

# Vinalhaven Historical Society

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## Newsletter 2013 Vinalhaven's Earliest Days



Although there are skeptics, it has long been thought that the first record of this area was by Englishman Martin Pring, who set sail for the new world with his two vessels, *Speedwell* and *Discoverer*, in 1603. Entering Penobscot Bay in June of that same year, he called his discovery the Fox Islands because of the number of silver foxes he observed on the shores,

Francis Cogswell, of Ipswich, Massachusetts, set up a temporary residence here in 1760. He built and operated a sawmill for several years. It appears that David Wooster was the first permanent settler on the North Island in 1762, and it is said his son was the first white child born on the Fox Islands. Settlements began shortly after the French and Indian War ended. The Carver family appeared in 1766, and from then until the beginning of the Revolutionary War, in 1775, many more families established themselves here. The war caused a great deal of distress for the islanders; food was scarce, as was the call for wood and lumber. Petitions were sent to the Provincial Congress asking for food, ammunition and arms. Most islanders were in support of the colonies and some left to fight the cause, while others left seeking safer quarters. Those who remained suffered at the hands of the Tories, who went about the islands in boats known as "shaving mills" robbing crops and supplies. During the British occupancy at Castine, many islanders were forced to leave their families to work on the fort and unfortunately faced many indignities while there. After the war, many of the original inhabitants returned, followed by a wave of new families.

In March 1785, a meeting was held and it was voted to petition the General Court in Massachusetts asking that the people of these islands be given full possession of the lots they occupied, with the promise of constructing a place for public worship, a minister hired for such, and a public school be built for the town's children. (A copy of the petition can be viewed at the museum.)

Following a survey conducted by Rufus Putnam in March 1786, the Commonwealth of Massachusetts granted the land to the settlers as long as the above-mentioned conditions were met. On June 25, 1789, the islands in Penobscot Bay commonly called the North and South Fox Islands, in the County of Lincoln, were incorporated into a town by the name of Vinalhaven (named after the Boston attorney, John Vinal, who was employed by the people of the islands to present the petition to the Court). In 1785 there were 75 settlers living on the islands, but by 1790 the population, including those living on Matinicus, had increased to 578.

In the ensuing years many changes came to the islands. According to town reports, taxes were collected, schools were constructed, churches erected and roads were built. For reasons unknown to us, there were many years in which neither schools nor churches were funded. In fact, it wasn't until 1888 that Vinalhaven saw its first high school graduating class. A few other interesting facts from early reports are: In 1818, it was voted to pay four cents per hour for labor on roads, down

from twenty-five cents per hour just three years earlier; from 1822-1825, an alewife fishery was set up on the North Island, the alewife privilege was sold to a local man, who in turn, was obligated to sell the fish to said town for no more than 33 cents per 100; in 1831, it was voted to build a bridge across Old Harbor Falls; in 1846, the North Island was set off and incorporated; in 1849, the contract for building a bridge across Carver's Mill Stream was awarded to John Carver for \$300; and during a special meeting in July 1862, to fill the town's quota for the Civil War, anyone who volunteered would be paid \$100 when mustered into the service.

There were several prominent men who played a significant role in the Fox Island's early history. We've highlighted a few here, but urge you to come to the museum this summer for information on others!

## A Few of Our Earliest Settlers

(Excerpts from *A Brief Historical Sketch of the Town of Vinalhaven*)

John Smith built his home on 320 acres at Poole's Hill. Married twice, fourteen children were born to him. He was one of the islanders who was forced to work on the fort at Castine during the Revolutionary War. Mr. Smith used to tell that the British got very little benefit from his labor, as he would pound his axe on a rock at every opportunity, so that it took up most of his time sharpening it.

Thaddeus Carver came to the island with his family in 1766 when he was but 15 years old. Later he worked for Francis Cogswell who owned and operated a sawmill. In 1776, he bought Cogswell's interest here which consisted of the sawmill and 700 hundred acres of land. He married Hannah Hall of Matinicus and ten children were born to them. Part of the original homestead still exists on the current site of the corner apartment at the John Carver Apartment complex.

