

BRHS News July 2019

Researching and preserving our history

From Our Archives



This photo of Townsend Avenue dates to the 1920s and shows the Kennedy building, built by a Dolloff in 1878. It is just to the left of the old car and the two women in white. Leading up to the Fourth, the building housed the vanishing 900-pound cannon in its cellar, second, and third floor.

Fourth of July High Jinks 1879

By Barbara Rumsey
(written in 2007)

The below article is the sort that often appeared in July newspapers of the late 1800s. As a rule, there was then much more joke-playing on a regular basis than today. And the Fourth of July was the great practical joke time, calling for special effort.

Some details of the people and locations in this July 5, 1879 *Boothbay Register* story are as

follows. I cannot place Captain Everett McNear; he was not a Boothbay man, but I suppose he was a frequent visitor. Perhaps he had a coasting schooner that often came in to Boothbay. The "Bean Pot" or lockup was on the site of Logan's clothing store. William Sawyer (and his son William Sawyer) had a ship stores business on the site of Tugboat on Commercial Street; both men were also wrecking commissioners and consequently dealt in recycled vessel parts, junk, and scrap metal, including cannons.

H. A. Kennedy came to town in 1873 and first had a hardware store on upper Townsend Avenue. In 1878, he built on the site that many remember as Bob's Photo-TV on Townsend Avenue and Bridge Street. Its third story served as an early Knights of Pythias hall. Kennedy left town in 1883, but his building survived to 1935, when it was town down. J. R. Auld's shoe store was in the vicinity of the old bank building in Bank Square. I do not know who the hardware runner was, though I suppose he was a boy who carried messages and merchandise—perhaps one of the boys assumed to be responsible for stealing the cannon.

Barbara Rumsey

Preparing for the Fourth - Boothbay Register

In order that a proper display of patriotism may be made manifest the coming Fourth, a few of our young men, under the leadership of Mr. Everett McNear, solicited and obtained contributions for the purchase of powder, which in due time arrived and was placed in the "Bean Pot," otherwise lockup, for safekeeping, the key being in Captain McNear's pocket.

On Friday last a rifled cannon, weighing about 900 pounds belonging to Wm. M. Sawyer was brought up and put in H. A. Kennedy's cellar for safe keeping, as heretofore cannons have been known to disappear just before the Fourth. Everything was now thought to be in readiness, powder safe in the lockup and gun locked up in the cellar.

Stealing the Cannon!

Early on Saturday morning it was found the gun was gone and a pair of forward wheels from the adjoining room down by the water's edge. Somehow the boys looked upon the wheels as a blind and searched nearer home for the gun but without success. Investigation proved that the powder had disappeared also. An idea was entertained that it might be found in J. R. Auld's shoe store, and while he was at breakfast an entrance was effected by a window and an ineffectual search made. The excitement ran high during the

day, powder and gun both gone.

The East Side people know how to sympathize with the boys as *their* gun mysteriously disappeared two years ago, and about a year afterward turned up in Portland. They offered to procure more powder, bring their gun from Portland and have a bigger time than ever, in case this gun and powder could not be found. Posters were written and posted about the village calling upon certain of our citizens to bring back the gun, but without any visible effect. There was some talk of arresting the boys for breaking into the store, the value of the cannon was estimated at \$100, or \$25 for each individual directly interested, a large sum for a boy to pay. Sometimes they had a clue but it would run out. Saturday night there was no sleep and active brains were striving to solve the mystery.

Breaking Open Stores and Dwellings to Search.

On Sunday Captain McNear who had searched every nook and corner around the store commenced investigating the neighbors, for he said, "That gun is too heavy to carry far." By a bold stroke of detective work he got a clew on Mr. Race's cellar and during a quiet time in the afternoon, while the pouring rain kept most people in their houses, he cut the wire screen, got in and found the gun, which with the assistance of his comrades was quickly and quietly transferred to Mr. Kennedy's hayloft and covered up.

By skillfully interviewing Mr. Race he thought he had found out who had a hand in the affair and the next move was to make a bet of \$4.00 with the same parties that he knew where the gun was and could produce it, which was done, to the satisfaction of the boys if not the other party, about 10 o'clock at night, by carrying the gun to the Boothbay House and collecting a fee from each individual who was supposed to have assisted in its mysterious disappearance. It was next taken to Mr. K's [Kennedy] store and hoisted to the stove room where it laid till Monday noon and while Capt. McNear was gone to dinner it again disappeared. Subsequently it was found one story higher, under a pile of rags.

