

Vinalhaven Historical Society

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Newsletter 2015

The Tradition of the Boston Post Cane



About the time of the First World War, Gilford Young was in possession of a beautiful, polished, black ebony cane. It had a 14-karat gold tip, and an ornate gold head. The engraving on the head of the cane said that it had been “Presented by the Boston Post to the oldest citizen of Vinalhaven, Me.” Then, ominously, the inscription added: “To be transmitted.”

Mr. Young’s cane was one of several hundred in the hands of the oldest citizens of towns in Massachusetts, Maine, New Hampshire, and Rhode Island. They had been distributed to the Selectmen of those towns by the Boston Post with the understanding that they were to be awarded to each town’s oldest citizen, and, when that recipient died or moved away, the canes were to be repossessed and passed on to his successor. As newspaper promotions go, it was a winner; the canes have long outlived the Boston Post (which ceased publication in 1956), and are still being “transmitted” in some of those towns. And it was only one of the promotional brainstorms of the Post’s energetic owner, Edwin Grozier.

Under Grozier, The Boston Post became one of the largest newspapers in the country, peaking with a circulation to nearly a million readers. It has been founded in 1831 by Charles Greene and William Beals, and had been run by them until the 1880s, when it had been bought by a consortium of Boston businessmen who were bolting from the Republican Party, and who wanted a newspaper to spread their political message. Known as “Mugwumps” they were bitterly opposed to the scandal-tainted James G. Blaine, and were urging all Republicans to desert the candidacy of Blaine and support Democrat Grover Cleveland. Cleveland won the presidency, and owning a sickly newspaper soon lost its appeal. Before long, the Post’s owners were Republicans once more, the paper was deep in debt, and it was up for sale.

In 1891, thirty-one year old Edwin Grozier, whose background in journalism started early when he enrolled at Brown University before the age of 17, purchased the paper in 1891. Grozier had been a reporter for the Boston Globe, and later worked for the Boston Herald. He also worked as the private secretary to the governor of Massachusetts, and as the private secretary to Joseph Pulitzer, before deciding he wanted a newspaper of his own. Impressed by his energy and his determination to avoid bankruptcy, the newspaper’s creditors agreed to extend the funding he needed to revitalize the Post. Success did not come quickly or easily, but Grozier was creative and devised many “promotions” to help boost the circulation of his paper. In 1903, a contest for The Oldest Couple (combined ages) asked married couples from New England states to send in a photograph along with their dates of birth and marriage, and list of children. Winners would receive a Morris chair and a rocking chair. Mr. and Mrs. Samuel Young, with a combined age of 165, were nominated and received the honor for Vinalhaven. Mr. Young was born in 1816 and his wife, Lydia, was born in 1825. In 1906, Grozier established the Post Santa Claus Fund when he learned children’s letters to Santa were going to the Dead Letter

Office. This organization continues today and is known as Globe Santa. In 1913, when Grozier heard of a man selling three trained elephants, he asked children to send in their pennies and get their name in the paper as part owner of the elephants that would be purchased with the collected funds and given to the Franklin Park Zoo in Boston.

A few years prior to 1909, Grozier had J.F. Fradley & Co. of New York manufacture 700 canes, made of Gaboon ebony from Africa and topped with a 14-carat gold head. In August 1909, Grozier sent a letter to the Board of Selectmen of several hundred New England towns (excluding Vermont and Connecticut) asking them to be the trustees of the canes. The Board of Selectmen for each town were instructed to present the cane to the community's oldest male citizen, on behalf of the Post. It was also requested that the Board send information back to the Gold Cane Department with the name and address of the recipient so they could publish it in the paper and keep a record of it in their archives. It wasn't until 1930 that the honor of the cane was expanded to include women. (We don't know if that was a reflection of the status of women as citizens, or the vestige of the Victorian reluctance to reveal a woman's age!)

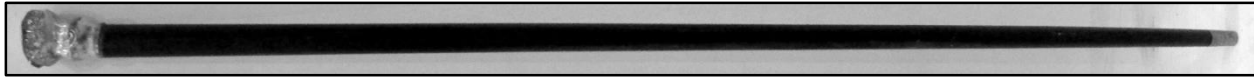
It is believed that Gilford Young was Vinalhaven's first recipient of the cane. It is not known exactly when he received it, but he was the holder for some years before he died in 1919 at the age of 95. Born December 29th, 1823, Gilford was the oldest of six children born to Alexander and Susan Philbrook Young. He married Jane Brown on October 28th 1847, but sadly she passed away shortly after their marriage. He married his second wife, Elizabeth Rackliffe, December 4th, 1850 and together they had six children between 1851 and 1867. According to Young's modest obituary, he followed the sea in his younger years, and later had a farm on the North Haven Road.



