



Mary G Maynard launch in 1920 at East Coast Ship Company yard

A Window to the Past

Boothbay Region Historical Society

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From Our Archives



This northeast view of the East Boothbay tidemill probably dates to the 1930s, when the third Hodgdon generation was running it. Logs have been run from the river under the mill into the pond to be hauled into the mill up the pond-side ramp. The palisade plank wall in the pond on the right was a sawdust containment area, occasioned by a 1909 dredging of the little harbor. It was not created for early pollution control, but to preserve depth under keels. The mill was torn down in 1960.

William McCobb, Blacksmith, Part IV

By Barbara Rumsey, 2015

In the last three articles I discussed the early to mid-1800s Boothbay blacksmith account books of William McCobb and my delight at the society's recently getting its hands on the first one. It starts in 1811 and predates his others we acquired in 1990.

I was especially interested in the earliest records of Caleb Hodgdon, who came to the village that became East Boothbay in early 1826 with men he encouraged to join him. I knew Caleb's jobs with McCobb could help bracket some pivotal events in his transforming the little river hamlet into a busy, populated village with many more houses, shops, an improved tidemill, and a busy shipyard.

What shape was the mill pond's tidal sawmill in when Caleb took it over? Samuel Murray, the prior owner, had his last McCobb mill job in September 1820. He was taxed in 1819 for a \$100 mill, but the next surviving tax list of 1823 shows no tax for the mill — it was shuttered. Caleb resurrected it, but when?

I believe Caleb lived aboard his pinky while he worked on the tidemill and built his house. McCobb's first book showed Caleb worked intensively on the mill in summer 1826. So that nailed down the "when." During those warm months Caleb rented McCobb's ox team for 29 1/2 days. The team must have hauled rock and lumber for Caleb's mill building project. I'm fairly certain by the timing that Caleb quickly got the mill up and running to create additional lumber for the mill and the houses and shipyard to come. In December 1826, McCobb made a grindstone crank among other things, and in March 1827 he cut buttonholes in the mill's saw, signs that Caleb was already repairing the combination grist and saw mill.

I knew Caleb had built or was building his house on present Lincoln Street by late November 1826 since nails and a crane gudgeon, necessary to cooking over a fire, were stolen from it then. Confirming the house, McCobb's records shows Caleb buying five "crain eyes" and a "crain" in late October and early November. Such verification of the house's probable date is gratifying.

A year later Caleb had McCobb make crane eyes for three men, including William Blake, thus helping them with their village houses. McCobb's work also shows that Caleb built a fishhouse, a workhouse (maybe in the shipyard), and another house by late 1827. Caleb was putting down roots in a big way.

Caleb's high level of land acquisition, building, and repairing was such that in his first few 1826 months in Boothbay, which then included the Harbor and Southport, he shot to the top five percent of town taxpayers. The next year he was among the top three and was elected selectman; the next year he was the top payer, a distinction I'm sure he was ambivalent about.

In that year of 1828, the double mill was valued at \$1,200, twelve times the 1819 Murray ownership valuation and six times the worth of any other mill in Boothbay. He hit town in a big way and measurably benefited it with his tax load.

It is reassuring to have McCobb's ironwork for Caleb support the assumptions I made about Caleb's building multiple houses and his tidemill project, and to more closely identify the dates of events. But what about his shipyard? Caleb had started building on Jeremysquam (Westport) in 1816, moving to Boothbay 10 years later to continue here. The 1826 and 1827 auxiliary buildings might have been in the yard, but vessel building ironwork is lacking; there's just a little for vessel-related and repair items.

I know Caleb launched the 76-foot schooner *Katherine* in December 1827 and the 59-foot pinky *Mary* in July 1828. I've seen the consistent pattern of ironwork necessary to build a vessel countless times in blacksmith account books, but it's missing on Caleb's pages in the McCobb books. As a matter of fact, he didn't use McCobb at all in the five months preceding *Katherine's*

I have to assume that there was an unknown blacksmith in the village he preferred or he imported one for vessel work. It would be preferable to have the ironwork made very near, so the smith could trot down to the building ways to take measurements, etc. without traveling more than a mile west to McCobb's.

Obtaining McCobb's first book 24 years after the others, answered questions I had about Caleb's moving here, his house, and the mill.

But the shipyard blacksmith and identifying other early vessels Caleb built, remains a mystery. But in the bigger picture, the book also provides a look at the other 183 Boothbay customers for those who want to delve into the lives of the people who once dwelt here.

Account books help to bring long-ago cardboard cut-out figures closer to three-dimensional life. I again thank Palmer Payne, Reid Ervin and Henry O'Neill for ensuring that we could obtain the first of McCobb's seven account books, covering 55 years from 1811 to 1866, and thus possess a full set.

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

GREETING VISITORS

We need you!

Would you like to help us greet museum visitors or help our visitors
with their research questions this summer?

It is fun and interesting!

If you have two hours between 10:00 am and 2:00 pm
on a Thursday, Friday, or Saturday in June, July, or August
please email Kathy Goldner at boothbayhistoric@gmail.com.

We look forward to hearing from you!



From our collections, pressed flowers from Mary Todd Lincoln's White House garden.

MUSEUM NEWS

Jon Dunsford to speak about the Bowdoin at Annual Meeting

Thursday, May 18th

Please join us at our public Annual Meeting 4:30 – 5:00 pm
at 5:00 pm

Jon Dunsford will present “The Bowdoin”

Local ship modeler Jon Dunsford will share two models of brigs built in Boothbay and summarize the era of their building from 1823 to 1855. He will then share part of his new story:
how and why the schooner Bowdoin was designed,
and why it was then built here in Boothbay.



The Bowdoin

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We are an [archive](#) serving researchers world-wide.



We provide a free [third grade history](#) program, a free [speaker series](#), and present [special exhibits](#).

We work on special projects: funding a college scholarship for a Boothbay Region High School student, digitizing our collections, writing an exhibition catalog.

We maintain the 1874 [historic house](#) which is our museum and offices, and a [museum store](#).

We do it with three part-time staff and our dedicated trustees and volunteers

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

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