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Boothbay Region Historical Society News

April 2020

Researching and preserving our history

It will not be forgotten

Photograph: Barter's Island class in the 1950s

From Our Archives

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Hope Hodgdon Updegraff and her friend Dot Rice Booth in their Indian outfits, about 1913. Hope, who taught generations of East Boothbay and Back Narrows students, is the taller of the two.

The Flu Epidemic of 1918, Part II

by Barbara Rumsey

(first published in the Boothbay Register)

A month after the flu epidemic hit Boothbay in September 1918, scarlet fever came to town. By October 25, it carried off Donald and Carlton Blake of Back Narrows, seven and fourteen; and their father Leonard died two weeks later of flu. Any other time scarletina would have been big news, but flu was still center stage. The ban on public gatherings was lifted on October 23 and things seemed to be improving in Boothbay, while people were still dying away. A third Murray brother, Capt. Brad Murray, died in Hollister, Massachusetts on October 30.

When East Boothbay opened its schools by December 6, scarletina was under control, but the flu still lurked. Beatrice Poore, who had gone to Augusta as a nurse, came

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population weakened by flu. The implication was that the flu was on the wane.

However the flu started to revive again with another wave of desperately ill and dead through Christmas. Hilda Hodgdon of East Boothbay, older sister of Hope Hodgdon (Updegraff), was sent home from Maine University which shut because of the epidemic, and the flu was hitting hard in Portland again. The schools were open in the Boothbay region, though there were still cases. There was no Christmas Sunday school pageant in East Boothbay, and two East Boothbay shipyards, Rice Brothers and the Adams yard, were shorthanded, but most men were recovering.

Memories of Dot Rice Booth and Gleason Gamage

Dorothy (Dot) Rice Booth of Murray Hill, East Boothbay, born 1905, remembers she was sick with the flu about Christmas time, as were many others. Dr. Fernald treated all the local people, and the flu seemed mild in the village. Dot's prescribed regimen was to stay in bed and take cough medicine. Though she coughed little, she took the medicine because it tasted so good! Dot remembers that Portland had it quite bad. A friend, Camilla Destefanis, who Dot met at Gorham Normal School, came from a large Italian family of nine—they all died except Camilla and a sister.

Gleason Gamage, born 1908 and of Pear Street, Boothbay Harbor, was sick with the flu in 1918 also. His family seasonally rented the Fossett house on the corner of Union Street and Atlantic Avenue. His father Ellsworth brought the family from Cape Newagen in the winter to get work in the Harbor, often doing carpentry for both vessels and houses. The rest of the year Ellsworth usually ran boat parties from all over the region, such as at Newagen for the summer people or from the Harbor's east side art colonies. In the winter of 1918-1919, Gleason's brother Lawrence was on the Navy patrol boat Halcyon which came in to try to keep the Harbor clear of ice for the Winter Harbor, the main delivery boat from Portland. There was sickness on the patrol boat, and Gleason's family got the flu, probably from Lawrence. Gleason's father was the only member of the family who didn't get it, and he cared for all of them. Dr. George Gregory served as their family doctor. Virginia Reed Gamage lived near the Murrays on High Street and she remembers that the mother of the three dead Murray brothers, traumatized by the flu, was petrified of going places.

On December 28, the epidemic hit South Bristol hard. Their Register column recorded that "Truly this year has been one which will be long remembered in South Bristol as

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draft; many families left town; and the flu epidemic paralyzed the village.

Conditions Worsen Again

The January 3 paper noted that the schools opened and then closed again as the epidemic continued. Among the dead: Roland Nason, a 20-year-old Back Narrows resident who worked at Rice Brothers; Charles Sylvester, 28, who worked at B. E. Hume's grain mill; teacher Verna Greenleaf, 20; Mrs. Willis Brewer of Southport; Hiram Lewis, 18, and Kathleen McInnis, 15, from Barters Island. Six others died in the region, perhaps of the flu. George Cameron and Mr. and Mrs. Otis Lewis died away.

By January 17, no more deaths were reported, though 16 were sick on Southport, including Mr. and Mrs. Charles Pinkham, daughters Ethelyn (later Giles), Eleanor (later Hainer), and the baby. The Barters Island column reported that only four families on the island had not been sick. The Island column differentiated between the September and the December outbreaks as two distinct attacks of the virus, and that seems to have been the general understanding. By mid-January 1919, all bans were lifted and the region's bout with influenza was really over.

South Bristol and East Boothbay came through the two-pronged epidemic with no fatalities, some people attributing that to the great care given by East Boothbay's Dr. Fernald to the two communities. More Americans died of the flu in a few months in 1918 than died in World Wars I and II, Korea, and Vietnam. In America 675,000 died, while between 20 and 40 million died worldwide. 1919 was a welcome sight.

This is the second of two articles.

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

Thank you!

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Thank you to the First National Bank of Damariscotta for its recent donation to the historical society of \$1,000. In Boothbay Harbor, the First has been a generous community member for almost forty years. During recent renovations, when their operations were moved to a temporary trailer, we were pleased to offer the staff use of restroom facilities at the museum. As more and more people doing bank business parked along the street, museum volunteers were often able to park in the bank lot.

We are lucky to have such good neighbors!

About Us

Due to COVID-19, effective March 16, 2020, the Boothbay Region Historical Society is **CLOSED UNTIL FURTHER NOTICE**. Email will continue to be checked daily, however phone messages may be checked less frequently. For research questions, or any other inquiries, please send details to brhs@zwi.net.

We know you will understand this action and are hoping similar measures being taken across the region will help lessen the spread of this virus. Please check our Facebook page or website regularly for further updates. www.boothbayhistorical.org.

Wherever you live, please be smart and be safe.



*Bertha D. Nickerson freezing herring on platforms protruding above the deck off
Newfoundland c. 1891 (detail)*

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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.

Yearbooks: Boothbay region high schools, 1934-1992.

Books and periodicals: Town reports, vital records, and valuation records.

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