

[View this email in your browser](#)



Photograph: Lobster clam bake crew at Murray Hill Indian Carry 1938

A Window to the Past

Boothbay Region Historical Society News

August 2021

Researching and preserving our history

Your stories will not be forgotten

From Our Archives



East Boothbay, Barlows Hill Lincoln Street from church steeple 1920s

The Dreaded Horn-Decker Gang, Part III

By Barbara Rumsey

Horn-Deckers Move to East Boothbay

Horn's Head at Hodgdon's Mills

The repeated jailings of the late 1830s or perhaps just the passage of time saw the wild plundering activities of the Horns and the Abraham Decker family damped down. And during the 1830s, many Cape Newagen Island Horn-Deckers moved to East Boothbay, then called Hodgdon's Mills. Maybe they were so unwelcome along the Sheepscot River that they decided to try the Damariscotta River side of town. Some Horn-Deckers who arrived in Hodgdon's Mills were paupers, residents who were "on the town." Payments by the town for their support show that, for instance, Rachel Horn, was in the village by the mid-1830s. However, consistent continual support started in the 1840s, placing them as a group settled in the village by then.

Though no village land was deeded to Horns or Deckers, the northeast end of Barlows Hill was called Horn's Head for a time in the nineteenth century. Few people remember that the area was so called, though the term endured until about 1900. For instance, an 1889 *Pemaquid Messenger* noted in its East Boothbay news that a small schooner went ashore on Horn's Head, but was gotten off safely. Also, Mrs. George I. Hodgdon Sr. wrote a profile of her husband in 1956 in which she mentioned the goings-on the day

family cows." Caleb Hodgdon, and his sons after him, owned the Head from 1826 to 1876. The Hodgdon family and town assessors also called it "the North and South Pasture."

The 1850 census is laid out in the order that the census-taker visited the houses, and it lists three houses north past the few houses on what is now lower Lincoln Street. The three houses were those of Horn-Decker squatters. Squatting was common back when unimproved land had so little value and the population was so sparse. No one now knows just where the houses were on Horn's Head, but probably they were small camps. 1840s valuation records show the structures worth \$25, while house values then averaged \$200. In the first house was Henry Horn, a Wiscasset jail alumnus, who was the son of Joseph and Sally Decker Horn, also jail alumni. Henry housed his wife, two sons, and a Decker second cousin. In the second house was Henry's father, Joseph Horn, who housed his niece Hannah Decker and one of her sons. Hannah would stay on the pauper rolls for more than forty years, usually housed by her brother Asa Decker.

In the last house was Joseph Horn's nephew, the much-incarcerated Asa Decker. Asa was jailed first in 1830, then with his cousin Henry Horn in 1831, and again in 1833 and 1835, the last time with his father Abraham Jr. In Asa's household were his wife, their children, and Asa's nephew Isaac Horn. Though Asa's 1813 birth is not recorded in town, and his unusual 1893 death certificate did not list his parents, I believe he was a son of Abraham Decker Jr.

Deckers Cove at Little River

Asa Decker bought a small lot of land for \$25 in 1854 and left Hodgdon's Mills for Little River on Linekin Neck. The cove just southwest of the old Royall house was known as Deckers Cove, named, no doubt, for Asa.

In accord with Asa Decker's purchase, the 1860 census shows Horn-Deckers vanished from the village of Hodgdon's Mills and places Asa at Little River with his wife, one son, and six others. Henry Horn had drowned in 1859, and Asa had taken in Henry's widow and five sons. Henry's five-year-old boy was named Caleb, perhaps for Caleb Hodgdon in gratitude for his allowing them to squat on his property at Horn's Head in the 1840s and 1850s.

Rioting on Linekin Neck

Things stayed lively on the Neck. Henry Hatchard of Linekin wrote a long complaint to the *Boothbay Register* in January 1878 about the recent partying of his rowdy Decker neighbors. He noted in his letter, entitled "Rioting on Linekin Neck," that "This is not the first time our sleep has been disturbed by Tom Decker's times."

there is a time to sing and there is a time to dance and a time to pray, and Mr. Decker thought he would take New Year's night to dance."

Not to be outdone, a re-rebuttal was shot back by Hatchard: "The noise that came with the howling of the wind made sleeping out of the question. All of their wicked actions were because this worthy couple made it a rule to offer thanks to Almighty God on their bended knees before retiring to bed. . . So you see dear neighbors how they would like to trample under foot all that put their trust in God. To show their ill will they spurted tobacco juice on the inner door, the front entry, and the stairs."

Asey Decker Stories

What survives of this colorful bunch of rascals—the Horn-Deckers? There must have been countless stories about them and their shenanigans all during the 1800s, enough to supply many hours of deliciously horrifying entertainment. They've passed almost totally into history and out of mind. Only one 1820s story survived oblivion in the *Sheepscot Echo* article, cited last week. It is too bad that what you might call Boothbay's folklore is so lacking.

