

WILSON MUSEUM BULLETIN

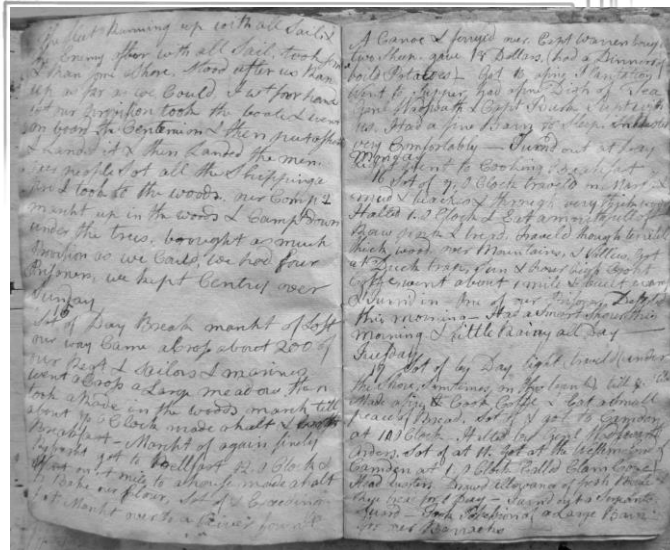
Spring 2014

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SALVAGING THE PAST: 1779 and the Privateer Defence

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.



In the late afternoon of July 24, 1779, William Moody, a young drummer boy on the sloop *Centurion*, recorded in his diary the crack of gunfire signaling the fleet of American vessels to commence an expedition toward Majabigwaduce (now Castine) to lay siege and loosen the hold of the British building a fort there.

Saturday
[July] 24

the Admiral fierd a gun bout 4. O Clock the whole fleet came to sail with a small brease. The Number of 45 Sails About 11. O Clock the Admiral fierd a gun for the foremost Sail to heve two We hove too several time for the fleet to come up. Caught Some fish. All Came at anchor bout 9. O.Clock at Night under the uper Fox Island—

Sunday
[July] 25

Made Sail bout 8. O Clock Stood in for Bagaduce the Admiral fired 2 guns betwixt .9 & 10. for to Shorton sail got up at Penobscot Came at Achor the Enemy fierd from the shore with Muskets Our Ships Returnd the fire excessefly lot Cannon- The Ships Ran in by the fort & fierd many Broad Sides – enemy boats went to land (? in Number) Got almost aShore the wind blew very hard & it Came in very foggy (the enemy Lay'd in ambush. & fierd up on us & killed one Indian - the boates immediately put back on board the trans ports -

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William Moody's diary, recently acquired by the Maine State Museum in partnership with the Castine Historical Society and several individual donors, is a treasure salvaged from the past. Moody's daily entries give flavor to an event that took place over 200 years ago.

Scuttled

The ill-fated Penobscot Expedition resulted in the routing and destruction of the American fleet on August 14. Moody describes the action this way:

Saturday [August] 14 Our two briggs Came in from Sea yesterday in the afternoon & brought News of 5 Sail of the Enemies Men of war, we began our Retreat About 0. O Clock Marcht Down by the Marsh at Day break orders for to Marcht back got on board of the transport at Sun Rise hold of in the Stream Not a man Lost in the Evacuation — We Ran up at Penobscot fort Came Anchor Eb tide. I went on board of the commissary to Draw Allowance Saw The fleet Running up with all Sails & the Enemy after with all Sail, took som & Ran some aShore, Stood after us Ran up as far as we Could. & with four hands got our provision took the boate & went on board the Centerion & then put ashore & landed it & then landed the men. Our people Got all the Shipping a fire & took to the woods. Our Comp^y marcht up in the woods & campt down under the trees. Brought as much Provision as we Could, we had four Prisoners, we kept Centry over

On that day, several American vessels were captured; the remainder of the day and into the evening saw the destruction of the rest of the fleet as ship after ship was run aground and set ablaze or scuttled in the river to prevent capture.

