noted as occurring in the mid-coast Maine region in 1605, a significant number of species are missing today. The great auk is extinct throughout its range, the last sighting having occurred on an island off Iceland in 1865. The passenger pigeon is likewise extinct. The whooping crane was nearly extinct throughout its range as recently as two decades ago, its worldwide population having

been reduced to some 50 individuals. But through heroic preservation efforts, the whooping crane has made a comeback from the brink, although it is highly unlikely we will ever again see it along the Maine coast.

The good news is that most of the remaining species mentioned by Rosier are present in numbers that may approximate their pre-settlement numbers. This happy circumstance is a result of more than a century of strict migratory and nesting bird protection laws that began, in part, with protection efforts initiated on tern nesting islands off mid-coast Maine in the late 1890s.

"SO PLENTIFUL AND SO GREAT"

As the *ARCHANGEL* crossed into the Gulf of Maine, Rosier provides an interesting note on what may be the first European description of the Gulf Stream that swirls by the entrance of the Gulf of Maine. "We came to a riplin, which we discerned to head our ship, which is a breach of water caused either by a fall, or by some meeting of currents, which we judged this to be; for the weather being very fair, and a small gale of wind, we sounded and found no ground in a hundred fathoms."



Courtesy of Frederic F. Flach, M.D., K.C.H.S.

"Captain George Waymouth on the Georges River" by N.C. Wyeth, 1938

As soon as the expedition had anchored at Monhegan, Rosier remarks excitedly on the astounding bounty of the waters. "While we were ashore, our men aboard with a few hooks got above thirty great Cods and Hadocks, which gave us a taste of the great plenty of fish which we found afterward wherever we went upon this coast."

Two days later, safely anchored off Allen Island, Rosier writes that a small fishing party went out "about a mile from our ship, and in small time with two or three hooks was fished for our whole company three days, with great Cod, Haddock, and Thorneback."

In their second attempt at fishing, Rosier relates, "And towards night we drew with a small net of twenty fathoms very nigh the shore: we got about thirty very good and great lobsters." A few weeks later, Rosier relates that at Allen Island "our men took Cod and Haddock by our ship side, and lobsters very great: which before we had not tried."

These observations are highly significant: many fishermen, including most of the lobstermen who fish the waters around Allen and Benner today, believe that the present abundance of lobsters in inshore waters is a result of the absence of cod which can be significant

predators of small lobsters. But Rosier's account clearly indicates that large cod and large lobsters occupied the same waters at the same place in abundant numbers. Cod and lobsters co-evolved with each other in the Gulf of Maine, and it seems unreasonable to conclude that an abundance of cod cannot also coexist with an abundance of lobsters.

As Waymouth and Rosier depart from Allen Island after their month-long visit and begin their voyage home, they have one last opportunity to experience the bounty of the waters of the Gulf of Maine. Two days later, not 30 leagues (60 miles) from land, they

suddenly find themselves in 24 fathoms. "Wherefore our sails being down, Thomas King boatswain, presently cast out a hook, and before he judged it at ground, was fished and hauled up an exceeding great and well fed Cod: then we were cast out 3 or 4 more, and fish so plentiful and so great . . . we were so delighted to see them . . . All were generally very great, some measured to be five foot long, and three foot about." The fishermen at Allen Island believe that Waymouth had found and fished on Jeffrey's Ledge, where several of them also fish in the spring of the year. Jeffrey's Ledge is about 90 miles southeast of Allen Island.

The fishing was so extraordinary on this offshore bank, Rosier observes, that it "should be alone sufficient cause to draw men again." Rosier cannot help himself, but to let his prose now reach the superlative description: "To amplify with words, were to add light to the sun: for every everyone in the ship could easily account this present commodity [since] in a short voyage with few good fishers to make more profitable return from hence than from Newfoundland: the fish being so much greater and better fed, and abundant with train [oil]."

