

# Mussel Ridge News

*A Free Publication of the Mussel Ridge Historical Society*

*Owls Head, Maine*

**Fall 2016 ~ Issue 32**



## **TOWNFOLKS—The Owl's Head Skiff Wars**

Imagine a hot summer evening in a Maine fishing community. Imagine two strings of fisherman's skiffs tied to chains that stretch across the rocky harbor landing between the road and the water's edge. Linda Bray Christie doesn't have to imagine the next scenario. She very distinctly recalls when, as a young teen, she and her friends would "borrow" those unattended skiffs for a little row around the harbor. And, on one occasion, for no real good reason, their little excursion resulted in a skiff war.

Teams were quickly chosen, (the girls against the boys of course!), and the melee began. The rules were simple: sink your opponents' skiff before they could sink yours. It started with bumping and shoving then progressed to physically grabbing the side of their opponent's boat and pushing it under. Some tried rocking their opponent's boat up and down hoping to dump them into the harbor or they used a bailer to load the other crafts with sea water. And their opponent responded likewise.

But, one minor detail was overlooked in their plan. The skiffs were made of wood and by nature wood floats. Those row boats were built to carry traps and gear out to the larger fishing vessels at their mooring in the harbor. The fishermen did not intend for them to sink. Now, how wet do you suppose a dozen young teens will get trying to sink an unsinkable boat? Linda says, "Very wet!" Oh, and the other thing that may've kept them awake all that night was wondering, "Did my knot in the skiff's bow line hold it on the mooring chain? The last thing we wanted was an angry fisherman knocking on our door because his skiff wasn't properly re-tied and had drifted off."

Linda remembers, "The lobstermen were very kind to us in allowing the use of their skiffs for our fun."



*Owl's Head Harbor- June, 1964*

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## **CALLING ALL COOKS, BAKERS & CANDY MAKERS**



The Mussel Ridge Historical Society will have a baked food sale at the Election Polls (Nov. 8) from 8a.m until the food is gone. If you would like to donate something for us to sell, please bring it to the Owl's Head Community Building (downstairs) between 8a.m. and noon on Election Day. We'll also have on sale the newest copy of *The Coastal Town of OWLS HEAD, MAINE* by Edward Wayman Coffin. This makes a great gift. We'll have other historically interesting literature pertaining to the town available, too.

## **Owls Head Firsts...**

### **from the Town's 50th Anniversary Program**



#### **First New Building was the Village Library**

On the evening of October 10, 1927 a meeting was held at the home of Mrs. Joseph G. Maddocks for the purpose of forming a library association. Officers chosen to serve for a term of five years were: president, Mrs. Bertha Borgerson; vice president, Henry E. White; secretary-treasurer, Miss Ella L. Maddocks and trustees, Vinal B. Perry, Allan B. Borgerson and Parker Merriam; librarian, Mrs. Celia Leadbetter (Wendell Leadbetter's mother).

It was voted to name the association the Owls Head Village Library Association. Land was purchased from Henry E. White, pastor of the Baptist Church, for the sum of \$50.00 with Vinal Perry chairman of the building committee, and Mr. White as boss carpenter.

The building was constructed by the men in the community and contained a community room and kitchen as well as the library section. Funds for the construction were raised through sales, and suppers with many generous gifts of money also contributed by friends.

On February 4, 1928 the first library books were given out from the library building. Previously books had been distributed from what is now the Owls Head Post Office.

Mrs. Nellie Reed was elected on February 5, 1928 as vice president to replace Henry White who resigned.

Miss Winifred Fitch served about 18 years as librarian, retiring in 1967. Mrs. Alfred Hill of Ash Point replaced Miss Fitch in 1968.

#### **Railway Service**

Although it is 54 years since trolley cars operated on the Rockland, South Thomaston & St. George Railway, many residents of Owls Head and the coastal area can remember the road. Particularly popular was summertime open car service to Crescent beach, although the particular trip pictured ended in tragedy. On September 3, 1914 this car left the tracks after crossing a trestle in Maloney's field, near Head-of-the-Bay and overturned. One woman was instantly killed, and several other persons injured.



The electric line was organized originally in 1902 as the Rockland, South Thomaston & Owls Head Railway, with the line to Crescent Beach completed in 1905. The railway soon went into receivership, and was reorganized in 1906, with power purchased, cars

leased from, the new Rockland, Thomaston, & Camden. Just two years later another new company was formed, and service to South Thomaston completed in 1913-14. Ambitious plans to continue the line to tenants Harbor and thence to Port Clyde, never got off the ground, due to continued financial difficulties.

The fatal accident shown had much to do with the trolley line's going out of business for good in 1917-18, in terms of claims paid, and increased operating costs.

