



Jonesport Historical Society Newsletter

“Preserving Our Heritage”

Message from the President

Each year during the winter and spring I catch up on the hundreds of photos, documents and other pages of text that were scanned the previous 12 months, and add them to the Archives database, which now contains almost 15,000 photos and 28,000 pages of text. JHS treasurer and genealogist Cathy Perry also takes advantage of the off-season to add more names and information to her Genealogy database, which now has more than 85,000 names and 520,000 text records.

Just because all public events are cancelled this year does not mean nothing is happening at JHS. Since March people have offered us artifacts and documents including: sail-making tools from the Sawyer Store; original birth, marriage and death certificates from the Bridgham, Urquhart and Norton families; high resolution photos of weir fishing at Little Spruce Island from 1903 ; photos of Norton Island; and photos of the William Riley Beal family. George Herrick from the Roque Island family has donated the 2018 book *A Natural Resource Inventory of the Roque Island Archipelago, Maine*. Three more JHS members have expressed an interest in volunteering their services. And JHS board member Jan Kristo, and a high school history teacher who is working on a Reconstruction Era project, has volunteered to digitize several thousand of our schooner records from the 1870s.

Bill Plaskon, President

Jonesport’s Down East Heritage Trail

Maine Archives and Museums (MAM) is an organization that represents museums, archives and historical societies in Maine. Vamonde is a company that offers a software application for creating digital and mobile tours through the Internet. MAM has collaborated with Vamonde to allow local historical societies to build historic town tours within a network called Down East Heritage Trail. Colin J.C. Windhorst, a Maine Humanities Council scholar and Digital Curator of Dennys River Historical Society, has organized workshops in Washington County to teach society representatives how to use the Vamonde tools. After JHS board member Jan Kristo attended a workshop, JHS board member Kylie Hinkley and I worked with Jan and created the Down East Heritage Trail for Jonesport. It was challenging trying to work as a team together by using Zoom meetings only.

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Summer 2020

2020 Events

Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, all the 2020 events and Friday night movies are cancelled.

We will try to offer the same events in 2021 that were scheduled for 2020.

2020 Board of Directors

Officers:

William Plaskon, President
Charles Alley, V.P. Emeritus
-- Vacant -- Vice President
Catherine Perry, Treasurer
-- Vacant -- Secretary

Directors:

Byron Carver, Jr.
Kylie Hinkley
Andrew Hutnik
Eric Kelley
Janice Kristo
Charlene Nelson
Nancy Sawyer
-- Vacant – Member at Large

Good Old Days

by Ralph Smith Sr.

Times have changed since the “Good Old Days.” Although I can only personally witness the past seventy years, it is mind boggling what has transpired.

When I was a boy, there were two Post Offices in Jonesport. One for Jonesport and one for West Jonesport. At one point there were three offices. There was no bridge between Jonesport and Beals Island. Transportation for the Islanders was furnished by Uriah Beal’s Ferries.

Willie Peck, as I knew him, would row his dory both morning and afternoon from Beals Island across the Reach to Charlie Cummings’ Wharf in West Jonesport, which was next door to the West Jonesport Post Office. This was to pick up and to deliver the mail for the Island. Because “the mail must go through,” weather, which should have been a factor, couldn’t be considered. In rain or sunshine, sleet or snow, thick dungeon of fog or gale force winds, Willie Peck, because of the extra size and length of the oars, would cross the Reach four times each mail day in “hand over hand” position.

Slop pails and outhouses were common. In fact, the hook or button on the outhouse door was the only lock used in those days. Nobody locked their homes. There was no sense because everyone had the same skeleton key.

Running water for the home was provided by “running to the well and back” for pails of water. Some homes still had kerosene lights with no electricity. Clothes were washed by hand in a washtub, then hung on clotheslines outdoor to dry. We were cautious if we tried this in the winter. With no wind our clothes might *break* when we took them in. Clothes were handed down from the oldest to the youngest as each grew out of them. Then, if there was any wear left in “them tattered clothes,” they were given to relatives or neighbors. I wore a lot of “hand-me-downs.”

I can name about ten grocery stores in Jonesport in those days. Every neighborhood had one or more. Ours was Charlie Cummings’. He, along with others, would let you “run a bill” in the winter. Although I didn’t realize it, we were poor, as were a lot of others. Every winter my father would run a tab and work in the summer and fall to pay it off, only to start all over again. If you couldn’t get to the store, you just called Charlie up on the phone and he would have Harry Scott deliver your groceries to your door.