Rosier devotes his last words in "A True Relation" to the Abenaki "manner of killing a whale." Perhaps impressed with the audacity of the Abenaki hunting techniques, he describes the whale hunt in detail: "They go in company of their King with a multitude of their boats, and strike him of a bone made in fashion of a harping iron fastened to a rope, which they make great and strong of the bark of trees." After the whale is struck, "then all their boats come about him, and as he riseth above water, with their arrows they shoot him to death."

EXTINCTION AND RECOVERY

Of all of the ecological notes that Rosier provides, perhaps none are so stunning as the changes that have occurred to the marine environment. The northern right whale is today the most endangered of all the great whales in the United States. Rosier's description of the "great cods and hadocks" they caught with a few hooks off Monhegan and "which we found afterward wheresoever we went upon the coast," are now all sadly depleted. Monhegan's groundfish populations now lack any recognizable relation to the description Rosier provided, in terms of both abundance and size.

As for the remainder of Rosier's richly described bestiary, we are missing the passen-

ger pigeon, the sea mink and the great auk, all three of which have disappeared forever into the ultimate ecological nightmare of extinction.

Yet the remaining plant and animal species are still present along the islands and most of the coast of Maine. Several have recovered from the brink of extinction, either locally or throughout their range. The recoveries include bald eagles, now regularly seen over Allen Island where they had been absent for over a half-century, and eiders, reduced to three nesting pairs on the coast of Maine by 1903. Even the cod, haddock and flounder that have so largely disappeared from their inshore haunts and spawning grounds for upwards of half a century have begun to show the faintest signs of recovery.

Every time I return to the yellow birch grove on Allen Island and listen to a smoky southwest wind begin to build offshore and to make its restless passage through the giant branches overhead, I feel as if I have stepped back into Rosier's time, and I believe Rosier would not be dissatisfied by our stewardship.

From a journal entry, reconstructed from notes taken on the day we found those giant yellow birch:

June 5, 1979

It is places like this where men in armor, glinting in sweat, first met men covered with seal hides, the fur turned in; where no one felled the trees in big piles and set the pyre aflame for thin pasturage; where deer have tugged at green growth and huddled down to fawn; where hurt hawks have perched and waited out the long weeks for a broken wing to heal. This is where time passes in measurements not of our making; where an epoch closes as one of these old monarchs falls limb by limb or in one thundering gale of a crash that no one hears. And nothing changes because these great birches make in their own moldering wood a perfect seedbed for the tiny winged seeds of their own kind from which a new monarch will grow and slowly cast its own deep shade over these glades. Whatever has happened here, or not happened, in ecological time, it's like nowhere else we've been.

Philip Conkling is president of the Island Institute.

THE ISLAND AS METAPHOR, FROM COSMOS TO EGO

Islands of the Mind: How the Human Imagination Created the Atlantic World

By John Gillis

New York, Palgrave-Macmillan, 2004

217 pp., \$26.95

REVIEWED BY
PHILIP CONKLING

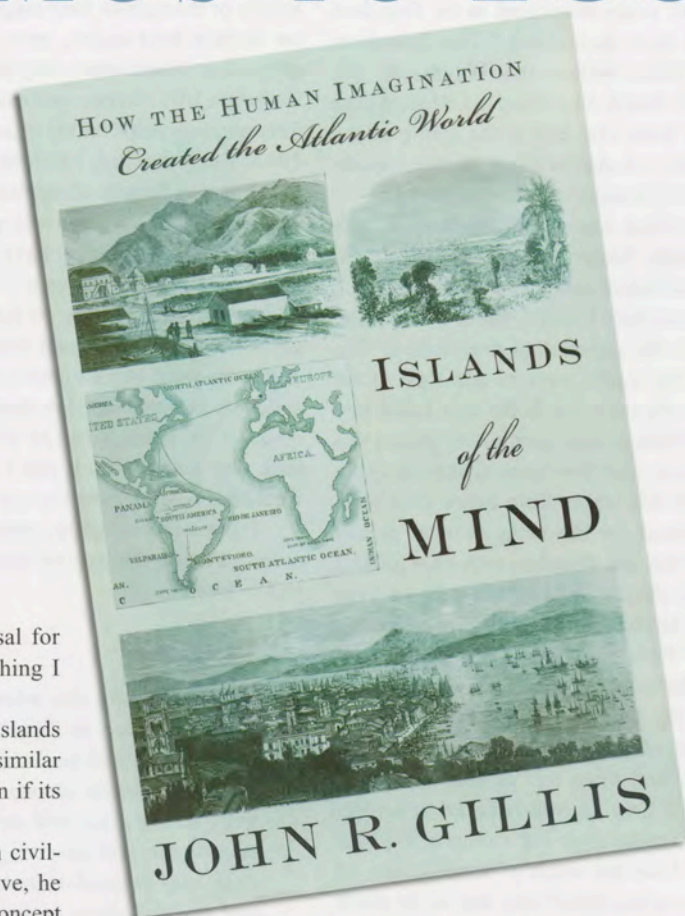
When I first approached a publisher with my proposal for *Islands in Time*, he told me it looked like “everything I never wanted to know about Maine’s islands.”

