

Oral History - Marie Hamly

Isle au Haut Historical Society

Date: August 5, 2015

Interviewer: Marion Breeze-Williams

Location: seasonal residence of Marie Hamly in Rich's Cove – Isle au Haut, Maine

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This is Marie Hamly and I am being interviewed by Marion Breeze. And it is August 5th 2015. We are not going to do just an oral history of my life. We are just going to do some remembrances of time past from when I first came to this island up to the present.

I started out the first time here when I was in college. This was in 1951 or 1952. I caught a train in St. Louis, Missouri and rode it all the way to Bangor, Maine where I was met by my future husband, Robert Hoskins. He drove me down through fog and rain to Stonington, Maine. We then got on Captain Stanley Dodge's little old original mail boat, The Fundy.

On the way over, a wave splashed over the edge of the boat. Being from the mid-West, born and raised there, I tasted it and I said to myself, "This is salty." It was simply amazing to me. At any rate, we proceeded to marry in 1953 and spent the next 8 or 9 years staying at my mother-in-law and father-in-law's cottage, Fred and Alice Hoskins. We bought our present house in Rich's Cove in 1965.

This house is 103 years old this year. It was built by Willie Rich. He was married to Emma Rich who was a school teacher on this island. It's quite an elegant house inside for that time. It has very high ceilings and big windows which is kind of uncommon on the island. Most of the island houses of that era concentrated on smaller rooms and smaller windows to conserve heat. But one thing it did follow, it's set back from the shore because the islanders who were lobstermen spent their lives out on the water. When they got home at night, they had very little interest in being exposed to more wind and water particularly during the winter months.

The mail boat in those days couldn't come into the Isle au Haut thoroughfare because it hadn't been dredged yet. So passengers from anywhere on the island got on and off at Point Lookout. It wasn't until sometime in the mid-50's I can't really remember when that the thoroughfare got dredged. And we could use the town landing pier which was a much smaller than this wonderful thing we have now. So, your approach to the rest of the island wasn't through the town. It was up through the cottages at Point Lookout. And then you came onto wherever you were going.

This morning, I had an occasion to look at the old Richard Bowditch map because the historical society is trying to find a suitable island map to put on some of its stationery. By looking at that map, I was reminded of how many trails we had that no longer exist. They were wiped out by storms and a

hurricane that came on the island. You used to be able to take a fairly well-marked trail from Rich's Cove all the way to Old Cove and around to the Burnt Island Thoroughfare. That has totally vanished as have a lot of the trails that were up on the mountain in those days. New trails have of course emerged through the Park and that sort of thing.

At any rate, there were many roadside common names such as the Devil's Den. I haven't heard anyone refer to Devil's Den in many, many years because it's a point on the road just opposite the swamp when you are heading to town from Rich's Cove. The old islanders believed that one of their ancestors had seen the devil there and it wasn't a place to linger. You just went through it.

There were two church services then, one in the morning where mostly the summer people attended and one in the evening where the islanders attended. The evening service was faithfully lit by the oil lamp chandelier. Miss Lizzie and Miss Ava kept those lamps trimmed and cleaned. The evening service was simply wonderful because the sun would be setting and we always went to that just because we had young children and it was better to do the evening.

The cove where I presently live and where I started out actually at my in-laws is named Rich's Cove after the family that predominated here. As you come down into the cove, first you go by my house. At that time in the 50's occupied by Del Bowen and his wife, Mary and her parents, the Rands. The next cottage which is now occupied by Peter and Holly Scott was occupied by Mary and Billy Bruce. The house on the shore was then owned and occupied by Janice and Dicky Turner. It was later bought by Kenneth and Beth Breeze and is still owned by their two children.

Up to the end of the road at the cove, was Ava's house, Mineola's house and Clydie's house. Clydie Rich used to babysit my children but we could never go anywhere in bad weather because she was terrified of thunder. She would absolutely dive under the nearest bed when it thundered. So, we always had to make sure it was good weather.

In 1965, we outgrew my in-law's cottage with the three children. So we bought the Willie Rich house and lived in it for many years just as it was originally; rain water from the roof into a cistern in the cellar pumped up with a hand pump in the kitchen, no electricity. We had Aladdin lamps, no running water or plumbing or anything of that nature. If you really wanted a full body bath, you went up to the lake. That was where a lot of people took their daily dip in those days. Very few houses occupied by summer residents on the island itself had any kind of plumbing of that nature. Point Lookout cottages did and we always marveled at how tidy and well put together they looked.

