

BEALS HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER



THE HERITAGE CENTER COMPLETION

Completion of the Heritage Center is slow but steady. With the help of BHS volunteer members, the exterior shingling is 75% complete with hopes that it will be finished in the Spring. This will complete Phase I.

Phase II includes the completion of the interior. We now have electricity, with receptacles to be installed when the sheet rocking is completed. The walls have been insulated and we now await funding to finish the walls and install the heating and air systems.

Phase III includes the completion of the landscaping. The Brick fundraiser contributes to this Phase. We also hope to include a Gazebo and a Veterans Memorial in this Phase.

The Center will be available as an educational resource to the general public and, in particular, to the youth

of our communities for research and enhanced educational opportunities.

The Heritage Center will foster community involvement and will also have an impact on the area's economy by providing space for a small gift shop where local artisans can exhibit and sell their products.

Currently we are awaiting the results of two grants which total \$27,000 and have two more to send that equal \$25,000.

We hope to complete Phase II by fall 2010. Further work hinges upon funding. BHS will continue to hold its annual fundraising events which contribute to this project. Once Phase II is complete, we will move into the Center. All donations are much appreciated and can be sent to BHS, PO Box 280, Beals ME 04611.

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MEMBERSHIP UPDATE

Membership Chairperson Eva Faulkingham reports that 87 members have renewed their 2010 Annual Membership and BHS welcomes 9 new members including David and Vicki Davis, Sharon Hosley, George Herrick, Noreen Beal Chandler, Leon and Bonnie Crowley and Holly Faulkingham Plaisted.

The Annual Membership dues are used for the general operations of BHS. We thank you immensely for your continued support. Please help us exceed the 2009 total of 184 members, including 54 Life members, by renewing your 2010 membership today!!!

UMM'S UKULELE CLUB TO PERFORM AT BEALS ELEMENTARY

The University of Maine at Machias Ukulele Club was founded in 1926, and was revived 80 years later by Gene Nichols and Jim Sawyer. For the past four years, anywhere from 3 to 30 people, ranging in age from 8 to 91, and coming from up to an hour away, has congregated to share music at parties, festivals, weddings, funerals, dances, fairs, parades, concerts, suppers, broadcasts, conferences--and have boosted lots of peoples' spirits with one of the simplest instruments around.

The Beals Historical Society has engaged the Ukulele Club for the purpose of raising funds to help finish the interior of its newly constructed Historical Center. The show will be held on Friday, March 26 at 6PM at the Beals Elementary School. BHS will be selling steamed hot dogs and other goodies. Suggested donation: \$5.00

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

March 19 - 6:30pm

Annual Business and Program Meeting at BES

April 22 - 7:00pm

Downeast Boat Racing Movie Night at BES

May 1 - 7:00pm

Talent/Variety Show at BES

May 31 - 10:00am

Memorial Day/Program/10AM

June 18 - 7:00pm

Danny Davis Head Harbor Program Meeting at BES

June 26 - 10:00am

Model Boat Race/Judges Choice RACE@NOON

November 11 - 7:00pm

Veterans Program Meeting at BES

Please mark your calendars.

We greatly appreciate your attendance!

HOW AND WHY THEY CAME

by Robert Hammond of Harrington Maine

A presentation given by Robert Hammond on the first 100 years of settlement of Western Washington County (beginning around 1730) will be held on March 19th at 7PM at the Beals Elementary School. Bob is a local historian and speaker at historical and other organizational meetings and

previously spoke on shipbuilding for BHS.

The Society's annual business meeting will be held at 6:30PM, prior to the program meeting. We welcome the general public to attend. Light refreshments will be served.

MEMORIES OF THE “VELTON”

by *Velton Peabody*

Word that Capt. John Williams of Columbia Falls had donated a 71-year-old lobster boat to the Beals Historical Society was in itself welcome news. But this isn't just any old lobster boat. This one, built by Beals Island boat builder Harold Gower, was built for my grandfather, Kenneth Velton Beal, in 1939, when I was three years old. For many years, she bore the name “Velton,” named for me as I had been named for my grandfather.

I do not recall if I was present when the “Velton” was sailed by my grandfather, his nephew Osmond Beal and others from the Gower boat shop at Barney's Cove to Alley's Bay, but the boat's donation has brought some memories of this boat and her first owner to the surface. In the late 1940s, when I was in my early teens, I would make frequent trips with my grandfather as he tended his gang of lobster traps in the Eastern Bay, off Great Wass Island.

