

WILSON MUSEUM BULLETIN

Fall 2015

Vol. 5, No. 12



JAKE DENNETT by Donald Small

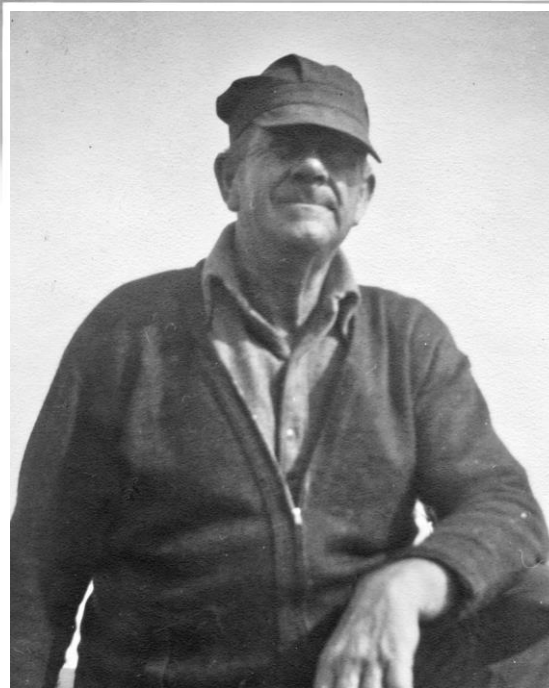


Photo of Jake Dennett courtesy Castine Historical Society.

The following two short stories of historical fiction (©2012 by Donald Small and used with permission) are about Jake (John Jacob) Dennett (1888-1953) who, with his brother Joe, were proprietors of Dennett Brothers, a marine service business at the current location of Dennett's Wharf Restaurant. These stories are set about 1950 and their purpose is to describe the town and the people who lived in Castine at that time. Their way of life no longer exists here, but hopefully the stories will be of interest to current residents, both new and long-term.



The Wilson Museum was recently gifted a 13' plank-sided, round-bottom rowboat from Maine Maritime Academy. Also known as a Bay Skimmer, it was likely built by Jake Dennett in Castine, and was formerly on display in Capt. Quick Hall at MMA. We look forward to gathering more information on Jake and his boats.

MISSION

Building on the legacy of its founding family, the Wilson Museum uses its diverse collections and learning experiences to stimulate exploration of the natural history and cultures of the Penobscot Bay region and the world.

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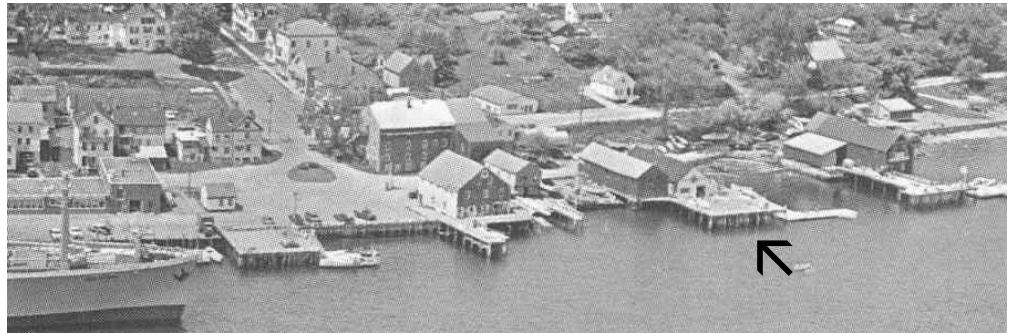
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Dennett's Boat Yard is the building attached to the second wharf from the right. Photo from an Eastern Illustrating postcard in the Wilson Museum collections.

JAKE'S BOAT SHOP

Light coming through the windows of Jake's boat shop was fading early on this cloudy January day, and the three light bulbs suspended from the high ceiling were mostly making shadows rather than throwing light. Jake was immersed in the delicate joinery work of repairing the coaming on *LUCY*, a pretty little sailboat that had been built on Islesboro 40 years previous. She had spent the last ten years in a storage building partially protected from the weather, but leaks in the building's roof had resulted in some rot, and the iron fastenings had rusted badly. The new owner, Hazelton Payson, had brought her to Castine and hired Jake to do a complete rebuild. World War II was over, Hazelton was home from his Navy service, and it was time to get back to some of the finer pleasures of life like sailing. Jake's work had included the installation of sister ribs and new garboards. The planking had been completely refastened with bronze screws to replace the original iron nails. With proper care, *LUCY* should be good for another fifty years.