General Lovell, in his journal, said:

The Transports then again weigh d Anchor and to our Great Mortification were soon follow d by our fleet of Men of War persued by only four of the Enemy's Ships the Ships of War passed the Transports many of which got a Ground & the British Ships coming up the Soldiers were obliged to take to the Shore & set fire to their Vessells to attempt to give a description of this terrible Day is out of my Power it would be a fit Subject for some masterly hand to describe it in its true colours to see four Ships persuing seventeen Sail of Armed Vessells nine of which were stout Ships Transports on fire Men of War blowing up Provision of all kinds & every kind of Stores on Shore at least in small Quantities throwing about and as much confusion as can possibly be conceived

Long Lost Property

As arms were valuable, salvage operations were begun almost immediately. Sergeant Lawrence's *Orderly Book* of 1779 notes on August 21: "Lieut. Wilson is ordered to send a man from the Artillery, with a Gin, for weighing the guns of those ships that were burned." (Wheeler, p. 270) William Hutchings, a resident during that time period, recounted that: "I saw as many as 50 or 60 cannon the English got from the fleet up the river. They all lay at high water mark on the shore, loaded, and were fired off, to see if they were cracked, or anything the matter with them." (Wheeler, p. 274)



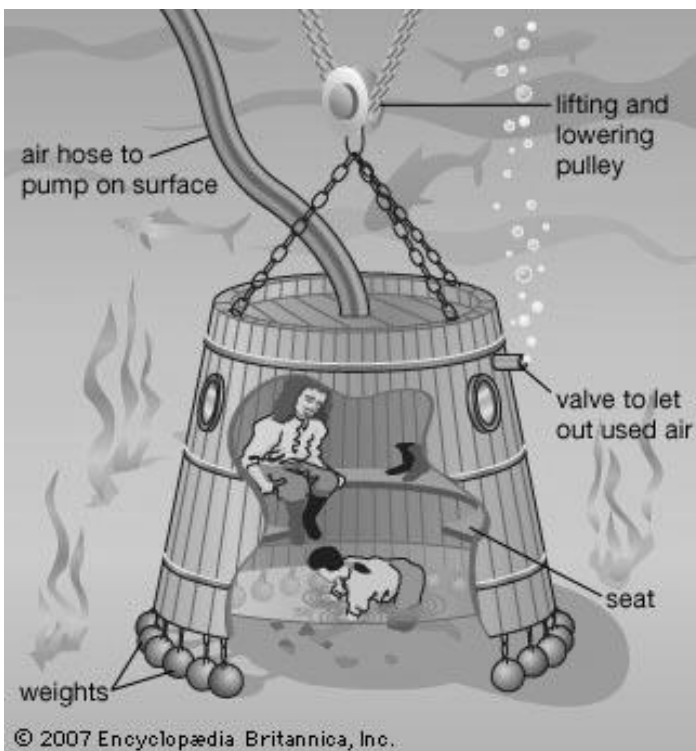
Cannonball recovered from the Defence

In mid-summer of 1809, an entrepreneur named Ebenezer Clifford arrived upon the scene with a small schooner and a homemade diving bell. The event was recounted in the *Annals of Jacob MacGaw* an early settler of Bangor:

Mr. Jacob Dennet was at that time alive, and able to point Mr. Clifford with much accuracy to the place in the river where some of the ships were exploded. The distance from Mr. Dennet's house did not exceed fifty or sixty rods and was in perfect view of it. His family was exceedingly amazed and terrified by the discharge of some loaded Cannon that received fire from burning ships, and were immediately succeeded by the explosion and entire destruction of the ships themselves.

The search was tolerably successful, though not long continued after exploring the localities indicated by Mr. Dennet.

Mr. Clifford found less than thirty cannon, and a few tons of balls which he very easily took up from the bed of the river, but because the precise localities where other ships were destroyed, could not be certainly designated, and because he did not readily discover any of their artillery, he conjectured that the shifting sands of the river bed had so effectually concealed it, that the probability of fair remuneration for further research, would not justify its continuance.



This illustration of an 18th-century diving bell may have been similar to the bell used by Ebenezer Clifford. Image courtesy of Encyclopædia Britannica, Inc., copyright 2007; used with permission.

He therefore took the long lost property which his enterprising spirit had recovered from the deep waters of Penobscot River, and removed it to Boston, so that it might be restored for a suitable Compensation, to the Commonwealth of Massachusetts which had been basely bereaved of it.

In a letter dated March 28, 1974, to W.F. Searle, Jr. from Maine Maritime Academy Professor Dean Mayhew, other salvage operations were outlined:

Around 1870 when Bangor was dredged, a couple of guns were found, one of which is located behind the Sears, Roebuck store.

