



Boothbay Region Historical Society News

February 2020

Researching and preserving our history

It will not be forgotten

From Our Archives



*Leach house fireplace.
The house is reputed to date from the 1760s or earlier. Photograph is c. 1950s*

The 1700s Court of General Sessions

by Barbara Rumsey

This article first appeared in the Boothbay Register in 1992. Some language and grammar has been slightly changed.

After Lincoln County was formed in 1760, its Court of General Sessions heard cases about violated laws, rather than cases between citizens; those were handled by the Court of Common Pleas. General Sessions attended to offenses against the state, county and town, including the enforcement of "blue laws" such as bans on fornication, work performed on Sunday, and the sale of liquor. Its duties also covered permits for innholders and ferrymen, the laying out of roads, and conservation of fishways.

A couple of examples of cases handled by General Sessions follow. In 1776 Timothy Langdon was charged with stealing 10 quintals (1000 lbs) of salt fish from a vessel in Boothbay. The fish had been the property of the Boothbay Committee of Correspondence and Inspection; it oversaw the local war effort. Langdon got off on a technicality since the designation of "esquire" wasn't written on the necessary papers. Another case of some significance was the 1778 apprehension of Joseph Booker of Boothbay for "desertion from the Continental Army to which he had been appointed for the town of Boothbay."

Nowhere in the records of the Court of General Sessions or the Court of Common Pleas did I see corporal punishment inflicted on men. Normally they were jailed and fined for their wrongdoing, whether their offenses were stealing or using a schooner on the Lord's Day. Women did not enjoy that luxury. They were jailed, fined, and whipped for fornication. When Sarah Pierce received five stripes in 1769, and Jane (Jean) Reed four stripes at the whipping post in 1771, where were the men? The record is silent on the whereabouts or responsibility of the requisite male partner. Women alone took the punishment for a crime that could not have taken place without two parties.

Margaret (Martha) Crommet was also found guilty of fornication in 1782, but she caught the guy by the arm and said, "Oh no, you don't—we're in this together whether you like it or not!" She promptly charged Patishall Knight with begetting her with child. The case was later postponed and never came up again that I could find, but she took a stand and exercised her rights, however limited they were for women. She married Stephen Rollins in 1786 and lived near the Murphy place up Back River.

By the mid-1770s most "blue law" cases had disappeared from the court record. They were then handled on a local level by justices of the peace. For instance, the Maine Historical Society has the justice docket of Daniel Rose from 1803 to 1813. Whether in Newmilford (Alna) or Boothbay, he meted out justice from his house in the evening, the cases running heavily to swearing and indebtedness.

Reflected in the written record is the rocky transition of allegiance from the King to the Republic. Though the Revolution is said to have started April 18, 1775, the court session in June 1775 found nothing changed. The session still opened with the words, "Anno Regni Regis Georgii

Tertii / Magna Britannia Francia & Hibernia &c decimo Quinto” (in the 15th year of the reign of King George III of Great Britain, France, and Ireland) “at his Majesty's Court of General Sessions of the Peace held at Pownalborough within and for the County of Lincoln on the first Tuesday of June, being the Sixth Day of Said Month, Annoque Domini 1775.” A year later at the June 4, 1776 session, there were no grand Latinate words at all, just the facts of when and where court was held. Finally September 24, 1776, two months after the Declaration of Independence, a new heading appeared: “Anno Reipublica Americana Primo”—the first year of the American republic. With those words the county commissioners made public their allegiance. That designation continued up through 1780 with secundo, tertio, quarto, and quinto. 1781 was an odd year when the June heading (four months before Yorktown) became Anno Reipublica Massachusettensis Sixto—a sign of how badly the war had been going and the growing disunion and despair. Evidently the province of Maine was not convinced anything more than Massachusetts would survive the war. Then in September of that year before the war was won, Latin headings were dropped altogether.

The permits granted by General Sessions cast some light on the times. Ordinarily in September innholders and sellers of coffee and tea were given permits. Prominent in the 1760s lists were Boothbay McFarlands, Reeds, Wylies, and someone on Ship (Sawyers) Island; either Joseph Patten, Thomas Hodgdon, or Israel Davis. Most parts of town were covered by someone. Samuel Kelley was in the Pleasant Cove area. In 1769 he was given a permit as an innholder and he was licensed to keep a ferry from Boothbay to Ware (Weir) Cove across the Damariscotta River. A 1767 deed and two 1768 deeds mention the Kelley family mill on Kelley Brook; it runs up north into Pleasant Cove. All the running water above Boothbay Center flows north; below, it flows south. With his triple responsibilities of ferryman, innholder, and miller, Samuel Kelley was a busy man in Boothbay in 1769. Multiple responsibilities tended to accrue to just a few.

