

BEALS HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER



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HARBINGER OF HOPE

Remembering the Life of Miss Edith P. Drury
January 14, 2025

This tribute to the life of Edith P. Drury is another in the “Time and Tide” series, compiled by Daniel F. Davis, President of Beals Historical Society. We trust that as you read it, your heart will be filled with your own fond remembrances of Edith’s life and ministry to the people of Down-East Maine. We invite you to share your memories of Miss Drury by contacting Beals Historical Society or the author directly at P.O. Box 22, Beals, Maine 04611, or by phone at (207) 497-5958.

“A Century of Hope—100 Years of Maine Sea Coast Mission,” a supplement to the Ellsworth American and Mount Desert Islander, published July 7, 2005, recognized the Mission for its century of dedicated care for islanders of Down-East Maine. Begun in 1905 and headquartered in Bar Harbor, Maine, its primary goal was simple, but challenging to say the least: to “try to improve the lives of the scattered families, fishermen, lighthouse tenders, men, women and children who lived on the windswept islands along the craggy bays of Maine’s rugged shoreline.” The aim was “to build a community of Christian faith whose connections would stretch the length of the coast, bring religious teachings to those whom [who] were beyond the edge of mainland parishes, strengthen the character of the people and improve their standard of living.”

What began as a huge undertaking with meager resources has, in the 119 years of its existence, grown into a much larger, well-organized missionary ministry to hundreds, even thousands, of needy families in numerous small communities up and down the Maine coast from Muscongus Bay to Cutler. The tiny seed of faith planted by its founding fathers (Alexander McDonald and his brother, Angus McDonald), took root and grew to become a vital force

for good for its many beneficiaries down through the decades.

It would be impossible to name all those who have played a role in the success of the Maine Sea Coast Missionary Society’s ministry down through its more than one hundred years of service, but one individual who deserves recognition as having played a local role in the Mission’s work is the late Miss Edith Drury. Information supplied to this author by the Sea Coast Mission includes an “In Memoriam,” which gives us deeper insight into the missionary work of this remarkable and beloved servant of God, much of which is summarized as follows: Edith P. Drury was born in 1915 and passed away in California in 1987. She was the daughter of Dr. Samuel S. Drury, who as a young man served as President of the Mission’s Board of Directors. Dr. Drury once predicted that Edith was going to be a “force for life,” and indeed his prophetic words proved to be true. This opinion is further sustained by a statement in the Maine Sea Coast Missionary Society’s Spring Bulletin of 1963, which speaks of Edith Drury’s ministry and service in this way: “... highly peripatetic [nomadic] as she is,” her activities “defy classification!” This statement refers to her multi-faceted ministry that took her in many

Continued on next page

2025

**MEMBERSHIP
RENEWAL OR NEW**

With the New Year, comes the renewal of your BHS membership. For your convenience, please find the attached membership application. Dues have not increased and the fee is very minimal. Annual membership dues are utilized for BHS general operation costs. We hope you will continue to support BHS as it is a most worthy nonprofit organization. We greatly appreciate your support. Please feel free to share the newsletter with your family and friends. Thank you!

*BHS Heritage Center
hours are by appointment*

PERSONALIZED BRICKS

Anytime is a good time to purchase personalized bricks for either the Veteran’s Monument Park or the Patio. For the 4”x 8” brick, you have three lines each with 21 letters and spaces for \$75. The 8”x8” brick offers four lines with 21 letters and spaces for \$125. The Veteran’s brick information includes the rank, name, branch of service, war and years served. You can be creative with the Patio brick. It can be your favorite Beal’s Island memory, memorialize your loved ones, honor the living, a school memory, etc. It’s your choice with the patio brick. Please find the personalized brick application attached. Thank you!

directions, making it hard to accurately and decisively define any one role in her Mission ministry.