Woster Vinal, last surviving Civil War Veteran, was a cane holder from 1932-1937. The first child of David and Mary Vinal, Woster was born on Vinalhaven in 1844. At the age of 18 he enlisted in the Civil War and served with the 19th Maine Volunteer Infantry Regiment. He saw action at many major battles including Fredericksburg, Chancellorsville, Gettysburg, and Petersburg, where he was captured and held at Andersonville Prison in Georgia, for ten months. After being released on April 28th, 1865, he was discharged in June of the same year. Upon returning home Woster became active in town activities. He was a member of the first town band, was a Mason for over 70 years, and led the Memorial Day parade on horseback for many years. According to a Pension field report in 1936, Woster was still living at home and would regularly visit the Pool Hall at the age of 93.

Almond Miller and his daughter, Bertha Winslow, both had the distinction of being cane holders. Almond had been a Vinalhaven resident since the age of 19, and retired from a lifelong career as a fisherman at the age of 82. After retirement he took up rug braiding to keep himself busy. In a newspaper clipping, Almond said the highlight of his 98th birthday was a card from President Nixon. His daughter, Bertha, received the cane at age 96 and, at the time, was still living in the same house she was born in on Vinalhaven. She celebrated her 100th birthday with friends and family at Knox Center for Long Term Care, in Rockland, ME.

Clarissa Vaughn, known to everyone as "Aunt Caddie," refused the cane at first saying that she preferred to wait until she reached a more honorable age - and she did - "Aunt Caddie" accepted the cane at her 100th birthday (pictured above with Selectmen Olga Carlton). In an interview she did for her 95th birthday she said that she had not bought more than ten loaves of bread in her entire life because she always made her own. On her 100th birthday she said the secret to her long life was that she had always eaten very little meat, but all kinds of vegetables, and never drank tea or coffee, but plenty of milk. She also proclaimed that she was in magnificent health; "I don't have an ache or pain... my hands are just as limber as when I was a schoolgirl."



Boston Post Cane Recipients

?-1919	Guilford Young, 95*
1919-1922	Dura Raymond, 95
1922-1932	Ezekiel Ames, 93
1932-1937	Woster Vinal, 93
1937-1944	Winfield Leadbetter, 97
1944-1952	Fred Hall, 94
1952-1953	Esther Robbins, 96
1953-1958	?
1958	John Marshall, 92
1958-?	?
?-1961	Mary Candage, 94
1965-1967	Carrie Burns, 97
1967-1970	?
1970-1971	Almond Miller, 99
1971-1979	?
1979-1980	Clarissa Vaughn, 101
1980-1983	Alec Bruce, 98
1983-1988	Rena Johnson, 101
1988	Eva Barton, 101
1988-1989	Eliza Patterson, 87
1989	Mae Tolman, 98
1989-1994	Hazel Kittredge, 99
1994-1995	Vera Johnson, 99
1995-1998	?
1998	Madeline Smith, 100
1998-2001	?
2001	Albra Whittington, 98
2001-2002	Ivan Arey, 96
2002-2004	Leola Smith, 99
2004-2008	Bertha Winslow, 100
2008-2015	No Recipient

*Age at which they passed away

Vera Johnson, born October 1st, 1895, in Yarmouth, Nova Scotia, was the daughter of Norman and Ethel Trefrey. She had many occupations throughout her long life. She was a teacher at the White School on Vinalhaven, a housemother at Westbrook Junior College for 12 years, owned and ran the C&C Restaurant, and owned and operated the Down Easter Inn (both on Vinalhaven), among many other professions. She was active in many town organizations as well; she was a member of the Union Church, the American Legion Auxiliary, and Garden Club, just to name a few. Vera received the cane at the age of 99 while a resident of Shore Village Nursing Center in Rockland, Maine.

Many exceptional islanders belong to the exclusive Boston Post Cane club, and this year we pay tribute to them. After the cane was declined in 2010, it was given to the museum for safe keeping and since then has been ownerless. This year the museum will feature the Boston Post Cane and its 23 remarkable recipients, to date. Also this year, a new committee has been formed to revive the tradition of the cane and how it is awarded. The cane will continue to reside at the museum, but a commemorative plaque and replica lapel pin of the cane will be presented to Vinalhaven's oldest citizen.

