

Vinalhaven Historical Society

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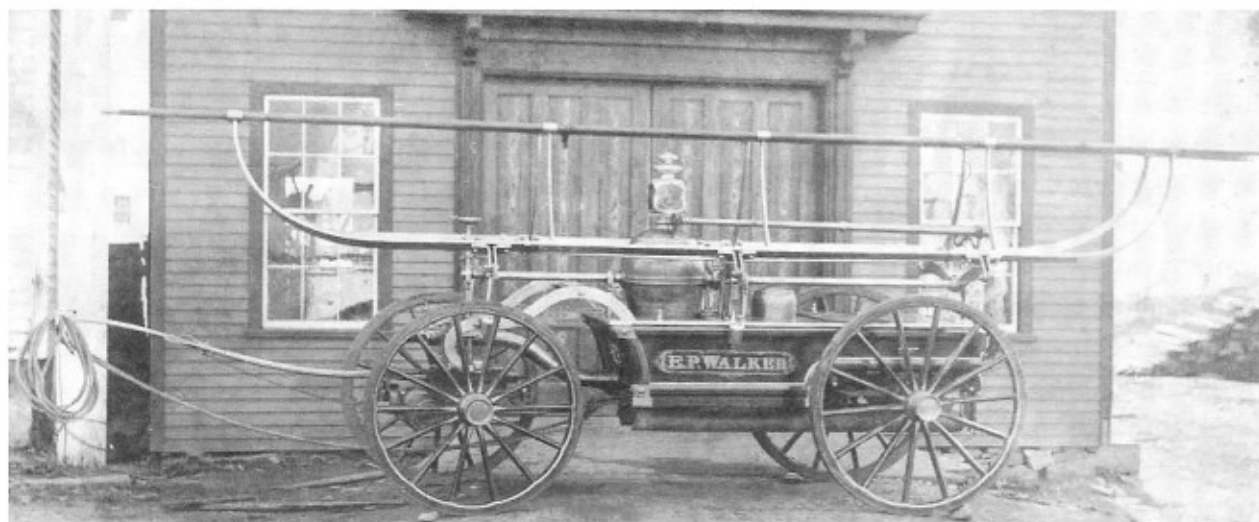
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Annual Newsletter 2007

History of the Vinalhaven Fire Company

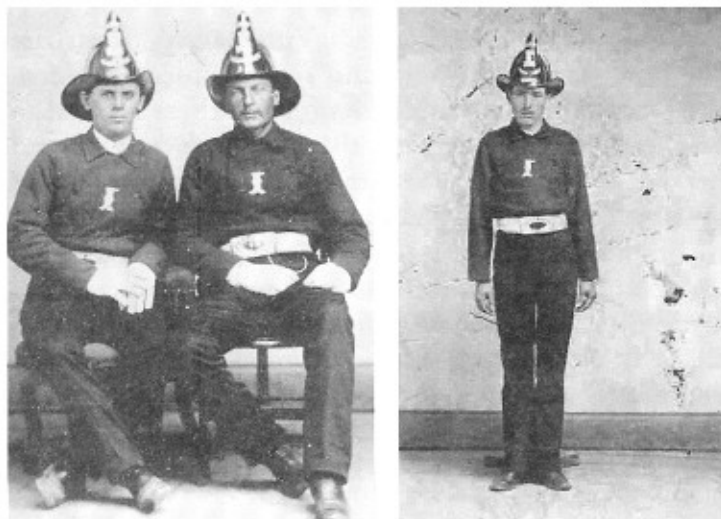
According to Sidney Winslow's *Fish Scales and Stone Chips*, Vinalhaven's first fire company was formed in 1870, shortly after the purchase of an "old hand tub," named the *Lion*. Immediately a group of forty young men stepped forward to volunteer. As many others wanted to join, a few took it upon themselves to purchase their own hand engine, the *Ellsworth*, and formed a second fire company. There was much rivalry between the two and musters (contests to prove each company's strength and endurance) were common. Vinalhaven, as in many other communities nationwide, was supportive and enthusiastic about firemen's musters, and large crowds gathered to cheer on their favorite team. The *Ellsworth* almost always reigned supreme.

It wasn't long, however, before citizens realized that neither the *Lion* nor the *Ellsworth* was adequate for Vinalhaven's needs. In 1872, E. P. Walker (one of the original founders of the Bodwell Granite Company) was able to obtain from a Brooklyn, New York Fire Company, a ten inch stroke Jeffers hand engine, the *Putnam*. Walker acquired the *Putnam* as partial payment for some granite supplied for the Brooklyn Bridge. He changed the name of the hand engine to *E. P. Walker*.



The *E. P. Walker* was used in Vinalhaven for many years. She traveled around New England numerous times to participate in firemen's musters, and eventually was sold. For ten years the island was left without adequate fire fighting equipment. In 1886 a huge complex, the Granite Hotel, burned to the ground and two years later the Ephraim Allenwood homestead burned during the night. The old *Ellsworth* failed to be of any use in either case.

In 1888, at the annual town meeting, voters agreed to establish a committee to look into the possibility of purchasing a new steam engine. Opposition was strong to this proposal, mainly out of fear, as many felt it would be too dangerous for the inexperienced men to operate. However, the decision was made to purchase a steam engine for \$3200 from the Silsby Manufacturing Company, of Seneca, New York. Just days before her arrival an engine house was completed on Main Street, the land being donated by Vinalhaven's oldest and most revered citizen at that time, Capt. Reuben Carver. The new engine was named in his honor, as well. The day the *Reuben Carver* arrived on Vinalhaven was a day unparalleled in local history. Every able man, woman and child turned out to welcome the new engine and no one was disappointed. All eyes focused on "the highly polished nickel shell which encased the boiler, the glittering machinery, the bright red wheels and their golden stripes."



