

Jonesport Historical Society Newsletter

“Preserving Our Heritage”

Message from the President

This year marks the 190th birthday of Jonesport. In ten more years, 2032, it will be Jonesport’s bicentennial. That got me thinking about how the bicentennial will be celebrated and who will organize it.

In 1932 the U.S. was in the midst of the Great Depression. The town did not have a historical society back then, so First Selectman Rev. Newman Wilson was chosen to be the Centennial Committee chairman. A 52-page booklet was published which contained a brief town history. Several speeches were given on September 3rd, the day of many festivities, including the dedication of a centennial monument placed in front of the library, baseball games, boxing and wrestling matches, a tug of war, sea plane rides, and a grand parade with many floats, one with “a hayrack load of modern girls in beach pajamas.” Spectators cheered when Old Man Depression was burned in effigy.

In 1982, with the Moosabec Historical Society disbanded five years earlier, the Jonesport Sesquicentennial was organized by Alvin Smith as Committee Chairman, Shirley Dunning as Committee co-chairman, and the three Selectmen. Commemorative items were made and sold, such as ceramic plates and ceramic tiles, and coins minted in both silver and bronze showing the D.J. Sawyer schooner on one side and Mink Island on the other side. There was a special event each month of the year, with beauty pageants, banquets, picnics, parades, a harvest fair and a costume ball. A highlight of festive activities was a re-enactment of the Seth Parker radio program that ran from 1926 to 1932 and was listened to by millions of people. The fictional characters in the radio broadcast were supposed to be Jonesport neighbors that gathered around every Sunday night to gossip and to sing hymns. The re-enactment cast of characters was played by 14 citizens.

So how will Jonesport celebrate its bicentennial in 2032? Besides the ever-popular lobster boat races and lobster crate races, will there be basketball games instead of baseball, corn hole games instead of boxing, helicopter rides instead of sea planes? Who will be burned in effigy instead of Old Man Depression? And who will volunteer to organize the events besides the Selectmen? Hopefully the Jonesport Historical Society will still be in existence and have a significant roll. But of the current 11 Board of Directors, most of us will be too old to take on the job. Who among you will take the challenge and join the Board? Please give this some thought while there is plenty of time.

Bill Plaskon, President

Summer 2022

Free Friday night movies are back!

Movies start at 6:30 p.m. in the JHS Meeting Room, Sawyer Square. Because of COVID, seating is limited to 30 people, and masks are recommended. Reservations are encouraged.

Jul 22 –*RawFaith*

An 88’ wooden boat built by the McKay family in 2003. Some parts filmed in Jonesport.

Jul 29 – To Be Announced

Aug 05- To Be Announced

Aug 12 -A visual Jonesport Soundwalk around historic Sawyer Square and Old House Point Road. Filmed in Jonesport.

2022 Board of Directors

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U. S. L. H. S. Tenders *Hibiscus* and *Ilex*

by Sharon (English) Josephson

Yes, both were from away. But each stopped at Jonesport regularly. They were the U. S. Lighthouse Service tenders *Hibiscus* and *Ilex*, and their many years of service were entwined with that of Jonesport native Osmond C. Faulkingham. *Hibiscus* and *Ilex* were well known to coastal folks, and their names show up in many books and documentaries about Maine lighthouses and coastal dramas.

Up until 1939, when the Lighthouse Service was taken over by the Coast Guard, South Portland was headquarters for the First Lighthouse District, which stretched from the New Hampshire/Massachusetts border to the head of navigation on the Saint Croix River at Calais, on the Canadian border. *Hibiscus* and *Ilex* were both stationed at the base in South Portland, but they serviced the remote light stations and tended the buoys all along the coast. Even when the Lighthouse Service merged with the Coast Guard, and Boston was headquarters for the expanded service, the two familiar lighthouse tenders—now referred to as “buoy boats”—remained in South Portland, and continued to take turns working the New Hampshire and Maine coast.