Four o'clock in the morning always came early. Typically, I would come over from my parents' home next door to stay the night before with my grandparents. It was a fun place to stay. The house, built on the northern end of Great Wass Island about 1825 by Capt. John Alley, my great-great-great-great-grandfather, was filled with family history. My grandparents, both of them descended from the settler who built the house, had lived there as long as I could remember. I was born there, in a tiny first-floor bedroom that could well have been named the Birthing Room for the many family births that took place there.

During the 1940s, this room in the northeast corner of the house was my grandparents' bedroom. By looking out the bedroom's one window, one could see, less than 200 feet away, my grandfather's skiff tied up by the edge of the shore between the waters of Alley's Bay and the unpaved town road that passed between the house and the



shoreline. To the left, one could see the Flying Place, where a narrow strip of water separating Great Wass Island from Beals Island provided a convenient passage for seabirds flying between Alley's Bay and the Western Bay. Straight ahead across Alley's Bay, one could see the main settlement on Beals, known then and today as the Head of the Island. Visible from this window also were French House Island and the central part of the mainland town of Jonesport, as well as the northeast tip of Great Wass Island known as Hicks' Head.

I usually slept in the northwest bedroom upstairs, while my great-grandmother Lucy Harding, grandmother Ina Beal's mother, occupied another tiny upstairs bedroom. At the other end of the upstairs hallway was a larger bedroom that served as the first home for my parents, Clyde and Arlene (Beal) Peabody, before I was born and for a short while afterwards. The room was quite well suited for an apartment in that day, providing as it did a small anteroom that I recall served for many years as a bedroom for my grandparents' visiting grandchildren. This “apartment” had its own closet and a wooden dry sink. The most fascinating room of all for me, however, was the “store room” at the head of the stairs. It was always crammed with all kinds of family treasures. A night with Grandmother and Grandfather Beal was not complete without at least a

peek into this room. Over the years I saw a spinning wheel beneath years of accumulation, old ornately framed portraits of relatives whose identities no one could remember, old clothing that would have made a great gift to a theatrical company and miscellaneous parts of beds and other pieces of furniture, along with canning jars and outdated Sears catalogs. Perhaps my greatest find of all, years later, was a set of brass running lights that I was told came off my grandfather's lobster boat.

The call to an early breakfast on those special mornings usually came from my grandmother. “Velton, it's time to get up,” she'd call from the bottom of the stairs. By the time I was dressed and downstairs, the breakfast table in the kitchen would be set for Grandfather and me. His lunch pail, packed with an extra sandwich or can of Vienna sausages, a banana and a bottle of Hires root beer or Nesbitt's orange soda for me, would be waiting by the door.

Soon, before daylight, we'd be out the door, on the way to the skiff for the first leg of a day's lobstering trip. The skiff, a rather nondescript utility boat of perhaps eight or ten feet in length, was an open wooden craft with a flat bottom and three thwarts or crosswise seats. My grandfather would occupy the middle seat, facing the stern, as he rowed the craft generally seaward while I kept a careful eye forward to be sure he wasn't going to hit some protruding

rock or the remainder of the wreck of the vessel Abbie C. Stubbs as we rounded Calvin Beal's Point on Hick's Head on our way to his moored lobster boat, the "Velton."

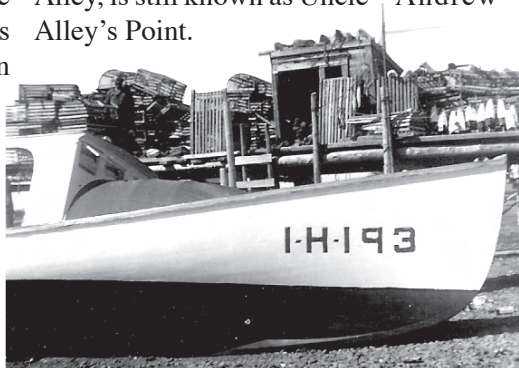
I suppose it was only natural that he would have my name painted on the bow. I was, after all, his first grandchild. The Velton was the eleventh built by Harold Gower, the fifth one that year. Gower's business register, owned by Douglas Dodge of Beals, indicates that the "Velton" was 32 feet long and eight feet wide, small by today's standards for lobster boats. She was open except for a canvas hood and an open frame cabin that afforded the captain and passengers some protection from the wind and the salty spray. Total cost: \$470.

