

Vinalhaven Historical Society

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Annual Newsletter 2008

Bodwell Granite Company Store 1858-1919

By Cynthia Martin



The Bodwell Granite Company Store was the most ambitious retail venture ever operated in the town of Vinalhaven. The general merchandise store occupied the street floor of the most prestigious commercial address in town, the Masonic Block (on the lot now occupied by Carver's Harbor Market). The dry goods department was housed next door in the building now known as Port O' Call. The coal, wood and lumber yards were located where the town parking lot is today.

Anyone on Vinalhaven could shop at Bodwell Granite Company Store. But it was operated primarily for workers employed by Bodwell Granite Company who would make purchases at the Company Store between paydays, using "trade tickets" or company-issued scrip. When payday finally arrived, some workers had little left unspent after deductions for purchases at the Company Store and rent at the company-owned boarding house.

Our feature exhibit explores the impact of the Company Store on the personal income and household expenditures of granite workers on Vinalhaven. What were they buying and how were these products used? Did workers feel compelled to shop there? Did they think prices were fair? How did the Company Store affect other retailers in the same small market?

William H. Paige - 1859

The sales daybooks for the Bodwell Company Store offer a detailed and intimate glimpse into rhythms of daily life for Vinalhaven's granite workers.

In 1859, William H. Paige was a middle-aged quarryman whose household included his much-younger second wife, Maranda Calderwood, their young son and two adult children from Paige's first marriage. W.H. Paige's store account #45 shows the household bought many barrels of flour, gallons of molasses (the preferred sweetener), cheese, tea, vinegar, salt pork and saleratus (baking soda, used for biscuits), as well as shoes, ready-made clothing and yard goods for dressmaking. Account #45 shows few vegetables and little meat. But many families grew a garden, kept a few animals and engaged in barter with neighbors.



Babbie Fife inside the Bodwell Company Store

1884.

1884.

*Campaign Opened!***DRY GOODS**

DEPARTMENT,

Bodwell Granite Co's

STORE.

EVERY DEPARTMENT FULL!

A splendid line of

BLACK SILKS

—AND—

SATINS,

SATIN MARYELLETTES.

Black Sicilian, Electoral
Double Face Ottomans.**SERGES, BUNTING AND
CASHMERES,**

In Great Variety.

New Patterns in Gingham
and Prints.**VELVETS** IN ALL
SHADES.

EXTRA BARGAINS IN

BROWN SILKS!

Fine Assortment of Ladies' Cloths.

**FANCY CASSIMERES FOR
GENTS' SUITS.****SHAWLS,
SKIRTS,
TALMAS,
JACKETS,
NEW MARKETS,****JERSEYS**

In all Colors and Sizes.

A complete line of

LADIES' UNDERWEAR.**SMALL WARE LINE,**Silk Handkerchiefs, Neck
Ties, Bibs, Collarettes,
Ladies', Misses' and
Children's Hose,**GLOVES, in New Colors,****BUTTONS! BUTTONS! BUTTONS!**Long and Short Sleeve Vests
for Ladies', Misses' and
Children.

Purchases reflect the changing seasons. William H. Paige bought 57 dozen eggs from the Company Store from April through September, 1859. He did not buy any eggs at all during the dark days of October through March, when eggs were scarce and prices high. The Paiges probably preserved summer eggs for use during winter months, either by sealing the eggs with a fat-like lard, or by immersing them in "waterglass," a solution of sodium silicate.

During winter months, quarrymen and paving cutters lost some work days to bad weather. During the month of December, 1859, quarryman W.H. Paige limited his purchases to a barrel of flour for \$8.00, a pair of pants for \$4.00 and 27 pounds of ham for \$3.33. Gift giving was not a universal practice in New England at the mid-nineteenth century. If Christmas gifts were exchanged in the Paige household in 1859, they were not purchased at the Company Store.

The Story Behind the Exhibit

A few years ago, the Vinalhaven Historical Society was excited to receive a gift from Bob Candage, who found hundreds of documents in a third floor attic crawlspace of his store, Port O'Call.

The Candage Collection paints a rich picture of the operations of a huge company store operated by Bodwell Granite Company, the major employer on Vinalhaven during the Granite Era. The collection includes internal company correspondence, external correspondence with vendors, trade tickets redeemed by workers at the store, boarding house lists, payroll records and bills of lading for the schooners that brought inventory to the store and took granite off the island. An intimate glimpse into the lives of individual workers is provided by sales journals which record all purchases by worker name and by the trade tickets issued to them.