Jake straightened up from his work and looked toward his assistant. "Time to quit, Ralph. This coamin's lookin' pretty good so far, but I can't see anymore and don't wanna bugger up the final joint."

Ralph, who was repairing the hollow wooden mast, looked at his boss gratefully. He had spent the previous night playing poker, drinking too much beer, and staying up late. It had been a difficult day, and the idea of quitting work early was very appealing. Sarah had said this morning that they'd have ham and fried potatoes for supper, his favorite meal. With this cheerful thought in mind he started to put away tools.

"This' a good stoppin' point for me. Got the soft spots in the lower part of the mast replaced. It's time to start scrapin' old varnish off and sandin'."

Jake moved over to Ralph's bench to inspect the work.

"That looks pretty good, and those repair joints are all goin' to be below the fo'rd

Board Members Elected at 2015 Annual Meeting

On September 22, 2015, the Board of Trustees met for its Annual Meeting and election of officers and Board members (see side bar for complete list). Officers elected for a one-year term:

President Temple Blackwood ♦ Vice President Harry Kaiserian
Treasurer Donald Small ♦ Secretary Johanna Sweet.

Two Trustees, Donald Small and David Wyman, were re-elected for their second three-year term. One new Trustee was appointed to fill a three-year term. We are pleased to introduce our newly-elected Board member:

Kay Hightower has lived in Castine since 2002. She has served as a business administrator in the insurance and nonprofit industries, and is currently working at Maine Maritime Academy as the Director of the Bowdoin Centennial Campaign.



deck, so we can still varnish the mast, and the new wood won't show."

"You plan to finish the mast bright?"

"Yeh. Payson wants a nice boat, and he's got the money to pay us right, so we'll varnish the mast, coamings, and oars. Those old oars are perfectly good, but they may be stained so bad that they won't finish good."

"We could paint 'em."

"No, he'd never go for that. He wants lots of bright work... 'spit and polish' he says. Oh, and all the bronze deck fittin's and oar locks need to be cleaned up. I think they're in good shape, just turned green. Why don't you work on those tomorrow morning', maybe put 'em on the buffin' wheel. Make 'em look like new."

"You don't want me to start varnishin'?"

Ralph's method of work was to finish one job before he started another. Jumping around between two or three different projects was confusing and inefficient.

"No, the shop's too cold this time of year. I'd have to come down here at bedtime to put more wood in the stove, and even with that the fire'd prob'ly be out before we got here in the mornin'."

"How about if I finish scrapin' and sandin' the mast so it's all ready to varnish, then put it up on the rack until warmer weather?"

"Oh...well...yeh, that's a good idea. Yeh, work on that in the mornin'."

"And how about if I scrape and sand those oars too, so they'll be all ready to finish later when I do the mast?"

"Well, see what you can do with'm. If they don't clean up real good we'll have to get a new pair. But I know Hazelton likes these. They're light ad it'll be hard to find new ones with spoon blades....ah, there's a company in Orono that makes nice oars, we can try there if need be. Yeh, work on those oars. You could try some bleach on the bad stains. Sometimes that'll bring the wood back to lookin' almost like new."

Ralph returned to putting away tools while Jake started to sweep shavings and sawdust from the floor. A northeast wind was whistling around the building and blowing into

the shop at the window frames. The outside darkness had invaded in spite of the light bulbs, but the glow from the stove showing through the isinglass door and the heat radiating from the stove filled the space with warmth. It gave both occupants a sense of companionship, although neither would ever admit to that. They finished their chores in silence, then donned coats, picked up lunch boxes and started out the door. Just as he was leaving Jake remembered Nelda's instructions and retrieved a piece of salt cod from where it was hanging on the wall. He put it in his lunch box, locked the shop, and the two trudged up the hill together. Ralph turned right at Water Street leaning into the wind and snow flurries to walk toward his house at "North End." Sarah, ham, and fried potatoes were waiting. Jake continued up Main Street, then turned left toward his house on Perkins where Nelda and Bos'n would be waiting.