#### **Second Lucia Beach**

The town beach property at 2<sup>nd</sup> Lucia Beach was purchased in 1951 from Edward Gonia, a summer resident, for \$2,000. This action was taken June 4, 1951 at the same time as the town voted to create the Town of Owls Head School District for the purpose of building the Central School. It was several years before an adequate road was constructed from the Ballyhac area to the beach due to the press of all the possible funds for the new school.

Since problems have arisen within recent years concerning proper care of the beautiful beach and regulations passed by the town are not effective, citizens voted at the annual meeting in 1971 to authorize the selectmen to negotiate the sale of the beach area to the State of Maine, Park and Recreation Commission to be used as a State Park. Final approval of said action to be brought before the town as a special town meeting when a sale price has been proposed.

## **"The Coastal Town of Owls Head, Maine"**

*By Edward Wayman Coffin*

In 2004 Edward W. Coffin, a long time resident of Owls Head, Maine, published his history book, *The Coastal Town of Owl's Head, Maine*. It took him over four years to research his book and put together all of the old pictures and stories he thought were important to preserve.

The Mussel Ridge Historical Society is proud to announce that it has 100 copies of Mr. Coffin's book for sale. This is your chance to own a brand new improved edition of his book. It will make a perfect gift for any occasion for a family or friend who is interested in the history of our area.

All proceeds from the sale of this book will go to the Mussel Ridge Historical Society to help preserve our Town's history, including the renovation and maintenance of the Grange Hall, the one room Village school house on N. Shore Drive and the Old Homestead on Ash Point Drive.

Books are exclusively at the Blue Yonder Coastal Artisans Store (at the Knox County Regional Airport) for \$32. You may order your book(s) by filling in the order form below and sending it along with your check made payable to: The Mussel Ridge Historical Society c/o Mr. Rodney B. Weeks ~ 43 Lucia Beach Road ~ Owls Head, ME 04854

### **ORDER FORM**

I would like to order \_\_\_\_\_ copies of *The Coastal Town of Owls Head, Maine*  
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## **SEAMAN'S SUPERSTITIONS**

Ever hear that a banana on a boat will bring bad luck and poor fishing? Some years ago an article in Field & Stream magazine described a charter boat crew that was experiencing a terrible day on fishing grounds that usually yielded good catches. The skipper had reached his limit in explanations for their disastrous outing when one of his customers went below, returning topside moments later with his skivies in hand. The garments' label was shone to the skipper, who immediately threw them overboard.

It seems the fisherman was an executive of Fruit of the Looms apparel company and had worn that brand underwear on this trip. The label depicted a banana in the company's logo. Now, whether one chooses to call it coincidence or kismet, the fish began biting soon after the garments were disposed of. Upon his return to corporate headquarters, he ordered the banana removed from their logo and to this day you'll not see a banana on any modern Fruit of the Looms apparel.

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## THIS HISTORY IS YOUR HISTORY

If not for our readers' support, this newsletter would have a meager existence. Over the past eight years, we've often invited our readers to share their family's journals, photo albums, news clippings and oral history. These are the best source for a glimpse at the real history of a community and we are honored that our townfolks trusts us with theirs. Recently, a friend of the Mussel Ridge NEWS brought her file of clippings she's been collecting since 1954. Here's one from the Portland Press Herald. Our slogan at The Mussel Ridge NEWS is, "This history is your history", and so it shall be.



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## The Cemetery Committee

The Owl's Head Cemetery Committee is comprised of as many as five volunteer members, each approved by the Town's Selectmen who also function as the Town's Cemetery Board. The Cemetery Committee advises the Selectmen as well as takes direction from them.

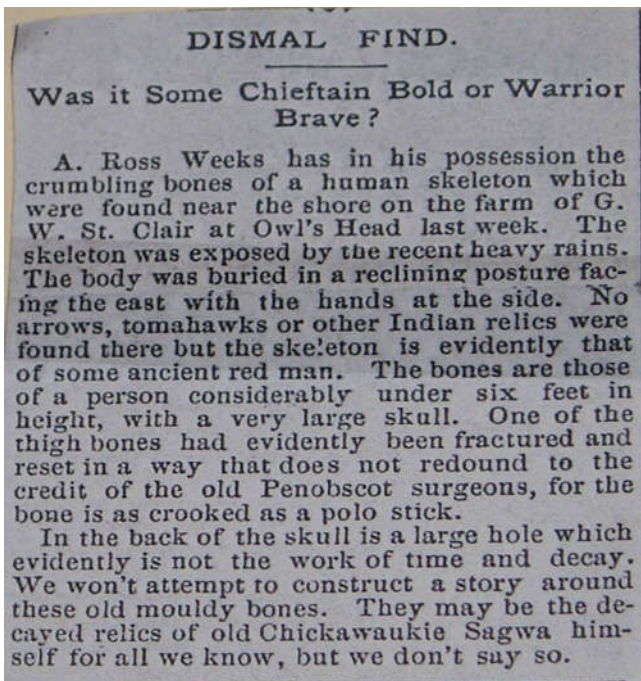
The purpose of the Cemetery Committee is to keep up with all aspects of the Town's cemeteries and make recommendations to the Selectmen regarding the preservation, maintenance, improvement, and record keeping for the cemeteries. In other words, oversee all matters related to the professional operation and management of the Town's cemeteries.