Sonny Hodgdon told me a story, something about Asey Decker and a skin nailed up on a barn. But I've forgotten it, and that's what happens to much of our history. It just fritters away as people and their memories die, and those left alive forget.

But, I do remember the other story Sonny told me (he was the great-grandson of Caleb Hodgdon who let the Horn-Deckers squat on Horn's Head in the village). Sonny was a great storyteller and he passed on one story for posterity about Asey Decker. Oldtimers often pronounced Asa, or any word ending in "a," that way. Many of the local stories I've heard older people tell are based on deflating others, bringing them down a peg or two with a sharp retort. This one is that type.

Asey and his wife Betsy (and the original witness) set off in his dory from Deckers Cove at Little River for Bath. Asey was a rough, crude fellow, and all the way he abused and berated his wife, and she stoically took it. Upon arriving at the wharf in Bath and confronted with an audience, his personality was suddenly transformed. He became politeness itself, offering gentle solicitude and his arm to Betsy. In front of everybody, she lashed out at his hypocrisy, mimicking the profane, crude remarks he'd made during the long trip over, revealing him as a phony. And then she strode up the wharf, head high.

Evidently Asa Decker honored by example the Horn-Decker tradition of liberating goods at will. One dark foggy night, Asa stole a black sheep, a wether, and slung him in a bag over his shoulder. Struggling home with his load, he was met on the road by a neighbor who made small talk, saying to Asa "How's the weather?" Asa answered, "black and heavy."

Afterword

After writing the above series of articles on the Horn-Deckers, a few people told me that they'd heard the term "Horn-Decker" all their lives. East Boothbay native David McKown at the *Boothbay Register* office was the first; then Lucy Marlowe said she had, as had her mother Eleanor Van Horn Flint, both originally of Linekin; Penny Plummer, formerly of the *Boothbay Register* office; and John West said he still uses the term to describe items whose name he's temporarily forgotten. He says "those little horndeckers," while others use such words as "whatsits" or "thingamajiggys." Perhaps such a use is a throwback to Horn-Deckers as tricky and ornery; objects whose names we can't remember are tricky and sly, slipping out of our minds against our wills.

For more articles by Barbara Rumsey about the Boothbay region check our website

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

BRHS 2021 Speaker Series



Earle Shettleworth presents

"Roadside Maine, The Development of Route One,
1900 – 1950"

Thursday, August 19, 4:30 pm

For a Zoom link, please email us at brhszoom@gmail.com.

Admission is free.

The coming of the automobile in the early 1900s forever changed the experience of traveling on the Maine Coast from Kittery to Calais. Roads were widened and paved, and all manner of commercialism developed along the roadside - gas stations, tourist cabins, motels, souvenir shops, and attractions such as the Desert of Maine in Freeport and Perry's Nut House in Belfast. Using old postcards, Earle Shettleworth will take us on a lighthearted journey along the Route 1 of 75 to 100 years ago.

Earle Shettleworth is the current State Historian of Maine and has lectured and written extensively on Maine history and architecture. He is past director of the Maine Historic Preservation Commission, past president of the Maine Historical Society, and past president of the New England Chapter, Society of Architectural Historians.

For more information on this talk and the rest of our Speaker Series
check our website [here](#).

RECIPE OF THE MONTH

GARDEN CASSEROLE

Florence Chapman

Two cups medium white sauce, one 8-ounce pkg. cheese, 8 small potatoes cooked, 12 small carrots cooked, 1½ cups canned peas. Salt and pepper to taste. To hot cream sauce add cheese and stir until smooth. Arrange vegetables in shallow baking dish. Season with salt and pepper and cover with cheese sauce. Broil 5 minutes or sufficient to brown cheese sauce.

This would be perfect for all your garden produce which is coming in
by the bushel right about now.

From the East Boothbay Cookbook, published in 1947

BRHS News & Queries

**Did you receive your membership card
in your thank you note?**

Please let us know if you did not receive your membership card.

The historical society is looking for volunteers to help care for our gardens.

If you enjoy gardening and would like to help us,
please call the office at 207-633-0820.

We look forward to hearing from you, thank you!

Come visit!

We are once again asking visitors to mask up,

but we are open to the public

Thursday through Saturday, 10:00 am to 2:00 pm.

See you soon!



A crew of Chester's clammers, all Back Narrows men, check over their hods in the 1930s.

Let's celebrate our cultural heritage together

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

Boothbay Region Historical Society

72 Oak Street

Post Office Box 272

Boothbay Harbor, Maine 04538

207.633.0820

Subscribe

Past Issues

*We're (normally) open year-round,
Thursday through Saturday, 10 am to 2 pm.*

Translate ▼

Please check our website for COVID-19 restrictions.

Copyright © 2018 Boothbay Region Historical Society, All rights reserved.

Want to change how you receive these emails?

You can [update your preferences](#) or [unsubscribe from this list](#).

This email was sent to <<Email Address>>

[why did I get this?](#) [unsubscribe from this list](#) [update subscription preferences](#)

Boothbay Region Historical Society · PO Box 272 · Boothbay Harbor, ME 04538 · USA