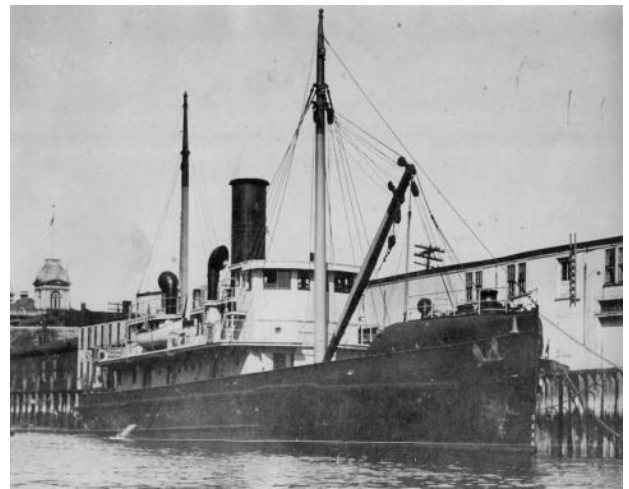
USLHS tender *Hibiscus*

The slightly smaller *Ilex* was built in Milwaukee as a “Speedwell-class” mine planter for the Army toward the end of the Great War. She was 172’ long, with a 32’ beam and 11’-6” draft. Commissioned in the Army in 1919, within four years she was refitted for use as a lighthouse tender, and was commissioned in the USLHS in 1924, at which time she joined the *Hibiscus* at the First Lighthouse District base in South Portland.

Family tradition has it that Osmond Faulkingham rowed out to the *Hibiscus*, anchored in Moosabec Reach, from his West Jonesport home, and asked to join her crew. In fact, he graduated from Jonesport High School in 1904, attended business school in Massachusetts, and returned to Jonesport. Older brothers, Albion and J. Roscoe, had become lightkeepers, but Ozzie joined the USLHS in 1911 to be on a tender, initially as Quartermaster. Indeed, the tender he was assigned to was the *Hibiscus*. Within two years, newly married, he was promoted to Second Officer, and the following year he became *Hibiscus*’s First Mate. By 1924 he attained the rank of Master, and was put in charge of the newly-commissioned *Ilex*. “Cap’ Faulkingham” was Master of the *Ilex* for more than a dozen years before becoming Master of his first posting, *Hibiscus*, in 1937.

Jonesport-born Leonard Tibbitts, a lifelong genealogist and history buff, was Capt. Faulkingham’s grand-nephew. Leonard recalled that whenever the *Ilex* steamed into Moosabec Reach and “Uncle Ozzie” saluted his

Hibiscus was built of steel for the U. S. Lighthouse Service (USLHS) in New Jersey in 1908, one of eight “Manzanita-class” tenders. Her length was 190’, beam 30’, and draft 13’-3”. She had two propellers, driven by coal-fired steam boilers. (In 1932 she was converted to oil-fired steam.) From the beginning she was assigned to the First Lighthouse District base at South Portland.



USLHS tender *Ilex* (Note the lighthouse emblem at the very bow, above her anchor.)

own boyhood home with the steam whistle, Leonard's great-grandmother Lena Faulkingham would wave her apron from the back steps to acknowledge that her son the captain would be ashore for supper. Leonard said that after supper the *Ilex*'s Master would send him off on his bike to Emery Farnsworth's store to buy Turner Centre ice cream for dessert.

According to Jonesport native Maxine Morris, when either tender visited Jonesport, it anchored off George Beal's wharf. The location was confirmed by Beals native Arthur S. Woodward, author of *Adventures and History from Downeast Maine*. This location would have these deep-draft vessels anchored west of Cross Cove, but east of the hazard of Cummings Ledge.



***Hibiscus* hauling a buoy, after 1939**



Capt. Faulkingham and Inspector Sampson at Little Diamond Isl. Buoy Depot, seen from *Ilex*

What did the tenders do? Their primary job was to service aids to navigation. Their sturdy deck cranes not only hauled and set buoys, but also delivered supplies to the many lighthouses not accessible by land. Buoys couldn't be left in the water indefinitely; they needed to be rotated through a buoy depot for maintenance, and fresh buoys set in their place. (At least into the 1930s, the District's major buoy depot was at Little Diamond Island in Casco Bay, off Portland Harbor. There was also a secondary depot at Bear Island, off Mt. Desert.)



Beryl and young officer Ozzie Faulkingham aboard *Hibiscus*

Until the USLHS was absorbed into the USCG in 1939, masters of tenders hired civilian crews. In peacetime, the *Ilex* had a total compliment of 27, and the *Hibiscus*, 34. (During WWII, when all tenders were part of the Navy, both of these vessels carried a compliment of 44.) Back when Ozzie Faulkingham became Master of the *Ilex*, in 1924, he not only hired a civilian crew, but also sometimes took his wife, Beryl (Bryant), whose father was a Jonesport captain of lumber schooners, and toddler daughter, Barbara, on his rounds of delivering supplies to lighthouses. Beryl would deliver the welcome books of the Lighthouse Service lending library, and visit with a lightkeeper's wife while supplies of coal, lamp oil (kerosene), paint, polish, whitewash, and sometimes even water were set aboard the light station by the *Ilex*'s mighty deck crane or transported ashore in small loads aboard a lighter.

