Yarmouth History Center
WEATHERVANE
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This Issue:

Cooling Off: The Forgotten History of Yarmouth's Ice Industry

By Matt Dressel

Yarmouth History Center 2024 Summer Intern

This summer, I had the opportunity to be an intern at the Yarmouth Historical Society. During my time here, I worked on itemizing scrapbooks (making a list of all the articles and people mentioned), cataloging photographs to a digital database, organizing old donated files, sealing and labeling newsletters, and shoveling dirt and putting grass seed down at the Old Meeting House. I definitely didn't expect to be doing the last one, but we had a good time (although I was sore the next day). On my first two days, while itemizing and organizing files on the Village Improvement Society's house marker program, I noticed multiple items that mentioned ice harvesting. I had never thought about ice harvesting before, so I decided to make it my research topic.

The first part of my research consisted of understanding how ice was harvested. If you've ever seen the first scene of the movie "Frozen", you likely already have a basic idea of how ice is harvested. First the ice is scored, either by horse-drawn saws or motorized saws, in order to make a grid of equally sized ice blocks. Then the ice is manually cut with giant saws and floated to the shore. The 200-300 pound blocks are stored in buildings called ice houses. The ice is then covered with sawdust, which both insulates the ice (slows down the melting) and prevents the blocks from sticking to each other. Ice that was stored this way could last all summer. The blocks were then delivered to homes and stored in ice boxes. Most ice boxes had two compartments: one for ice, and one for perishables.

Above: Moving ice from the Royal River up a conveyer belt and into an ice house on East Elm Street.

The ice industry began in the 1800s, and by the 1880s ice was the second largest export in the United States (only behind cotton). Ice from Maine was "premium crystal blue", which made it highly sought after. Maine's biggest competitor was the Hudson River in New York. If the Hudson River's crop was bad, demand for Maine ice would skyrocket (ice was called a crop because it could be cultivated and harvested in the winter). The commercial ice business started to die out around the 1930s with the popularization of artificial refrigerators (like we have today), but continued for longer with local businesses.

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Yarmouth Historical Society
118 East Elm Street
PO Box 107
Yarmouth, ME 04096
207-846-6259

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From the Chair

Binks Colby-George

This last month we celebrated the semi-demi-sept-centennial (175th) anniversary of the founding of the Town of Yarmouth as a separate political entity. North Yarmouth was originally incorporated as a town in 1680, but by 1821 had shrunk to the just the area encompassing the current towns of Yarmouth and North Yarmouth. Differences between the coastal "village" and rural "town" induced desires to separate the two areas and by 1849 a series of special town meetings were called to discuss secession. Votes were taken and the majority decided in favor of division. The act went to the Maine legislature and was passed on Aug. 2, 1849, and signed into law on Aug 20, 1849.

This August 20th the Yarmouth History Center helped commemorate the event by holding a party at the Old Meeting House at 25 Hillside Street. We had about 75 people stop in, and festivities included party food, tours of the Meetinghouse, and a skit performed by members of the Royal River Community Players. Thank you to all who attended and helped us recognize this special date.

For more details on the historic process to create the town of Yarmouth please check out our webpage, *175 Years as a Town* (yarmouthmehistory.org) or visit the Yarmouth History Center to view the Yarmouth history exhibits and talk to the staff.

Binks Colby-George
Chair, Board of Trustees

Fall Lecture Series

Wednesday, September 18, 7:00
"Maine's Connections to the Cotton Industry in the 19th Century"
Speaker: Vivian Cunningham
Inspired by the cotton bale dolly on display at the History Center, Cunningham will share her investigation into the links between Maine's economy and the cotton industry of the 19th century.

Wednesday, October 9, 7:00
"Black Sailors in Maine and New England"
Speaker: Seth Goldstein
Goldstein will share his recent research on the lives and careers of Maine and New England's Black sailors. This lecture will begin with the Society's annual meeting, a brief meeting to elect new trustees.