The Cemetery Committee feels honored to serve both our Town's past and future and take on the responsibility that goes with providing our community with cemeteries that are sacred areas of beauty and serenity for our loved ones. To that end, we welcome anyone who would like to attend our meetings; help with projects; offer suggestions.

Imagine your family member's resting place in one of our cemeteries. Are you happy with the way things are? What would you like to see? What would you want to change to make things better? Let us know and help us out. Anyone can make a difference.

*Owl's Head Cemetery Committee: Bill Gay, Michael Vonnannon, Dan Clough, and Andrew Carpenter*

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Anyone have any information on where the St. Clair farm was located? Maybe in the village?

This is from the Aug. 30, 1887 issue of the Rockland paper (could have been the Gazette or the Rockland Free Press)

*Clipping courtesy of Cindy Perkins Beane*

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## JOHNNYCAKE? or CORNBREAD?

Recently, I was in a discussion reviewing the differences between Johnnycake and Cornbread. I recalled my Mom made johnnycake from an old New York farmer's recipe. When we moved to the Florida Gulf coast, we were introduced to cornbread, which may have resembled johnnycake, but Mom was adamant that, "It's NOT johnnycake!" I decided it was time I educated myself on the subject and found a host of blogs and tutorials on the computer. The following recipe, and comments with each ingredient, is from: *Johnnycake as it was meant to be* written by John Gould, Nov. 3, 2000. All other succeeding notes are a compilation from those online writings.

### Johnnycake (Yankee corn bread)

- 1 cup sweet milk- in olden days, this would have come directly from the cow and left in a pan overnight to form cream which was skimmed off the next morning and the milk put in the cornbread.
- 1 cup sour milk- today's pasteurized milk cannot be soured. A reasonable substitute is to moisten dry milk and add a bit of cider vinegar. Do not use white vinegar.
- 2 cups corn meal- The native Americans showed the Colonists how to grind corn between two rocks. That's not necessary today, the product today is much finer than back then.
- 1 cup white flour- Rhode Islanders take their johnnycakes to competition level with entrants made only from white corn that has been milled by water power.
- ½ cup molasses- in olden days, molasses came from Caribbean Islands in barrels. It was dark and rich; used for sweetener. Note: all old recipes forbid the use of sugar in johnnycake
- 1 teaspoon salt- if using sea salt, add just a smidgen more
- 1 teaspoon soda- mix all ingredients and put in a tin; "bake until done" seems to be the prescribed time.

One recipe suggests while preparing the ingredients, we pre-heat a 12" skillet in the oven at 425° then carefully pour our batter into the hot skillet. Bake for another 20 minutes. This will likely produce a flat johnnycake, similar to pancakes, which is how the early pioneers ate it.

Keep in mind the skillets of those bygone days had been used the night before to fry some kind of meat and were pre-greased for use the next morning. Often, the cook, whether a farmer's wife or logging camp cook, was up before dawn and had made a batch of cornbread for the day. Then as the workers came in from early morning chores, the bacon, beans, potatoes, or whatever was fried in the same skillet; which pre-greased it for the evening meal. Of course, this "pre-greasing" lended it's flavor to the bread.

So, to address the question introduced by our title, I've concluded that there are a million recipes out there for Johnnycake or cornbread, most with only minor variations. The major differences I found are:

- Most ancient johnnycake recipes use molasses but no sugar; nearly all cornbread recipes include sugar.
- Nearly all johnnycake recipes include white flour while cornbread recipes don't use white flour.
- Many cornbread recipes, especially the modern ones, use some butter.

We'd love to have a copy of our favorite johnnycake or corn bread recipe. Is there a family story that goes with it? Perhaps we could compile a cookbook. Give us a call at 207-594-2438 or contact Tom Christie at [tchristie@myfairpoint.net](mailto:tchristie@myfairpoint.net)

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## CHATTING IT UP

Here's something to help while away those long drives "over the river and through the woods to grandmother's house" for the holidays.

There is really no difference between **Merry-go-rounds and Carousels**. In most playgrounds the small manually operated ride is usually called a "merry-go-round" while the name "Carousel" is preferred for those large, mechanically operated theme park rides. But either name is acceptable. In Great Britain carousels rotate clockwise, but in the rest of Europe and U.S. they rotate counter clockwise.