Tintype images of Vinalhaven firemen.

Changes throughout recent years have brought improved fire protection to the island; a full time fire chief was appointed, modern fire equipment purchased; and more rigid regulations and training were made necessary for volunteer members. With advancements in technology and communications we are now comparable to any firefighting unit of our size. We pay tribute with this year's special exhibit to all the men and women who have served and continue to serve us so well.

Fires from the Past

- 1886-Granite Hotel
- 1894-First High School
- 1897-Cascade House
- 1899-First Union Church
- 1903-Harbor House
- 1933-Forest Fire-Calderwood's Neck
- 1934-Log Cabin-Round Pond
- 1956-Jack's Restaurant
- 1959-Medical Center/MacIntosh Grocery
- 1967-Masonic Building/A&P Store
- 1971-Vinalhaven School
- 1979-The Islander Inn



Steam engine Reuben Carver pumping water.

YEAR IN REVIEW

The 2006 special exhibit was "Island Winters of the Past" and featured an old horse-drawn snowplow, several old wooden sleds, ice skates, ice-cutting saws and a collection of winter photos. Our busy summer schedule began with the release and signing of Jeannette Lasansky's saltwater farms book at an informal gathering at the Legion Hall where several islanders shared farm memories. Professors Emeriti Harold W. Borns and David C. Smith of the University of Maine lectured on Vinalhaven's Dr. John De Laski and his role in the development of the ice age theory. Long time summer resident Harry Gratwick captivated his audience with his personal perspective on island baseball through the years. Our final presentation was a slide show of old Vinalhaven images from various island collections. Partnering with the Vinalhaven Historical Society and the local Land Trust Jim Boone organized and conducted a successful Hurricane Island walking tour.

Once again a faithful group of volunteers has worked tirelessly to produce an extraordinary amount of material. The completed projects include: a Hurricane Island recipe book, several photo journals of Vinalhaven servicemen and women, homes and weddings. Hundreds of letters from the 19th century and several oral histories have been transcribed. In addition, materials in the vault were reorganized and vital records were reformatted and updated. With volunteer help we were open an extra day each week during July and August. We sincerely appreciate the time and efforts all our volunteers give to the museum, especially Laurretta Chilles, Elizabeth Bickford, Tracy Rantala, Jessica Martin, Emily Dean, Roy Heisler and Lorraine Bunker.

With generous donations from several members we were able to reshingle the roof on the Boy Scout Hall, renovate the office and purchase a new computer. Our new office space is much more efficient with a bigger work area, more storage room and easier access to materials. Thanks to Martin Stein, Paul Chilles and many others for their help.

Other activities for the year include supplying clues for the annual Fourth of July treasure hunt, building and placing a plaque on the galamander, and hosting the release and signing of another book, 2006 Vinalhaven graduate Holly Walker's *Vinalhaven Places A to Z*.

There were approximately 1400 visitors from 36 states and 15 countries, including Denmark, Japan, Vietnam and Israel. We had the usual amount of genealogical inquiries and research, including a Japanese group from East River Films, who was here filming a documentary about Margaret Wise Brown for Japanese television.

The museum hosted several private parties throughout the summer. Among those who visited were the staff and crew of the Fox Island's Electric Co-op, Paul Chilles and friends, two groups of local women and The Red Hat Society (pictured at right with visitors from the Rockland area.)



GIFTS TO THE MUSEUM

We are fortunate each year to add to our collection many donations including photos, artifacts and documents. We appreciate the many donors who entrust us with so many Vinalhaven related items. Following is a partial list of our 2006 donated gifts.

From Elva Hunt and Ginny Fitts, Vinalhaven post card collections; Priscilla Rosen, Bert Dyer, Linda Philbrook, Larry Hopkins, Vera Stone and others, photos; Chandler Blackington, Lane-Libby poster; Charlotte Goodhue, Arts and Crafts Society records, programs, clippings, etc; Buddy Skoog, Odd Fellows-Star of Hope Lodge notebooks, letters, applications; the late Susan Stump Sulzer (via Grace Hinrichs) dishes from Rockaway Inn; Clare Winslow Gosselin, doll and wardrobe won by Sidney Winslow during the 1939 Sesqui-centennial; Dr. John Root, 1904 map of Vinalhaven; Peter Bodnar and Lida Gordon, clothing from Mel Smith's house; Dot Tolman, Allston Roberts WWI uniform; Elin Elisofon, prints from her father's collection; and Lawrence Philbrook, framed maps and old ledgers.



The steamer Pioneer built and donated to the museum by Dexter Wadsworth

MUSEUM PUBLICATIONS

Last year the museum was fortunate to offer two publications, *Island Saltwater Farms Farming on Vinalhaven 1820-1960* by Jeannette Lasansky and *Vinalhaven A to Z An Alphabet Book of Places* by Holly Walker. This year, thanks to the work of many volunteers, a unique Hurricane Island recipe book will be sold. This book contains recipes found in an old granite ledger from the Hurricane Island Granite Company, as well as a history of the island from the earliest known deeds to the present.

Ansel and Nellie Philbrook and their ten children lived on Hurricane as caretakers for several years after the demise of the granite boom. The recipes in this book were recorded by Nellie and we include some of their story, as well.



Arlene Johnson proudly displays her quilt.

FRIENDS OF THE MUSEUM

A local group of ladies, who dubbed themselves the WAVITS, donated a handmade quilt made from scraps of material found in the swap shop at the transfer station. A very successful raffle was held and Arlene Johnson of Vinalhaven, was the lucky winner. Thanks to all who created this special quilt and offered it to us as a fund-raiser.