As we secured the skiff to the mooring and headed for Pig Island Gut and the Eastern Bay, we could see the lights coming on at other fishermen's homes on Hicks' Head. Lined up along the shore were the homes of Calvin Beal, Eben Walter Alley, Archie Alley, Herman Backman and Isaac Seavey, all of them related to both of my my grandparents by blood or marriage. Soon we would pass the Alley's Bay Cooperative store, where my grandparents owned shares and where they did most of their grocery shopping. The store still stands, now much expanded, beside the Beals Town Landing.

A little farther along, as we passed through the narrow stretch of water separating Pig Island from Great Wass, we'd pass the home of Ralph Davis. This one, a frame structure somewhat larger than others in the neighborhood, had been moved some time before from the Back Field, where it had served as my grandparents' first home. It was difficult for me to envision how this house could have been floated from one section of the island to another, as was the practice, I was told. One of the houses I grew up in at Alley's Bay, known as the rain splitter for its steep roof, had been moved in this way from Head Harbor Island.

Soon, we would move slowly past the homes of Uncle James Alley, my grandmother's brother, and the home

of Uncle Andrew Alley, the oldest man on the island. He was not really my "uncle," but everyone called him that, probably out of respect for his advanced years and his kindly, saintly appearance. For me, Uncle Andrew was the picture of old age. He seemed like someone left over from a much earlier period. He was, in fact the last living grandson of settler John Alley. I can still picture him sitting quietly, whittling those tiny wooden pegs lobstermen used to place in the claws of lobsters to prevent their damaging each other or, perhaps more importantly, from grabbing their human handlers. Uncle Andrew died in 1954 at age 97, but memory of him lives on. The point of land where he spent the closing years of his life with his son and daughter-in-law, Clarence and Elnora Alley, is still known as Uncle Andrew Alley's Point.



As we slipped past the last houses on Great Wass and past tiny, uninhabited Alley's Island to our right, we entered the Eastern Bay. The sun was beginning to climb above the horizon, above the cliffs of Grand Manan Island in Canada, and it was becoming easier to distinguish one island from another. My grandfather's 100 or so wooden lobster traps, each marked by a wooden buoy painted red and white, were strewn mainly along this eastern shore of Great Wass, all the way south to Freeman's Rock. I remember that landmark well, because of the gulls and cormorants and other birds that congregated there. Grandfather would slap an oar on the deck of the boat to make a loud noise as we passed and great numbers of birds would scramble into flight.

Perhaps another reason this landmark is so fresh in my mind is that by this

time in the day, perhaps 10 a.m., we had made dozens of stops to check lobster pots. My grandfather would slowly approach a buoy, taking great care not to entangle another fisherman's trap line in his wheel. The boat engine now on idle and the boat slowly turning and rocking in its own wake, he would use a narrow wooden pole with a hook in the end to grab the rope connecting the buoy with the trap, pulling the trap line, hand over hand, until the trap broke the water's surface and was manually lifted onto the side of the boat to reveal its content. Small lobsters and big ones, those that did not fit the size range that made them legal, were returned to the sea. Legal lobsters were laid carefully in a container on the boat's flooring, crabs went into a pail for Grandmother to cook, while sea urchins, star fish, sculpins and other creatures of little or no value were tossed back into the sea.

I would pay particular attention when Grandfather approached two traps that had been specially marked, one for Grandmother and one for me. We were to get the earnings from any keeper lobsters coming from those. I was reminded of this practice years later when I read Erskine Caldwell's "God's Little Acre," in which one character digs for gold on his farm. In the novel, the farmer sets aside an acre for the church, with the idea that if the gold were discovered on that acre it would benefit the church. But he keeps moving God's acre around and it is never dug up, so there is no chance the church will benefit. Not so with Grandfather. The special traps were clearly marked with our names and though the traps might be moved around a bit during the lobster season, he checked them the same as he did his own.