When you first consider John Gillis’s remarkable book on islands in the Western imagination, you may be forgiven if you have a similar reaction. But press on; this is an intensely interesting book, even if its historical sweep might seem initially daunting.

Gillis takes the reader through the entire history of Western civilization through an island lens. Through his time-travel narrative, he takes on a tour-de-force time-space voyage to explain how the concept of islands infused Greeks, Romans, medieval Christian monks, Age of Discovery explorers, Enlightenment utopians, Victorian novelists and naturalists, rusticators and post-industrial summer people’s imaginations. This book is the ultimate effort to explore why islands have held such a powerful place in our minds and how those images have changed time and again to reveal the depths of human consciousness.

Here are a few samples of the sweep of Gillis’s thesis on the centrality of islands in Western thought: “Islands are among features of the landscape that are indispensable to Western thought processes. Along with mountains, seas and rivers, islands provide metaphors that allow us to give shape to a world . . . Islands evoke a greater range of emotions than any other land form. We project onto them our most intense desires, but they are also the locus of our greatest fears.” And “The island of the mind is not just an object of passive contemplation. It has been an incentive to action, an agent of history.”

This can be pretty heady stuff. But Gillis is able to lighten things up along the way by reminding us that ‘islomania,’ a word coined by the novelist and traveler Lawrence Durrell during his residency on the isle of Rhodes after World War II, is most common among those who seldom, if ever, reside on islands. Islanders, ironically, rarely suffer from islomania—it’s the rest of us who do.



Gillis begins his island time-travel with the ancient Greek and Roman philosophers. Enamored of the stability and civility of small city-states, they mostly viewed islands as places where their heroes shed their mortal coils, often to become gods and goddesses. But the Greeks also used the idea of islands in their stories and myths as metaphorical warnings to those who wanted to push beyond the boundaries of the small city-states. “The Romans, like the Greeks, considered the city as the source of all order; barren untamed places such as uninhabited islands were associated with barbarism; remote areas were strange and unappealing; they did not seek wilderness.” Plato invented a mythical island, Atlantis, which had in the distant past disappeared into the sea because of a devastating flood (a tsunami?) after it became too large and commercial for its own good.

Another Greek, Pythias, coined the term “Ultima Thule” after voyaging in the fourth century B.C. beyond the Mediterranean as far as the British Isles—the “tin isles,” into the Baltic. Pythias may have even visited Iceland. He used the description Ultima Thule, “furthest islands,” to describe a place as remote as the mind could conjure and, according to Gillis, forever married the concept of the remote and unknown to the idea of islands that has haunted Western imagination ever since.

Gillis ties the concept of the “ultimate” place to the early Christian search for spiritual transcendence. The concept of spiritual transcendence through sensory deprivation was originally grounded in desert landscapes—Moses led the Jews across the desert to the Promised Land; John the Baptist wandered in the desert wilderness in search of salvation. But Gillis shows that medieval monks, especially Irish monks, lacked a desert, and instead sought out remote, barren and austere islands as the place most likely to meet God. “The equation of the spiritual quest with a voyage offshore would motivate exploration for centuries thereafter.”

