



Boothbay Region High School football team c. 1957

A Window to the Past

Boothbay Region Historical Society

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From Our Archives



This section of the 1857 Lincoln County map shows the houses on Barters Island. There were then about 44 houses on the island, mostly lived in by Barters and their relatives.

Barters Island Settlement Pattern, 1730 to 1860s

By Barbara Rumsey, 2013

Samuel Barter, a housewright born in 1711, left Arundel and settled on Barters Island about 1737. His forebears were from Amesbury, Mass. He stated in an 1800 deed that he had lived on the island for 63 years, except when the Indians drove him off for a few years. His 1750s petitions to the Kennebec Proprietors, the premier landsharks of the time, also confirm his long residency. In the 1730s, things were still so unorganized here that the Sheepscot River islands, at least Barters and Sawyers (then called Ship), were described as being part of Wiscasset.

Joseph Patten at his store on Ship Island with labor or goods, such as 5,500 shingles, 1,140 uncultured clapboards, shaved and unshaved clapboards, and hogshead staves. If Samuel worked off his bill, often it was by “three days of His Saw” or “part of a day's Worke aChooping.” At times he worked alongside Patten, helping to make his “flote” or framing. Court suits also reveal the family probably sailed boatloads of clapboards and shingles to Massachusetts for sale. Barter's Island must have been pretty bare. On the 1771 tax list, the only two Barter's listed as heads of households had frame houses, a rarity in Boothbay. No doubt Samuel, being a housebuilder, could not abide living in a log house.

The next year, seven Barter men, more than any other Boothbay family, presented themselves to sign the petition to quiet title. Boothbay residents were harried by various land claimants for more than half a century, and the townspeople were in a state of constant fear and loathing of the landsharks. Local people had found, to their sorrow, that the more people knew about them, the harder their lives could be. But the hatred of land claimants overcame the natural inclination to keep a low profile and their heads down.

Dividing the island

All of the island was owned by Barter family members, except the confusing northern tip. The rest was divided into six lots for Samuel's offspring, but not for many decades after his arrival. The first lot to be deeded went to grandson Nicholas in 1780. All the other lots went out at Christmas time 1792 and 1793 to son-in-law Ebenezer Dean, grandson-in-law Samuel Kenney, and sons Samuel Jr., Joseph and John. Maybe Samuel's 80th birthday caused him to focus on his mortality and set about deeding parcels out. The lots transferred to his male heirs were of approximate equal size, except where the island widens out to the south.

In 1783 the town approved a road running south to north up the middle of the island. With its approval, fairness prevailed – not often so in small towns with few assets and, in this case, on a small town's island that was nearly a self-contained family kingdom. The more rural parts of town have always had a harder time getting tax money to come their way. In that vein, the island was not bridged for 120 years after the first Samuel arrived, and the early bridges were not permanent. Ice took the first one out, maybe the second too. Nor were the bridges easy to come by; the townspeople turned down the cash outlay to build a bridge so many times that finally the county commissioners stepped in and ordered it done.

By 1815 the island was divided into 16 lots, almost all sons, grandsons, and Barter in-

3rd. By the mid-1860s, more Barter marriages brought in Campbells, Caswells, Camerons, Conarys, Greenleafs, Gareys, Days, Davises, Dawses, Dodges, Duntons, Bourgets, Stones, Stuarts, Hardings, Robertses, Reeds, Rackliffs, Kimballs, Alleys, Adamses, Andersons, Matthews, Wylies and Hodgdon. I imagine not all the married couples settled on the island.

1857 versus 2013

On the 1857 map, there were 44 houses on the island, three-quarters of which were lived in by Barters or families that had married into the Barter family. I assume that pattern didn't change by much until maybe World War II. The north end of the island still had no electricity then (that would have given potential new residents second thoughts). The last thing I did was call Ronnie Spofford to ask him how many natives were still on the island. I assumed most (three-quarters?) of them would have been Barter in-laws at some point in the past. He came up with about 22 houses owned by natives, a few of them Barters. I counted the current separate lots on the island in an inexact way, knowing full well there were not houses on all of them. There look to be 225 or so on the island. Doing a rough count of houses on Google maps, there were maybe 160. So while nearly 75 percent of the houses were Barter-related in 1857, more than 150 years later about 14 percent are Barter-related or natives. Ronnie's west side grandmother, Inez Barter Greenleaf, who died in 1949, confirmed my speculation that the 1940s brought radical change.

Inez told Ronnie that by looking around she could see that it wouldn't be too long before almost all the houses and land would go out of the hands of the old families. It's the way of the world, particularly so in a desirable part of the country.

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

CHEESE AND BAKE SALE FUNDRAISER

Friday, October 7, 10 am to 2 pm
Saturday, October 8, 10 am to sold out
at Boothbay Region Historical Society



New this year, we are offering [Pineland Farms](#) Reserve Cheddar. This delicious cheese is aged for two years, giving it a bold sharp scrumptious taste. You will want to try it!

Like working with wood?



As you see, our two signs need repairing and painting. We would be so very grateful to some kind soul who could spruce them up. If you are out there, just waiting for such a project, please email us at brhs@gwi.net or call 633-0820. Thank you!

We need your help digitizing and preserving our collections

Can you volunteer an hour a week?

If you would like to join this exciting project, or have questions, email Kathy

Let's celebrate our cultural heritage together

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*We're open year-round,
weather permitting
Thursday through Saturday, 10 am to 2 pm.*

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