Perhaps it was the smell of the ripe herring and other foul-smelling fish in the bait tub, or the rocking of the boat, or the shifting horizon, or the undigested soda in my stomach, or a combination of these factors. But by about mid-way through the day, my head would begin to spin and I would head for the side of

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MEMORIES OF THE "VELTON"

Continued

the boat to "feed the fish," as they say. I was, and still am, especially prone to motion sickness, on land, on sea and in the air. But this seasickness sticks in my mind as the worst. I recall thinking, even wishing, as I leaned over the side of the boat, that it would be an act of kindness if someone took me by the heels and dropped me overboard. I think it was in such moments that I realized it could never depend on the sea for a living.

The run up the bay, back toward Pig Island Gut and home, was always welcome. There was the anticipation of being back on firm land, seeing family and friends. But first, there was the trip to Jonesport or Beals Island to sell the lobsters and obtain more bait and fuel.

The waters of the Moosabec Reach, between Beals and Jonesport, were smoother than those of the Eastern Bay. On this leg of the journey, we might make several stops, at Bert Look's, George Beal's, Jonesport Packing Co., or the Underwood's sardine cannery in Jonesport or Vernal Woodward's lobster wharf on Beals. One of my favorite stops was at George Beal's wharf to sell lobsters or re-supply for the next day. While Grandfather was handling his end of the business, I would find my way up the stairs to the business office where the secretary, Vina Noyes, sold candy on the side. Another favorite destination was the William Underwood sardine cannery, which was located where the Coast Guard base now stands, at the Jonesport end of the Beals Bridge. While my grandfather waited in line for his turn to fill his bait tubs with cuttings from the sardine operation, I would pass the time fishing for the countless harbor pollock attracted by the spillage from the factory operations. There was no limit then to the number of these tasty little fish I could take home for pickling and drying in the sun and it was not uncommon for me to fill my grandmother's clothesline with them.

Soon, the "Velton" would be back on her mooring off Hicks' Head and I would be back home in Alley's Bay,



Original owner, Kenneth Beal, while fishing from the *Velton*.

prepared to report to Grandmother how many lobsters we had caught that day and how many of those had come from our personal traps. By this time, early afternoon, everyone would be up and about and I would be left wondering: Why do lobstermen have to begin the day at 4 a.m.?

My grandfather fished from the "Velton" for many years, from as early as I can remember until he retired from the sea. He sold her to Clarence Alley of Beals. Over the years, she changed hands many times, going to Carl Presley, Russell Batson and Alan Alley of Jonesport, Ben Bean of Beals, Burton McGuire of Cutler and John Williams of Columbia Falls, among others. She bore several other names, from "Arlantine" to "Turk" to "Rascal." She was used to fish from the Western Bay of Beals to Cutler. But now she is coming back home to Beals Island, a few hundred feet from Barney's Cove, where she was built. Eventually, she will be displayed by the historical society that I helped found 10 years ago. That was years before I had any idea that the "Velton" might be made available for historical display.

OFFICERS

President: Carol Davis

Vice President: Kenton Feeny

Secretary: Melinda Woodward

Treasurer: Almena Alley

Other Directors: Ruth Carver, Ray Beal and Chris Crowley

BRICK FUNDRAISER REMINDER

Currently we have 16 memorial brick paver orders and are in need of 25 before we can place our first order. We hope you are still considering honoring or memorializing your loved ones. There are many possibilities to express your sentiments for your favorite Island people. The following is a wonderful example of a recently received creative brick order that quoted Isaiah 42:12, "Declare His praise in the Islands!"

The price for a 4x8 brick is \$100 and the price for an 8x8 is \$150. If you would like an application and a sample list of brick ideas, leave your name and address at 207.497.2675 or email cfDavis44@yahoo.com. Thank you!



HISTORICAL LOOK AT HEAD HARBORS SEALAND SETTLEMENT

by Daniel Davis

BHS Member Danny Davis will offer a Power Point presentation on the hundred-year history of Sealand, a Head Harbor settlement of the 19th and early 20th centuries, on June 18th at 7PM at the Beals Elementary School. This presentation will include the historical background of the island, its early settlement, the growth of industry (including quarrying and fishing) and the work of the Maine Seacoast Mission, featuring photos from the period. Be sure to mark this on your calendar as you won't want to miss this presentation!

Membership Chairman & Committee:

Daniel Davis, Pamela Davis
and Eva Faulkingham

Newsletter editors: Carol Davis and
Luther Beal

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