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

Events



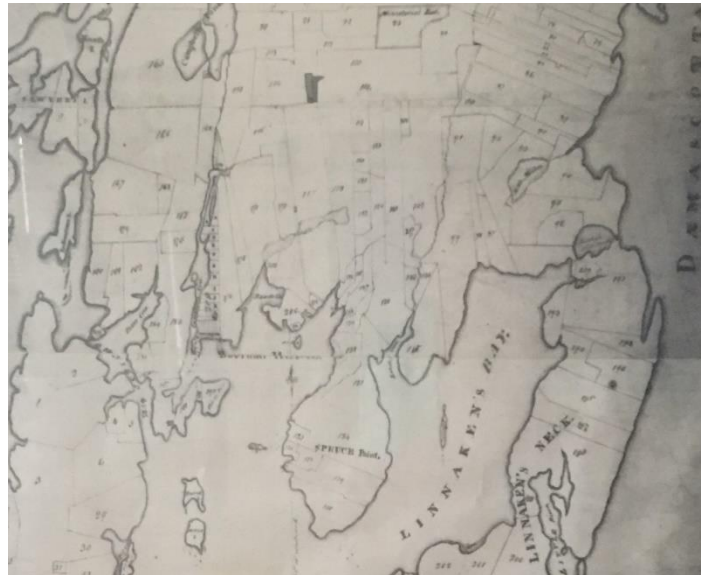
Nat Wilson, Sailmaker!

Mark your calendar Tuesday, May 19th at 4:30 (wait, is it only February? oh go ahead and mark your calendar anyway) for our Annual Meeting and guest speaker Nat Wilson. Wilson is an innovator in the sailing industry and is known worldwide for his knowledge of sailmaking and rigging.

See you there.

Exhibit News

We are planning special [Maine Bicentennial](#) exhibits for you. Keep your eyes peeled (if you are wondering about the origin of the phrase, [click here](#)). The phrase evidently appeared in the US around 1850, thirty years after Maine became the twenty-third state.



Detail of our 1815 map by Daniel Rose, made five years before statehood.

Education News

Our joint [Maine Bicentennial](#) project with [Boothbay Region Elementary School](#) third grades will be a time line! The students will illustrate time lines for our exhibits. Our thanks to the wonderful teachers and students of the BRES third grades for making this collaboration possible.