Wednesday, November 20, 7:00
Winners of the Elsie M. Wellcome Prize
The students who created the winning videos and papers for this contest will be presenting their research projects for our November fall lecture.

The Lecture Series is sponsored by the Leon and Lisa Gorman Fund. All lectures will be offered in person at 7pm at the Yarmouth History Center. Lectures are free and open to all.

Welcome New Trustees

Above: New Trustee Kate Huntress.

Kate Huntress brings years of diverse experience and a deep-rooted interest in history to the Board of the Yarmouth Historical Society. Throughout a sixteen-year real estate career based in Yarmouth, she has built community and gained deeper understanding of the town's architectural heritage.

Kate's family roots in Maine go back six generations, and as a child, she was profoundly influenced by observing Helen Camp's archeological excavation of Colonial Pemaquid during summers there. Kate's interest in archeology led to four summers working with the University of Chicago Summer Field School on prehistoric sites in southern Illinois. More recently, she dusted off her trowel and helped the Freeport Historical Society with historic excavations at Pettengill Farm.

Prior to earning her real estate broker's license, Kate worked as a legal advocate for a non-profit organization serving Cumberland County, a role that underscores her dedication to serving the community and advocating for important causes. Before moving to Yarmouth in 2000, Kate was chef-owner of a thriving catering company on Mount Desert Island, Maine, where she moved in 1995 after living abroad in London for thirteen years. In England, she worked as a nurse and raised her young family while gardening and renovating two houses—one Victorian and one Edwardian.

Kate attended Scripps College in Claremont, California, before moving to London and completing her nursing degree. She has served on several executive boards and Committees over the years, including Birthroots, The Marti Stevens Interactive Improvisational Theater, the Maine Coalition to End Domestic Violence, and the Maine Judicial Branch Committee on Guardians Ad Litem. Kate continues to be an ardent supporter of Yarmouth Music Boosters, Yarmouth Playmakers, and Maine Needs. She regularly supports the Yarmouth Historical Society through business sponsorship of their annual calendar.

Currently alongside her real estate career, Kate is an active recipe developer and food writer. Her recipes have appeared in the *Maine Community Cookbook* and the *Portland Press Herald/Maine Sunday Telegram*, as well as on her website VeganFromScratch.kitchen. She lives in Yarmouth with her husband, Scott Beatty, and enjoys spending time with their five children and five grandchildren, cooking, yoga, organic gardening, and tending to a small menagerie of rescued farm animals.

Above: New Trustee Stacey Lamparter Pardales

Originally a native Detroiter, this is where Stacey's love of all things architecture, art and music began. Stacey received her Bachelor of Science from Western Michigan University in Interior Design and Pre-Architecture; she worked in the field but found her way to volunteering in the historic preservation of the city of Detroit.

After getting married, Stacey and her husband moved to New Jersey, then back to Michigan, began a family of three and continued moving east to Buffalo and landed in Yarmouth in 2013. Stacey has been heavily involved in volunteering in the Yarmouth school community, sports, and the Yarmouth Clam Festival. Two of her children have graduated from YHS and one is still in the high school. Stacey has been working at Martin's Point for the past five years working with military families and providing members with financial assistance.

When not hiking, Stacey can be found in the garden, traveling or, her favorite place to be, with her family.

Summer in the Stonewall Gallery

Above: *Counterpanes,* a collage by artist and poet Jeri Theriault

The Stonewall Gallery had a full schedule of art exhibits throughout the summer. June was the final month to view new work by Anne Tommaso and July and August brought the Maine landscapes of Sheri Oliva. *Counterpanes and Other Fabrications*, recent collages by artist and poet Jeri Theriault, will be on view at the Stonewall Gallery September 6th - November 2nd.

Visit 'News and Events' at yarmouthmehistory.org for more information on upcoming art exhibits and for links to recorded talks from our past exhibiting artists.

