



BRHS News October 2019

Researching and preserving our history

From Our Archives



The pogie factory and associated buildings where Jainus Jones worked is shown on and near Luke's boatyard at Linekin.

Pete Jones and March Hill

By Barbara Rumsey

Written in 1991

In 1985 my eighth-grade son Keith was assigned a local history project. We knew our Linekin Neck home at that time had been part of a 19th century pogie (fish) factory so that seemed like a good topic. Talks with townspeople narrowed down some likely sources: Clyde Dodge, Everett Vannah's daughter Mary Alice Fairley, and Pete Jones (born 1899, died 1991). Pete's father, Jainus Jones, had come to town to teach at the Linekin school, now a private home just a little bit north of the turn to Little River. Jainus had also been bookkeeper at our pogie factory in the late 1800s, one of five such factories on Linekin Neck at that time. The factory had been supervised by Osgood Vannah, grandfather to Mary Alice, and had thrived (as long as the pogies lasted) in the approximate area of Paul Luke's boatyard on Linekin Neck. Young drivers know the area as that spot just as you look right while airborne under "thrill hill" heading for Ocean Point.

Pete and Pogies

Keith and I went to see Pete at his East Boothbay home on School Street in December 1985. Keith and I were equally ignorant of old times here; local history was not among my interests then. We talked for some time with Pete and he acquainted us with the Neck as it was back when he was a kid in the early 20th century. He also dredged up what he'd heard or had known of earlier conditions from his parents and others. We learned a lot about the many buildings that had been on the factory property; the Cape Verdean blacks brought up from Cape Cod each summer to supplement the local work force; the processes used to extract the oil and flesh with the immense steam pressure involved; and the steamers that brought the fish in, announcing their catch while at sea by whistle signals which gave the factory some time to gear up before their arrival. After an hour or so, we had the gist of it and could refine details.

I remember how it suddenly dawned on me that the factory didn't run year-round. I said to Pete, "Oh, you mean it only ran in the summer. What did everybody do the rest of the year?" It seemed like a simple question to me at the time but he gave me a funny look and was real quiet for a minute or so. Looking back now, I think I know what must have been going through his mind: probably something along the lines of, "How can anyone be so numb, and how do you let them know gently?"—always a great jumpstart to the learning process.

March Hill

That, of course, wasn't his answer. He just finally looked up after being silent for a while, fixed me with a look, and asked, "Have you ever heard the expression 'getting over March hill'?" I said that I hadn't. Then he said, "They just about starved to death. If you made it through March, up over March hill, you'd probably make it through the year. They did anything they could to survive." I really didn't know what to say. Part of me wanted to pass it off with: "Just a guy trying to shock me with how hard it was in the old days." The other part of me was the me who sat in his house, his words having sent a chill down my spine, knowing, no matter how foreign it was to my upbringing and experience, that it was all true.

The worst hardship I endured as a kid in East Boothbay in the 1950s was having to depend on cisterns for winter water and having to flush the toilet with buckets of the scant weekly bath water used by all four of us—my father allowed maybe 2 ½ inches in the tub, which my mother warmed up between bathers with a teakettle. Pretty tame stuff compared with starvation which was supposed to be somewhere else. I realized I had a lot to learn.

Over the years I've tried to educate myself to the point that I can put into perspective whatever I've learned about the past here. I was mindful of Pete's words and they've been borne out. Times here were very hard for a good part of the population and those times were glossed over, maybe because hardship was a fact of life and there was no particular reason to dwell on it. Or maybe because people were reluctant to readily talk about raw hunger, foreclosure, and death from malnutrition, freezing, and associated diseases. But if you talked to people over 80, you learned startling things about how people did and did not get by and what it was like to try.

Getting By

The needs back then were clothing, feeding, and warming yourselves. For most, survival depended on your time being taken up with those tasks. To do less than work from dawn to dusk and after dusk to that end added a measure of uncertainty to your future welfare. You just went out every day and scabbled for what you had to have. You ate what you grew or gathered and you supplied a commodity—maybe just a strong back—to trade for the things you could not get yourself such as molasses, flour, shoes, and spices. Any leisure back along was devoted to such tasks as knitting potheads, whittling plugs, sharpening tools, or making clothes. The idea of spending time on anything that did not directly help you stay alive now or in the indefinite future was absurd. You worked hard, not to send your kids to college or to buy a camp on a lake, but to stay alive. I doubt I would have ever learned so much so fast

about Boothbay's past without Pete's dramatic memorable words—he was a natural-born teacher.

For more articles by Barbara Rumsey check our website
www.boothbayhistorical.org/out-of-our-past

EVENTS

TODAY! Thursday, October 5, 4:30 pm

History of Quilting Trunk Show



Back by popular request! Wendy Caton Reed will present fifty of her quilts and discuss historic styles of quilting in her popular *History of Quilting Trunk Show*. Wendy grew up on River Road in Edgecomb, Maine and was taught to quilt by her neighbor Arzetta Poole when she was nine years old. She has been quilting ever since and is well known for her original interpretations of traditional designs. Wendy's quilts have been exhibited at the National Quilt Museum and the New England Quilt Museum, and have won awards including the Purchase Award from the American Museum of Folk Art.

**And thank you in advance
for supporting our BRHS fundraisers!
We depend on you, and you always come through.**

Saturday, October 12

***Extremely Scrumptious Cheese and Tea Sale
and Raffle Drawing***



**Grafton Village Cheese and Tea Sale 9:00 until we are sold out
at Fall Foliage Festival, Boothbay Railway Village**

**Grafton Village Cheese and Tea Sale 9:00 – 2:00
at Boothbay Region Historical Society**

AND Fire Engine Ride Raffle Drawing!



Win a chance for you and up to 7 companions to enjoy a private ride on Charlie Bamberg's beautiful 1957 International Pumper next summer. Your unforgettable

two-hour tour may be scheduled on a date convenient for both you and Charlie between the end of May and September 10, 2020.

Raffle tickets are \$1.00 each or six for \$5.00 and may be purchased at the Society's museum or by sending a check and self-addressed stamped envelope to BRHS, PO Box 272, Boothbay Harbor, ME 04538.

For more information on upcoming events, please check our website's [Events Calendar](#).

GENEALOGICAL & HISTORICAL RESEARCH



Who are they?

Come visit us and let us help you with your research. Our archives are extensive. For more information, including a list of family names, [click here](#) to check our website's Family Files page.

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*Come visit! We're open year-round,
Thursday through Saturday, 10 am to 2 pm.*

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