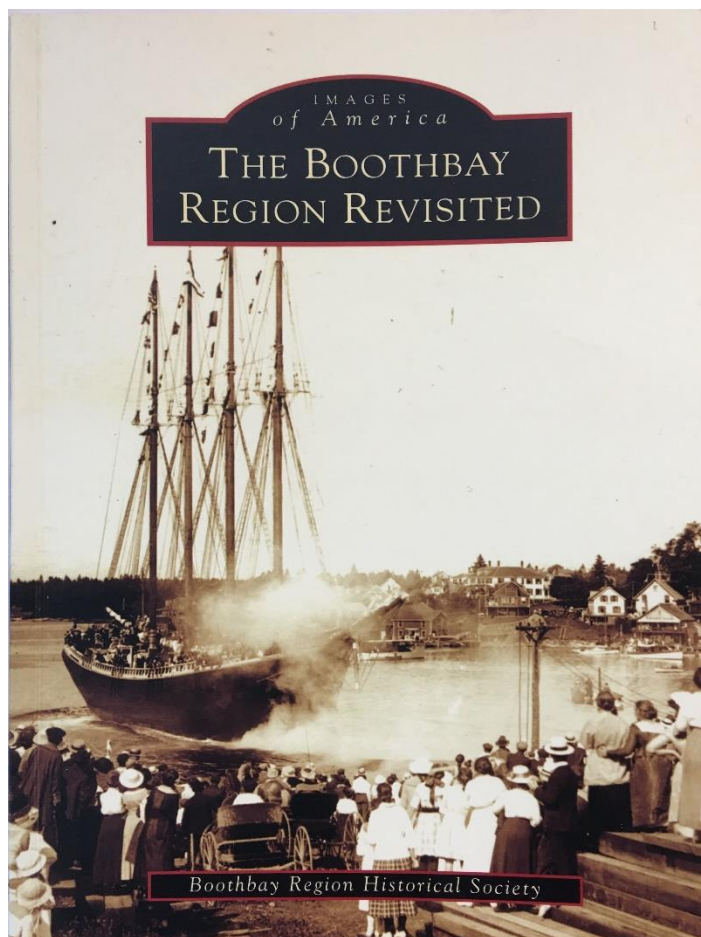


BRES third grade students explored our museum last spring as part of our BRES Boothbay history program.

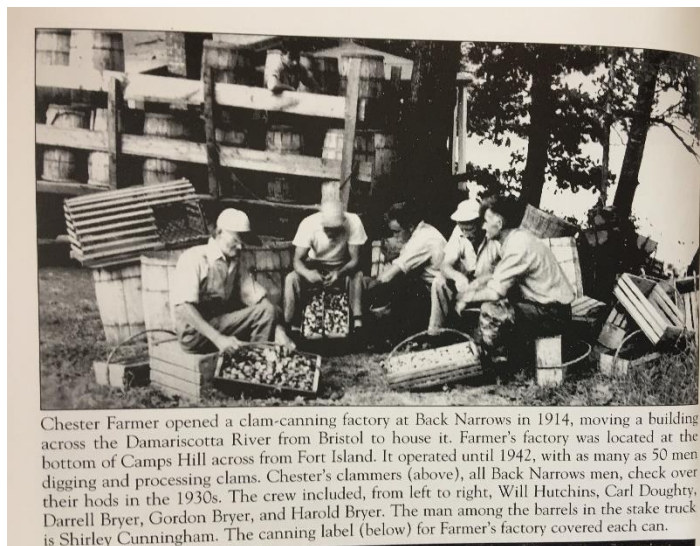
For more information on our educational programs [click here](#).

Our Museum Shop

There are only 322 days left until Christmas 2020. Just saying.



This fascinating book is \$19.99.
 We take cash, checks, or credit cards. You can call us, or better yet, stop by!



Chester Farmer opened a clam-canning factory at Back Narrows in 1914, moving a building across the Damariscotta River from Bristol to house it. Farmer's factory was located at the bottom of Camps Hill across from Fort Island. It operated until 1942, with as many as 50 men digging and processing clams. Chester's clammers (above), all Back Narrows men, check over their hods in the 1930s. The crew included, from left to right, Will Hutchins, Carl Doughty, Darrell Bryer, Gordon Bryer, and Harold Bryer. The man among the barrels in the stake truck is Shirley Cunningham. The canning label (below) for Farmer's factory covered each can.

It is filled with wonderful stories and photographs.
 And Valentines Day comes sooner than Christmas, doesn't it?

About Us

We preserve your history. It will not be forgotten.



McCobb Blacksmith Account Book, 1834 to 1837

We are open year-round, Thursdays through Saturdays, 10 am to 2 pm.

Come visit us!

We have:

Photographs: More than 15,000 images, including negatives, prints, scans, glass plates, and photographic postcards.

Newspapers: Thirteen feet of local newspapers dating from 1876 to the present.

History files: More than 4,500 items arranged by more than 200 topics.

Family Files: Obituaries, genealogies, correspondence, news clippings pertaining to numerous local families.

Special Collections: Account books, day books, logs, ledgers, diaries, and family albums dating from the 1750s to the mid-1900s.

Document boxes: Discrete, fairly large collections of information on families, businesses, schools, cultural organizations, and similar.

Oral history: Video and audio interviews with area residents.

Maps, surveys, nautical charts, vessel plans.

Boothbay and Boothbay Harbor: Town reports, vital records, and valuation records.

Books and periodicals: Generally secondary sources of historical information related to the region.

Yearbooks: Boothbay region high schools, 1934-1992.

The towns of Boothbay, Boothbay Harbor, and Southport are the principal areas represented in the BRHS collections.

Come see us soon!

Celebrate your cultural heritage

[Follow us on Facebook](#)
[or click here for our website.](#)

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*Come visit! We're open year-round,
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