The phone was a very modern convenience. There was no such thing as a private line. You could possibly have up to ten on your party line and the person you were speaking to have ten on theirs. That meant that there could have been up to twenty people “rubbering” your call. That’s how the news spread in days gone by.

Then there were milkmen. Alton Davis not only delivered to our house, but he would walk right in through the porch and the kitchen and go into the dining room and put all seven quarts of milk in the refrigerator. He would then pick up his empty bottles and leave saying “have a good day.” This was done six days a week in all kinds of weather.



Automobile ferry service began in 1951 and continued until the bridge opened in 1958. The ferry had capacity to move six automobiles. Marshall Peck Kelley’s boat *Spitfire* pushed the scow.



These are telephone operators Imogene “Nettie” (Reed) Alley and Laura Jane (Drisko) Wilson on the day Mrs. Wilson retired.

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(Good Old Days, continued)

As a child, I recall, if you lived within a mile of school, you walked to school. The bus was for those who lived over a mile away. Since there were no lunch programs, we also walked home at noon and back. Even through High School we walked. As kids we had no cars. Parents did well to have a family vehicle.

All the kids played outdoors. Each neighborhood had their gathering places. It was nothing to see fifteen to twenty kids in one dooryard playing.

In the Spring I can remember making huge homemade kites out of the green window shades. This was so you could fly them in the rain and heavy weather. May first was May Basket Day. This was the only time it was ok to kiss a girl, that is if you could catch her. In the Summer, the boys hung out at the wharfs, playing in the skiffs. In the Fall, Bennie Pratt and myself would work for days damming up Leon Smith's (my grandfather's) pond, only to have the DOT rip it out because we might flood the road. So we had to do it all over again. But, it paid off, because every Winter there would be anywhere from twenty to fifty kids and adults gathered for ice skating. Playing prison base, crack the whip, or jumping over kids instead of barrels was always included.

Some things of the past that are missed today in our fishing communities are the lighthouses and fog horns. Any time the wind was from the south'ard or east'ard, they could be heard. The sardine factories and whistles, along with the carriers and their fog horns, are now silent. The fish weirs and the herring seiners with their dories and twines no longer exist.

The church bell was a desired sound. Even if you weren't a church attendee, most people wouldn't even think about going to work on Sunday. The evenings were spent around the table playing games. If not, a lot of nights the entire family would visit with family or friends.

Now I am living in the Golden Years, so they say. All my life I've worked hard providing for and raising a family to get to the Golden Years. Sometimes I wonder *Why can't I have a little of both?*



The William Underwood Company completed its sardine factory in 1880, on the present site of the Coast Guard base. It was the first of many sardine factories to operate in Jonesport, but closed in 1962.



A dory of Jonesport herring seiners.

What is this? Although it is not a dental tool, this 9" long item with the 1"x1" square is something that Dr. Henry Mansfield gave to JHS board member Eric Kelley, Jr., many years ago. Can you tell us its name and use?



Did you know?

According to Jonesport Historical Society member Maxine (Smith) Morris, during the summer of 1942 the playground of Lincoln Grammar School (next to the Union Church and cemetery) became the site of a huge pile of scrap metal collected for the war effort. The space is now a park.

If anyone has memories or photos of this scrap metal collection, would you please share them with us?

Contact information for the *Jonesport Historical Society Newsletter* is on the last page. Your comments, suggestions, responses, and submissions of all sizes are invited. This is your Society, and your *Newsletter*. Engage!

By Clayton Beal
NEWS Machias Bureau

JONESBORO - More than a few Downeast residents can recall that Sunday afternoon four years ago when a group of Beals fishermen flew their 14-foot kite off the Jonesport Beals bridge and caused the Bangor Hydro - Electric Co 's 2,400 - volt circuit to blow a fuse. That 14-foot giant's record may be challenged on March 31 during the first annual 4-H kite festival at nearby Jonesboro.

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The Beals flyers gained recognition during 1973 - 75, during April as they flew plastic covered varieties in Ewart Lenfestey's pasture and over Moosabec Reach by using a lobster boat as a "runner" and operations control center.

