

WILSON MUSEUM BULLETIN

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LIFE AS IT WAS Part II



Nautilus Island - To the far left is the house where the dried fish was kept; at its right is where the boats came up to load and unload. The farm house was built 1839. The house on the highest point was not built until 1883

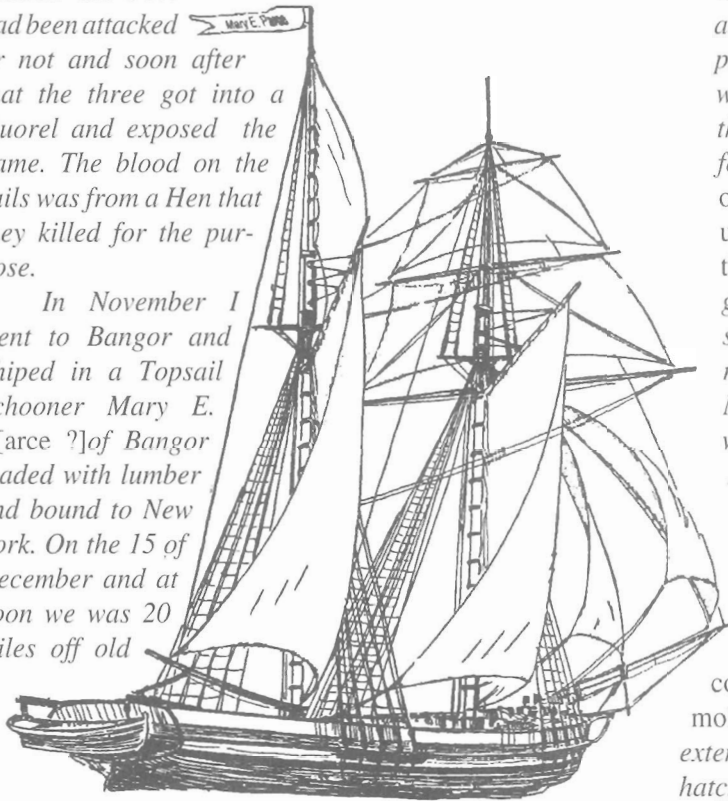
This issue continues with the journal of Rufus Coombs Ames, a young man who came to Castine around 1857-8. After serving in the Civil War, Rufus sought employment: he enlisted for a short time on board a Revenue Cutter stationed in Castine; worked on the reconstruction of Fort Madison; and then, as many men chose to do, he turned his eyes toward the sea. Fishing drew Rufus away from his home and family for weeks and months at a time. Shortly after returning from one of these fishing trips on the Grand Banks, a "supposed attack" was made upon Fort Madison between the hours of 11:00 p.m. and midnight, October 31, 1864. News of this attack spread quickly and was far reaching. Castine soldiers, who were serving elsewhere in the Civil War, wrote letters home inquiring of their families' safety. Rufus, living just northeast of the fort, recorded in his journal the incident and the subsequent actions taken by the town:

There was 12 Soldiers stationed there under a Sergeant as a guard to the Harbor and Town. Their

orders were to keep one of the big Guns loaded and to discharge it in case of an attack to allarm the inhabitants. One night the Big Gun was fired accompanied with small guns and the whole Town was allarmed suposing that the Fort had been attacked by armed men that marched from back of the Head. The next morning when we went down to the Fort we was showed where a number of Balls had struk the Flag Staff and one had went through the Corprels Cap. A number of Balls had struk the corner of the Barcks where the Sergeant said he was standing. There was none of the Soldiers up excepting the Sergeant Corprel and one Private that was on post at the time so these three were all that was engaged. They showed us where the fence was hacked down in back of the Fort and there was blood on the rails. The Sargent said they fired on the enemy and suposed that they wounded some as they hered groaning. There was a few xperts called. Among them was Lieut Collins. He pronounced it human blood. That night there was a Town Meeting called and the Hall was

packed and a good many expressed their opinion and all thought that there was danger of the Town being burned and the inhabitants put to the sword. There was only one exception Dr. Bridgham, who said he thought some ones goose suffered for that blood! He was what they called Copperhead and there was a good many there that would have liked to ride the Dr on a Rail. [Dr. Roland H. Bridgham lived on Main Street where the Castine Inn stands today. He came to Castine in 1829 when appointed Collector of Custom and served in that capacity until 1849 with the exception of four years serving as State Senator. He occasionally practiced medicine during this time, more fully in the latter part of his life. A Copperhead was a name given to the Peace Democrats who criticized President Lincoln's Administration during the Civil War. Loyal Unionists claimed the Copperheads were pro-Southern and reminded them of the poisonous snake. Union military victories and Republican election victories in 1864 helped to end the Copperhead movement.] *The Sergeant Corprel and Private was there and each one was examined and of corse all told the same story. After the thing had been talked up the Folks of the Town said that we must have a guard to walk the streets nights or we should be murdered in our beds. There was 4 appointed I being one of the number. Our orders were to go armed and equipped redy for any emergency. I was on about 15 nights and then there began to be doubt expressed whither the Fort had been attacked or not and soon after that the three got into a Quorel and exposed the game. The blood on the rails was from a Hen that they killed for the purpose.*