Timothy Lane resided on Lane's Island, was married to Rebecca Smith and had six children. Sometime about 1850 he commenced curing fish and furnishing outfits for fishing vessels. At one time he owned between 20 and 25 vessels. He amassed a great deal of property and wealth and in 1875, paid the largest tax to that date, ever assessed to the town.

*Timothy Lane's homestead on Lane's Island. Later altered and run as Rockaway Inn, now a private residence.*

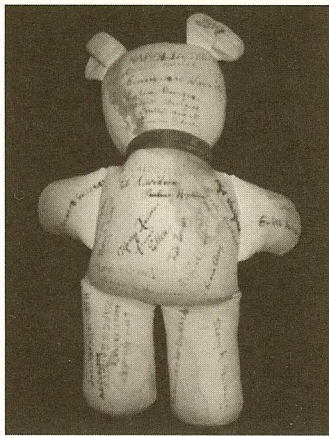


William Vinal was the son of John Vinal (for whom the town is named), and came to Vinalhaven with a group of settlers prior to 1786. He owned land on both islands and was married twice, once to Peggy Wooster of the North Island and later to Peggy Dyer of this town. He was a man of "decided ability" and was Justice of the Peace as early as 1785. It was under his warrant that the first town meeting was held. He was a member of the board of selectmen, elected to the General Court as the first representative from this town, and later in life was a judge in the Hancock County Court of Common Pleas.

John Calderwood was born in Ireland in 1725; his family immigrated to this country that same year, settling in Londonderry, New Hampshire. Years later, John and his wife, Elizabeth McCurdy, settled on the North Island, but soon after came to the South Island and settled on the "Neck". It is believed that his home was the first frame house built here.

Capt. Eleazer Crabtree was born in New York in 1738. He arrived on the North Island in 1760, but was forced to leave after conflicts with local Indians. He returned again in 1784 and bought property from John Perry, now know as Crabtree's Point. He was a master mariner and shipbuilder, one of the first Selectmen and served as a Captain in the Revolutionary War. Capt. Crabtree was well advanced in years when he died.

## Year in Review



The 2012 special summer exhibit commemorated the men and women of Vinalhaven who served our country during WWII. In addition to highlighting several of the veterans with images and short bios of their service, we also displayed an array of memorabilia from that era; uniforms, letters, medals, photographs and so forth. We also had the unique opportunity to present a video collage depicting life on the island at that time, including the construction and manning of the Lookout Tower on Armbrust Hill.

We received as donated gifts many wonderful items, including boxes of letters, photos, Bibles, period clothing and more from the home of Bruce Grindle and Clinton Smith. Special thanks to Bill Brown for this treasure trove of artifacts. We were also fortunate to receive many granite pieces and tools from the Stephen Marcoux Estate. Some of the granite pieces will be placed along the walkway from the Historical Society to the Town Office. It was indeed a thrill to have an autographed teddy bear from the early 1940s given to us. The bear was a Christmas gift given to Erdine Chilles from Ellen Conway with about 75 signatures on it, including Max and Eleanor Conway, John and Mary Wentworth, Beatrice Ewell, James Roberts, Phyllis Guilford, Mary Maker and so many more. What a fun piece to add to our collection! (Pictured at left; donated by Bobbi Bowman)

During the late summer, Elizabeth Bunker transitioned to the position of Executive Director. Sue Radley will work part-time, and our fantastic seasonal and year round volunteers continue to put in copious hours for the overall betterment of the museum.

Museum visitors came from 41 states, Washington, D.C. and 19 countries, including the Netherlands, Vietnam, Bulgaria, Pakistan and Indonesia. Overall there were close to 1600 visitors during 2012.

## Engine House Restoration

We applaud the town appointed committee for their efforts to raise money and restore the 1888 Old Engine House, home of the Silsby steam engine, *Old Reuben*. Rejoining *Old Reuben* will be the hook and ladder wagon *Colonel Libby* and a hose cart, currently stored in the basement of the Vinalhaven Historical Society. With an expected completion date of July fourth, these three pieces of Vinalhaven's fire history will be together again and can be viewed by all. We sincerely thank this hardworking committee and all those who have supported this community project. The early image at right shows the above mentioned pieces of equipment as they were in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century.