Chandler Blackington Acquisition Fund

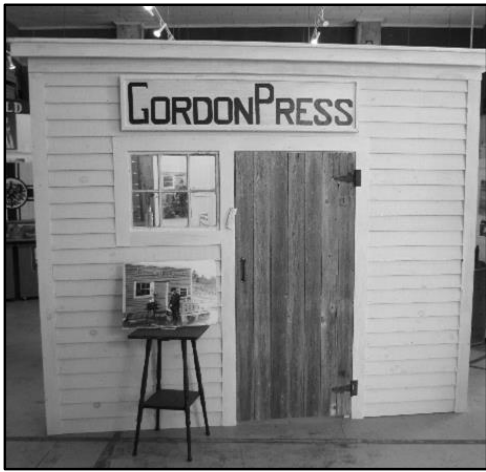
We were truly saddened this winter by the passing of our dear friend and longtime board member, Chandler Blackington. Chandler had been a driving force behind many museum acquisitions and fund raising endeavors. Chandler enjoyed volunteering at the Museum and the Old Engine House on Main Street during the summer, where he could share his knowledge of Vinalhaven history and firefighting equipment.

In 2008, an original E. P. Walker fire helmet and belt buckle were located by Chandler's son, Neil. With donations from the Blackington's and other contributors, the helmet and belt are now on display at the Museum. This purchase prompted Chandler and friend Frances "Fraffie" Welch to help the museum establish an acquisition fund.

In September we learned of another original E. P. Walker helmet on eBay. With money from the acquisition fund and a few museum friends, we were able to add this piece to our collection. (See Year in Review)

We have renamed our acquisition fund in Chandler's honor and donations can be sent to the Museum with CBAF on the memo line. He will be greatly missed!

Year in Review



Another great summer came and went at the Museum. Our 2014 summer exhibit of the John Gordon Printing Press was the perfect catalyst for a family reunion! Many members of John's family came from across the country to view the exhibit and see where their ancestor lived and worked. We would like to thank them for donating to the exhibit and making their visit the highlight of our summer! The guest book totaled roughly 1480 guests from 42 states and 14 countries including Sweden, China, Jordan, Austria, Lebanon, Japan, and India!

We continue to receive slides to scan; we received a full suitcase from Diana Roberts Gay and five totes from Chandler Blackington's family. Slides from Diana revealed many images of the Garden Club and their projects, her mother's gardens on Indian Creek (Elizabeth "Betty" Roberts), beach picnics, and winter on the island. Chandler's slides contained images of fires he responded to in the Boston area as a member of the Red Cross, along with images of Roberts Harbor, parades, and the Vinalhaven waterfront/harbor. If you're cleaning out a closet, basement, or attic please remember the Museum! We can scan your slides and return them to you with a digital copy on CD.

We received many wonderful items from Wyman and Astrid Philbrook, including a Commandery hat and sword, a 1953 game baseball from a championship doubleheader against Thomaston, a pot buoy that belonged to Wyman's father that was found at Providenciales (an island 150 miles north of Haiti), and a pool stick that belonged to Ed Johnson.

At the beginning of September we were approached by Wes Reed who had found an original EP Walker fire helmet on eBay and thought we should have it at the museum. Using our existing acquisition account, along with generous donations from Marty Stein, Ken Reiss, Wes Reed, and the Vinalhaven Fire Fighters Association we were able to obtain the helmet! As soon as a suitable case can be found it will be on display at the Old Engine House.

We had a small gathering September 18th to welcome master model maker Thomas Black and his model of the *Vinal Haven* to the Museum. Chandler Blackington had been corresponding with Black (they had the same barber in Concord, MA!), and organized the arrival of a model which took roughly six years to complete. Black became intrigued by the steamboats that served the islands after reading *Steamboat Lore of the Penobscot* by John H. Richardson, and chose the *Vinal Haven* because he thought it was a good representation of that era. The beautiful scale model is now on display at the Museum.



Jane Hutton, assistant professor in Harvard's Landscape and Design Department is writing a second piece with a Vinalhaven connection, to be published in 2016. Her first article about Vinalhaven paving blocks in New York City was published in Harvard Design Magazine in 2014.

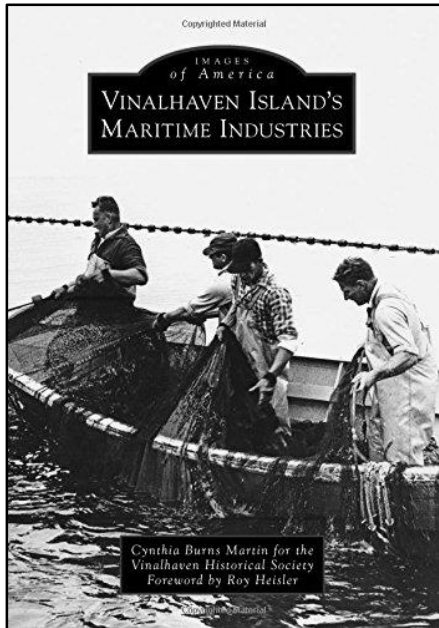
This year, Vinalhaven High School chose to focus their annual Knowledge Quest on Vinalhaven topics. All high school students were to pick a person or topic in Vinalhaven history to write a paper about and give a presentation on. Topics include The Bodwell Granite Company Store, Sunny Slope Dairy Farm, Leonard Hokanson, Margaret Wise Brown, island theatre and musicians, islanders in WWII, and Franz Herrmann. On April 7th, the students presented their projects to the community, either a tangible product relating to their topic or give a biography of their chosen person.