These documents survived due to a fortuitous series of choices. The company decided to locate their office away from the main store building which was later destroyed by fire. At some point, someone decided to stow the old documents in the attic. Bodwell Granite Company employees either intentionally abandoned or simply forgot the documents when they closed the store and left in 1919. Subsequent owners of the building left the documents in the crawlspace for eight decades. Upon finding the documents, Bob Candage recognized their significance to the history of Vinalhaven and donated them to the Vinalhaven Historical Society for preservation.

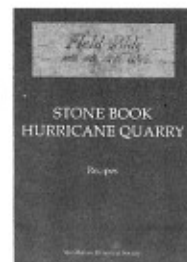
Scholarly work has only begun with the Candage Collection and will continue for many years, depending on the availability of funding.

The exhibit opens in June 2008 and will run through the season. Made possible with generous support provided by Maine Humanities Council and New England College.



Year in Review

Our 2007 special exhibit was a tribute to the men and women of this community who have served and continue to serve us so well: our local volunteer firefighters. *The History of the Vinalhaven Fire Company* featured old firefighting equipment, including a hand-pulled hose cart, a collection of old fire extinguishers, helmets and belts, as well as fire company records and old photos. Thanks to the Vinalhaven Fire Department for lending materials to us for the display. It was our hope to begin our summer schedule with the release in June of our *Hurricane Island Recipe Book*, but printing delays forced us to postpone its release until October. Our first program was *Fire Department Recollections*, an informal gathering of local firemen, past and present, who shared some of their experiences



and answered questions relating to local fire history. In August a showing of *Deep Waters* at the auditorium helped commemorate the 60th anniversary of the filming of the movie in Vinalhaven. A week later Army Armstrong's documentary, *Hollywood Comes to Vinalhaven-The Making of Deep Waters*, was shown to a large, enthusiastic audience. The Vinalhaven Historical Society co-sponsored (with the Vinalhaven Land Trust) another successful walk and talk, *Wharff's Quarry-Then and Now*, led by Jim Boone.

With generous donations from several members we were able to purchase much needed archival materials, a new computer and printer and a media storage unit. Dan Bickford and sons finished their part of our outside landscaping project and in the spring we will add plants and shrubs to complete the new look. Not only does this provide an easier access to the town office, but looks wonderful as well.

Our year-round volunteers have been involved in many projects including photographing local homes and researching their history, updating birth, marriage and death records, assisting Cindi Martin with the Bodwell Granite Company project, and much more. With volunteer help we were able to be open daily during July and August. We sincerely appreciate the time and effort all our volunteers give to the museum, especially Lauretta Chilles, Elizabeth Bickford, Tracy Rantala, Jessica Martin, Emily Dean, Roy Heisler and Ken Reiss.

There were approximately 1600 visitors from 37 states and 16 countries, including Germany, Australia, the Virgin Islands, Italy and Scotland. We had several visitors of interest during the summer of 2007. Relatives of E.P. Walker, Cissy Smith and O.P. Lyons stopped in to say hello and share family stories. All were pleased to see that their kin had played such an important role in Vinalhaven's history, and that personal memorabilia and photos were so prominently displayed.

We had more than the usual amount of genealogical inquiries, as well as several visiting school groups, both local and off-island. We helped with many research topics such as the *Royal Tar* tragedy, the history of the local library, the granite industry and shipbuilding.



Local elementary students dress and pose in period outfits for a school project. Nobody smiles in old pictures!

Gifts to the Museum

Each year we are inspired by the willingness of so many who donate old photos, letters and artifacts to the Museum. This year we were overjoyed when Sidney Winslow's granddaughter, Clare Gosselin, donated his complete set of diaries from 1921-1954 (see below.) In addition, she spent months transcribing them and sent a copy for our files. Following is a partial list of 2007 donations:

From Dana Barton, newspaper clippings, photos and post cards; Priscilla Rosen, 1818 sampler, scales from H.Y. Carver's; Patsy Colhoun, kitchenware and laundry items; Brandon Small, wicker coffin; Philip Kintner, wooden lobster trap and a hand-made halibut hook; Connie Andrews, Net Factory ledger; David Hyde, stone hand-grinder; Phil Crossman, doors from the old Post Office boxes; the Hoffman family, double ox yoke; Chandler Blackington, old Osprey brand fish bucket; Bill Schmidt, two packets of letters(1880-early 1900) found in walls of the California House; Bill Brown, box of ephemera and artifacts from Bruce Grindle; Virginia Wadleigh, halibut hook and codfish jig, belonging to her great-grandfather, Harry Young; Lee Osgood, herring "feeler pole."