Edith Drury (affectionately known to most as “Miss Drury”) first served on the coast of Maine as a teacher on Muscongus Island [Louds Island in Muscongus Bay, off Pemaquid Point] in 1945. The Spring Bulletin of 1945 shows Miss Drury in a photo and confirms this. Subsequent paragraphs also state: “February 10. At 2:30 P.M. the Sunbeam reached Loudville, forty-five miles [south] further down the coast [from Isle au Haut], and at 4:00, the Island mail boat arrived from Round Pond with Miss Edith Drury of Milton, Massachusetts, on board. A path had been shoveled earlier in the day from the one bare spot on the beach to the house of the former teacher and path broken to the place where Miss Drury was to live, a half mile up the island. Under these dramatic circumstances the mission welcomed a new member to the staff...She is proving to be a real soldier. Not only does she teach the island school, but in line with Mission tradition, she is contributing of her time and talent in community service.”

In 1946, Edith was given the position of Assistant to the Superintendent, and began to serve the Mission in a variety of ways. During her 20 years of service, she visited over fifty mainland schools and twenty island schools, working with children, devising contests, recreational activities and reading programs. She distributed garden seeds and plants in the schools and encouraged the children to plant gardens. Through her visits, vitamins were provided to children whose diets lacked proper nutritional balance. She won the hearts of children in every place she visited, as evidenced in a letter to the Sea Coast Mission, dated January 16, 1955, from a Cutler Sunday School, in which is stated: “We love Miss Drury. She brings books, vegetable and flower seeds, etc., to our school, and always has a nice story to tell us.”

The 1948 Annual Report reveals how the garden and seed program started

in island schools. It reads: “A project started last year [1947] in the schools along the coast has gained momentum during the year, and by the close of the school year Miss Drury was visiting regularly forty schools within a 125 radius of Bar Harbor. In some instances the Mission worker was the only visitor during the entire school year. She took with her collections of children’s books, various kinds of ‘busy work,’ playground equipment, portable victrolas, and albums of records.”

Each spring, a garden project was sponsored by the Garden Clubs of Mount Desert with the idea that each child would take seeds for his own garden and would receive a certificate of achievement if a crop was produced. Over 500 children applied for seeds, thus participating in the program. The 1953 Annual Report included a map showing a number of schoolhouse locations to the east, north, and west of Cutler—rural schools on the circuit journeyed by Miss Drury as often as her schedule permitted. In the summer of 1953, she visited 968 boys and girls and inspired many to participate in the seed program. Although this program took root slowly in 1946, it blossomed in seven years into a successful undertaking which encouraged many children to improve their diets for a lifetime.

The children of Beals Island were privileged to participate in the seed program, as well. In addition, the Mission conducted occasional rummage sales, dental clinics, and provided Mission Christmas packages for both the children and the elderly, among others, all wrapped in the traditional white paper and tied with red yarn. Sometimes these services were provided outside the school setting when Mission workers would inadvertently encounter children on the mud flats digging clams or when making a visit to one of the island community’s homes.

A variety of school projects, in addition to gardening, have been sponsored over the years by the Mission, including a Christmas story contest, with as many as

286 entries in one year. During the late winter the children were encouraged to make articles which could be used as gifts for boys and girls in other schools on an exchange basis, with as many as 28 schools participating. One of the conditions on entry into the project was that they write a letter of thanks to the child from whom they received their exchange gift. The volume of mail exchanged was impressive, to say the least, with the initial letter, in many cases, establishing a lasting “pen pal” relationship.

Another program involved the distribution of vitamin capsules in some schools, as well as oranges, with noticeable results in improved health among the children. The Spring Bulletin of 1948 notes of Miss Drury that she visited one school in particular with a supply of books, oranges, and vitamins, and left a “circle of multi-colored fuzz on the floor after some recess-time haircuts.”

The Spring Bulletin of 1952 speaks of another vital program to the children of the islands and coastal communities and gives us some humorous insight into the missionary service of Miss Drury. It seems a winter dental clinic was being sponsored by the Society in Jonesport. A seven-year-old showed up late for his first appointment and when Miss Drury saw him at the door and went to let him in, he turned and ran away back to the school. Miss Drury surveyed the slick conditions outside the door with deep snow banks and icy roadways that favored the young boy in his escape from the dental office, and wisely decided not to give chase.