Long before he was Master of the *Ilex*, Ozzie Faulkingham was part of tending to buoys and lighthouses aboard his initial posting, the *Hibiscus*. He was still just First Officer when the *Hibiscus* moved the Puringtons and the first seven of their children from Mark Island off Stonington to Nash Island Light off Addison in 1916. (This was ten years after Ozzie's brother J. Roscoe Faulkingham was keeper at Nash Island.) In the documentary "*Jenny's Island Life*," made by Friends of Nash Island Light, keeper's daughter Jenny (Purington) Cirone recalled that the *Hibiscus* and *Ilex* took turns making deliveries of lamp oil for the light and coal for the house, as well as items for repairs, while her father was keeper. She said that twice a year the tenders brought the District Inspector to evaluate the light station's appearance and functioning.

Although the tender didn't have a hull designed to break ice, in 1918 the *Hibiscus* responded to an emergency situation and successfully broke a passage through the ice in the Kennebec River—a feat noted by the USCG in their history of the vessel.

The following year, 1919, the *Hibiscus* moved keeper Hervey Wass and his family of six, and all their belongings, from Whitehead Island, Penobscot Bay, to Libby Island at the approach to Machias Bay. Son Philmore B. Wass, in his 1987 memoir *Lighthouse in My Life*, notes that even his sister's piano was aboard. (The keeper's wife, Mabel [Crowley] Wass, had siblings in Addison and Jonesport, including Meta and Charlie Cummings, who had a West Jonesport store with a notable candy counter.) The keeper that Wass replaced on Libby Island was Ozzie Faulkingham's oldest brother, Albion, who was transferred with wife Lucy and their three daughters from Libby Island to Moose Peak Light on Mistake Island, off Jonesport.



USLHS Inspector Pennant, 48" long

Author Wass notes that *Hibiscus*, in addition to her normal supply runs, delivered diesel engines for the Libby Island fog signal in 1923, and at unexpected intervals brought the District Inspector to perform the white-glove evaluation of every aspect of the station's operation—right down to the cleanliness of the keeper's quarters. When the Inspector was aboard, the tender would fly the special USLHS Inspector's pennant, sometimes the keepers' first indication of an impending inspection.

Fit in among her regular rounds of duties, in May of 1921 the *Hibiscus* towed a pair of lightships (#99 and #103) to the St. Lawrence River entrance, north of Nova Scotia, handing them off for their eventual duties at Detroit and Milwaukee.

In her memoir *The Lighthouse Keeper's Wife*, Connie Small does not name the tender that moved them in July of 1926 from Avery Rock Light in Machias Bay down to Seguin off the mouth of the Kennebec River, but she has a great deal to say about the tender's Capt. Faulkingham. Because Ozzie Faulkingham became Master of the newly-commissioned tender *Ilex* in 1924, it's safe to say that the Smalls were moved aboard that tender. And the move included a stop at Jonesport: "*Captain Faulkingham headed for Jonesport where we anchored for the night. Born in Jonesport, he was a favorite son and it was exciting to see the people lining the shore, waving as he blew the whistle in answer to their greetings. The next morning at sunrise we were on our way again. Even at five o'clock in the morning people were there to wave good-by.*"

Connie Small goes on to note that the tender stopped at the supply depot at Bear Island, and a day later set a spar buoy and granite mooring block on a newly-identified ledge near Two Bush Light at the entrance to Penobscot Bay.

Four years later, in 1930, Capt. Faulkingham and the *Ilex* moved Elson and Connie Small from Seguin to their new posting at Saint Croix River Light Station near the Canadian border at Calais, Maine. Along the way the *Ilex* stopped at Isle au Haut for a supply of fresh water to pump into the rain-starved cisterns at Saint Croix River Light. The vessel also carried the light station's annual supply of coal.

In 1937 Osmond C. Faulkingham became master of the tender on which he'd begun his Lighthouse Service career back in 1911, the *Hibiscus*. There were undoubtedly many trips to set buoys and to deliver supplies—and staff—to lighthouses up and down the coast. But the task which brought that tender and her crew the widest attention may have been their involvement in the 1939 salvage of the stricken submarine *U.S.S. Squalus* off the coast of Portsmouth, New Hampshire.