Finally in the 1950's, Dravo raised four guns while working on the bridge construction site. (One is mounted at the bridge entrance on the Brewer side; the rest went out of state.) The Navy made survey dives using MMA facilities in 1963 but found nothing. The Dow AFB dive club combed the river down to Eastern Paper with, I understand, good pickings at several spots.

Underwater Search and Salvage

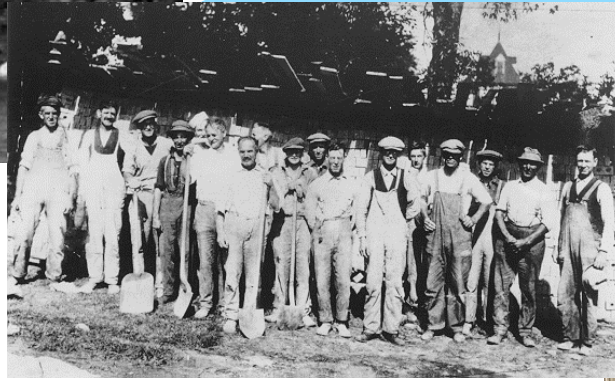
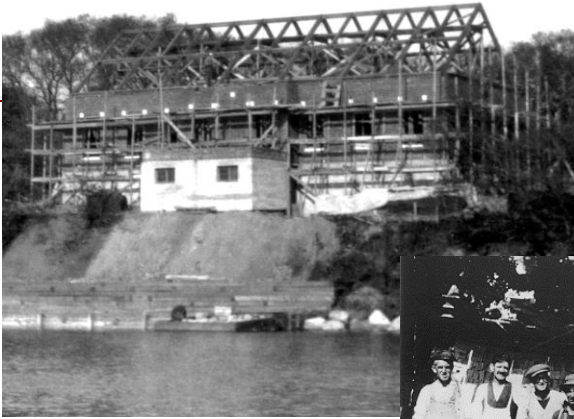
The most recent salvage operations were conducted upon the discovery of the remains of the privateer *Defence*. The *Defence*, "...following a more westerly course, apparently sought to escape by hiding out in what today is known as Stockton Harbor. Pursued by a man of war, she was trapped. To avoid capture a charge was set; the crew rowed ashore. The captain of the pursuing ship, HMS *Camilla*, recorded hearing an explosion." (Switzer)

In 1972 the Ocean Engineering Summer Laboratory, a joint project of the Ocean Engineering Department at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and Maine Maritime Academy which is partially funded by Sea Grant, was looking for a good project to teach undergraduate students how to conduct underwater search and salvage projects. Interest developed in the ships of the 1779 Fleet and through extensive Historical research and talks with local fishermen two probable search areas were identified.

The search was conducted using sonar, both a vertical echo sounder (fathometer) and a side scan sonar. Toward the end of the allotted time period three sonar targets were found and upon investigation proved to be two cannons and a brick cook stove. A permit to work the wreck site was granted under the Antiquities Statutes of the State of Maine and work began. (Wyman)

(continued on page 6)

A Museum Evolves



1921 – John Howard Wilson created a museum showing “the antiquity of man” and highlighting the evolution of man’s use of tools.



2013-14 – To meet the evolving needs of our visitors and larger community, the first steps of the Museum’s master plan were set in motion. The Blacksmith Shop and small exhibit building were moved across the street and the barn was transformed into a year-round Education Center, creating a village setting for demonstrations and programs all year long. Walkways and landscaping will tie the campus together!



As Time Marches On



1950s - The exhibits and collections evolved and expanded when Wilson's daughter, Ellenore Doudiet, took over the Museum's operations.



2004 - With the passing of Ellenore Doudiet, guidance of the Museum's mission was transferred to the Board of Trustees who took up the challenge by educating themselves and evolving through a series of assessment and strategic workshops to embrace and uphold the eclectic nature of the Wilson Museum.

1968-70 - The Museum evolved into a campus of multiple buildings including the John Perkins House, the Blacksmith Shop, and a small exhibit building.