Miss Drury also spent part of her time developing promotional materials for the Mission. Her writings were read by people all over the country through the “God’s Tugboat” column in the National Fisherman and through the Mission’s bulletins and Annual Reports. Her contacts in the summer communities gave her the opportunity to tell the story of the Mission’s work all along the coast.

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During her two decades of dedicated service to the Society and people of coastal Maine, Miss Drury shared her faith with many people, doing all she could to make their lives happier and more meaningful. Not one to allow problems to stand in her way, she tackled them head-on and moved ahead vigorously. She once said, "This Mission is a wonderful organization and I love it, so we've got to do something every day for the Lord. Zeal isn't a bad word for what we need—zeal and imagination, and brains and energy, and the habit of saying 'POOHN!' to difficulties."

And doing for the Lord was truly the story of Edith's life. Many of her assignments with the Mission took her into deplorable conditions of great poverty, infirmity, and a plethora of other hardships, yet she faced each with purpose and a dedication to making life better for those under her charge. Although many of her encounters were sad to behold, often there was humor in the midst of adversity.

It was written of Miss Drury in the Annual Report of 1952 just such a pathetic, yet humorous experience that she had with a little girl named Beulah, which is summarized as follows:

Beulah was a seven-year-old who attended one of the island schools Edith visited—the third of six children under ten. She lived in a two-room shack built mostly of laths and edgings. Although raised in a poor environment, Beulah was a very bright young girl. Spelling came easily to her and she could spell a hundred words just as fast as the teacher could pronounce them. In fact, she was a little show-off, spelling with her stomach stuck out and her bright blue eyes shining. She would even whisper the correct spellings to the slower students.

Continued on next page

BEALS HERITAGE CENTER FUNDRAISING DRIVE BUY A PERSONALIZED BRICK PROGRAM

The Beals Historical Society offers the chance to be creative in personalizing a brick for your favorite person, pet, place, event, occasion, or simply something that is near and dear to your heart. Purchasing a personalized brick will enable the continuation of the brick patio, and/or adding your favorite Veteran to the Veterans Monument Park Area. The Veteran's 4 x 8 brick consists of the Veteran's rank, name, branch of service, war served in and years served. Your purchase of a personalized 4x8 cinnamon colored brick with black filled lettering for \$85 is a tax-deductible donation or you may wish to purchase an 8x8 brick for \$125. Purchasing the 8 x 8 brick gives you an additional line or instead of the line you may purchase a logo for an additional \$10. Price includes shipping.

YES! WE'D LIKE TO RESERVE A PERSONALIZED PERMANENT BRICK.

Please check one of the following:

- Patio Veterans Monument
- Check here for 4x8 brick for \$85.00 (standard block lettering included).
- Check here for 8x8 brick for \$125.00 (add an additional \$10 for a logo)

Please engrave your brick as follows: For a 4 x 8 brick use three lines with 21 letters including spaces and for an 8 x 8 brick add use four lines.

PLEASE MAKE YOUR CHECK OR MONEY ORDER PAYABLE TO: BEALS HISTORICAL SOCIETY, ATTN: Treasurer, PO Box 280, Beals, ME 04611 Thank you for your contribution!

Name: _____ Phone: (_____) _____

Mailing Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Email Address: _____ Amount Paid: _____

For further information or suggestions with a design for your personalized brick, please contact Carol Davis at (207) 497-2675 or email cfDavis44@yahoo.com.

The sad thing was, although bright as a button, Beulah's hygiene was sorely neglected. She didn't have a dress, until the teacher bought one for her—which she wore sparingly. She usually wore boy's clothing, and on even the coldest winter days had no stockings or under garments. Her face was dirty, and her blonde hair uncombed. A highlight of her life was when her father made crude chairs for the home out of discarded nail kegs. With such luxury, the family could even sit down while eating. Beulah was even more excited that a new baby had arrived the night before.

