



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

A Window to the Past

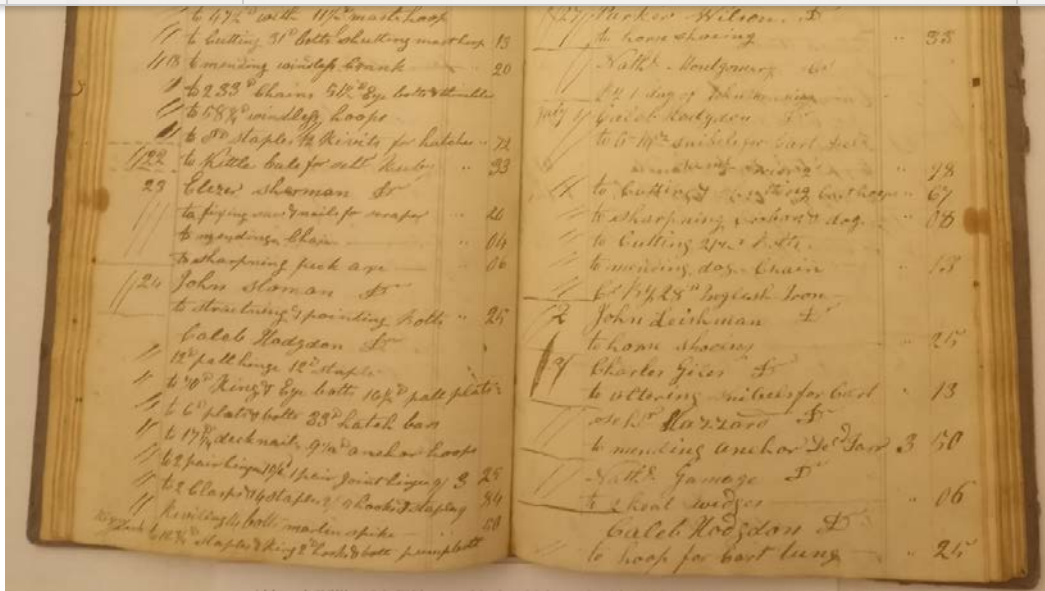
Boothbay Region Historical Society

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Researching and preserving our history

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From Our Archives



William McCobb's account book

William McCobb, Blacksmith, Part I

By Barbara Rumsey, 2015

I originally wrote part of the following two articles more than 20 years ago. Since there is a development in the subject, I've edited and corrected them, and I'm running them again as context preceding new information that will appear in part III.

The society was fortunate to acquire many of the account books of William McCobb of Boothbay in 1990. William was born in 1791, probably at Pleasant Cove where his father Samuel Jr. lived. The house William occupied as a blacksmith was built perhaps in the 1780s by his uncle William McCobb, an extremely successful Harbor businessman who left the house and blacksmith shop to him. The McCobb house, which has also been known as the Larrabee or Marson place, is situated on the western "big hill" above Oak Lawn cemetery. Many used to call it Larrabee's Hill. Milt Van Vlack has owned the property for many years.

As a young man William was apprenticed to a Bath blacksmith named Thomas Trott, and we have William's lesson book from that period. Evidently he got a well-rounded education from Trott, instructed in business methods to boot. The first Boothbay account book we have starts in 1828, but it doesn't appear to have been the first; that one was missing.

Account books: History's little gold mines

pronunciation of words by his phonetic spelling; you can learn the professions of many of his customers by how they paid their bill. For instance, I feel sure no shoemaker paid his bills in cash, for most account books list shoes bartered in trade.

You can see how varied the work lives were, with customers paying in fish, then in haying, then in wood chopping. Local people slip through your categorizing fingers, doing any seasonal thing that could generate cash or staples, just as the times demanded.

McCobb worked a few consecutive days and had stretches of days between forge work, keeping an erratic schedule that matched the lifestyle then of doing mostly for yourself in food and heat creation and maintenance. Time spent in cash labor was usually not more than a fourth of the year, and normally less.

You can see beautifully laid out all the ironwork on a David and James Adams-built vessel and track the vessel's progress; you can figure out when cookstoves hit Boothbay; you can pinpoint what sawmills and gristmills were functioning; you can find out who was in partnership with whom; you can identify when people came to town.

Bartering for ironwork

Winthrop Andrews often paid for his blacksmith work with "holabot." I guess there's no question how McCobb thought halibut should be pronounced. Andrews, like John Love and Newbury Morse, always paid in fish — thus fishermen. William Reed paid by "bootchering a heiffer." Again the old pronunciation of "butchering," only heard from old-timers, is revealed. (They may all be gone now, 20 years later.)

John McClintock of Dover, the richest crop center of the region, must have had a huge garden. His bill was always paid with produce that could be grown locally: apples, peas, beets, turnips. If patrons like McClintock came from Dover, there may have been no blacksmith in North Boothbay or Boothbay Center.

In September 1837, McCobb was working on his house. He credited Charles Giles for seven days on the "seller"; Moses and George Huff put in almost two weeks on the same job. On Nov. 7, 1837, McCobb bartered 2,000 bricks and 24 tiles from Jonathan Morrison, a brickmaker at Boothbay Center. Those entries reveal when the work was undertaken, of great interest to the homeowner, also who in town specialized in foundation work (Gileses of course then and now), and who had the brickyard.

Hodgdon Shipyard and tidemill

Caleb Hodgdon brought his shipbuilding and mill business from Jeremysquam (Westport) to the village in the mid-1820s and by 1828 the village was known as Hodgdon's Mills.

Unfortunately, no pre-1950s business accounts of the now nearly 180-year-old shipyard survive. Reconstructing a picture of the Hodgdon yard, tidemill and stores, and of 1828 East Boothbay, takes other sources, which I used to write my book on the topic. Similarly, in particle physics, one has to construct a profile of a particle by its impact on other particles.

Next time: More on how account books pry open history's door, particularly regarding the Hodgdon businesses.

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

MUSEUM NEWS

Join us in welcoming our new trustee John Morris.



John Morris comes to the Boothbay Region Historical Society board with forty-four years of experience working in the tech industry, as well as experience working with non-profits. He was on the board of the Handel & Haydn Society of Boston, and was one of the founders of the Essex County Community Foundation in Massachusetts, through which he provided business support to dozens of non-profits across the county.

lived adjacent to the Tugboat Inn. John recently discovered that his fourth great-grandmother, Elizabeth Barter (1760-1831), was born on Barter's Island not more than three miles from where he and Susan live today.

SCHOLARSHIP FUND

Last year, with your help, we were able to present the first Boothbay Region Historical Society college scholarship of \$1,000 to a Boothbay Region High School student. This year, with the inflation we are all experiencing, helping a student achieve their dream of higher education seems even more pressing, and we come to you again for your help in funding this scholarship.

Donations at any level are welcome. Checks may be made out to Boothbay Region Historical Society with "scholarship" written in the memo line or in a note with the check, our mailing address is POB 272, Boothbay Harbor, ME 04538. You may donate with a credit card on our [website](#) using the donation box with "scholarship" in the note box.

Last year, along with many individuals, the following businesses generously donated to the scholarship fund:

Bath Savings, Boothbay Harbor
Bayside Inn B&B, Boothbay Harbor
First Federal Savings and Loan Association of Bath
First National Bank, Damariscotta
Hodgdon Yacht Services, Southport
Pinkham's Gourmet Market, Boothbay Harbor

The staff and trustees thank you for considering this opportunity to join us in making an investment in the future of our children.



Boothbay Harbor High, graduating class 1917

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We are a [museum open free of charge](#), year-round.

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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weather permitting
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