

For The Isle au Haut Historical Society: Addendum to Dan Ellis Oral History Interview

By Carolyn Ellis Bergen of Hope, Maine, daughter of Dan Ellis, Sr. 31 Aug 2016

I have always considered it a privilege to have had the opportunity to spend my youthful summers on Isle au Haut. Yes, as my father attests, it was a time of carefree fun and play, an opportunity to foster lasting friendships with people from near and far, but in retrospect, for me it was so much more than that. Significantly, it was a time and a place that exposed me to a way of life that centered on self-reliance, wholesome values and an appreciation of the integrity of the land and a close-knit community. There are a handful of islanders who stand out in my memory as having had an impact on my young, impressionable mind.

I have vivid memories of the excitement that built up upon each arrival in Stonington where we would hustle aboard Stanley Dodge's boat, the Fundy, which was tied up at the pier behind Webb's Store. Capt. Dodge (Stan Sr.) was an able and unflappable fellow who seemed to have had no qualms about letting us kids clamor atop to sit over the un-railed, open wheel house for the ride out to the island.

Once settled into the house on Point Lookout, a trip to the village was never complete without a stop at the post office, not just to pick up the mail, but more importantly to have a visit with the indomitable Miss Lizzie. She was a hardy soul who told the best stories.

Always a big highlight of my summer vacation was the day I was driven down to the town dock in the early morning darkness to meet Ev Robinson for a day on the water. Ev was a fisherman who lived with his wife Etta in what is now the Chamberlain house. For sure he could have completed his day of fishing much more efficiently without me, but he was always kind and welcoming. I had the thrill of filling bait bags while he hauled his traps.

Another memory is going down to Head Harbor to fish for flounder off of Gooden Grant's boat. Gooden moored his boat out in front of his house so it was an idyllic set-up for us. we took generous hauls from the sea in those days, and i doubt we left his boat as clean as we found it. It is a credit to Gooden's good will and generous nature he allowed a bunch of rowdy youngsters from The Point to commandeer his boat this way. He must have had a soft spot for kids.

Saturday nights meant dances at the town hall. It was mostly square dancing back in those days (1950's and early 1960's), and Bernadine Barter, Noyes

MacDonald and Bob Dewitt were among those who would climb onto the stage and really crank out some lively music. The Lady of the Lake was always a favorite and I loved to watch my father take his turn with Miss Lizzie. She was a formidable dancer, as was my father, and to tell the truth, you could never quite tell who was promenading whom after those two finished with their doe-si-does.

Sunday mornings were a time for us to be more mindful of less fleeting pleasures and fulfillment. Summer folk and year 'rounders gathered together as one to come listen to Ted Hoskin's exquisitely crafted sermons which subtly and sometimes more directly addressed the importance of fostering commitment and respect both near at hand and beyond. Ted's children's stories were also very captivating and children and adults alike always paid rapt attention.

My mother, Eloise, would take me to Rich's Cove with her to visit Mineola Rich where we had tea, listened to Mineola's tales and marveled at her industrious production of colorful crazy quilts, many of which graced the beds of people who lived in the houses on Point Lookout.

Maybelle and Gordon Chapin and Helen and Maurice Barter were also people with whom my mother kept in touch. I still sleep on the hand-tatted, lace trimmed pillowcases Helen sent to me for a wedding present. That was in 1969 – 47 years ago.

As caretakers of The Point, George Donnelly and his wife Vera, and later Bob Turner and his wife Gerry would be our neighbors and staples in our daily lives. George and Bob both were the most versatile tinkers I ever met. I never knew either of them to fail to find a solution to the most vexing of problems. Vera was notorious for her bountiful output of ginger cookies, so her kitchen was a frequent stopover for me.

Other fond memories include encounters with the MacDonalds, - Ginny and Skeet and Belvia and Jack. Our paths did not cross as often as with others, but I still absorbed the fact that these were kind, genuine people who as well as anyone exemplified the decent, hardworking folk who made up the core of the lauH community. I would come to know Belvia more closely in my adult years and learn to respect her all the more.

Summer vacations on the Island were rare times for the Ellis's to be together as a family. My father practiced medicine during an age when it was not unusual for doctors to be on call 24 hours a day and to work seven days a week. Island time was an opportunity for him seek refuge from a very demanding practice, but also a

chance to be fully present with his wife and children for 2-3 weeks at a time. That meant dutiful returns to Boston to tend to his sick patients while the rest of us had the luxury of staying on. On departure day, we would wave from the dock as the mailboat ferried him away and back to life in the fast lane, and then we would bound back up the boardwalk to get on with the pleasures of another blissful summer day on the island. What sweet indulgence!