Miss Drury thought about a life-size rubber doll that had been donated to the Mission, which had stood unused on a shelf in the office for some time, since it was hard to place such a cherished single doll in the hands of one child to the neglect of the others. After all, many needy girls would have loved to have it. And what chance would such a treasured gift have for survival in Beulah's household, anyway? Yet, the compassion of Miss Drury prompted her to see it as the perfect gift for Beulah, who likely had never had the enjoyment if even the crudest of dolls. So, on her next trip, she took the precious doll to the classroom teacher, to be given to little Beulah anonymously and privately.

This simple, yet touching story, is just one of many examples of Miss Drury's love for others, especially disadvantaged children who have known but few of life's pleasures. She imagined in her mind's eye that that cute little doll took a position of honor at the family table of that crude shack—and was likely sitting on one of the wonderfully crafted nail keg chairs.

Although Miss Drury retired from the staff of the Mission Society in 1966, her name and the memory of her caring ministry have been the subjects of many conversations in many little homes in coastal Maine. Perhaps the



Edith Drury (on the left)

words of Superintendent Emeritus Neal Bousfield say it best: "The Lord can use men and women who are not especially gifted or brilliant, but when someone who is both says, 'Here I am, send me', as Edith did, we rejoice that such a person was led to give her life to this work in which we and so many heartily believe." Surely the words of Jesus are words of welcome for Miss Drury when He said, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant."

The Maine Sea Coast Mission gives additional insight into the life and service of Miss Drury in an article published February 1, 2022 entitled, "Edith P. Drury—Enthusiasm for Mission Work." Citing her years with the Society, they refer to her "God's Tugboat" newspaper columns, written over many decades for Maine Coastal Fisherman and National Fisherman. Through her columns, Miss Drury has given us her first-hand account of the Mission's work from 1950 through 1960 among people and places on the mainland, along the coast, and on the islands.

Her accounts speak of her trips to deliver neatly wrapped Christmas

gifts in plain white paper, tied with red yarn, to children, seniors, the infirmed, those of low income and others. This done despite inclement weather, when bitterly cold winds and blinding snow often made the journey difficult, and often threatening to delay such generous visits from Mission donations of new and slightly used items, as well as handmade mittens, hats, and other necessities.

Miss Drury also writes of the hardships and dangers that coastal fishermen faced, often in the form of economic challenges, sickness, domestic losses, and death in the family—sometimes unexpectedly while working the coastal waters—from drowning and other causes.

At times, piloting the Sunbeam in rough seas proved extremely challenging and dangerous, to say the least. Docking at ice-covered wharves, tide surges and the like, taxed the skill of even the most competent captains. Fog also presented its own set of challenges. Thankfully, radar on board the Mission's craft helped alleviate problems associated with navigation in

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the dense fog.

The Annual Report 40th Anniversary 1945 edition of the Sea Coast Mission notes some interesting facts and figures relating to the Sunbeam's routine visits to the islands. Since a number of people lived on more remote islands some distance from the mainland, travel by boat for the mail, general supplies, and social interaction was a major challenge, especially during the winter months when ice formed for miles on what otherwise would have been open waters. Often small boats were pushed from Sealand on Head Harbor Island nearly two miles to the Jonesport shore, an undertaking that brought with it its own set of hazards. In 1909, the Mission organized its "Brotherhood of the Sea Coast" to provide closer fellowship among scattered island people who did not live within reach of an organized church for spiritual and social interaction. The churches were, for the most part, one of the most accessible opportunities for such engagement. In 1911, a Brotherhood Church was erected and dedicated Sealand to serve the needs of the 200 or more people living there year round. That church served the islanders until the Sealand settlement was disbanded around 1941. The church windows and pulpit were donated to other island churches, and the structure itself was disassembled by Arnold Beal who reused the materials to build his own home in Jonesport, which still stands today.

Miss Drury not only spoke of the hard times associated with her travels and the adversities facing coastal and island residents, but she wrote much about the good times as well. She wrote of islanders who loved and cared for their neighbors, pets, others in need of assistance; of providing for the family in the home and others by knitting and crocheting bedspreads, mittens of all sizes and colors, and a host of other items including bibs, dish towels, and aprons. Home-made soap was a challenge in and of itself, but a necessity not to be neglected.