The *Defence*, a brigantine of 170 tons, was built as a privateer and carried 16 six-pound cannon and 100 men. Owned by Andrew Cabot and Moses Brown, she was under the command of John Edmonds, all from Beverly, Massachusetts. Privateers were privately owned vessels empowered and used by the state and national government to disrupt the enemy's maritime endeavors taking prizes when possible and receiving remuneration usually as a percentage of the value of the prize. Privateering was generally a lucrative occupation at the time of the Revolution and brigantines like the *Defence* were built specifically for this endeavor; however, a privateer could also be "requested" (really commanded) to join an expedition. In the case of the *Defence* and its involvement with the Penobscot Expedition, this proved most unfortunate. (Howe)

Though the *Defence* met her demise on this expedition, "little did her officers and seamen realize that they would be making an important contribution to the understanding of our maritime past based on archaeological evidence. Indeed, not until 1975 would it be known that they had set the stage for a nautical archaeological project the goal of which was to recover the contents of an eighteenth century time capsule." (Switzer) Artifacts from the underwater excavations, on loan from the Maine State Museum, can be viewed in the Wilson Museum's seasonal exhibit *SALVAGING THE PAST: 1779 and the Privateer Defence* from May 27 through September 30. David Wyman, a member of the *Defence* excavation team, will give a talk on July 8 on the

project. Several programs related to this area's involvement in the American Revolution have been scheduled including lectures by Professor Liam Riordan and Michael Cecere as well as a living history encampment by the 74th Highland Regiment of Foot. The summer schedule can be seen at the end of this Bulletin or the Wilson Museum's web calendar.



After two hundred years under water and mud, several provision barrels were found amid the wreckage of the Defence, still containing bones from the salted pork and beef stored in them.



In their rush to leave the vessel the crew left many personal items behind including shoes, buttons, buckles and the pipe shown above.

SOURCES:

Howe, M.D., Octavius Thorndike. (1922) "Beverly Privateers in the American Revolution," *The Colonial Society of Massachusetts*: Vol. XXIV, John Wilson and Son, University Press, Cambridge.

Lovell, General Solomon. (1881) *The Original Journal of General Solomon Lovell, Kept during the Penobscot Expedition, 1779; with a Sketch of his Life by Gilbert Nash*. Weymouth Historical Society, Vol. 1.

MacGaw, Jacob. (date unknown) *Annals of Jacob MacGaw*. Transcription Special Collections Bangor Public Library.

Mayhew, Dean. (1974) Letter from Maine Maritime Academy Professor Dean Mayhew to W.F. Searle, 28 March. Copy courtesy David Wyman.

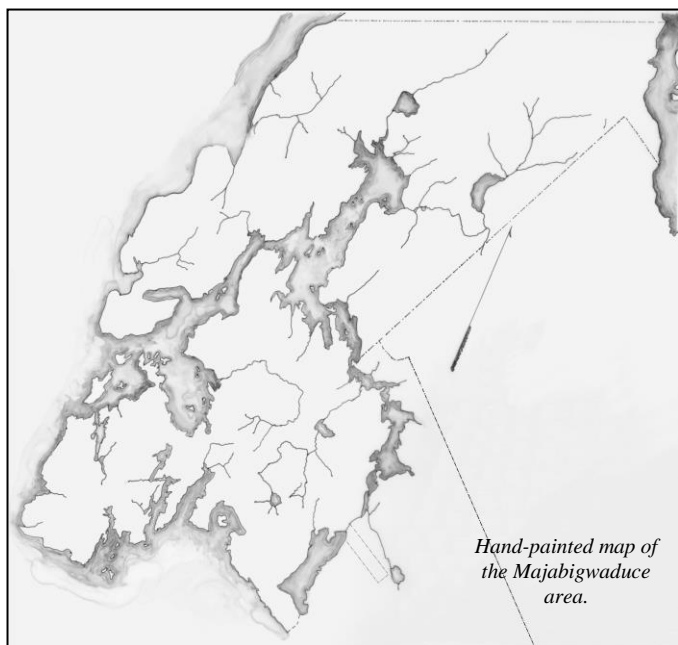
Moody, William. (1779) Handwritten original journal. Maine State Museum Archives.

Switzer, David C. (1983) "The Excavation of the Privateer *Defence*," *Northeast Historical Archaeology*: Vol. 12 12: Iss. 1, Article 9. Available at: <http://digitalcommons.buffalostate.edu/neha/vol12/iss1/9>

Wheeler, George A., M.D. (1923) *History of Castine Penobscot and Brooksville, Maine*. Privately Printed. Cornwall, NY.

Wyman, David. (1975) *The Search for the Revolutionary War Privateer "Defence."* Typed manuscript.