In and Around the History Center

Above: Work day spreading topsoil at the Old Meetinghouse.
Above right: Intern Matt visiting with his parents while he was hosting at the Old Meetinghouse's open house event.
Below: A view of the Meetinghouse interior with Director Katie Worthing, the Society's former Chair Linda Grant, and Shawn Quirk of YMTV working on an upcoming program about the history of the Meetinghouse.

A Busy Summer at the Old Meetinghouse

The Old Meetinghouse has been a busy spot this summer. Director Katie Worthing and Old Meetinghouse Advisory Committee members Paul Engel and Matt Schumacher spent a warm Saturday morning spreading topsoil and grass seed on the slope at the front of the building in an effort to improve the landscaping. Joining them was our intrepid intern Matt Dressel who found himself on site at the Old Meetinghouse a few times during his summer internship.

There were six Open House events offered this summer giving residents and visitors opportunities to tour the interior of the building and learn a little history about the 1790s structure. Trustees and volunteers hosted, including our intern Matt who took a shift. While there he had the opportunity to host his parents, Doug and Ina Dressel, when they stopped by to tour the building.

Community members were thrilled to step inside and view the building's austere interior. Many spoke about passing by thousands of times but never having the chance to go inside. During one of the Open House events a couple, who had been married in the building, happened to be passing by. They were delighted to find the doors open and grateful for the chance to step inside, especially on that particular afternoon as they were celebrating their wedding anniversary that day!

Our thanks to the Trustees and volunteers for making the Open House events possible.

In and Around the History Center


Above left to right: Royal River Community Players perform a skit about the town's division; trustee Betsy Langer's celebration sugar cookies; trustee Ed Libby serves blueberry shrubs.

Town of Yarmouth Celebrates 175 Years!

August 20th marked Yarmouth's 175th year as a town. On this day in 1849, Yarmouth's split from the town of North Yarmouth finally took effect after months of debates and votes. History Center board, staff, and volunteers came together to celebrate the occasion at the Old Meetinghouse where, 75 years earlier, the Village Improvement Society had centered their centennial celebration of the same event. Although the day began with showers, it transitioned into a nice summer day for visitors to partake in special commemorative cookies, birthday cake, and historic refreshments, including a homemade blueberry thyme shrub.

Participants also enjoyed tours of the Old Meetinghouse and a special staged reading of a skit about the split of the towns by Royal River Community Players.

Happy 175th Birthday, Yarmouth!

Right: Trustee Bill Nugent, Representative Art Bell, former trustee Julie Benavides, and member Katherine Uschmann visit.

What's a Shrub?

Shrubs evolved from 17th century England, when vinegar was used to preserve fruit and berries for the winter. This practice was brought to North America by the English settlers. By the 19th century, shrub recipes called for pouring vinegar over fruit and allowing the mixture to steep for a few days creating an infused vinegar that was then added to water, soda water, or cocktails.

Our thanks to trustee Ed Libby for his time brewing the syrup for the shrubs and serving them at this event.

Yarmouth's Ice Industry Continued

Above: Joseph Porter's Royal River Ice Company's delivery wagon. Picture taken at his residence at 83 East Elm Street. **Right:** Joseph Porter, an owner of the Royal River Ice Company, standing on the banks of the Royal River with a view of workers in the background loading ice into the East Elm Street ice house.

Researching ice companies, mostly from old newspapers and files, was not easy. For a long time, I was trying to find information on a phantom "Yarmouth Ice Company". I eventually found out that this company did not exist and was just generally referencing Yarmouth's ice business. During my research I got a lot of valuable practice corroborating sources to piece together the full story of something in addition to learning to read cursive. Reading cursive is something that I struggled with (but I think I improved a little). I would like to thank our wonderful Executive Director Katie Worthing for helping me improve with that.

Compared to ice harvesting from other regions in Maine (especially along the Kennebec river), most ice from Yarmouth was for local use. The Groves family and the Talbot family supplied ice on Cousins Island to residents and tourists for many years. Both families harvested ice from ponds on their land, but the Talbot family had to dam a stream to make theirs. E. L. Baker was the first ice merchant that I found record of in the Maine Business Directory. He was active from 1881 until 1886. From 1889 to 1901, Mr. Charles S. Russell was listed as Yarmouth's ice merchant. In 1901, the Portland Daily Press forecasted that the Royal River ice crop would "be a good one".