In November I went to Bangor and Shiped in a Topsail Schooner Mary E. P[arce ?] of Bangor loaded with lumber and bound to New York. On the 15 of December and at noon we was 20 miles off old



Topsail Schooner, after Gordon Grant

Cape Cod Light and the vessel got a fire. We had a deck load of cedar shingles with heavy timbers piled over it and the night before we had rain turning off cold freezing the timber together. It was blowing very hard at the time. We cut away the Lee stonchels [stanchions located on the calmest side of the ship] and shoved the timber overboard but when we got to the shingles they had burned a part so it was hard to handle them and by that time the deck was all ablaze soon catching the sails and rigen. We fought it as long as we could and then took to the Boat leaving every thing. I lost all my cloths and about one months pay \$30. The Brig Abner Taylor see us on fire and hove down to us and picked us up. I stopt on deck to help take care of the boat and then went into the cabin. My Captain and his mate were siting by the fire when I came in. The Captain offered me his seat and introduced me to the Captain of the Brig saying if they had all been like him I should have saved my vessel. This was the same vessel that Robert Patchen died aboard of. [Robert Patchen was Rutus' father-in-law. He died, in 1862, of fever and was buried at sea on route from the West Indies to Philadelphia.]

She landed us at Newport and the mate and I went on to New York and went to a bording house, 16 Monroe Street. I stopt there one week. Chances to ship were very scarce. I then shiped on the James Crow of Truro, Novascotia and on the 22 of December a very cold day we left New York harbor bound for Mexico.

We had a strong Norther which lasted three days and carred us into warmer weather. We had a good passage and arived at the mouth of Rio Grand River where we had to anchor outside on account of a Bar that extends across the mouth with only three or four feet of water. We was discharged by Lighters [large, open, flat-bottomed barges, used in loading and unloading ships wherever shallow water prevents the ships from coming into shore]. We had a general cargo in the hold and wagons on deck just such as our Government used. And we had a great many boxes of harneses. This stuf went to Matamoros and there is no doubt in my mind but what it crossed the River there and went into the Rebel lines. After stoping there about one month we left in [?] for Harvaner Quba. where we charred and went up the Island to Armedus and took in a load of mollasses. In taking this mollasses in it was brought along side in lighters. We stowed empty Hogsheads [wooden barrels, each commonly weighing a half ton when filled with molasses] in the hole. We had a cuple of scids extending from one rail to the other. Over the main hatch we would hoist a Hogshead up and turn it bung

down over the hatch where we had a tub with a strainer in it and hose leading from the tub to a Hogshead in the hold. Every onse and a while we would be obliged to empty the strainer and each time we would have a peck of rats, mice, big bees, and lizards. They say mollases purifys itself. I should hope it did.

After geting loaded we started for Portland where we arrived the 11 of May. I had a good time on bord of the Brig if I was the only Yankee in her. The officers were all in simpthy with the Southerners and I had some perty raucus times with them. In the Forkisal there was myself and one Englishman and two Sweeds. I had \$30 per month. I got home the 13 of May and found the family well.

Uncle Jessie Coombs was about to leave Nautilus Island where he had been 10 years. He recommended me to the Agent William Witherle and I took the place on the same log that Uncle had it which was $\frac{3}{5}$ of every 18th Quintle. [A quintle is equal to 100 pounds U.S. or 112 pounds British.] Expenses all born by the company excepting the hired help. The Island had about 60 akers in it and about one half was under cultivation. [Nautilus Island is approximately thirty acres.] I was to have $\frac{3}{5}$ of the income of the farm, stock furnished. I went and bought a yock of catel and moved on the 24 of May and went to planting. In July I made the fish of one small banker and in the fall made the fish of two Grand Bankers, about 1600 Quintles. The small vessel had 2.50 Q. After the Fish were made I sold the oxen keeping two cows and a heffer. [Bankers were fishing vessels which plied the waters of various off-shore fishing banks.]

In 1866 I don considble planting and cut about 14 Tons of hay and made the fish of a cuple of small vessels through the summer. August 30 the day my wife was 20 years old she give birth to a son which died about as soon as born. She was very sick we did not expet her to live for three days.

May 17 [1867] I joyned the Free Masons in Hancock Lodge No 4. Castine. In September two Bankers got in with 1600 Quintles, all I had for the year 1867. In the spring I bought out a Pogie stand of a man in Castine and sit it up back of the Island. [A local name for the menhaden - a fish that yields a valuable oil, used in the manufacture of soap, oilskin garments, paint and varnish. Many men living along the coast were able to supplement their income by catching and processing pogies.] I hired a man all summer and farmed and Pogied untill the Bankers got in which was the first of September. I then hired another man and comenced making the fish of 4 Bankers which brought in 3200 Quintles. After the fish were made I sold the oxen for



Flora Maud Ames (1867 - 1944)
and Virginia Etta Ames (1864 - 1897)

\$250 which I had paid \$200. For the good trade William Witherle gave me a Gun that was picked up on Bull Run Battle Field by the Fifer in the Company I was in [2nd Maine Infantry, Company B]. He sent it home and when he got home he sold it to Witherle for \$10. It is not of any real value excepting it being a Rebel gun and picked up on the Battle Field, the first Battle of the Rebellion.

November 8 - 1867 Flory Maud was Born.

1868 - I did not start my Pogie works this summer as there was a doubt whether there would be any Pogies in the Bays. Last season was wost of all, most a failure. I just cleared myself. I don my farming and did not have any help until the last week in August as I expeted the 4 Bankers would comence cuming in by the first of September. I had two men hired by the month and made the same amount of fish that I made in 1867. I was two months in making the fish and then I had nothing to do untill spring as the wood was all up and cut.

In the spring of 1869 I accomplished what I have been trying for ever since I come on the Island. That was to have a Horse insted of oxen. My idea was that I could do my work cheaper and faster with a horse than oxen. This Island has been run as a fish yard for 30 years. (it was run first by Uncle Benjiman Coombs) and they have always hollid the fish out on a drag and wheeled them in. Witherle would say we have always used oxen and I do not think a horse would do. But this spring he told me to do as I choose. I then went and bought a horse and sent over to Belfast and had a cart made to order. I could drive this horse into the wet fish house back up to the fish and take a larger load and do it Quicker. And when the fish were made I had an extra pair of sidebords to put on the cart so I could take about 12 Quintles, drive in the drye fish houses, back up and dump. One man could hall in as fast as I could shovel. When I could keep three men a wheeling I made 3700 Quintles, had one man hired by the month and paid 9 dollers out besides. So I hed made a big saving and Witherle acknowledged that it was a good improvement.

July 25, 1869, Alvin Gwinn was born.

1870 - Last years fish were sold during the winter to good advantage and my years work was \$750. The only good year I have hed on the Island. Fish have been low every year excepting the first year. Then the Agent was offered a good price for the fish as Quick as I got them made which if he had excepted I should have made about \$800. But he thought they would go higher and so did the rest of the owners. And I was wiling to run the risk myself. We kept them all winter and sold at a very low price. This year they have concluded not to rent but two Bankers and during the winter I made up my mind

that I had better leave the Island for my Children were geting large enough to go to school. I reviewed a number of places over in my mind and concluded to go and see Camden and see what there was there for me. So I took my row boat in March and rowed to Long Island [Islesboro] halled acrost what they call the carry and arived in Camden less than 5 hours from the time I started. After stoping in Camden a few days I concluded to move there and as the weather was bad when I got redy to go I left the boat with a man to sell. I went to Belfast took the packet for home, arrvd the 9 day of April. I chartered a vessel halled into the wharf in Castine took mothers things in then halled over to the Island and took in mv things, one Cow, one years wood and lots of stuf that I hed raised and at 6 oclock on the morning of the 11 we left the Island - the whole of the family including Mother and my wifes sister Lizie Patchen. At 6 oclock that afternoon we got into the wharf at Camden

Rufus and Sarah Ames settled in Camden where they eventually established themselves in the grocery business. They had four more children: Charles Rufus, Arthur Patchen, Francis Rufus and Leroy Hudson. It is due to the foresight of their daughter Flora Maud Ames Nutt that this journal was saved and can be enjoyed today. Rufus' great granddaughter Marie Nutt Burns has spent many years researching her family genealogy; this material and items relating to the family are now valuable assets of the Wilson Museum. In return, we were able to offer Mrs. Burns a story of a visit made to young Lizzie Patchen (her great aunt) on Nautilus Island. We will share this story with our readers in the next bulletin



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