During the fifth and sixth centuries, Gillis tells us that these Irish monks “led the way in the initial settlement of North Atlantic Islands” including the Hebrides off Scotland, the Faeroe Islands to the north and ultimately Iceland. Many of these monastic island communities ultimately became powerful and wealthy, and when the Vikings came looking for targets to plunder beginning in the eighth century, they focused on holy islands rather than the impoverished mainland.

Even though the holy islands offshore were obliterated by Viking raiders, the western religious imagination continued to be fired by the idea of making a passage, in both literal and figurative senses, to a new world. Crossing this threshold to salvation always involved confronting supernatural forces, like Christ and his disciples on troubled waters of the Sea of Galilee before entering the Promised Land. The most celebrated of such stories was the Voyage of Saint Brendan, which had gained a powerful foothold in the Western imagination by the tenth century. Gillis tells us that “what Brendan’s story lacked in geographical detail, it more than made up for in its power to evoke that strange mixture of pagan and Christian beliefs that constituted the worldview of the Middle Ages.”

Thus St. Brendan’s Isle and many other mythical places began to appear on the maps of the Western Sea by the late Middle Ages. Gillis writes, “By the High Middle Ages the once empty western seas were filling up with imagined islands.” The combination of the tales of wealth described in Marco Polo’s narrative of his expedition to the East and the religious imperative became the twin pillars of exploration. Gillis wryly remarks that it took 13 centuries for the Isle of St. Brendan to disappear entirely from sea charts. But in the meantime, voyaging into the unknown to find the islands of religious legend or to discover new ones, in combination with commerce, became a basis for the Age of Exploration. “When Irish monks set off to sea to escape from the world,” he writes, “they established a precedent for waterborne quests that would persist for the next thousand years.”

Next, islands became “stepping stones” in the Age of Discovery. “As far as (Europeans) were concerned . . . the world consisted entirely of islands, the great earth island and its vast eastern and western archipelagoes.” When they set out from their small harbors, they expected to find a world of islands and had difficulty grasping that “they had inadvertently found not one sea but several and that some of the lands found were not islands but continents.” In fact, the very idea of a continent was unknown at the time.

Early sailors knew about the Canary Islands and later the Madeiras and Azores. From these beginnings, “mapmakers”—who were really “cosmographers”—filled up the empty ocean with mythical islands that could bridge the void between west and east. Once the earth was conceived as a sphere, along about the 13th century, it became possible to imagine reaching the east by sailing west. Marco Polo had returned from the east and left an account of the commercial possibili-

ties of a “vast archipelago” of more than 7,000 islands stretching east from the coast of China and the Indies. Having set out to find these islands, it is ironic that Columbus in fact discovered islands, not continental America for which he is given credit.

Between 1500 and 1800 a vast sea of islands constituted the core of Western civilization’s view of itself. “For almost three centuries islands constituted the center rather than the periphery of what was then a leading edge of world economic, social, and cultural developments. The later rise of the power of continents should not be allowed to obscure the degree to which islands influenced the course of early modern history.”

During this 300-year period, mythical islands such as the Isle of St. Brendan moved further and further westward on maps—into the void as explorers pushed further and further into the unknown. Gillis amusingly tells us that by the 16th century the Isle of St. Brendan “came to rest just off the coast of Newfoundland”—where they were still being searched for until the 18th century.

From the 16th through the 19th centuries, islands became the favored places, the anchorages from which sea routes, trade, wealth and empire could be protected. The British Empire was an island empire, pinned together by Royal Navy bases on tiny island outposts across the oceans of the world.

In the most poignant last sections of his book, Gillis shows that at the end of the 19th century, as the unknown parts of the watery earth became ever smaller, Western imagination reinvented islands as a place for retreat, renewal and rediscovery of lost worlds, lost childhoods. In the Hebrides, “Just as the islands’ isolation and loneliness were making the Shiantians a kind of hell, the first dreamy-eyed travelers from the south were coming to see the islands as a vision of earthly beauty. As the place became difficult and empty for Hebrideans, it became beautiful and empty for outsiders,” writes Adam Nicholson.