The memorable launch from the middle of the J - B bridge on April 20, 1975, resembled the Wright brothers' historic flight, except that the flight lasted longer (15 minutes) and the episode was a bit more spectacular, because the aerial sports spectacular caused a one - hour blackout of the championship Washington - Buffalo basketball game (during the last crucial seconds of the contest), and the Boston - Baltimore baseball game was interrupted on local television screens.

Jonesport Turns Out To Honor Neighbor Who Has Been Ringing Their Telephones For 40 Years

By AL MOULTON
NEWS Washington County Bureau Chief

1951

JONESPORT, Oct. 26—People in the friendly town of Jonesport turned out to honor a neighbor who has been ringing their telephones for 40 years here this week, a woman who may be the oldest telephone worker in the state.

GIVEN OPEN HOUSE

She is Mrs. Laura Wilson, a gay, gray-haired lady who celebrated her 80th birthday this week and is still "busy as a bee" operating the Jonesport telephone office at an age when most people are willing to sit back and take things easy.

Mrs. Wilson was given an open house party Wednesday in her honor by the telephone operators who work for her in Jonesport.

The party was in the same little office-home that housed the telephone office back in 1911 when Mrs. Wilson first took over the business. She has been operating it ever since.

Although she gave up the actual telephone operating work a few years ago, the active old lady is still running the business office for the New England Telephone and Telegraph company and serves as chief operator for the office.

PERMITTED TO WORK

Since Mrs. Wilson is an agent, not a regular employe of the company, she does not come under the firm's retirement plan. Therefore she has been allowed to work these many years when regular employes would have been in retirement.

Sinking back in her favorite rocker and looking over her many years in the telephone business, Mrs. Wilson likes to talk about the changes that have come about since 1911.

"When I took this office, we had only 75 subscribers and two private lines. Now we have more than 355

subscribers and Lord only knows how many private lines," she recalls.

Mrs. Wilson and another woman did all the operating in the old days, but now she has five girls to work as operators.

One thing that Mrs. Wilson likes to remark about is the change in telephone habits in the past 40 years.

"There used to be a time when people did most of their telephoning during the daytime and never bothered us at night. Now they are calling all the time and at all hours of the night. I never saw anything like it."

BUSIEST TIME

Mrs. Wilson says the busiest time she ever had at a switchboard or seen in the office was during the terrible Maine forest fires a few years ago.

"We were going at it all the time, night and day," she said. "We didn't have many fires here, but folks were calling to get help and ask about fires."

Mrs. Wilson's husband, Edgar R. Wilson, died two years ago, shortly after the couple had celebrated their 59th wedding anniversary.

What about retirement?
"Oh, say," she says, "I've thought about it, but I have my daughters-in-law, granddaughters and all the family working here, so I can't find time to stop working. Besides, I've got to support myself now and a person doesn't want to give up a good job."

(Jonesport's Down East Heritage Trail, continued)

To create Jonesport's Heritage Trail, we had to follow the rules and guidelines of the Vamonde software application. As a result, we separated the trail into five sections of town, each section being an adventure in Vamonde terminology, and having its own URL. Each section of town contains from three to seven sites, each site being a post in Vamonde terminology.

Since the tour will also be available from a mobile app, we arranged the URLs in sequence starting from West Jonesport, thinking most tourists will be driving north on Route 1 to get to Jonesport. Each site within each section is also in sequence from west to east.

To take the tour of each section of town, go to the following:

- vamonde.com/adventure/link/1557 (West Jonesport)
- vamonde.com/adventure/link/1643 (Central Jonesport)
- vamonde.com/adventure/link/1558 (Sawyer Square)
- vamonde.com/adventure/link/1566 (Sawyer Cove)
- vamonde.com/adventure/link/1563 (JHS Museum and Heritage Center)

Please let us know what you think by e-mailing comments to us.

Michele Romanini-Pollard has regretfully resigned from the JHS Board of Directors. She has sold her house in Jonesport and will be relocating to California. Michele has been on the board since 2015 and was always ready to help with serving refreshments and selling tickets at meetings, making popcorn at movie nights, and promoting JHS at special events. She also was a temporary secretary and served on the committee to create the book *Jonesport America: A History Preserved in Pictures*. Michele was a delight to work with and we will miss her.

Jonesport Historical Society
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Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, the JHS Museum will be open only upon request this year, from June through October, and guests will be required to wear face masks and observe social distancing. Please call 207-747-8228 to make an appointment.