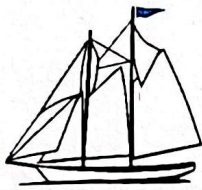


Spring 2022

Hancock Historical Society Newsletter



Hancock Historical Society — M A I N E —

Spring is here at last and with it we have a brand-new logo to celebrate our rich maritime history. Look for it on merchandise in our museum gift shop.

Wednesday, June 1st will be the official kick off of the 2022 season. We will be open Tuesdays and Wednesdays through the end of October. We hope to add more open hours this year, but that has not been firmed up yet.

A very special exhibit featuring the Mount Desert Ferry is being put together by Alan Gray through the auspices of the Penobscot Maritime Museum where Alan volunteers. (See the article by Alan for more information.) Some of our summer programs will revolve around our maritime and railroad history.

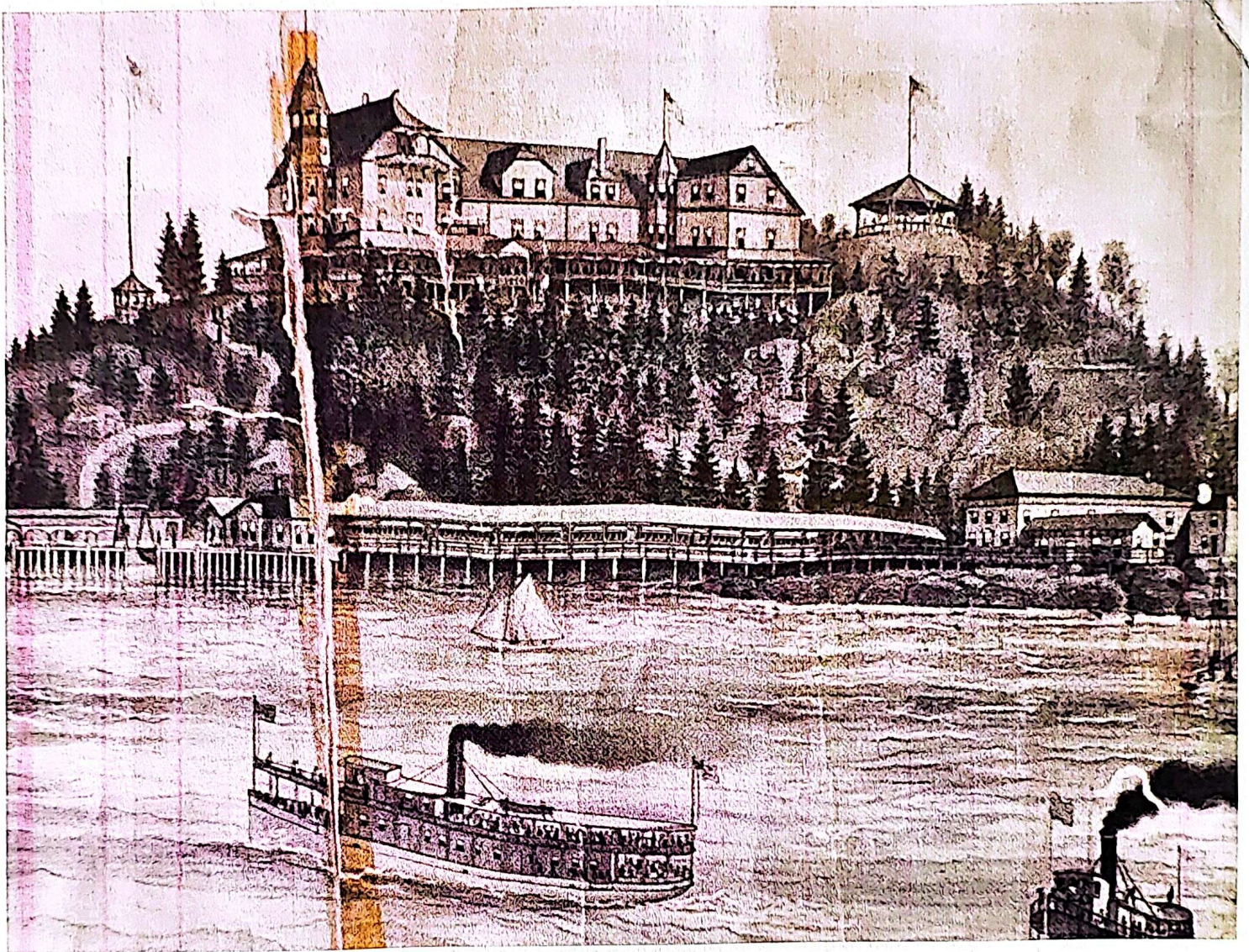
If you are planning a vacation in the area or just a day trip, please stop by and spend some time visiting our museum.

2022 Feature Exhibit - Mount Desert Ferry Trains and Ferries

This summer we will feature artifacts and stories about the 50 years (1880's to 1930's) that the Maine Central Railroad operated their terminal at McNeil Point at Mount Desert Ferry. The highlight was summers, when the Bar Harbor Express and other trains brought MDI summer residents to the terminal to board the Maine Central's ferries over to Bar Harbor, as well as Seal, Northeast and Southwest Harbors. The railroad served the terminal year-round, handling freight for MDI as well as people, and carried freight from Hancock to Bangor, Portland, Boston and beyond. The ferry terminal also featured a coal dock and served local coastal schooners.

For this summer, we have been fortunate to be able to borrow from the Penobscot Marine Museum a spectacular diorama of the ferry installation as it appeared about 1911. It includes passenger trains, the passenger sheds and ferry boarding areas with several of the ferries at or near the dock. At the other end of the long wharf are freight sheds with freight cars with schooners alongside.

The diorama was made by William E. Hitchcock of York, Maine in 2001 at a scale of 1/8"=1'. It sits on a 2-foot-high base, is roughly 4 feet by 2 feet, with a 2-foot glass cover.



The Bluffs House and Mount Desert Ferry. Notice the proximity of the train, one of the reasons for the unprofitability of the venture.

THE BLUFFS HOUSE, Mt., Desert Ferry

Wilfred E. Mansur (1855–1921) a prominent architect in late 19th and early 20th century in Bangor, Maine was chosen to design a new hotel at Mt. Desert Ferry in 1885 built to serve the tourists arriving in Hancock by train on their way by steamboat to Bar Harbor. He was a member of the American Institute of Architects, the Boston Society of Architects, and the Maine Society of Architects. Examples of his designs include the Penobscot

County Court House, the Nichols Block, the Columbia Building and at least seven schools in Bangor.

Located on a knoll above the intersection of Grant Street and Ferry Road, the hotel's dimensions were 132 feet by 41 feet with three stories over a finished basement. The plan for the basement was to house laundry facilities, a billiard hall, bathrooms and a

store room. The first floor would include a dining room 30' by 40' capable of seating 130 diners. There would be a 24' by 26' kitchen, pantry, 130 square foot China closet, a 23' by 43' parlor, a 930 square foot office, bath rooms and closets. The dining area, parlor, office and halls would be outfitted with fireplaces.

The second and third floor would each contain 20 large guest rooms and baths. The fourth floor containing sleeping quarters would also have the entrance room to the octagonal tower located on the south end of the hotel facing Frenchman's Bay and Bar Harbor. The 100-foot-tall tower topped by a grand observatory would provide magnificent views at every turn.

The first floor would be 30 feet above sea level and a 12-foot-wide veranda would be built around the entire building with two staircases descending to the ground level and four entrances into the hotel, one on each side and one on each end of the building.

The exterior of the building would be broken up by various forms of architecture and four balconies at desirable locations on the second floor. Shingled and painted on the outside, it would be similar in architecture to the Marlboro Hotel in Bar Harbor. Approved in the spring of 1885, construction was to begin immediately with an expected completion date of August 9 of the same year. We believe they opened that year.

A year an item later in the June 4, 1886 issue of the Mount Desert Herald announced a grand opening shortly after the Fourth of July. A new octagonal pavilion was to be erected in the rear of the hotel where a ball was to be held as part of the grand opening.

The Bluff's was never a financial success despite repeated attempts to make it a profitable business. Much of the problem was the proximity of the building to the railroad tracks with the attendant noise and noxious fumes from the engines. May 27th, 1897, the Ellsworth American reported another

attempt would be made to run The Bluffs at Mt. Desert Ferry on a paying basis. The hotel would be open in the summer by Proprietor Down, of the Hotel Everard in Bar Harbor.

The 1897 register for the Bluff's Hotel lists visitors from May 19th through November 28 of that year with steady occupancy. Guests from as far away as London and Georgia and as close as Ellsworth and Sullivan enjoyed the luxury of a stay at the Bluffs. Among the local guests were Hannibal Hamlin, Ellsworth, E. H. Greeley, Bar Harbor, C. P. Simpson, Sullivan, F. Carroll Burrill, Ellsworth, and Clarence Emery of Salisbury Cove.

An undated poster in the files of the Museum advertised a dance. On Friday, May 29th, the year was either 1898 or 1909, a Social Dance was held at the Bluffs Hotel. Music was by Monaghan's Orchestra. The poster noted "the Steamer "Mascot" would leave Bar Harbor at 8 p.m. for Mt. Desert Ferry, and return to Bar Harbor at close of the dance. The fare was 50 cents with a return trip. Dance tickets were 50 cents per couple." The Mascot was a "handsome little steamer from the Barbour yard at Brewer ..., launched in 1894 for use as a summer excursion boat at Mount Desert. Sixty-three feet long with a single stack, she resembled a small tug, but with both an enclosed lower deck aft and an open deck for sightseeing above. She was later sold and renamed *William Connors*." (Penobscot Bay Mount Desert and Eastport Steamboat Album' by Allie Ryan, Published 1972 by DownEast Magazine.) Her registration indicates she was built in 1898.

August 4, 1899 saw one of the worst disasters in our history when the passengers disembarking from the train rushed onto the gangplank in order to be the on the first boat to Bar Harbor to view the war ships in port there. With an estimated 200 people crammed on the narrow gangplank, the structure gave way and the people were dropped 15 feet into the 20 feet of water under the pier. Despite heroic efforts to save them 20 passengers drowned – 17 at the scene and

three more on the boat being transported to Bar Harbor for care.

Hotel proprietors Bemis and Cuddy threw the hotel open to the injured and their friends where guests gave up their rooms for them and worked along with hotel staff to care for the victims pending the arrival of medical help from Ellsworth, Bar Harbor and Bangor. Other local guests joined with locals in the search for survivors and the dead. The 17 dead were put into the freight house to await identification and transportation to their hometowns. At least 50 persons were treated, most of them for minor injuries and were able to return to their homes that night. Others stayed on until a train could be outfitted with sleeper cars to carry them along with nursing staff back to their homes.

It was estimated that the hotel fed over 300 people and burned more than two cords of fireplace wood in an attempt to dry the passengers out during that disastrous weekend.

In December 1901 the Ellsworth American reported the potential addition of 30 "chambers" and 15 baths at the west end of the structure. Senator Hale, Dr. A.C. Hagerthy and E. H. Greeley of Ellsworth and Thomas Moran of Bar Harbor were said to be interested in the project.

By 1915 personal yachts had come into favor with the wealthy summer rusticators causing a decline in the number of travelers using the train and ferry.

The Bluffs Hotel was torn down sometime around 1915 or 1916.



The Bluffs House with the Toole cottage in front.

PRESIDENT'S CORNER

Our winter was fairly quiet at the museum; however, board members were busy securing programs for our summer and fall season, as you will see from the schedule.

I did have a delightful cell phone conversation with Ed Newcomb and his wife as they were leaving Bar Harbor. Ed had left a message on my phone about visiting the museum earlier that day.

He was interested in knowing if the HHS had more information about Ivory Leslie Wardwell. It was too late for Ed and his wife to return to Hancock to visit the museum, but I said I would check. Unfortunately, there was not more in the Wardwell file than when Ed had previously talked to Lois Johnson. With help from others perhaps we can investigate Mr. Wardwell who did work at the old rail line at the Ferry and lived at the house of Cynthia Post Goodman, mother of Brendon and Liam Goodman.

Our extensive files are recognized as some of the best for a small-town museum. Communicating with people is very interesting and informative. Ed Newcomb was interested in knowing that Ivory was a common name many years ago. *Myrna*

Thank you to Board Member, Erick Gatcomb for our new Facebook Page.

<https://www.facebook.com/hancockhistoricalsociety>

The Old School House

Call 422-3408 for an appointment.

2022 SEASON PROGRAMS

July 1 at 7:00PM

Songs of Ships & Sailors Program

For the last twenty years, Fred Gosbee and Julia Lane have been gathering songs from pre-1945 Maine archives in both institutional and personal collections, as well as audio field recordings. These songs were collected in the late 19th and early 20th centuries and have heretofore been unpublished. Their book, *Songs of Ships & Sailors* was published earlier this year. Their intent is to make these songs easily available for not only musicians and traditional music enthusiasts but as a resource for educators and those interested in social history. They have arranged some of these songs, particularly songs originating in Hancock County, and will perform them for this program as well as a few original songs of the sea. The history and social context of the songs will also be discussed. Go to this link to hear the NPR interview with Julia and Fred.

<https://www-cf.npr.org/2022/02/16/1080670062/sea-shanties-revisited-maine-couple-resurfaces-works-thought-lost-to-time?fbclid=IwAR20SuyS9CfNih2Kz5ghMNzYxzYAC2rvDGjU0nlsTbZmqu5S7gCdil-SLQE>

COMING SOON

A webpage for HHS. (finally!)

August 5th at 7:00PM

Downeast Maine Women at Sea presented by Cipperly Good, curator of the Penobscot Marine Museum.

This visual slideshow and dramatic reading explores the herstories of Maine women and daughters who went to sea in the nineteenth and early twentieth century. Despite the old sailors' superstition that women at sea were unlucky, the women accompanied their fathers and husbands on cargo voyages around the world. Some were literally born into the profession and others joined their loved ones with initial trepidation. Using letters, manuscripts and newspaper articles from the Penobscot Marine Museum archives, we will learn about their experiences at sea.

September 9 at 7:00PM

Downeast Scenic Railroad

Join a representative of Downeast Scenic Railroad to hear the about railroads in Hancock. Did you know Hancock once had five railroad stations?

October 7 at 7:00PM

These Are Some of Our Favorite Things

Board members will talk about favorite items in the museum collection. What is your favorite item in the collection? This will also be our annual meeting and election of officers.

Current officers:

President, Myrna Coffin

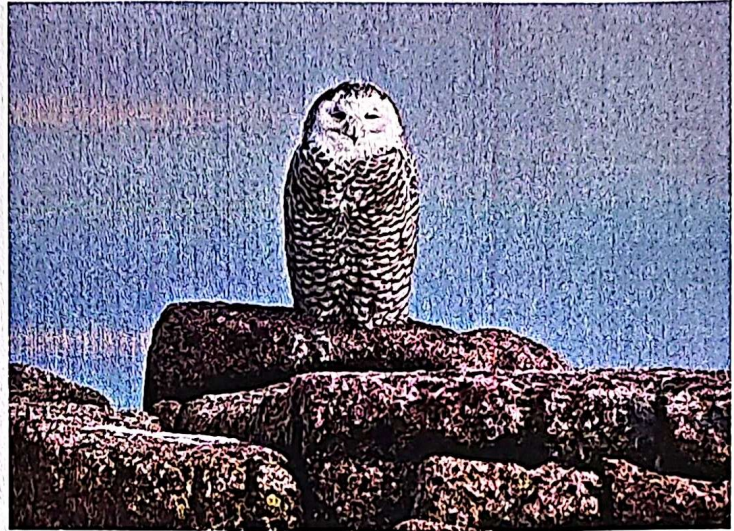
Vice-President, David Johnston

Secretary, Charlotte Stetson

Treasurer, Don Parker

HANCOCK HISTORICAL SOCIETY 2022 RAFFLE

Here's a chance to win either this beautiful Gull Rock Pottery vase (5 1/2" high X 3 1/2" across) or a stunning framed 8" X10" print by Charlotte Stetson.



Raffle tickets are \$5 each, or 5 for \$20. Entries can be dropped off at the museum or mailed to HHS, PO Box 212, Hancock, ME 04640 using the enclosed form. (If you would like more tickets, contact Don Parker--207-479-5251) We will hold the drawing at the Annual Meeting in October 2022.

HANCOCK HISTORICAL SOCIETY 2022 RAFFLE

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