Also in her "God's Tugboat" columns, Miss Drury tells of visits to lighthouse keepers' families and United States Coast Guard station keepers' families, visits that took her to Seguin Island Light, Ram Island Light, the Cuckolds Light, and Libby Island Light, among others. During her tenure with the Mission, Edith was dedicated to all areas of the Mission's work, sharing faith with people and offering assistance—whether on the mainland, on inner islands, remote islands, or at light stations up and down the coast.

It might interest our readers to know how the Sunbeam came to be known as "God's Tugboat," a name that originated in the Jonesport area and has remained with the vessel down through the years to the present. According to the Society's Annual Report of 1948, the title came about as follows: "In the early days of our Mission fellowship, the people living on Head Harbor Island used to watch for Rev. Alexander P. McDonald as he made his regular visits. They never knew what he was going to bring with him—building materials, clothing, food, or visitors. The local people quickly and affectionately nicknamed the first Sunbeam 'God's Tugboat', and the title has stuck." That title was used for the heading of the monthly column in the Maine Coast Fisherman, and Arthur Bartlett, the writer of the story which appeared in the May 29 issue of the Saturday Evening Post, decided to call his story by the same name. Edith Drury submitted numerous stories and updates to this column of the paper.

Reflecting some time later on the service of Edith Drury and her passing in 1987, Gary DeLong, who served as Maine Sea Coast Mission president from 1999 to 2010, recalled Miss Drury's visits to the Beals School (where he grew up), talking about the importance of fresh vegetables and making a big impression on students of all ages. He also mentioned in his comments that she was the daughter of a highly regarded headmaster at a legendary Prep School in Concord, New Hampshire. Dr. Samuel Drury was an Episcopalian rector who

had been offered some even more prestigious positions of leadership, but turned them all down in order to spend his career at St. Paul's. DeLong looked back with fondness on the legendary service of Miss Drury in those earlier years of Mission work. He suggested that people like her would not believe the scope of the Mission today, but they need to be remembered because people like Edith paved the way.

Perhaps Miss Drury sums up her life and ministry with the Maine Sea Coast Mission best in her own words, speaking of her time spent in Jonesport's Sawyer Memorial Congregational Church, and published in the March 20, 1960 edition of "The Pilot." She states: "Six years have passed and what seemed then 'the edge of the world' has now become 'the center of the world.' I am glad that I have since learned that the center of the world is everywhere. God's work must be done everywhere, and wherever He calls me to do it, there is the

'Center' God has chosen for me. The roads no longer seem so narrow and the lights that fall from the windows upon the snow speak to me of the warmth within, and remind me of the joys and sorrows so many of us have shared."

This is the Edith Drury that so many of us knew and loved. She was truly a humble servant of God, who was willing to follow whatever path He had for her as a chosen harbinger of hope to a world in need of love and spiritual leadership.

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Beals Heritage Center



Beals Historical Society Membership Application

Please check one: Renewal New

Name(s) as you wish it to appear on membership card and member roll on website:

(Please type or print clearly)

Your mailing address: Street or Post Office Box: _____
City: _____ State _____ ZIP: _____

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Type of membership (Please review all types and check the one that applies)

- | | |
|--|------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Individual Annual | \$10 annually |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Individual/Life | \$200 one-time payment |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Couple Annual | \$15 annually |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Couple/Life | \$300 one-time payment |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Senior/65 Annual | \$5 annually |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Senior couple/65 Annual | \$7.50 annually |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Student | \$5 annually |

Over and above dues, I wish to donate _____ for __operating expenses, __building fund, or __ endowment fund. Receipt and membership card will be sent to you.

Instructions: Please print, complete and mail this application, together with tax-deductible check or money order payable to Beals Historical Society to:
Membership Chairperson, Beals Historical Society, P.O. Box 280, Beals, ME 04611

Annual memberships are for the calendar year and expire Dec. 31.