The Royal River Ice Company, created in 1903, was the biggest ice company in Yarmouth. The Royal River Ice Company typically supplied 50lb blocks of ice three times a week in Yarmouth, but they also shipped to further locations such as Portland. They usually harvested ice for two weeks in January when the ice was at least a foot thick, and employed around 15 people (mostly farmers or other people without work in the winter).

In 1907, the Royal River Ice Company sold 700 tons of ice to the Grand Trunk Railroad. The purpose of this ice was not specified, but it was most likely used to transport perishable goods to bigger markets further away. A 1911 heatwave in Portland caused temperatures to spike to 103°F, leading to an ice shortage. Because of this, Yarmouth shipped 20,000 tons of stored ice to Portland. This was most likely one of the biggest transactions in the Royal River Ice Company's history. Despite these major events, the entirety of Yarmouth's ice industry almost came to a premature end in January 1916. Yarmouth's Board of Health considered banning ice harvesting due to possible contamination from the stockyard on Sligo Road. After testing the water, the ice was found to be safe. The Board of Health issued a statement saying that they "do not consider the menace to health from the pollution of the water…[to] be at all alarming".

After all this excitement, I could not find anything pertaining to the Royal River Ice Company for some time with the exception of a small 1925 ad in the Portland Press Herald. Finally, I found a 1938 Portland newspaper article entitled "Yarmouth Ice-Harvesting Typical Of Operations Throughout The State". This article doesn't explicitly mention the Royal River Ice Company, but rather

Continued on next page

Yarmouth's Ice Industry Continued

"Yarmouth's Ice Business". This confused me, but also made me determined to find out if this was truly talking about the Royal River Ice Company or maybe some other company. I was able to confirm the reference to the Royal River Ice Company by looking through the diary of someone mentioned in the article. According to the article, the Royal River Ice Company cut 3000 tons of ice in 1938 (700 more tons than the previous year), indicating a thriving business.

In 1947 the ownership of Royal River Ice Company changed from founder Joseph W. Porter to Harry J. Fotakis. In the same year, they cut 1,800 tons of ice, and bought two abandoned ice houses. The abandoned ice houses demonstrate the waning state of ice harvesting as a business. The last mention of the Royal River Ice Company being Yarmouth's ice dealer was in the 1949-1950 Maine Business Directory, never to be heard from again.

The past six weeks that I've spent at the History Center have been very memorable and enjoyable. I want to thank everyone at the History Center for being so kind and helpful. This research project has helped me to realize how many things we take for granted in our daily lives. It is necessary to appreciate even the most "mundane" things such as ice and refrigeration. The story of the ice industry in Yarmouth is a testament to how nothing lasts forever. It is interesting to see how a once prominent business could now be mostly forgotten. Next time you see the Royal River frozen in the winter, try to imagine what the river might've looked like over 100 years ago, busy with hard-working people sawing ice for your icebox.

Top: Orland Blake, son of diarist Tristram Blake, sawing ice on the Royal River in 1938. **Above:** It takes two to operate this home-made ice scorer. **Left:** Matt Dressel organizes files at the Yarmouth History Center.

2024 Summer Intern Matt Dressel

Matt Dressel, Yarmouth High School class of 2025, was the History Center's intern this past summer, a position made possible by a grant from William S. Harwood and Ellen Alderman. Matt approached every project assigned to him with great enthusiasm and a smile. He tackled everything from organizing files and artifacts, filing documents, hosting an open house event, and landscaping the slope at the Old Meetinghouse.

We wish Matt the best of luck as he begins his college application process and his last year of high school.

Thank you Business Members!

Museum and Shop Hours Tuesday – Saturday 10am to 4pm

Yarmouth Historical Society
P. O. Box 107
Yarmouth, Maine 04096-0107

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