NELDA AND BOS'N

Six AM found Jake in his back yard on the way to the henhouse with a bowl of hot laying mash. Bos'n, their black Labrador Retriever, was making his rounds of the yard to make sure that all was well, and, as usual, peeing on Nelda's lilac bush. Jake hollered at him, but too late. The wind had come around to the northwest sometime in the night pushing snow clouds out into the Gulf of Maine and bringing with it icy-cold air from Quebec. A clear sky and no moon allowed a myriad of stars to show. A faint glow on the eastern horizon and light through the kitchen window showed the path to the henhouse. But that was enough to arouse the rooster, and he was announcing that another day had started. On entering the henhouse, the eight birds all crowded around Jake's feet, eager for a hot breakfast. Egg production from the hens was way below the warm-weather level, but Jake did find three eggs in the laying box. Those, combined with smoked mackerel, leftover cornbread and coffee, would be enough for his and Nelda's breakfast.

Back in the house, Jake loaded the wood box, fed Bos'n his morning ration of kibble, then settled into the rocking chair in front of the Atlantic Clarion kitchen stove. He put his

IN MEMORIAM

The Wilson Museum is saddened by the following recent deaths. These members will be greatly missed not only for their various contributions, but for the friendships cultivated over many years of close association.

Marjorie Babcock
1923-2015

Laura Gray Hatch
1919-2015

Barbara Mallonee
1926-2015

Additionally, the Museum has received generous donations in memory of the following:

John & Jean Baker

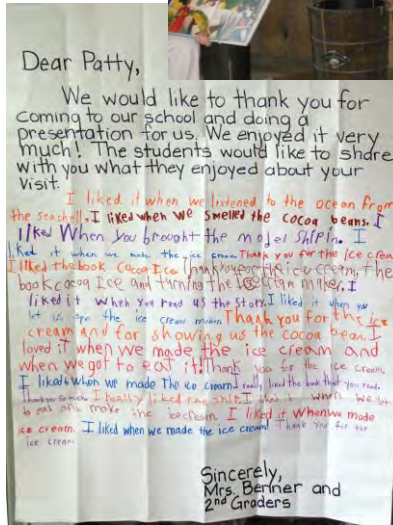
*The family of
Hannah Shepherd Bond*

Mardi Byers-Gay

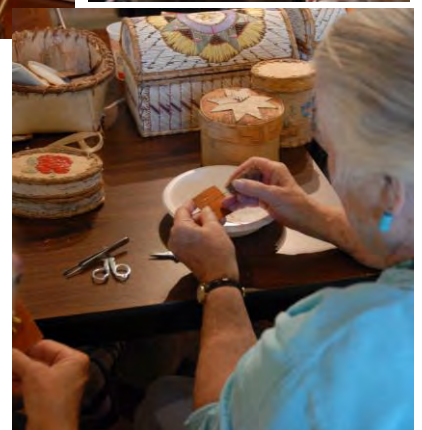
Barbara Mallonee

Marion & Arnold Wyman

Programming Highlights of 2015



This year the Museum was privileged to work with two outstanding teachers through the Robin Bray award. Students in several schools enjoyed our Cocoa Ice Cream program and others were challenged with Maja Trivia. Summer programming included hands-on classes like cooking, basketmaking, flute playing, and quill work. We learned about windows, celebrated "Home and Away" and even had a visit from the nation's first First Lady, Martha Washington!



2015 Fundraising Events
Preservation Celebrations for the John Perkins House

Thanks to everyone who made these summer events so successful and just plain fun!

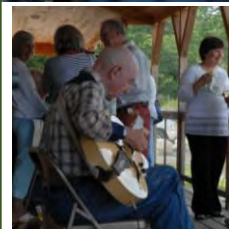
First Dibs raised \$6,750, and the Perkins House Candlelight Dinner raised \$600. We have received a quote for window protection in the amount of \$9,277. You can help us meet this goal before the snow flies

by donating on line at www.wilsonmuseum.org/membership.html or calling the office 207-326-9247.