There were lots of interesting islanders. All of the houses lining the thoroughfare, the houses in Head Harbor were all occupied by islanders, fishermen. The summer invasion hadn't yet happened or very minimally. So, you really became friends and well-acquainted with the permanent residents here. It was a very special time because they were getting used to us summer seasonal residents. The island was facing great change. When the power boats for the lobstermen were running on diesel, there was no fuel available out here on the island. So, prior to that, Isle au Haut's fishing grounds were considered very desirable because we were nearer where the lobsters were than the Stonington fishermen.

The island itself was becoming a difficult place to make a living with their older smaller gasoline engine boats. Properties started being sold to us summer residents. That's maybe sad from one point of view but it's wonderful for us.

One of my favorite stories about an older resident was a gentleman named Dennis Eaton. Dennis and his wife, Nettie lived up in Blatchford's Cove which is currently where Bill and Deborah Landers live. Dennis was quite a character. He had a boat with an engine but he preferred to row over to Stonington when he needed to go onshore. They didn't call it going ashore in those days. The islanders said they were going back to earth and that was used for quite a while believe it or not.

One day I was in my car down at the south end of the island. I had gotten it going and for some reason I was down there. But at any rate, I knew that once I turned it off, I would have to go through an awful procedure to get it going again. So, I kept it going. Dennis stopped me in the road and we had a nice talk. Finally I said to Dennis, "I really have to go or my car is going to get too hot and boil over if I leave it idling much longer." Dennis drew back and said, "Well dear, sometimes you just have to let it boil over." That has stood me in good stead remembering that throughout the rest of my life.

When my youngest child was three which would have been in, I guess 1966, we had just moved into this house. We were having a birthday party, his birthday was in July. So, Maurice and Helen Barter came, and Lizzie and Ava and I think perhaps Leon Small was there along with my mother-in-law, Alice Hoskins. This 3 year old had a pretty geriatric birthday most years on the island.

That particular time, Ms. Ava said she certainly wanted to do the cake and everything for Charlie's birthday party. So, the cake and Miss Ava and the rest duly arrived. Miss Ava said, "Oh, I brought the candles for the cake." So, she put three candles on the cake, lit them and we instructed Charlie what he was supposed to do with these candles, "Make a wish and blow them out." So he did. He blew and he blew and he blew and the candles would not go out.

Meanwhile, Miss Ava and Lizzie were falling out of their chairs laughing because they were trick candles. Well, this little lad solved this problem. He proceeded to spit on them and that was a good story for a long time on the island. The islanders loved little children and little children loved the islanders. They seemed to have infinite patience with little visitors.

But, I did remember a few times when we'd get back home, after my son had spent quite a few days tailing behind Uncle Maurice down on the shore here in the cove. We had to watch his vocabulary because the islanders had a rich vocabulary that wasn't always used on the mainland. [laughs] I am sure everyone knows what I mean.

We had lots of musicales in those days. There wasn't any entertainment out here on the island. So, the islanders had their own entertainment. Quite a few of them played instruments. You never knew when one of these was going to arise. But you would somehow get word that there was going to be a musicale. It was pronounced 'musicale' in somebody's cottage whether it was a summer person or an islander. Gooden Grant down in Head Harbor loved to have musicales. Bishop Bob Dewitt would bring his saxophone, I think it was and Noyes MacDonald would play his violin. Bernadine Barter would

sometimes bring her accordion. We would have a lovely gathering. You always were prepared in the evening for visitors. There was no TV, no radios; I guess some people had radios, no telephones or anything of that nature. Visiting was the social norm and you never knew who was going to knock at your back door. And it was a lovely way to get to know people.

When I was divorced in 1970, I lived then in Washington, D.C. I moved to Orono, Maine and proceeded to get a job in Bangor. Me and my 3 children spent about 17 years coming down here on weekends or whenever we could squeeze out the time to be down on the island. Those were wonderful years because the island was changing but it hadn't changed quite that much. You could still live rather simply out here and not really have to put on any airs or anything.

Eventually, the years came around. I met my second husband, Charles Hamly in 1989 out in the middle of the Isle au Haut thoroughfare, believe it or not. He was cruising on his boat and mutual friends introduced us. Until his death in 2-0-0-8 he was a very, happy new resident on this island.

My last name had been Hoskins for so many years out here. One of the residents in this cove had painted a sign listing the last names of the four houses here. And so Hoskins was of course on that sign. The sign disappeared for awhile and then it got put back up. At that point, I had been married to Charles Hamly for a long time. I was very discouraged because I had spent a long time trying to persuade people that my last name was now Hamly and not Hoskins.

We scattered his ashes out in Rich's Cove in 2-0-0-8. And here I am in 2015 many years later still in Rich's Cove and quite a few things are unchanged here.

But this is a nice little opportunity to share lots of good memories.