*Photo courtesy of Wyman Philbrook*

## What is the Museum According to a First Grader?

- We thought it would be fun to ask a few first graders what they knew about the Museum. Here are the responses:
- Do you know what the Historical Society is?     Tanner: Vinalhaven's Zoo? No, that's not true!  
                                                                  Jordan: It's our museum  
                                                                  Sadie: That's my bus stop.
- What do you think happens there?             T: There's things there – a lot of things.  
                                                                  J: People look at the things that are there.  
                                                                  S: It has old things in it. I think there is a piano.
- Would you like to visit the museum?           T: Yes, because I've never seen it.  
                                                                  J: Yes, because I like to look at things a lot.  
                                                                  S: No, I don't think it's really exciting.
- How old does something have to be to be put in the museum?  
                                                                  T: At least 100. Or from the 90s, 80s or 70s maybe. But not people.  
                                                                  J: Really, really old  
                                                                  S: Um, about 700
- Is there something you would like to put in the museum?  
                                                                  T: A \$100 bill or a postcard of Larry Bird shooting a 3.  
                                                                  J: A painting of trees.  
                                                                  S: Rocks.
- Thank you to Mrs. Sam Thompson and her students Tanner Lazaro, Jordan Hoose, and Sadie Falconer for their answers!

## Society Events

The Vinalhaven Historical Society is pleased to have the opportunity to present some exciting programs this summer: *Art from the Heart*, an art auction in conjunction with Jerry Michael Community Enrichment Fund, Key of She concert; *Bodwell & Webster's Climb to the Top: 1852-1862* talk and new publication, *The Bodwell & Webster Papers: Big Business on a Small Island* by Ken Reiss; and *The Mysterious Mr. Herrmann and an Island Legacy*, a film, talk and walk by Army Armstrong, co-sponsored with the Vinalhaven Land Trust.

### *The Mysterious Mr. Herrmann and an Island Legacy*

Film by Army Armstrong

Just as the U.S. entered WWI in 1917, a man named Franz Herrmann, a frequent summer visitor to Vinalhaven, suddenly bought Elisha and Addie Roberts' farm and began spending lavishly on renovations, new barns and a bevy of other buildings, roads, gardens and pathways, transforming the simple farm into a lively, productive site, the Herrmann Estate. Herrmann was congenial, generous, hired scores of farm workers, treated them well, and gave to the needy. But who was he really, this so-called "alien enemy," a German citizen? Why was he here? Where did the money come from? Rumors ran rampant that he was a spy or German agent, but no proof was ever uncovered. After his sudden death in 1921, the property remained inactive for many years, until a New York doctor, Paluel Flagg found it ideal for his 12 children. In the 1970's a section of the estate was purchased by Charlotte Goodhue. There have been some changes of course, but to this day, both families are firmly committed to preserving the legacy of the Herrmann Estate, unspoiled by thoughtless development, a treasured asset for the island community. Ninety years after his death, Franz Herrmann is all but forgotten. This film explores the mystery of the man, and the history of the estate and its people.

## The Bodwell & Webster Papers

Big Business on a Small Island: The Birth of the Granite Boom

New publication by Kenneth Reiss

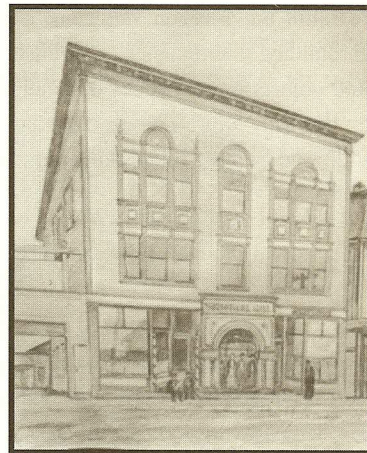
We never knew what it was about the stone at East Boston that drew a succession of aspiring quarry owners to Vinalhaven all the way from the Granite State. Nor was it said why, in the early 1850s, two of those hopefuls, Moses Webster and Joseph Robinson Bodwell, succeeded in East Boston when others had abandoned it. Nor had it been shown just how Bodwell and Webster were able to turn that early, limited success into the foundation for one of the greatest granite empires in the nation, in the process altering Vinalhaven forever.