When writer-mystic Cynthia Bourgeault came to Swan’s Island in the 1980s, she loved how “in this minute excruciating finiteness you could see the real scale of things, the passage through time that is the other component of our identity here on earth, again marked and honored in community.” But ultimately, she found what so many others before her had found—that a community of native islanders excluded those “from away” and that “acceptance must be earned; a place in the community must be won.”

In a comic aside, Gillis also reminds us that the idea of deserts and islands as places for spiritual uplift ultimately morphed into the cartoon concept of the desert island as the archetypal metaphor of the human condition, where its characters face their situation, stripped to life’s barest essentials. “Once upon a time, the desert island represented the cosmos; now it symbolizes the ego.”

But he doesn’t leave the reader there; he concludes that “even as physical islands retreat to the margins of history and geography, islands of the mind loom large in our consciousness of ourselves and the world around us. The less they are occupied, the more they preoccupy the modern imagination.”

Philip Conkling is president of the Island Institute.



ISLAND INSTITUTE

Sustaining the Islands and Communities of the Gulf of Maine

OUR MISSION

As this issue of *Island Journal* goes to press, the Island Institute is completing its 21st year as the only nonprofit organization dedicated solely to serving as a voice for the balanced future of the islands and waters of the Gulf of Maine. Even as we celebrate the accomplishments of past years, we look to the future and rededicate ourselves to an island ethic that recognizes the strength and fragility of Maine's island communities and the finite nature of the Gulf of Maine's ecosystems. We seek to:

- Support the islands' year-round communities
- Conserve Maine's island and marine biodiversity
- Develop model solutions for the coast's cultural and natural communities
- Provide forums for discussion of wise stewardship of finite resources

Three program areas—Island Fellows, sustainable communities and working waterfronts—define the Island Institute's work along the Maine coast and in the state's 15 year-round island communities.

Island Fellows

They are the ambassadors of our community-based programs. They are energetic and committed recent college or university graduates who spend one to two years living in island communities, working on service projects that have been identified as priorities by the community leaders who request their placement. The Island Institute currently supports 13 Island Fellows who, in turn, support a wide variety of community needs, including marine research and monitoring projects; creating and implementing community arts programming; collaborating in community comprehensive planning efforts; creating an inter-island library program and contributing to regional planning efforts by teaching GIS mapping skills to local officials.

Sustainable Communities are the Key to the Future of Maine's Island Culture and Heritage

The Island Institute supports sustainable island communities through the Island Community Fund, a grant program that provides seed money for community programs and activities; an Island Lodging Program that provides stipends toward the cost of mainland lodging for islanders who must travel for medical, educational or professional development reasons; tens of thousands of dollars in scholarships for island residents for both college and non-traditional education; and a host of other activities and programs that support island institutions.

Working Waterfronts

Access to the water is key to island livelihoods, and the Island Institute is committed to protecting working waterfronts in Maine. Working waterfronts make up only 25 miles of the state's 7,000-mile coastline, and they are continually threatened by development. The Island Institute works to protect this resource through advocacy, coalition-building, GIS mapping, partnerships with land trusts, public education activities and publication of our newspaper, *The Working Waterfront*, which reaches 45,000 readers 11 times a year.

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Jay Panetta

THE THOUGHT GARDEN

I will build a thought garden behind my house.
Raked sand or gravel flowing will stand
for a stream, the sea, or trackless woods.
Gnarled rocks anchored in twos, threes,
will be mountains, islands, plunging cliffs,
or clusters of friends—the Poets of the Bamboo Grove,
perhaps—who made boats of their poems
and floated them out on the river.
There will be no bright colors in my garden.
Evergreens, rather, or moss that has no skin to shed,
for we are talking not of evanescent things
but of the bones and marrow of the world.

Mark Perlberg

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