Can You Make History?

We hope so! We are looking for original material relating to the early days of Vinalhaven. It's part of a project on which we are working with author/ historian Ken Reiss (*The Bodwell & Webster Papers*) to document in as much detail as possible the fascinating story of the settling, founding and life in the early days of our town. We are off to a good start, but there surely are more pieces of the puzzle out there, waiting to help fill in the picture.

If you have a Vinalhaven-related letter, note, document, account book, or deed from the 1760-1820 period, we would love to know about it. Standing alone, it may appear to be of little significance, but it just might hold the key to solving a whole line of inquiry...or to opening a fresh one! If you do have something that might make history, please drop by, give us a call, or email Ken directly at kenreiss@optonline.net. We appreciate it!

New Book



The Museum is proud to announce the publication of its newest book, written by Henniker College professor Cynthia Martin, with a forward by director emeritus and Society board member, Roy Heisler. Vinalhaven Island has been the home port of a productive commercial fishing fleet for over 200 years. By 1819, Vinalhaven vessels were fishing for cod and herring from Seal Island all the way to Labrador waters. By 1878, Carver's Harbor was lined with docks, fish houses, a sail loft, a net factory, and the Lane & Libby fish plant. Throughout the 19th century, boats brought bait, salt, and supplies to Vinalhaven and returned with fish and granite from the island's quarries. Lighthouses at Brown's Head, Heron Neck, Saddleback Ledge, Goose Rock, and Matinicus guided mariners through storms. In Vinalhaven shops, boat builders constructed small dories, peapods and double-enders, masted schooners, and lobster boats, as well as the 365-ton Margaret M. Ford. Passenger ferries played an important role as the primary link between Vinalhaven and the mainland. The island has

long been a successful center of maritime economic activity, so it is no surprise that islanders call it "the center of the universe." *Vinalhaven Island Maritime Images* will be available for purchase at the Museum this summer.

Britannia Ashore

In the second installment of his series of WWI exhibits, Roger Young continues to explore the Great War, this time featuring Vinalhaven resident Jerrold Leroy Smith and Brittan's role in the war. Smith returned to Canada where he had been born, enlisted with the 85th Nova Scotia Highlanders, and was seriously wounded while fighting in France. Due to pre-arranged 'understandings' with France and Imperial Russia before WWI, Britain, the then great naval power, obliged itself to 'come ashore' and lead its empire in a massive land based campaign that would eventually defeat Germany and her allies.

Documents and other WWI related items belonging to Smith, as well as others, are included in this exhibit created by Roger Young with other artifacts provided by American Legion Post #18.

Let There be Light

In the fall the Museum applied for, and was awarded, a matching grant from the Island Institute to upgrade our lighting to more energy efficient LED bulbs. With the help of the Vinalhaven Energy Club, we tried many kinds of bulbs and found the right ones for our space. With this grant and funds raised from Lois Candage's art auction last summer we were able to purchase 60 lights for the exhibit space, six lights for the office, and a new outside light! Many, many thanks to the Island Institute, Energy Club, and Lois Candage!

Milestones

1865 - 150 years since the end of Civil War. It is estimated that over 170 Vinalhaven men left to fight for the Union during the Civil War, twenty-three died in service. The last surviving Civil War veteran, Woster Vinal, died June 7, 1937.



Left to Right: Civil War Veterans Woster Vinal, Stephen Colson, Albert Wooster, and Calvin Vinal

Summer Hours

June 15 - September 19

Monday - Friday 11-4pm

(Open Monday - Saturday in July and August)

Summer Exhibit: Boston Post Cane: Honoring Vinalhaven's Oldest Citizens

August 11: *Observing on Vinalhaven: The WIND since 1883.* The Observer column has been a feature of The WIND newspaper for over 30 years. Phil Crossman will share this history, its stories and a history of Vinalhaven newspapers since 1883. In this stimulating talk, Phil will regale the audience with his humor and insight. 7:00pm at Smith Hokanson Memorial Hall. Co-sponsored with the Vinalhaven Land Trust.

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