The Custom House Searched for the Stolen Powder.

In the meantime every conceivable place was searched for the powder, not even excepting the Custom House, but of course it was not found there. Sometime in the afternoon, on a promise not to make a very great noise during the night they were told where the powder was, when quiet reigned for a time, but by evening anxious fears again prevailed and the gun was moved to a place of safety and about 11 o'clock at night the powder also called for and the two were "set up" with during the night.

It seems that after the money had been contributed it was found the boys intended to commence firing at midnight, to which some of the contributors were very much opposed,

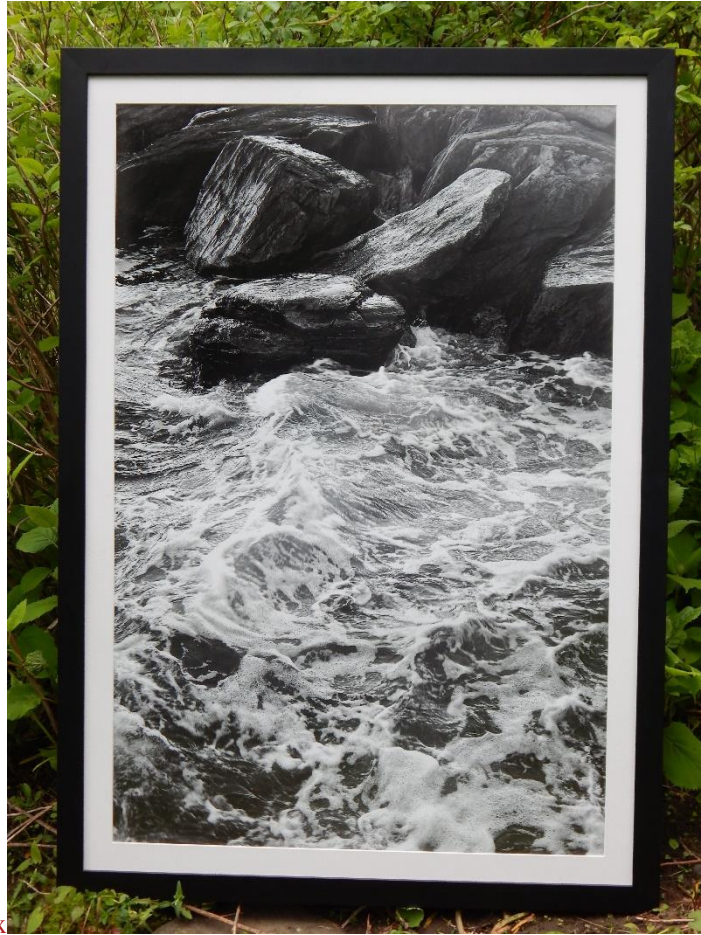
and took this method to preserve quiet during the night. The question frequently discussed before lyceums, Resolved, That there is more pleasure in anticipation than realization, is frequently exemplified, but never more strongly than in this case. If after all the worry and anxiety of the past few days these young men have any real enjoyment from the fulfillment of their desires it will be one of the seven wonders.

It is still a query “Who stole the gun?” Some say “That hardware runner.”

For more articles by Barbara Rumsey check our website

www.boothbayhistorical.org/out-of-our-past

RAFFLE



Turbulent Sea at Ocean Point

by Robert Mitchell

Satisfy your craving to support history and your craving for spectacular art.
Buy raffle tickets!

Robert Mitchell has lived and photographed in Maine for over 40 years. He photographed newscaster Charles Kuralt for the cover photo of the book *Charles' Kuralt's America*.

Raffle tickets are \$1.00 per ticket or 6 for \$5.00 and may be purchased at the society's museum at 72 Oak Street, Boothbay Harbor or by sending a check and a self-addressed stamped envelope to BRHS, PO Box 272, Boothbay Harbor, ME 04538. Be sure to include a return address. The drawing will be December 7, 2019.

Thank you!

GENEALOGICAL RESEARCH



Is this your ancestor?

The Boothbay Region Historical Society archive includes files on over 550 families. These family files consist of obituaries, descendancy charts, correspondence, news clippings, and some secondary material. Most of the correspondence was with local historian, Barbara Rumsey, from 1986 to the present.

For more information, including a list of family names, our website's Family Files page.

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