First Dibs

Not only was this a great fundraising event, it generated many other shared get-togethers such as the Baron's Banquet (below), boat rides, lessons, and even a pie or two which may or may not have been shared!



Perkins House Candlelight Supper

It is a very rare treat to enjoy a meal in an authentic historic home and even more magical by candlelight, especially when hosted by the original homeowner's daughter, Polly Perkins (portrayed by Grace Tarr), while her cousin, Jane Russell (portrayed by Ellenore Tarr), serenaded the gathering with period vocal music.



feet on the warm shelf below the oven door and opened yesterday's copy of the Bangor Daily News. He was miffed that the newspaper boy didn't deliver until nearly seven o'clock, which was when he left the house for work. As a result, he read yesterday's news while Nelda fixed breakfast. After thirty years of marriage their morning conversation was limited.

"Do you want your egg fried or scrambled?"

"Scrambled."

And, later, "You want cornbread or toast?"

"Cornbread. What are we havin' for suppah?"

"I'll use that fish you brought home last night to make creamed salt cod. We'll have it on baked potatoes, and I plan to make an apple pie today. Those apples we got from the back yard are not very good, and they're almost gone. Maybe you can prune the tree in March. I think it's puttin' all its energy into makin' branches 'stead of apples."

As Jake sat down to his breakfast, he allowed that she would have to remind him in March about pruning the tree. Nelda continued.

"Did you know that salt cod was one of George Washington's favorite foods? That, and green beans with mushrooms. Read that in my magazine this month."

Jake grunted and wondered where that comment ever came from. It was sometimes difficult to understand what his wife was thinking about.

Nelda was in charge of making sure that their small backyard paid for itself. There was the apple tree, some raspberry bushes, a patch of rhubarb, and a vegetable garden. About half of the latter was devoted to summer crops; tomatoes, cucumbers, spinach, green beans, and peas. Some of these were eaten as they ripened, and Nelda canned the rest along with jams and jellies made from the backyard raspberries, blueberries that she picked behind Fort George in the Tenney's field, and strawberries she bought from Spunk Hatch. The other half of the garden was used to grow winter vegetables, and these, except for the squash and onions, were stored



Wardwell's Sanitary Market was owned by Gus Wardwell. Wayne Wardwell (Gus's grandson) remembers "Jake coming in at the end of the day to sample the goods--two things he liked very much --block rat cheese of which he would slice a big piece and eat it on the spot--The other was raw pickled tripe. Granddad kept a barrel of tripe under the meat counter --Jake would whack off a chunk and enjoy it straight. Also took some home to have with Nelda's baked beans. Jake could also tell you where you dug the clams you brought back to the dock-- he would take one taste of a raw clam and knew where it came from--we were never able to fool him."

Photo courtesy of Castine Historical Society.

in the basement to last for a good part of the winter. The squash was put in the pantry where it was warmer and drier, the onions hung over the cellar stairs. And, of course, there were the chickens.

Every other spring they bought 25 chicks from a mail-order company. By late summer they started eating the young roosters as fried chicken, and shortly after that the pullets started laying delicious little eggs. As egg production increased, Nelda would take several dozen a week to Wardwell's Sanitary Market with the proceeds going to reduce their charge account. One rooster would be spared from the fry-pan to head up the new flock of hens and crow daily at dawn. Both Jake and Nelda liked that sound, although the summer people who came to the neighborhood for July and August did not always appreciate it. During the fall and winter of the second year the old rooster and hens

would, one by one, end up in the stew pot for Sunday dinner.

Jake's contribution to the kitchen was fish. During the summer, he caught mackerel, pollock and tom-cods from his dock. They ate these several times a week, even though most people in town would not, as the sewer pipes all emptied directly into the Bagaduce River. Jake figured that if the fish was well-cooked, it would be ok, and they never did get sick from eating Bagaduce fish. He also went to Smith Cove several times a month for flounder. Some of this along with mackerel, he smoked for winter use, and once every summer Jake went with several friends down the bay to spend a day fishing for cod and haddock. These would be split, salted and dried, then hung up on the shop wall to add to the winter supply of fish. In addition, Raymond Bowden, who dug clams, would occasionally give Jake a "mess" in exchange for letting him keep his rowboat at Dennett's Wharf. Nelda was a champion at knowing what to do with

this bounty from the sea. They ate fried fish, baked fish, fish chowder, fish casserole, creamed fish, fried clams, clam fritters, pickled clams, and other dishes that Nelda just made up on the spur of the moment.