Memorial Hall Recollections



Built in 1895, the Memorial Hall stood on Main Street for nearly 100 years. The building paid tribute to our Civil War veterans and was home to the G.A.R. (Grand Army of the Republic), the ladies of the G.A.R., Women's State Relief Corps and Sons of Union Veterans Post. In addition, the building functioned as a theater, dance hall, a place to hold town meetings, graduations, rummage sales, dinners and much more. Sadly, in 1973 the decision was made to raze the building as it was deemed unsound. Many island residents have fond memories of the Memorial Hall and the various activities that were held there. The Historical Society is showcasing those memories with a small display at the Museum and a mid-summer program entitled *Memorial Hall Memories*.

"Every event held there was perfect material for fond memories." —From *Memorial Hall Reminiscences* by Bruce Grindle

Excerpts from Sidney Winslow's Diaries

1935-I am glad to write that the observance of Memorial Day is carried out just as meticulously as it was during the years the G.A.R. was in its heyday, and I hope it always will be.

1937-This is the first Memorial Day in Vinalhaven that no veteran of the Civil War was present. Woster S. Vinal, the towns only surviving veteran of the great rebellion was absent because of illness and he probably will never take part again. (Wos Vinal died a week later) I may be mistaken, but it seems to me that at one time there were 85 Civil War veterans in the local Memorial Day parade.

1946-Memorial Day services were carried out in the customary manner, but it yet lacks the spirit of the G.A.R. days. Our local musicians did manage to get a band together, but I don't believe it will be possible to assemble another one next year unless some new blood is "transfused" into it. Memorial Day observance has been nobly carried out in Vinalhaven and I hope it will ever be continued.

1947-The fellows managed to get a "pick-up" band together and they did a good job (all things considered), but we wonder if it can be done again next year. Colon says that the young men are going to organize a band right away, but I wonder if they have the "grits" to do it.

1948-Another "pick-up" band, composed of ex-Vinalhaven band members, furnished music for the occasion. Never since 1872 has Vinalhaven observed a Memorial Day without a Vinalhaven band in attendance.



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.

Your continued support allows us to carry out the goals of our mission statement. Memberships and donations are our largest source of revenue. Grants help, of course, but often are slated for a specific project or purchase and often require matching funds. Basic year to year expenses are met because of your generosity. However, we are facing larger challenges. The Museum needs structural repairs, the roof resingled, and the exterior painted. None of these projects can be achieved within our current budget. We plan to announce a Capital Improvement Fund for this purpose.

After seeing the newly painted galamander a few members expressed interest in helping us maintain and preserve it along with other local historic sites, such as the bandstand and watering troughs. Each endeavor costs money, but it is our hope there is enough community interest and support for this to happen. A couple items relating to these places can be purchased from our gift shop. All profits will go directly toward their upkeep. We welcome suggestions and ideas.

Much of Vinalhaven's history has been recorded by island families on old home movies. Due to advancing technology these films (8mm, 16mm, etc.) have not been viewed for years. Thanks to a matching grant, we now have the opportunity to convert these films to DVD format. Each film donor, as well as the Museum, will receive a free copy.

Over the years, we made several unsuccessful attempts to procure the rights to have *Deep Waters* reproduced. Last fall a generous friend of the museum was able to obtain a limited supply for fund-raising purposes. Filmed in Vinalhaven during the fall of 1947, *Deep Waters* features, among others, Dana Andrews, Dean Stockwell, Jean Peters and Cesar Romero as well as local people and scenes.

Your annual membership/appeal form is enclosed. Please include your winter and summer address as well as your email address. We look forward to your response in support of our volunteer efforts and programs. As always, your membership dues and donations are greatly appreciated. With a donation of \$100 or more we will send you a complimentary DVD of *Deep Waters*.

Local Inventors

In the course of research we come across many items of interest. Our curiosity was peaked when we discovered that many local inventors tried to obtain patents for their sometimes ingenious inventions. A couple worthy of mention are: a sock protector, the brainchild of Messrs. Lane and Smith, which apparently didn't garner much interest in the shoe, boot and hosiery industry, and to our knowledge didn't reach the final stage of the patent process; and a rope clamp (image at left), designed by Charles Littlefield of Vinalhaven (a Bodwell Granite Company blacksmith) "which provides a cheap, efficient, and easily-applied and self-adjusted rope holder for holding and splicing hempen or wire ropes without cutting, marring, or otherwise injuring the rope." The patent was issued May 22, 1883.

Applications were also filed for various types of lobster traps (most of which we are unable to confirm if patents were issued). However, a design submitted by Omar Thomas of North Haven was accepted on November 6, 1888 (image at right).