Now, for the first time, we can fill in those blanks and many others, thanks to a long-overlooked trove of business papers that lay for more than a century in the attic of the Moses Webster house. We now see how East Boston's special stone opened doors to jobs in distant markets, how Joseph Bodwell was able to take advantage of opportunities that were unique to the 1850s, and how Vinalhaven rose to the prospect of a booming economy fueled by workers from away. And, when the Civil War put a damper on construction, we see how Bodwell & Webster met the challenge by selling hay and potatoes to the Union Army!

It is a story about granite and about Vinalhaven, and it is also a story about making it in America in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. We have long heard the stories of how, in the early days, Joseph Bodwell would drive the oxen in the quarry and even shoe them when needed, and of how wealthy and politically powerful he became later in life. These documents permit us to look over his shoulder as he goes about building the business of Bodwell and Webster. After having watched him at work, the success of Joseph Robinson Bodwell is easier to understand.

### Art from the Heart

Local artist Lois Candage, son Scott Candage, and granddaughter Bethany Candage have corroborated on a project of tremendous proportion. Bethany has photographed places of interest on the island and Lois painted these images as they appeared in the past, i.e., the Union Church in 1860 (which burned in 1899), the Memorial Hall and the Bodwell Granite Company Store. Scott will use his writing skills to briefly describe each of the photos and paintings. Lois has graciously offered these paintings for auction this summer, with all money raised going to the Vinalhaven Historical Society. When asked what sparked the idea for this project Lois responded that in 2007, as part of a fundraiser for the new addition to the Vinalhaven Public Library, local artists were asked to design and paint benches. The positive response from this effort prompted her to show her work at The Haven with all proceeds going to one of three local charities. Lois has now given us the opportunity to once again show off her amazing talent. Lois has dubbed her work as "Art from My Heart" and we, at the Vinalhaven Historical Society say "Thank You" to her from the bottom of our hearts! The auction will be held July 26, at Smith Hokanson Memorial Hall. *Shown below are two of the many paintings to be auctioned.*



## Summer Schedule

June 17 - September 14  
Monday - Friday 11-4  
(July and August - Open Daily 11-4)

**Summer Exhibit - Vinalhaven's Earliest Years** – Displaying letters, documents, ledgers and artifacts from the late 1700s thru late 1800s.

**July 26:** *Art from My Heart* Auction - Series of paintings by L. Candage, in conjunction with JMCEF Key of She concert.  
7:00p, Smith Hokanson Memorial Hall

**August 1:** *Bodwell & Webster's Climb to the Top: 1852-1862*. Talk and book signing by Ken Reiss.  
7:00p, Smith Hokanson Memorial Hall

**August 20:** *The Mysterious Mr. Herrmann and an Island Legacy*. Film by Army Armstrong.  
7:00p, Smith Hokanson Memorial Hall

**August 21:** Walking tour of Herrmann Estate. Meet at Skoog Park at 9:30a to carpool.  
(Both film and walking tour co-sponsored by Vinalhaven Land Trust and Vinalhaven Historical Society.)

Go to our website, [vinalhavenhistoricalsociety.org](http://vinalhavenhistoricalsociety.org), for more information. Like us on Facebook!

## Vinalhaven Historical Society's Mission Statement and Annual Appeal

*"The purpose of our organization is to collect, identify, preserve, exhibit, interpret and make available for education and research, information and artifacts which illuminate the history of Vinalhaven and its families from its beginning to the present."*

Each year the Historical Society asks you, as do other worthy organizations, to donate money. In these tough economic times, many of you must choose carefully as to which cause(s) you will donate. Remember your donation makes it possible for us to fulfill our mission statement goals, thus preserving Vinalhaven's history for many generations. Proper archival materials, building maintenance, insurance, and other daily expenses become costly and as the number of donated photos, papers, and objects grow so does our monetary need. Your memberships and contributions are our sole source of financial support. We truly appreciate all our members and friends! Any donation, large or small, is greatly valued and is tax deductible as allowed by law. Enclosed is our membership form. Thank you for your generosity!

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