From the old **Truth or Consequences TV Show**- If a truck driver turned the wrong way onto a one-way street, why didn't the cop that was directing traffic stop him? Because the truck driver was walking!

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## IMAGINATION

One memory I recall from my old neighborhood was a five year old boy who, as soon as the sidewalks were clear in the spring, would drag out a faded red tricycle with a basket lashed to the rear step. He and his stuffed bear spent hours cruising the sidewalk between his home and the fire hydrant on the corner. Or they headed in the other direction to the big Elm tree four houses away.

The unique thing about this kid was that, as he pedaled along, he uttered a noise similar to the sound of an engine revving up. Upon reaching the highest octave his young voice would allow he'd pause for a half second, occasionally making a scraping sound we presumed to be the gears grinding, and begin the rev-up utterance again. He must have shifted those gears a dozen times or more enroute to the corner. It's been rumored when the boy ground the gears, the bear would wise crack, "Grind me a couple of pounds too". Otherwise, he calmly rode along in complete confidence of his chauffeur's abilities.

One fine Spring morning the boy and his bear surprised the neighbors with a new antic added to their drive. When they reached home after a couple of trips, the lad dismounted and took a stick from the bear's basket and shoved it down between the front wheel and the fender of his trike. Slowly retrieving it, he hauled a rag from his back pocket and wiped the stick off, then repeated the performance. After wiping down the stick for the second time, he nodded to the bear and placed his dip stick back in the basket. Turning their twelve speed truck-cycle around, they made another run to the fire hydrant on the corner, shifting all the way. Though we never saw any oil slick on the sidewalk, he obviously had a concern for the oil because it got checked about every third trip.

Alas, teddy bears grow old and lose their courage. Tricycles grow too small to ride and get left in the shed. Little boys grow into men who drive real trucks with real shifters and dip sticks. But, I'm confident that his children, and his grandchildren, knew the joy of a tricycle with a basket lashed on the back.

*by Tom Christie*

### The Dusty Gardener

#### PANSY? OR VIOLET?

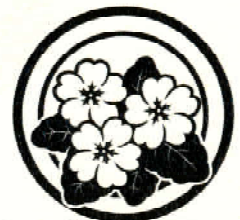
The common words "pansy" and "violet" are often used interchangeably. When a distinction is made, plants considered to be pansies have four petals pointing upwards, and only one pointing down. Violets have three petals pointing up and two pointing down- (Wikipedia)



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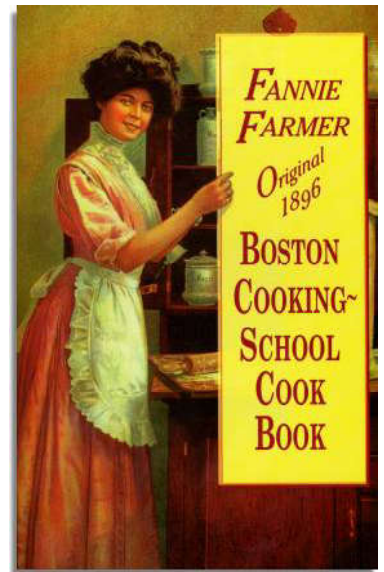
## THE BOOK THAT ALMOST WASN'T

Fannie Farmer was born March 1857, into a family that placed great emphasis on education. Her High School years and plans for college were nixed when she suffered a paralyzing stroke. It would be years before she could walk again with a permanent limp reminding her of life's cruelty.

In 1888, at 31 years old, she enrolled in the Boston Cooking School and was so successful as a student, she was asked to be the assistant to the school's director after graduation. A year later she moved up to full directorship when that position was vacated by the death of her boss. As such, she took charge of revising the school's textbook, *The Boston Cooking School Cookbook*, replacing vague measurements such as "a pinch of salt" or "bake until done" with exact measurements for ingredients and cooking times. She added discussions on household management, sanitation, and nutrition, all very innovative ideas for that time.

Fannie approached the publishers about printing the book for sale to the general public. They could not see the merits in that and refused. Fannie paid the cost of publishing 3000 books, convincing the publisher to at least help her manage the distribution. All bookstores sold out in just a few days. Today the book is more commonly known as *The Fannie Farmer Cookbook*.

In 1902 she opened Miss Farmer's School of Cookery, devoted explicitly to training young women in the art of homemaking. Although not in operation today, it remained active long after her death in 1915.



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### Did ya Know ...

The Rubik Cube was invented forty two years ago by Erno Rubik, a Hungarian sculptor and professor of architecture. Today's models have sphere-like cores to reduce friction and make manipulating the sections smoother and quicker. It's thought there are more than 43 quintillion combinations to solving the puzzle. In November, 2015 an American lad broke the "five second ceiling" by solving it in 4.904 seconds.



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