Schools Compete in *Maja Trivia* and Mapping Project



Students from grades 5-8 in the area once known as Majabigwaduce (Brooksville, Castine and Penobscot) will once again compete in the *Maja Trivia Tournament of Champions* at the Wilson Museum on May 22. This year the games have been facilitated by community volunteers, Johanna & Pedrick Sweet from Castine and Liz Hotchkiss & Edson Blodgett from Brooksville as well as Museum Education Coordinator Darren French. Along with playing the *Jeopardy*-like game of *Maja Trivia* once a month throughout the school year, a map building project was added to help students become familiar with the history of the area and prep for the *Tournament*.



2013 *Tournament of Champions*
A great day for a tournament and a cookout!

The new map-building project started with a hand-painted map (upper left) showing the physical features of the area. In a series of three to four sessions at each school, students moved through time by locating boundaries, roads, and buildings.

Maja Trivia is a collaborative project of the Wilson Museum and the three local historical societies with initial funding from Acadia Trust, N.A. and Hancock County Fund of the Maine Community Foundation. The Wilson Museum is pleased to see this project continue to excite and enrich the lives of our region's youth.

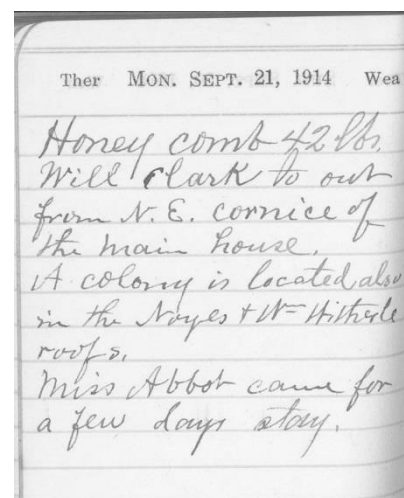
Recent Gifts

Early this year the Museum was gifted with a collection of diaries. Donated by the Hatch family, the diaries were kept by members of a Castine family: Frank E. Lewis (1850-1928), Annie Perkins Lewis (1851-1926), and Gertrude Lewis (1880-1966). Diaries are a wonderful historical resource, with entries that range from everyday occurrences, like who the ladies in the house called upon that day or the planting of radishes, to special or unusual occurrences, such as details about a 1903 fire in Witherle Woods or the 1887 installation of the Civil War monument.

To the right is a sample transcription and an image of the original.

Ther MON. SEPT. 21, 1914 Wea

Honey comb 42 lbs.
Will Clark to out
from N.E. cornice of
the main house.
A colony is located also
in the Noyes + W^m Witherle
roofs.
Miss Abbot came for
a few days stay.



WILSON MUSEUM
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Castine, ME 04421

WILSON MUSEUM

May 27-September 30
Weekdays 10 a.m.-5 p.m.
Sat. & Sun. 2-5 p.m.

JOHN PERKINS HOUSE

~ NEW THIS YEAR ~
Hour-long tours at 2, 3 & 4 p.m.
each Wednesday and Sunday
during July and August.

BLACKSMITH SHOP & EDUCATION CENTER

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

2014 CALENDAR OF EVENTS

(www.wilsonmuseum.org/calendar for complete listings)

MAY

22 10-1 p.m. Maja Trivia Tournament of Champions

JUNE

20 5:30 p.m. Members' Reception

24 3 p.m. Lecture: *Does the Revolution Look Different from the Penobscot River?* Liam Riordan

JULY

8 3 p.m. Lecture: *Lost & Found: The History and Excavation of a Revolutionary War Privateer*, David Wyman

9 3 p.m. Demonstration: *Fireside Cooking*, John Perkins House

23 3 p.m. Demonstration: *Fireside Cooking*, John Perkins House

24 3 p.m. Lecture: *To Hazard Our Own Security: Maine's Role in the American Revolution*, Michael Cecere

26 & 27 74th Highland Regiment of Foot Encampment

AUGUST

1 5:30 p.m. Education Center Dedication

6 p.m. Castine Town Band Concert

6 3 p.m. Demonstration: *Fireside Cooking*, John Perkins House

8 & 9 2nd Annual *Storytelling by the Sea* festival

13 1 p.m. Lecture: *A Comfortable House: Furnishing the Maine Frontier*, Joshua Klein

20 3 p.m. Demonstration: *Fireside Cooking*, John Perkins House

21 12-5 p.m. Demonstration: *From Stone to Art: A Granite Sculpture*, Andreas von Huene