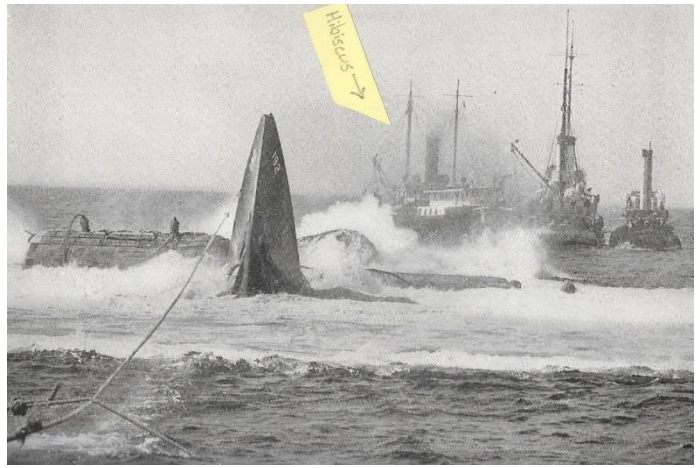
On the last day of her sea trials, May 23, 1939, the newly-built submarine *Squalus*, with 59 aboard, suffered a catastrophic valve failure and sank in 240 of water. An



***Hibiscus* and *Ilex* in their slip at South Portland**

experimental rescue chamber was rushed to the scene, and over the next two days all 33 men who had survived the initial calamity were rescued by the Navy. It was an historic first. But the salvage of the sunken submarine took many more weeks of trial and error, and the naval vessels involved in the work were joined by several small Coast Guard boats and the Lighthouse Service tender *Hibiscus*—her captain and crew experts in handling the various buoys and temporary moorings involved in the salvage operation. In James A. Jones’s famous *Boston Post* picture from the salvage work, the *Hibiscus* is maneuvering close by.

When the stricken submarine was finally raised from the bottom by inflated pontoons, and was being towed submerged back into the Navy Yard at Portsmouth, a decisive maneuver by *Hibiscus* saved the day. As written in Nat Barrows’s *Blow All Ballast!*, “...the submarine began to take a bad set toward one of the (mooring) buoys. There was little the tug could do to haul her clear in time. In a splendid exhibition of seamanship and skill, Captain Osmond Faulkingham of the Coast Guard lighthouse tender *Hibiscus* maneuvered his ship in past the tow and worked alongside the buoy that threatened to wreck the successful end of the salvage. His crew swung the buoy up and dropped the anchor clear. The listed submarine



USS *Squalus* with *Hibiscus* in background, 1939

moved past without danger.”

In his post-salvage report, Rear Admiral Cyrus W. Cole, Commander U.S. Fleet’s Submarine Force, and Commandant of the Portsmouth Navy Yard, hailed the participation of the Lighthouse Service, and commended, among others, “Captain O. C. Faulkingham, commanding Lighthouse Tender *Hibiscus*.”



Jonesport native
Osmond C. Faulkingham

The U.S. Lighthouse Service was absorbed into the U.S. Coast Guard on July 1, 1939. The tenders raised their new service flags, took on military crews, and continued to service aids to navigation. And they assumed many added duties during WWII, including managing submarine nets.

The USCG “buoy boats” *Hibiscus* and *Ilex* were decommissioned and sold in 1947, the same year that Lt. Cmdr. Osmond C. Faulkingham took mandatory retirement. They had been an integral part of coastal life for decades, and their stories will live on in books, documentaries, and memories for years to come.

—**Note:** Osmond Faulkingham was my grandfather. He grew up in the West Jonesport home now owned by his great-great-grandnephew Ira Guptill. My mother, Barbara, grew up in South Portland in the civilian-crew time of the USLHS, and spent many happy days aboard the tender *Ilex*. Much fact-checking has gone into this writing. I hope Gramp and Mumma would have liked the result. —SMEJ, July 2022
sharon@6pine.com

—**Selected Sources**

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**Membership Form (Q)
2022**

Please print all information clearly. Use a separate form for each person. Membership is 5.00 per year per person.

Name _____

Maiden Name (optional) _____ **Phone (required for ID)** _____

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\$ 5.00 **2022 Membership**

\$ _____ **2023 Membership (\$5.00)**

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Make check payable to *Jonesport Historical Society*

Mail to: Jonesport Historical Society

P.O. Box 603

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Jonesport Historical Society

P. O. Box 603

Jonesport ME 04649

207-497-2395 or 207-747-8228

Located at 21 Sawyer Square

jonesporthistoricalsociety@outlook.com or jonesporthistoricalsociety@peabody.lib.me.us

NOTICE:

Until the COVID-19 restrictions are over, the Jonesport Historical Society Museum and Heritage Center will be open in 2022 only upon request May through October. Please call to make an appointment.