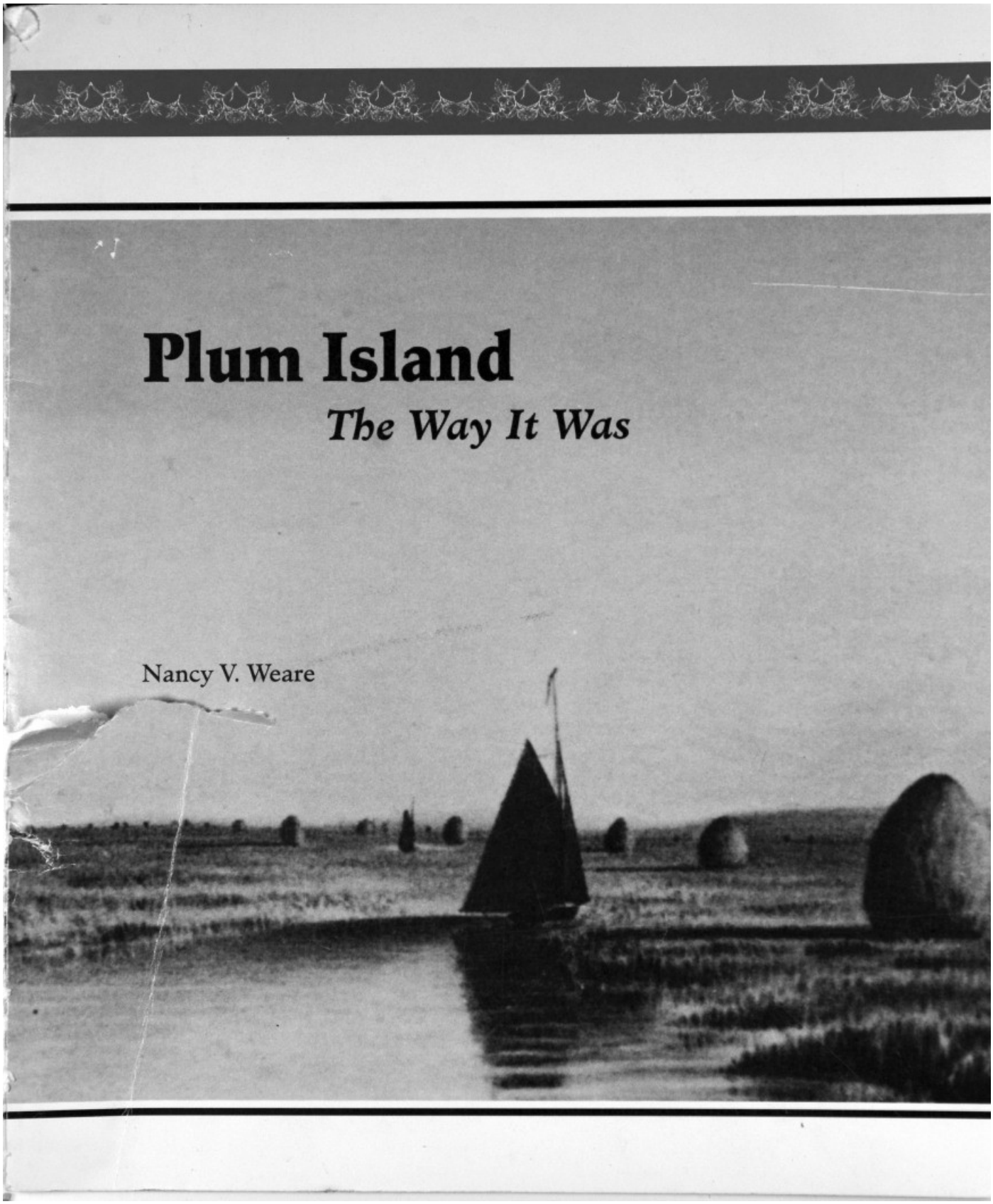
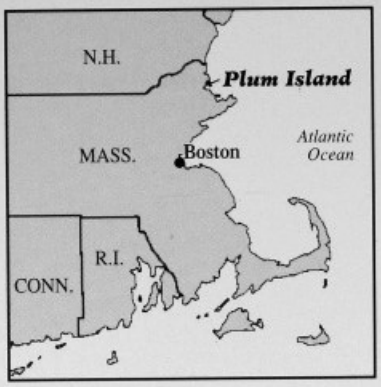

Plum Island
The Way It Was
Nancy V. Weare

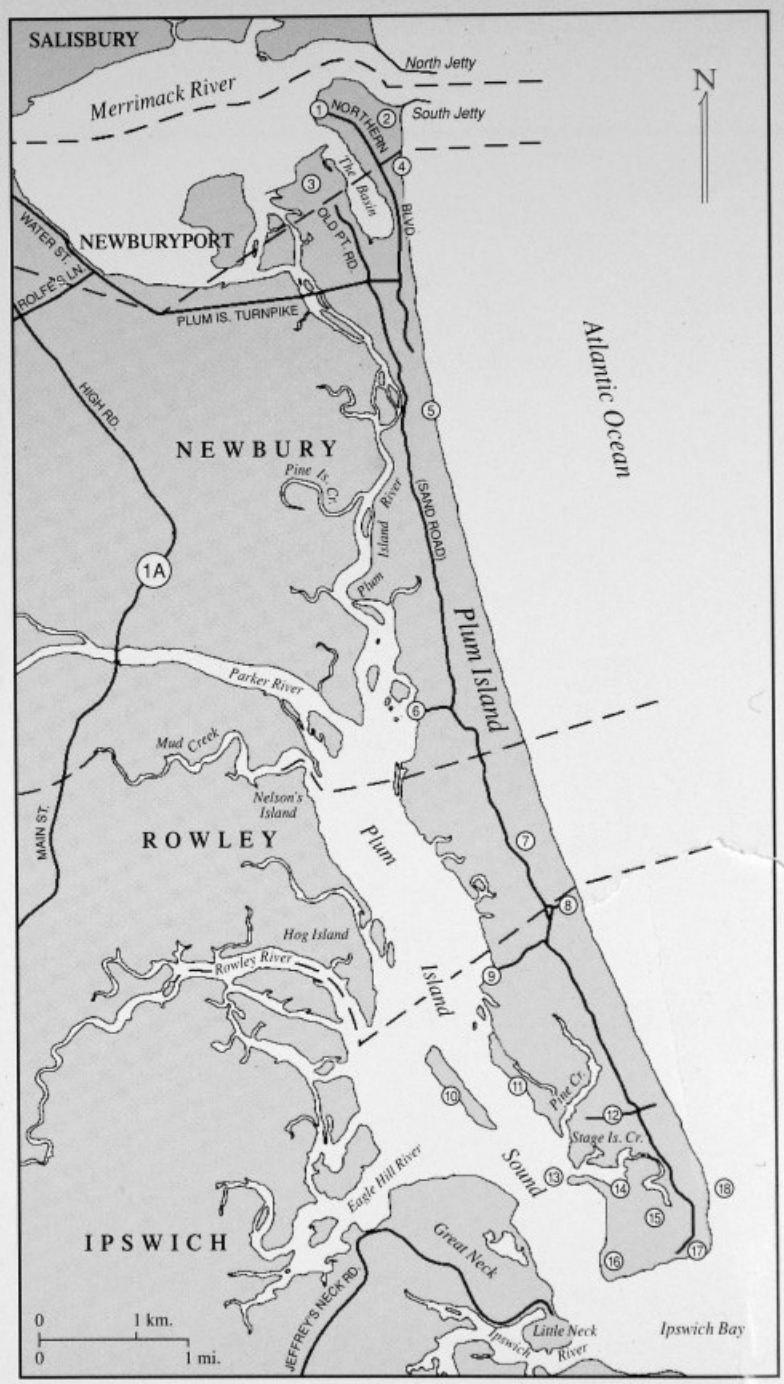
Plum Island Before 1940

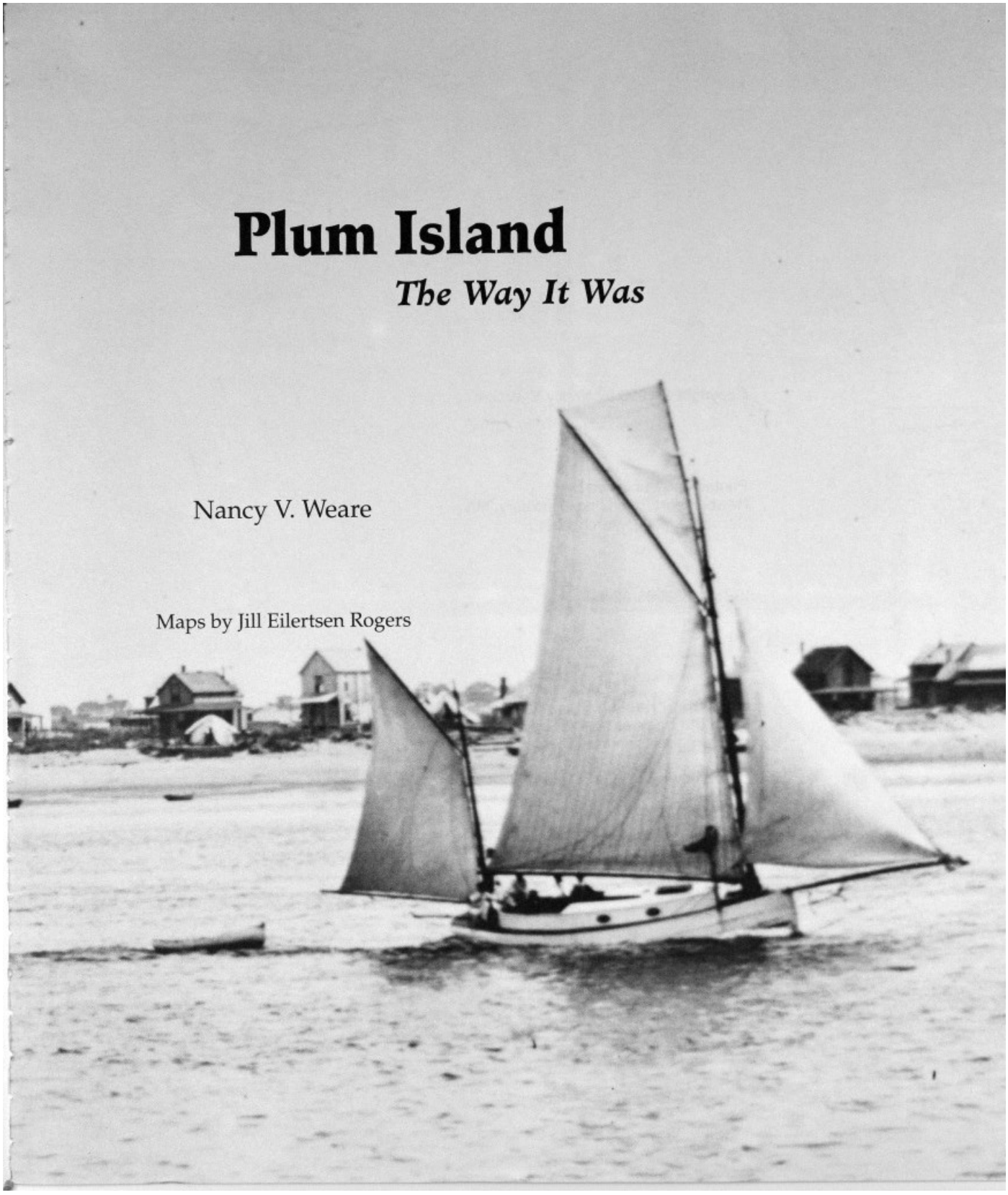


— — Town Boundary

Points of Reference

1. Newburyport Light
2. Merrimack River Coast Guard Station
3. Old Point
4. Life Saving Station #2
5. High Sandy and Life Saving Station #1
6. Hale's Cove and Halfway House
7. Hellcat Swamp
8. Knobbs Beach Life Saving Station
9. The Knobbs
10. Middle Ground
11. Grape Island
12. Cross Farm Hill (Middle Island)
13. Sutton's Point
14. Ipswich Bluffs (Stage Island)
15. Old Salt Works
16. Sandy Point
17. Bar Island (Bar Head)
18. Emerson's Rocks




Plum Island
The Way It Was
Nancy V. Weare
Maps by Jill Eilertsen Rogers

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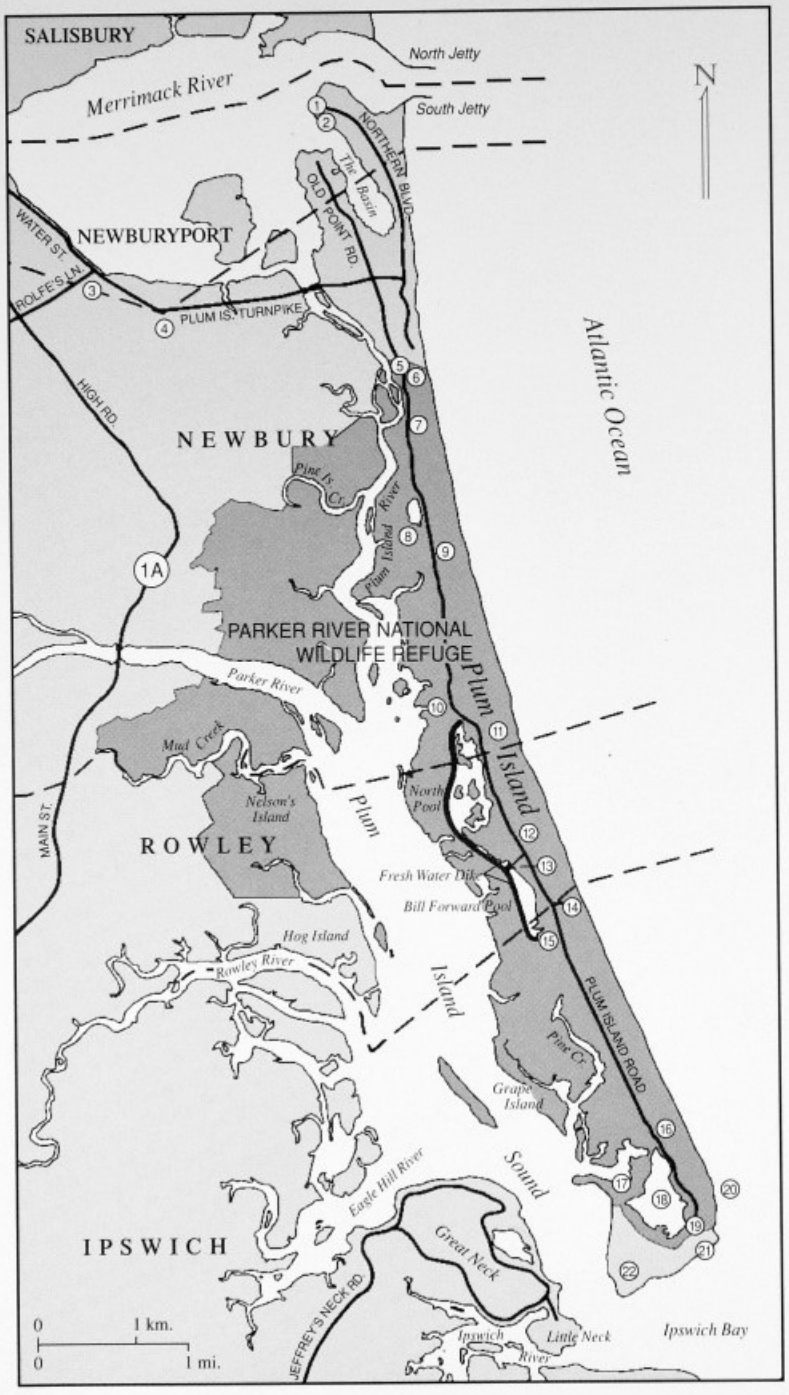
All proceeds from this book will be given to nonprofit organizations for the acquisition and/or preservation of materials relating to the history of Plum Island.

Plum Island

The Way It Was



Plum Island Today

Parker River National Wildlife Refuge

Town Boundary

Points of Interest

1. Newburyport Light
2. Refuge Headquarters
3. Site of Future Refuge Headquarters
4. Plum Island Airport
5. Refuge Entrance Gate
6. Parking Lot #1 and Restrooms
7. Parking Lot #2
8. Salt Pans Area
9. Parking Lot #3 and Kettle Hole Trail
10. Sub-Headquarters and Parking
11. New Pines Observation Area
12. Hellcat Swamp Nature Trail and Tower
13. Parking Lot #4
14. Camp Sea Haven
15. Parking Lot #5 and Pines Trail
16. Parking Lot #6
17. Stage Island Area
18. Stage Island Pool
19. Parking Lot #7 and Observation Tower
20. Emerson's Rocks
21. Bar Head
22. Plum Island (Sandy Point) State Reservation

Preface

Plum Island is divided among the four townships of Newburyport, Newbury, Rowley and Ipswich, and over the years a number of excellent town histories have been written that include valuable and detailed material about the island. There is, however, no publication exclusively about Plum Island, one that recounts the history of the entire island, ignoring township boundaries. This fact, and the awareness that nearly all evidence of settlement at the southern end of the island is rapidly disappearing, prompted the compiling of this book.

There is also a more personal reason. It was my good fortune that over one hundred years ago my grandfather and his brother built a camp on the shores of Plum Island Sound to be used as headquarters while duck hunting. Within a few years the shotguns had become a memory, save for the empty gunrack over the mantel, and the camp was used solely for family weekends and vacations. By the time I was born and had grown old enough to be aware of nearby Grape Island and Ipswich Bluffs, the resort business that had once flourished there was finished. Most of the buildings were still standing, but some were vacant and falling into ruin, remnants of an earlier era. I dimly remember going by rowboat with my grandfather one fall weekend to say good-by to John Post at the time of the final closing of his Grape Island hotel. So I was present at a momentous occasion although it had no meaning for me then. Nevertheless, I grew up sensing that the Plum Island of my time was just a shadow of what it had been in my parents' time, and I loved to hear stories of the "old days."

Three years ago I began to do serious research on the island's history, knowing that the past can only too quickly become buried. Along with reading the available printed sources, I spoke with numerous Plum Island "old timers" willing to share their personal knowledge as well as family anecdotes and memorabilia. It became apparent, after much reading and listening, that each area of the island was unique, with its own lifestyle and experiences. The hundreds

of vacationers who travelled by steamer or trolley to the northern end in summer knew an aspect of Plum Island life quite different from that of the year-round residents at the southern end. The mainland farmers who spent many hours on the marshes in both summer and winter cutting and stacking and hauling the salt hay had recollections of the island that were in sharp contrast to those of the men in the Life Saving Service whose attention was focused seaward while they patrolled the ocean beach in all kinds of weather. But all of these people are part of the island's rich and diverse history.

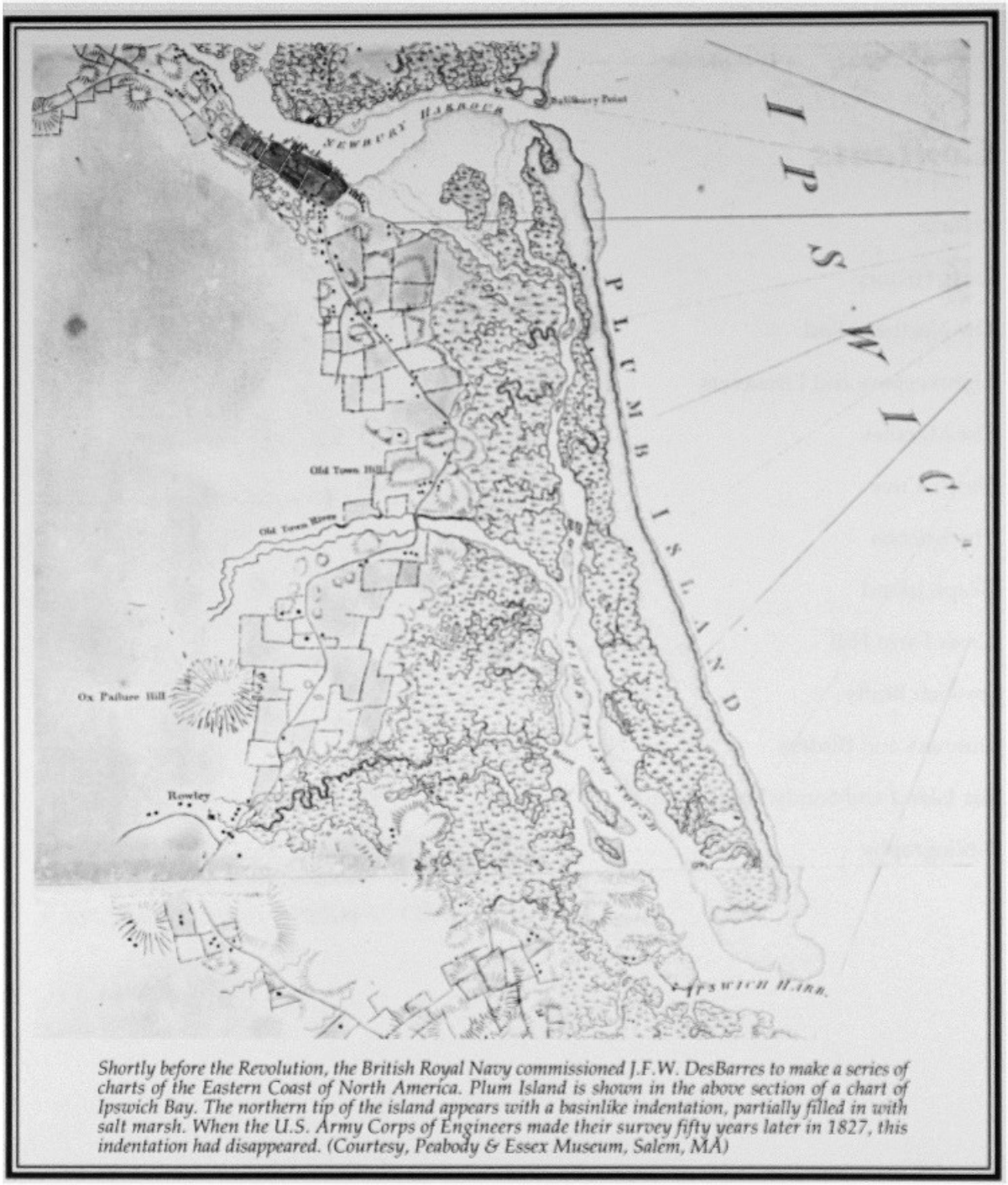
Written records about Plum Island began in colonial times, so it was not difficult to know where to start this book, but it was far less easy to know where to stop. The decision to end with the 1930's was based on the belief that changes occurring in the 1940's so profoundly affected the character of the island that they were beyond the scope of this book. The establishment of the Refuge and the State Reservation eliminated all private ownership of land within their confines and led to the gradual razing of all cottages and homes at the southern end of the island. The road that was built down the center of the island introduced automobile traffic to areas that had once been difficult to reach except on foot or by boat. At the northern end, after World War II, there began a gradual evolution from a vacation resort to a thriving year-round community that continues today. This is a new chapter in Plum Island's history, one that is still unfolding, and we can only speculate about the future.

I hope that these explorations into Plum Island's past will evoke warm and happy memories in older readers and that those who are new to the island will enjoy learning about "the way it was."

NVW

Ipswich, 1993

Contents



Shortly before the Revolution, the British Royal Navy commissioned J.F.W. DesBarres to make a series of charts of the Eastern Coast of North America. Plum Island is shown in the above section of a chart of Ipswich Bay. The northern tip of the island appears with a basinlike indentation, partially filled in with salt marsh. When the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers made their survey fifty years later in 1827, this indentation had disappeared. (Courtesy, Peabody & Essex Museum, Salem, MA)

Acknowledgments

Many people encouraged and assisted me in the compiling of this book. Some were part of the Plum Island experience within the time frame covered and generously shared personal anecdotes and family reminiscences as well as photo albums, diaries and other materials. Their contribution was unique and invaluable and added greatly to my understanding. Many others provided information and photographic material. I should like to express my thanks and appreciation to all of the following: *Peter Atherton, Mary Humphreys Barton, Susan Howard Boice, Daniel Brown, Marion Ilsley Brown, Everett Clark, Gertrude Cobb, O. R. Cummings, Paul Currier, Charles Davis, Eliza Leet Dodge, Rep. John Dolan, Isabelle Dole, Muriel Dorr, Candace Erickson, Margaret Thurlow Furlong, Theodore and Doris Fyrberg, Elizabeth Gillette, Bartlett Gould, Robert Gould, Elizabeth Pritchard Horton, Malcolm Hudson, Ruth Thurlow Isaksen, Joanne Lowell Johnson, Barbara Kezer, Mary Kezer, Elizabeth Knight, Richard Knight, Granville Lovely, Marjorie Lowney, Forrest MacGilvray, Brownie Macintosh, Fred Mackinney, Idabelle McGregor, Kay Moulton, Scott Nason, Rep. Thomas Palumbo, Edward Plumer, Isobel Quimby, C. G. Rice, Frank Serwon, Mary Smith, Christopher Snow, Prescott and Margaret Spalding, Francis Stanwood, Thomas Stubbs, William Varrell, Malcolm Wood, Betsy Woodman, Arthur and Barbara Woods, Ruth Yesair.*

The staffs at the following institutions were unfailingly helpful: *Custom House Maritime Museum, Haverhill Public Library, Historical Society of Old Newbury, Institution for Savings, Ipswich Historical Society, Ipswich Public Library, Newburyport Public Library, Peabody & Essex Museum, Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities.*

Special thanks are due to Bill Lane, who rephotographed the majority of the old pictures reproduced in this book, and to Virginia Leonard whose editorial guidance helped make this book a reality.

Cover: Plum Island Marshes (Courtesy, Historical Society of Old Newbury)

Title page: Plum Island Point around the turn of the century (Rodigrass Collection)

This book is dedicated to all who have known and loved Plum Island but especially to those who once lived at the island's southern end, who can never go home again.

Oh, to hold these thoughts
And this place forever
In my mind
This beloved place
So much a part of me.
—Alice Taylor, from "Healing Place"

Early History

The narrow barrier island of sand dune and marsh that we recognize today as Plum Island is believed to have started as a sandspit perhaps as many as 6,000 years ago. As it increased in area, its southern end eventually attached itself to four glacial-drumlin islands that are today called Cross Farm Hill, Bar Head, Ipswich Bluffs and Grape Island. In length, the island extends nearly nine miles from its northern extremity at the mouth of the Merrimack River to Bar Head, which rises majestically to overlook the mouth of the Ipswich River.

Plum Island was first recorded on European charts in the early seventeenth century, and from artifacts found at kitchen middens on Grape Island, the Bluffs and Bar Head, we surmise that local Indians had found the island an agreeable summer habitation. There is some speculation but no agreement that Vikings had stopped there centuries earlier, and we know that Champlain sailed by the island during his exploration of the Massachusetts coast. Captain John Smith, who visited our shores in 1614, described the island in some detail, although he did not give it a name.

"... On the east is an isle of two or three leagues in length; the one halfe plaine marish ground fit for pasture, or salt Ponds, with many fair high groves of Mulberrie trees and gardens; and there is also Oaks, Pines, Walnuts and other wood to make this place an excellent habitation, being a good and a safe harbor."

—Captain John Smith

The island was included in the 1621–22 land grant to Captain John Mason when the president and council of Plymouth granted to him, under the name Mariana, ". . . all the land lying along the Atlantic from Naumkeag River to the Merrimack River . . . to geather with the Great Isle or Island henceforth to be called Isle Mason lying neere or before the Bay, Harbor or ye river Aggawom." However, the name Plumb Island is the one recorded on early local maps, very likely in recognition of its many plum bushes, and is the one that prevailed.

For the first one hundred and fifty years of the nearby settlements of Newbury, Rowley and Ipswich, Plum Island was treated primarily as a resource. In the beginning days of the colony, open pastureland was limited, and the island's marshes, or meadows, offered grazing for the colonists' livestock. The salt hay was also used for bedding and mulching and as insulation to bank against the foundations

of houses. The trees mentioned in the earliest descriptions of the island were probably cut for lumber and floated to the mainland. We are certain that pines existed, since they were used to define the land boundaries in some of the early deeds. Only at the southern end of Plum Island, where the higher ground of the glacial drumlins provided rich topsoil, was there any attempt at settlement.

Plum Island was not included in the territories granted to the early settlers of Ipswich, Rowley and Newbury but was under the jurisdiction of the General Court. In 1639 two residents of Ipswich obtained permission to keep "fourscore hoggs on the island . . . from Aprille next untill harvest be got in. . . ." The town of Newbury responded by asking for title to the whole island. For the next ten years the three settlements shared the island. Eventually in 1649 the General Court divided Plum Island among the townships, two fifths each being awarded to Ipswich and Newbury and one fifth to Rowley.

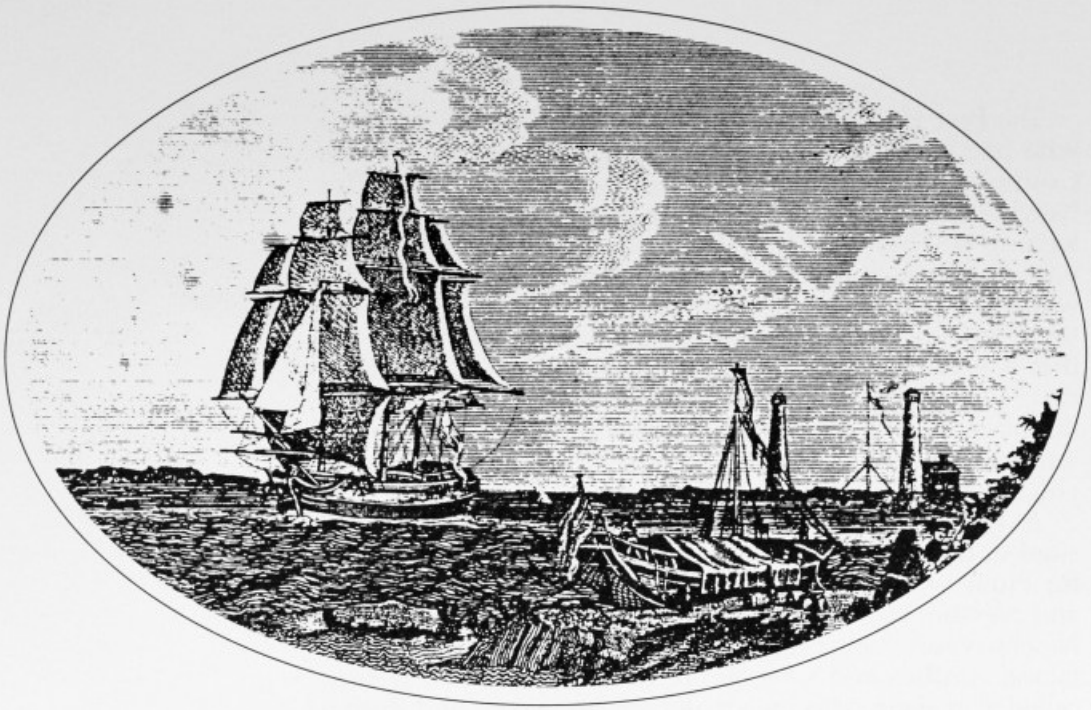
Most of Newbury's land was held in common by the freeholders except for the valuable marsh along the river and eighty acres of upland near the Rowley line. In Ipswich and Rowley the land was surveyed and measured, and shares were allocated among the commoners. Since no fencing existed on the island, there was still much contention among the three towns. Ipswich complained that the horses and cattle placed on the island by Newbury residents to forage during the winter months were destroying the vegetation and ". . . would be the ruin and utter destruction of the whole island. . . ." Even in colonial times there was concern about erosion, and the selectmen tried through regulations to prevent the destruction of the dunes lest the shifting sands overrun the valuable salt meadows.

In the summer of 1769 Newbury and Newburyport, which had by then become separate towns, joined together to share the cost of a hospital to be built on Plum Island in order to shelter and care for those who were ill with smallpox. This highly contagious disease was greatly feared, and it was the custom to isolate the afflicted. The hospital, or Pest House, was located near the northern end of the island to make it accessible to ships arriving from foreign ports where seamen were often exposed to both smallpox and yellow fever and needed to be kept in quarantine. If an incoming ship had disease on board, it was required to be washed down with vinegar, and its soft goods, such as cloth, were buried in sand for nine days.

The Pest House was also used to care for local residents who had smallpox. Not all the patients were cooperative. Comments taken from a letter sent to a patient by Newburyport's selectmen indicate how seriously these rules were to be observed: ". . . if you should come away before you are Cleansed & your Cloths shifted, the People in Town will Stone you out again. . . ." Instructions to staff included the following: ". . . we desire you to be extremely Carefull that you Burn nothing in the fires, but to Bury every thing that is Offencive & to cover it with earth as soon as put in the place for that purpose, and when the Cows shall be put into the Pastures we desire you to keep them away as far as you can from the Fence. . . ."

At the time of the Revolution, forts were erected on both sides of the river to guard the harbor entrance. The funding for Plum Island's fort was undertaken jointly by Newbury and Newburyport. The historian Joshua Coffin wrote that Newburyport "voted to allow the soldiers stationed on Plum Island candles and sweetening for their beer." The fort, called Fort Faith, was eventually washed away, and during the War of 1812 a temporary fort was built.

A mid-1800's view of the old fort on the Salisbury side of the river (Courtesy, Historical Society of Old Newbury)



An artist's conception of the twin lighthouses, the signal tower and keeper's house on Plum Island around 1800. The engraving was taken from the Newburyport Marine Society's certificate of membership.

As shipping increased along the coast and particularly in the Merrimack, there was a need for range lights to guide incoming ships. In 1783 a group of private citizens provided the funding. These beacons were later replaced with two small wooden lighthouses and a keeper's dwelling.

An ever-growing number of shipwrecks on the shores of Plum Island caused the Newburyport Marine Society in 1787 to build and equip two shelters for the use of shipwrecked sailors in winter storms. Unless a ship was stranded on an offshore bar, the crew were sometimes able to reach shore alive, but without shelter it was likely that they would perish from exposure before their plight was known. A few years later, in 1804, the Merrimack Humane Society added additional huts. The locations of such shelters along our coast were described in leaflets that were carried aboard ships using these waters.

In 1829 an attempt was made to increase the depth of water at the bar at the mouth of the Merrimack by the construction of a breakwater extending from Plum Island to Woodbridge Island. Congress appropriated $32,000 for the purpose, later adding to that sum before the project was completed in 1831. The breakwater did not prove to be effective and eventually was destroyed by wave and water action.

The Northern End

Plum Island in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries could be reached by boat, but it was too isolated to attract large numbers of people. In winter its remoteness could also be dangerous. Town records show, for instance, that in 1798 Richard Jackman and his eleven-year-old son died from exposure on the marsh while attempting to walk home. They had gone to Plum Island for wood the previous day, and after harsh weather forced them to abandon their boat, the two had tried to make their way home on foot.

The first attempt to promote Plum Island as a resort came in 1806 when a group of Newburyport businessmen formed a corporation to build a bridge over Plum Island River and a toll road from the corner of Ocean Avenue to the Center. In late fall of that year a small hotel was erected near the beginning of Old Point Road, and it is believed that the construction workers were housed there.

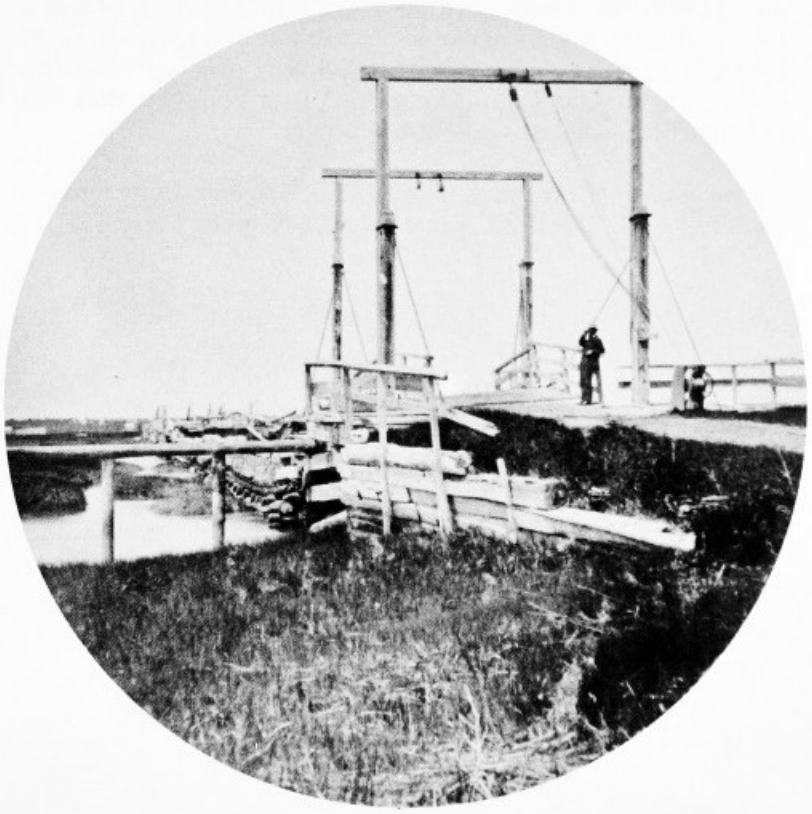
An early view of the Plum Island Hotel. The sign in foreground gives toll rates. (Courtesy, Historical Society of Old Newbury)

Toll rates varied according to what was being transported: a 4-wheeled coach or a wagon on springs pulled by two horses was 25 cents, a man on horse-back paid 4 cents, pedestrians were charged 2 cents, sheep or swine cost 5 cents per dozen.

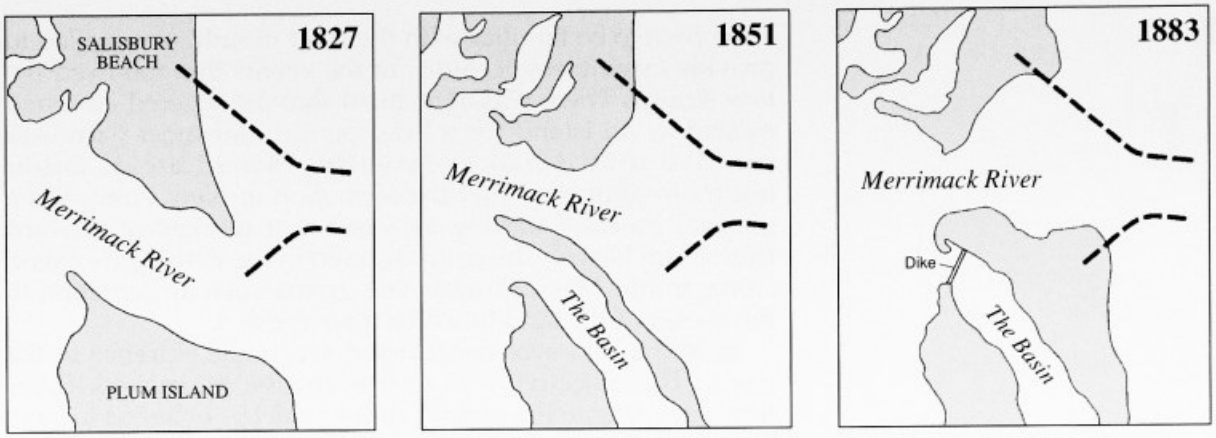
Old newspaper accounts indicate that for many years the toll road was used primarily by guests of the hotel and by farmers who took their hay wagons across on their way to the salt marshes.

The hotel, under the management of Benjamin Clifford, quickly attracted summer visitors and sportsmen, but its function as a hostelry was interrupted briefly during the War of 1812 when it served as a barracks for soldiers stationed on the island. It soon returned to its original function, and for several decades the hotel remained the only significant non-government building at the northern end of the island.

Access to the island was not always easy despite the new road. In severe weather the bridge over Plum Island River was highly vulnerable. It was destroyed during a great storm in l832 and was not rebuilt for several years. In order to transport guests to the hostelry, a canal was dug from the river to the hotel, and ferry service was provided. Traces of the canal, parallel to today's road, can still be seen.



Plum Island drawbridge in the 1800's. Note the pulleys used to open the bridge for boat traffic. (Courtesy, Historical Society of Old Newbury)



Three maps, based on surveys by the Army Corps of Engineers in 1827, 1851 and 1883, show the changing land contours at the mouth of the Merrimack River in relation to the present-day jetties indicated by dotted lines. The views represent the high-water mark on both the Plum Island and the Salisbury shores.

In 1827 Moses Pettingell purchased all of the land at the north end of Plum Island from the Proprietors of Newbury with the exception of the government lot containing the lighthouses and the land occupied by the hotel complex. His purchase price of $600 was soon recouped from the sale of timber cut down on the island and from the ongoing sale of sand, which was in demand for use in the building trade.

Sometime in the period between 1840 and the mid-1850's Mr. Pettingell received an unexpected dividend from the sea. Prior to that time the Basin and all the land between it and the ocean were nonexistent. In December of 1839 three very destructive storms served as catalysts for dramatic changes that would follow in the next few years. These storms cut a channel through a sizeable portion of Salisbury Beach at the mouth of the Merrimack, thereby creating an island in the middle of the river. For a brief period there were two channels into the harbor. Eventually the mouth of the south channel, which had previously been the single point of entry, filled with silt and sand. As this reef expanded northward, it formed the cove we now call the Basin. This new, slender arm of land, which continued to increase in area, was called New Point and retained that designation for many years.

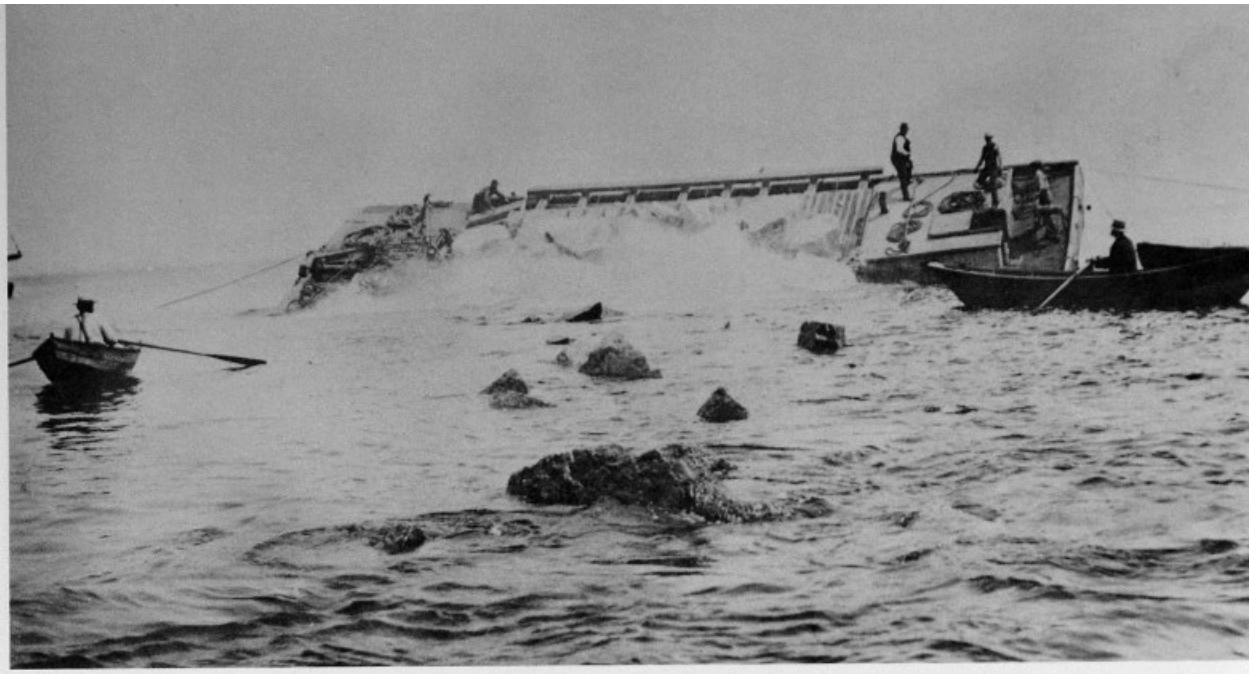
New Point became the subject of a fascinating lawsuit several decades after it was affixed to Plum Island. In 1883, E. Moody Boynton sued the Pettingell heirs, claiming that the new point of land was the same piece of property that had been violently severed from Salisbury Beach during the winter storms of 1839-40 and that he, E. Moody Boynton, had acquired title to it from the Salisbury Proprietors and was thus the rightful owner. A number of local residents,

all known to be familiar with the river mouth, were called to provide eyewitness accounts of the events that followed the 1839 storms. There was agreement that the severed land had existed as an island for a brief period, but most witnesses recalled that it had eventually washed away. Other testimony indicated that the formation of New Point was a gradual process, starting as a reef that worked northward from Plum Island. The court decided in the Pettingells' favor, citing an old Massachusetts law giving such an accretion to the owner of the land to which it was added.

In 1883 a dike was constructed across the entrance to the Basin. The objective was to prevent the Merrimack River from reverting to its original outlet, which is believed to have been near the head of the Basin. One effect of the dike was to create a new and safe swimming area at all times of tide. The dike remained functional for a number of years but was not kept in repair. Traces of it are still visible at low tide.

The construction of the jetties at the mouth of the river commenced in 1881, and for a number of years the area was the scene of great activity. The purpose of the jetties was to increase the depth of the water at the river's mouth and to prevent the accumulation of sand on the bar. The plans called for two stone jetties to be built, each fifty feet wide at the base and fifteen feet wide at the top. Both jetties were to be at least four feet above the surface of the water at high tide. The north jetty was to be extended nearly one-half mile in a southeasterly direction from Salisbury Beach, and the south jetty was to run in a northeasterly direction from Plum Island to within a thousand feet of the north jetty.

Clam diggers at work near the mouth of the Basin sometime in the 1890's. The dike can be seen at the right of the photograph. (Courtesy, Historical Society of Old Newbury)

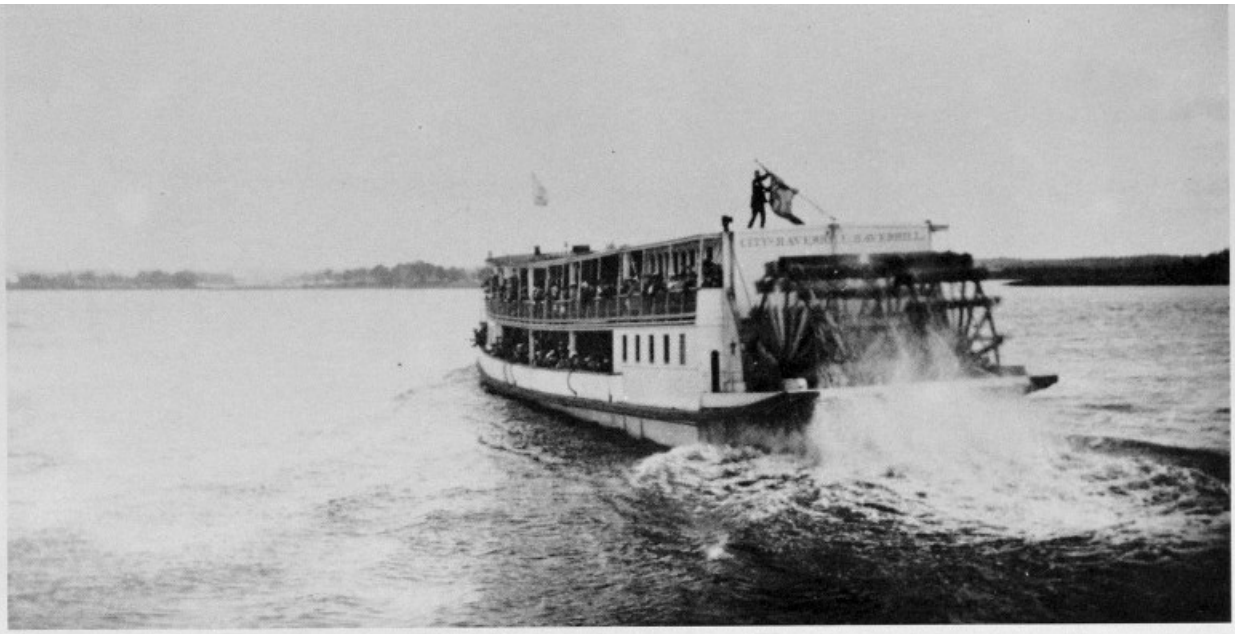


A lighter discharges its cargo of stone during the building of the jetties. (Courtesy, Custom House Maritime Museum — Cheney Collection)

Work began in April, 188l, when the first load of rubble was dumped to form the base of the north jetty. The south jetty was started in l883, and the work continued with many delays over a period of years until 1900, when the original jetties were completed. The stone was brought to the mouth of the river in barges, most of it from Rockport although some stone came from the quarry opposite Carr's Island in the Merrimack. In 1914 the north jetty was extended, and in 1932 both jetties required work to overcome settling. Additional repairs were made in the 1960's. The effectiveness of the jetties has been a subject of controversy over the years, but they remain a familiar landmark on the island and attract many fishing enthusiasts.

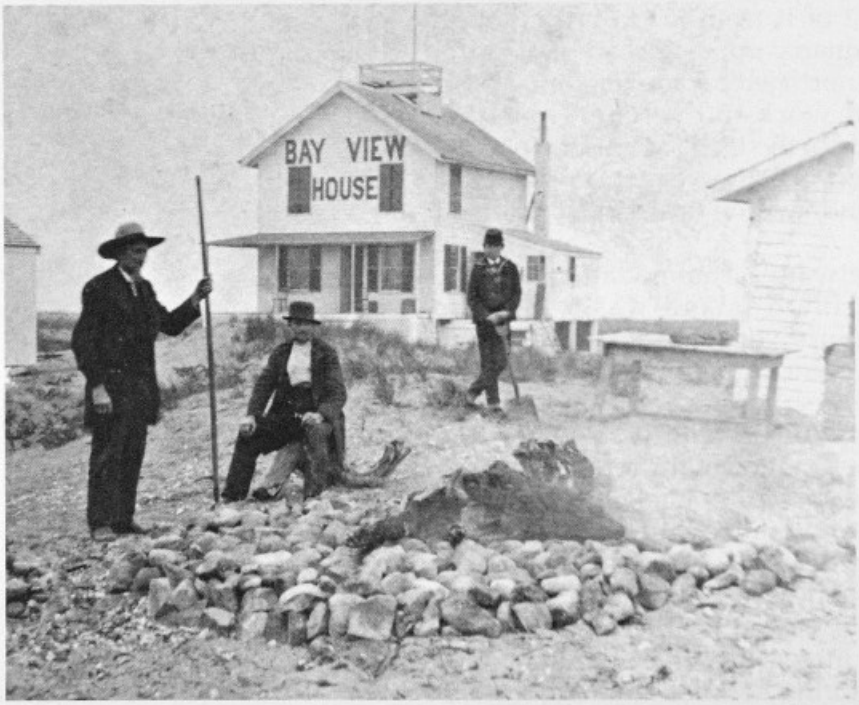
Although for years there were accommodations for the public only at the hotel, Plum Island was a favorite destination for people from upriver who came by wagon, private boat or steamer to picnic or camp, often bringing their own tents with them. Mrs. E. Vale Smith in her book *History of Newburyport* describes a familiar scene at the island: ". . . the sandy beach dotted with tents, the cloth spread on the clean yellow sand, surrounded with groups of young men and maidens, old men and children, the complacent pastor, the grave deacon, all enjoying together a day of unrestrained mirth and healthful recreation. . . ."

Steamboats, which first appeared on the Merrimack in 1828, made it possible for increasingly large numbers of people to enjoy the river and the beaches at its mouth. By



The sternwheeler City of Haverhill, *filled with passengers for a day's outing (Courtesy, Historical Society of Old Newbury)*

A pit has been dug in front of Bay View House in preparation for one of its clambakes. These were well attended by steamer passengers. (Courtesy, Christopher Snow)



the summer of 1876 there were as many as ten steamers running the river, carrying passengers from as far away as Lawrence and Haverhill. Some of these operated on a regular schedule, stopping along the way to pick up passengers bound for Newburyport, Black Rocks or Plum Island. There was also a ferry service that carried passengers between Plum Island Point and Salisbury Beach.

Fred Parsons, a local historian, described Plum Island as he remembered it in the middle 1870's: ". . . In our early sojournings there, the number of cottages on the Point could be counted on the fingers of one hand. There stood the government house and lighthouse just where it stands today. To the south of the lighthouse and near the Basin was another building of fair size and bearing the imposing title of Bay View House. . . . Three little cottages stood side by side between the river opening and the government lighthouse. . . . Farther out toward the ocean front stood what was called the 'Bug Light.' And so, to the best of my recollection, that was the extent of the colony on Plum Island with the exception of the Halfway House down the island. . . ."

SALISBURY BEACH

— AND —

Plum Island Hotel!

— VIA —

PEOPLE'S LINE

— OF —

Steamers and Railroads.

STEAMER E. P. SHAW, Capt. J. Frank Tilton, will leave Central wharf, Newburyport, for Plum Island and Salisbury Beach, at 9:30, 10:30, 11:30 a. m., 1:30, 2:30, 3:30, 5, 6:40, 7:30, 8:20 p. m.

Leave Plum Island and Black Rocks at 9:50, 10:50, 11:50 a. m., 1:50, 2:50, 3:50, 5:20, 7, 7:50, *10 p. m.

SUNDAY TIME.

Leave Central wharf at 9, 10, 11 a. m., 12 m., 1, 2, 3, 4, †4:50, 6, 7 p. m.

Leave Black Rocks and Plum Island at 9:20, 10:20, 11:20 a. m., 12:20, 1:20, 2:20, 3:20, 4:20, †5:15, 6:20, 7:20 p. m.

*From Black Rocks only.
†For Black Rocks only.

Seining for menhaden at Plum Island Point (Courtesy, Custom House Maritime Museum — Cheney Collection)

The Simpson Cottage, near the Center, is a familiar landmark. (Courtesy, Historical Society of Old Newbury)

The building of private cottages began in the fall of 1880 when Michael Hodge Simpson, a Newburyport native and Boston merchant, built a large summer home. This imposing cottage, located on a high dune just south of the Center, still commands attention.

For many years the Pettingells had done little with their land beyond the selling of sand at the Point to Boston construction companies that sent old schooners, called droghers, to load and transport the sand to Boston. In the 1880's the Pettingells began to offer lots for lease, and within a decade scores of camps and cottages were built, many of them substantial. The Pettingell leases contained one restriction, however: no alcoholic beverages could be sold.

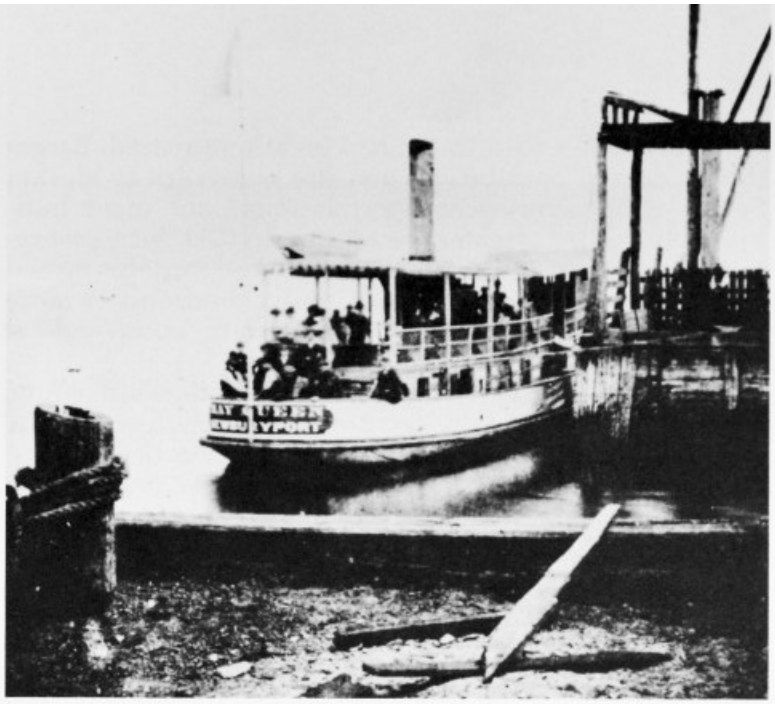
Although Plum Island never pretended to be a fashionable resort, many prominent business and professional people had summer cottages there. They entertained friends from home and abroad, and one of these guests, a former Japanese ambassador who was a visitor at a cottage near the Basin, is said to have given it the name Rinkoo-Tei, meaning "The Place Between the Waters."

By the 1880's road traffic had greatly increased. Barges (horse-drawn omnibuses) met the horsecars at Market Square to transport people to the island, and many individuals went by private conveyance. In 1883 the *Newburyport Herald* reported that "over two hundred carriages passed over the Plum Island turnpike, and a thousand or more gathered on the sands" for a West Newbury outing held at the island.

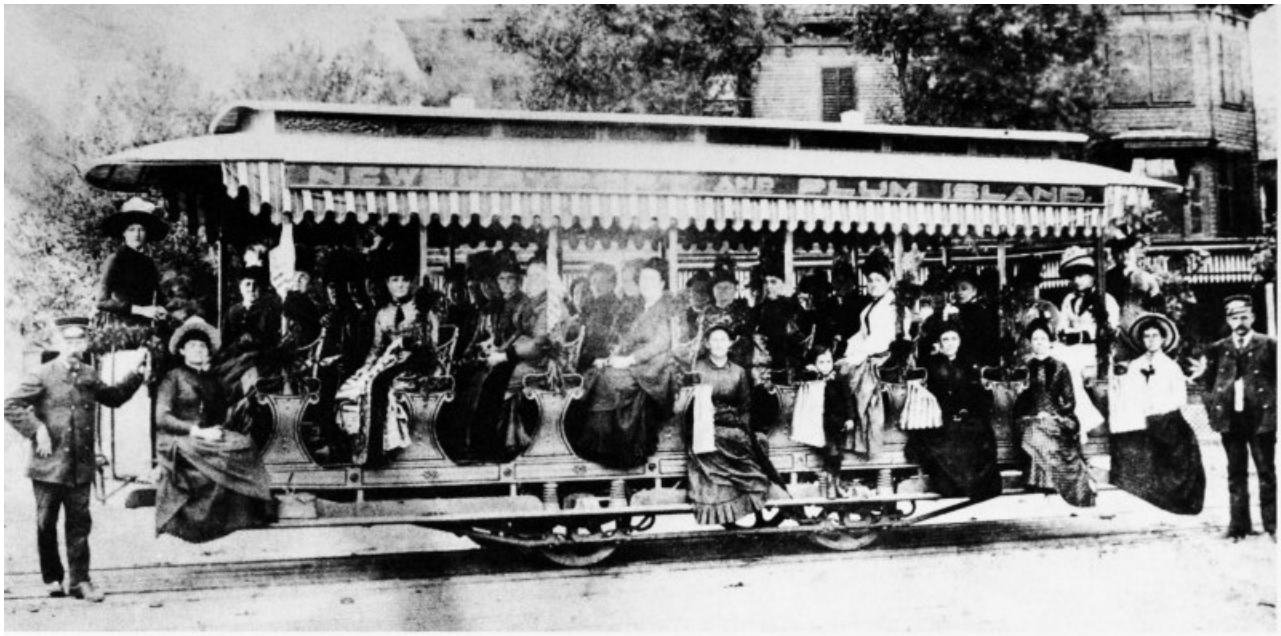
The hotel, which was not part of the Pettingell holding, continued to be the focal point of the northern end of the island and over the years underwent a number of additions. During its one hundred and seven years of existence the hotel had many managers, one of the earliest being Captain Nicholas Brown, a highly respected mariner whose presence attracted many of his seafaring colleagues. During his tenure the hotel staff was always prepared to offer shelter and assistance to shipwrecked sailors. Another notable manager was William Thompson, father of the local photographer W.C. Thompson. During his management the hotel was a mecca for sportsmen and became renowned for its game dinners, so much so that a piazza and a two-story ell were added, the ground floor containing a new dining room. People often came from great distances by horse and carriage to dine there. Mr. Thompson also initiated a coach service to pick up passengers at the Newburyport railroad station at 9:00 A.M. and 2:00 P.M. daily during the summer months.

Enjoying the beach and dunes around the turn of the century. The many footprints in the sand show that the beach was well frequented. Note the height of the dunes. (Courtesy, Christopher Snow)

(Right) Passengers board the steamer May Queen *at a wharf in Newburyport. (Courtesy, Historical Society of Old Newbury)*



(Below) The steam dummy engine Jetty *hauled horsecars from the steamer landing at Plum Island Point to the hotel at the Center in the 1890's. (Courtesy, Historical Society of Old Newbury)*



Ladies on an outing to Plum Island fill this horsecar to capacity. The hotel is in the background. (Courtesy, O.R. Cummings, New England Electric Railway Historical Society)

PLUM ISLAND
Street Railway.

ON and after MONDAY, June 26, 1887, cars leave Market square, Newburyport, at 5:45, 7:30, 9, 10, 11 a. m., 12 m., 1, 2, 2:30, 3, 3:30, 4, 4:30, 5, 5:30, 6, 7, 8, 9 p. m., for Plum Island.

Leave Plum Island at 6:15, 8, 9:30, 10:30, 11:30 a. m., 12:30, 1:30, 2:30, 3, 3:30, 4, 4:30, 5, 5:30, 6, 6:30, 7:30, 8, 8:30, 10 p. m.

Extra trips when required.

Waiting room at Commercial wharf.

je20tf W. B. FERGUSON, Supt.

The horsecar line was a great success. In a letter to the editor of the *Newburyport Daily News* a reader stated: "I have seen as many as twelve or fourteen open horsecars, with seats running crossways, and running boards on either side the entire length jammed to the limit, leave Market Square for Plum Island hotel."

The horsecar line ran until 1895 when it was sold and then replaced by an electric railway in 1897. The electric cars served for two decades as the primary means of conveyance to Plum Island and still evoke fond memories for old-timers. For a while, travel by trolley and by steamboat overlapped, but shortly after the turn of the century, the steamboats were no longer able to compete financially, and they soon disappeared from the river. The trolleys survived until 1922 when the tracks were taken up and rail service was replaced by buses and private automobiles.

The hotel itself had been enlarged into a much more impressive structure in 1885 under the management of Mr. D. H. Fowle. The addition of another story and tower increased its capacity to forty-eight rooms, and the *Newburyport Herald* assured readers that it was now "a la mode." With the arrival of the trolley, the hotel prospered and was the scene of many business and civic functions. For entertainment there was bowling in a building opposite the

In 1886 the Plum Island turnpike, bridge and hotel were sold to E.P. Shaw, a local businessman and entrepreneur. Mr. Shaw immediately built a horsecar railway line from the hotel to the Point in order to connect with the steamers of the People's Line, also under his ownership. The following spring, tracks were laid the length of Plum Island turnpike linking Plum Island to Newburyport and beyond.

The new horsecar railway line made its first trip on May 9, 1887, carrying fifty invited guests as passengers. The sidewalks of the south end of Newburyport were lined with people cheering with excitement as the four open horsecars went by. The coming of the trolley line marked a new era for Plum Island, making it accessible to anyone who wished to spend a day at the beach. The trip from Market Square to the Center took twenty minutes and cost five cents. Many families now spent vacations and even whole summers at the island, since the regularly scheduled and frequent trips made it possible to commute to work.

Plum Island Center around 1900. The original Pavilion is at the left. Across the tracks is the theatre. All the buildings in the foreground were destroyed in the fire of 1913. (Thomson & Thomson photo, Courtesy of the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities)

Plum Island
HOTEL

SOUP
Plum Island Clam Chowder
Fish Chowder

BOILED
Chicken, Egg Sauce
Leg of Mutton, Caper Sauce

FISH
Boiled Halibut, Egg Sauce

ROAST
Mallard Duck, Giblet Gravy
Beef, Dish Gravy
Turkey, Cranberry Sauce

ENTREES
Ipswich Fried Clams

COLD DISHES
Boiled Ham - Beef Tongue

VEGETABLES
Boiled Potatoes - Fried Chips
Mashed Potatoes - Corn
Squash - Stewed Tomatoes
Marrow Fat - Green Peas

PASTRY & PUDDING
Mince Pie - Apple Pie
Washington Pie - Sponge Cake
Frosted Cake - Harrison Cake
Cold Plum Pudding, Wine Sauce

DESSERTS
Oranges - Apples - Raisins
Soft Shell Almonds
Pecan Nuts - English Walnuts

DRINKS
Milwaukee Lager Beer
Guiness's Dublin Stout
Coffee - Tea - Cigars

A view of the newly enlarged hotel after its renovation in 1885, its facade adorned with the trimmings and furbelows of the Victorian era. A celebration dinner was held at the opening, and the invited guests selected from the menu shown at left. (Courtesy, Historical Society of Old Newbury)

A view of the original Pavilion. "It was possible to watch an outdoor performance and see the ocean at the same time," wrote a reader to the Newburyport Herald. *The Saturday night dances with live orchestra held in this Pavilion were very popular. (Courtesy, Historical Society of Old Newbury)*

Plum Island Pavilion.

ALL THIS WEEK

JOS. J. FLYNN PRESENTS

Mr. Fred Wyckoff & Co., in the funny farce comedy

Johnny on the Spot

Everybody should see this great show.

Bring the children.
Every afternoon and evening.

hotel. There were also band concerts followed by dancing, and the latter became such an attraction that a pavilion was built nearby on the ocean front. Among the orchestras that played at the Pavilion in 1905-6 was Bill Hardy's, whose song "Won't You Be My Little Sister, Louisa?"was a great hit. Also at the Center, and independent of the hotel, there were a theatre, a small restaurant and a grocery store.

Although the hotel at the Center was by far the largest hostelry on Plum Island, there were two other small hotels at the Point. Bay View House, one of the first buildings on the island, was renowned for its clambakes, relished by upriver excursionists who arrived at the nearby steamer dock. The proprietor, George Torrey, also ran the ferry from Plum Island to Salisbury. Another hotel that was famed for its shore dinners in the early 1900's was the Oliver House on the present Northern Boulevard. Oliver House was originally built at Black Rocks and moved across the river by barge during the late 1890's.

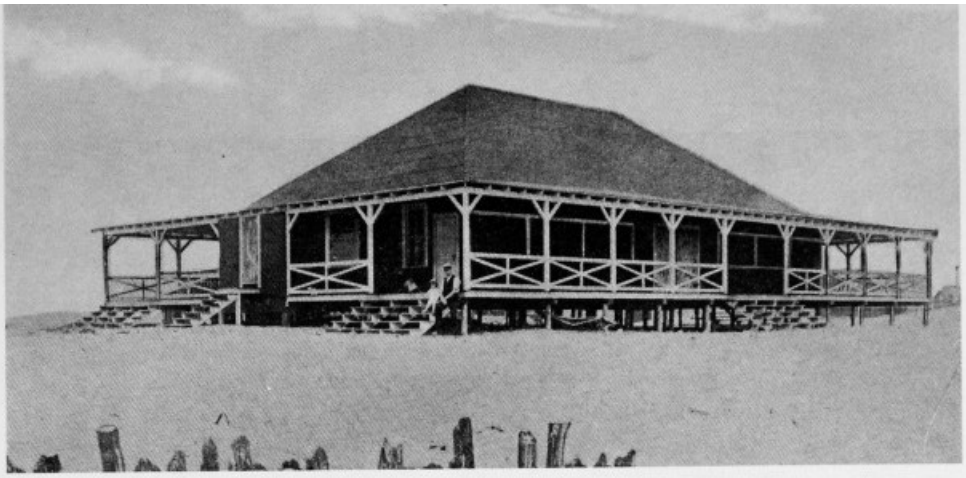
A view of the Oliver House, in left foreground, at Plum Island Point. This house, owned by the Boyjian family, was purchased in the 1920's at auction from the Plum Island Beach Company. (Courtesy, Historical Society of Old Newbury)

Before the completion of Northern Boulevard, cottage owners relied on the steamer, and later on the trolley freight car shown below, to deliver heavy goods such as ice, coal, furniture and building materials. Merchandise was ordered by telephone or by messenger. (Courtesy, Historical Society of Old Newbury)

In 1913 the Center suffered the first of two devastating fires that occurred in consecutive years. On the afternoon of July 9, a fire started beneath the platform of the refreshment booth run by Charles Noyes. Fanned by a strong southwest wind, the flames soon engulfed the Noyes buildings and the grocery store beside them. Despite the efforts of Captain Maddock of the Life Saving Station and the help of many volunteers, the blaze swept across the trolley tracks, igniting and levelling the Pavilion and a double cottage on an adjoining lot. The musicians at the Pavilion were able to rescue all their instruments except the piano, but little else could be saved. That same evening, at about ten o'clock, a fire destroyed half the length of the wooden bridge, stopping all land traffic and forcing the temporarily marooned island residents to come and go by boat. Both fires were attributed to the careless disposal of cigarettes or matches.

Less than a year later, on the morning of May 21, 1914, disaster struck the recently renovated hotel. Thomas Barney, who had just bought the property, and his staff were in residence preparing for the season's opening. When the chef, Frank Dyer, entered the kitchen to start breakfast, he was not alarmed by a faint smell of smoke because he knew that

The hotel as it appeared at the time of the fire. The building had been refurbished around the turn of the century, and it had shed some of its Victorian decor. The ground floor under the tower housed the dining room. The wooden platform led to the car tracks. (Thomson & Thomson photo, