

Winter Harbor Historical Society

P.O. Box 93, Winter Harbor, ME 04693

June 2022

NEWSLETTER

Truxton Coombs Homestead **268 Main Street**

Carol Slattery's cheerful daffodils wave in the sunshine across from the Winter Harbor Post Office. The house sits high on its foundation and looks trim and solid; ready for the future. Truxton died in 1982 and the house was abandoned until the Slatterys purchased it in 2001. Bruce and Carol Slattery



moved to Winter Harbor after his sister purchased The Pines Motel. They came with significant experience with house preservation in Rhode Island. This house discouraged homebuyers for over 20 years, but the Slattery's carefully cleaned, painted and repaired the original 1904 beadboard paneling that covers the ceilings and walls. They initially replaced the asbestos siding with clapboards, but were forced to redo the entire exterior again with cedar shingles after water damage. This fortunate house now has period furnishings and is truly a step back in time, as seen in Carol's kitchen:



Capt. Francis Coombs had purchased this Winter Harbor lot designated in the original 1820 plan

created by John Black. The lot was later divided and sold to Hammonds and Smallidges with the Coombs family holding six acres. Truxton and his brother, Blaine were the fourth generation to have homes on this land. Truxton was blinded in a dynamite accident in 1933 and trained at least three shepherd guide dogs. He worked in the logging industry and later learned to cane chairs and would restore furniture. Truxton is remembered sitting on the door stoop of his home greeting walkers with his dog, as they passed. His sister, Myrle Coombs Silsby married William Silsby, who founded Silsby & Silsby Law Offices in Ellsworth. William became Justice of the Superior Court, President of the Union River Electric Corporation, owner of the Union River Telephone Company, Senator and Speaker of the Maine House of Representatives.

The Silsby's sons continued the law practice and their granddaughter, Paula Silsby became the United States Attorney for the District of Maine in 2001. In a Bowdoin College oral history interview, Ms. Silsby recalls visiting her grandparents at their Winter Harbor summer home on Harbor Road.

Mrs. Slattery's son and daughter-in-law have built a home on the site of Blaine Coombs' trailer and the younger Slatterys have found full time work in Ellsworth and Cherryfield. Thank you to Carol for caring about this Main Street home and for her respectful appreciation of its potential and history.

Movie Night

Hammond Hall will host the Winter Harbor Historical Society's annual meeting on Thursday, June 16 at 4pm, as we welcome volunteers for our board of directors and officers. The short meeting will be followed by the film: "Schoodic. Where Sea Meets Land." "Schoodic" is a one hour documentary film produced nearly 20 years ago, featuring many residents of the Winter Harbor and Gouldsboro area. "Schoodic" was filmed, as the communities were adjusting to the closure of the navy base, but portrays an optimism and shared love for the area that bonds new and old efforts to thrive here. A theme of humor and mutual respect permeates this place called, "Schoodic." We invite the community to join us and share their memories with film stars, Shirley Chase and Larry Smith. Donations for our building projects are welcome!

Museum

As we celebrate the preservation of buildings and the stories of our past, the Winter Harbor Historical Society is faced with the decline of our museum's structural integrity. Despite spending nearly \$63,000 in the last eight years, a recent professional engineering

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assessment estimates over \$300,000 needed to reconstruct and stabilize the building. Some of the issues identified are walls more than 2" out of plumb in just a 4' distance, mold, unstable field stone foundation, second floor joists not attached to studs, separation at roof ridge, inadequate roof framing for load, outside trim separated from exterior walls and ADA accessibility issues. This estimate does not include insulation, windows or heating. We invite community members to comment on the future of this building, as the Historical Society board of directors attempts to respond to the engineering recommendations. Please make comments to winterharborhistory@gmail.com.

Winter Harbor Historical Society

President: Diana Young

Vice-President: Johanna Smith

Secretary: Pearl Barto

Treasurer: Cathy Carruthers

Board Members:

Deborah Martin Sandra Daley

Joanne Brown Charles Arnett

Rose Arnett

Annual Membership Renewals are due every July. Lifetime memberships and Donations are welcome anytime!

Winter Harbor Epidemics **1850-1870**

Philippa Harvey of Norris Island completed a thesis on this period of Winter Harbor's history based on her great grandfather's (Dr. Nathaniel Pendleton) diaries written between 1852 and 1873. Although the Civil War produced nationwide change, Winter Harbor remained largely unaffected by that. Ms. Harvey found, however that Winter Harbor had a population of 349 in 1850, largely younger than 20 years old and by 1870 the population of people under 20 and middle aged were about equal. She reported an increase of population to 429 in 1860 and back to 373 in 1870, a decline of over 17%. By 1860, the village was besieged by a series of epidemics: measles in January to March 1862, diphtheria from October 1862 to July 1863, smallpox from December 1863 to March 1864 and typhus during the summer of 1864. Winter Harbor lost 33 residents to diphtheria alone. Of the 26 new households recorded in the 1860 census, only 5 of them remained in 1870. Thirty-eight percent of the 119 deaths attended by Dr. Pendleton were children. At Dr. Pendleton's insistence, the village designated Hanover Hotel as a quarantine site for victims of smallpox.

Ms. Harvey's complete thesis can be found at the Winter Harbor Historical Society Museum.