Breakfast finished, Jake pulled on another pair of overalls, a second pair of socks, a heavy wool sweater that Nelda had made, and his green rubber boots with felt inserts in the bottom. The boat shop extended out over the river, and the floor was always cold in winter, no matter how warm the air at head level. After years

of cold feet, Jake had discovered felt inserts as a way to keep his feet warm. He put on his wool-lined canvas jacket, said goodbye to Nelda, patted Bos'n on the head, and went out through the door for the cold walk to work.

Nelda retrieved the morning paper from the front steps, poured her second cup of coffee, then sat in the rocker to enjoy a half hour of quiet time with the paper. Bos'n lay on the floor by the stove with his chin on Nelda's left foot. 🐾

Collections Conversations

Abby Dunham, Collections Manager

Several years ago, the Wilson Museum conducted an inventory of all objects and archives in the collections. The first step in this inventory was to give everything a temporary number so that it could be counted and tracked in a digital collections management program. When visiting the Museum you may have seen white tags with these inventory numbers sitting close to or hanging from artifacts on exhibit. These temporary numbers have served their purpose well, but permanent accession numbers are the ultimate goal.

Beginning in 2011 a permanent accession numbering system was introduced for all incoming artifacts and archives. This system, in keeping with current best practices, indicates the year that an artifact came into the Museum and associates it with other artifacts that came in at that time from a single donor or purchase. With this system, one glance at an object's unique number can tell you a fair amount about the artifact. New objects are then labeled with their number, ideally in a way that is more secure and less visually obtrusive than the white tags that were used for the inventory project. Methods of labeling are guided by the principle that they should be reversible, therefore objects of different materials such as metal, cloth, and paper all require different methods. For certain materials, such as metals, the process is to apply the accession number over an impermeable barrier coat on the surface of the object.

The next step is to dig deeper by going through our past accession records and donor files to assign a permanent accession number to every inventoried object in the collection. This process includes adding additional information from these sources to the object records in our collections management program, making the collection records and



information more searchable and user-friendly. Overall this is like putting together a puzzle that spans decades and continents, meeting individuals and families along the way through the artifacts they collected and the records they left.

Excited to embark on this project, we determined that researching and assigning numbers to the artifacts in The Village Blacksmith building would make the biggest visual impact to visitors. Our summer docent, Hannah Flood, has volunteered to help out this fall for a couple of afternoons a week after school. To date, over 30 percent of the blacksmith objects have been marked with their accession numbers, and their records have been updated to reflect this change. It is very satisfying to be able to remove the large and glaringly white (even when they are sooty) tags.

Look at the difference!



WILSON MUSEUM
P.O. Box 196
Castine, ME 04421

WILSON MUSEUM

May 27-September 30
Weekdays 10 a.m.-5 p.m.
Saturdays & Sundays 2-5 p.m.

JOHN PERKINS HOUSE

July & August
Wednesdays & Sundays
Hour-long tours at 2, 3 & 4 p.m.

**THE VILLAGE BLACKSMITH
& WOOD SHOP**

July & August
Wednesdays & Sundays 2-5 p.m.

BAGADUCE ENGINE CO.

May 27-September 30
Same hours as Wilson Museum

Volunteer Hero!

Marisa Higgins, from Stockton Springs, has been spending her Sundays this summer voluntarily creating a scavenger hunt based upon musical artifacts in the Museum as well as producing three panoramic maps so that visitors will know what makes up the gorgeous view out the Museum's sunporch windows. Marisa is the great granddaughter of Dorothy Farnham who was a member and front desk attendant for 25 years.



Thank you Marisa!

Marisa is a recent University of Maine graduate majoring in Anthropology. We wish her luck as she pursues her studies in graduate school.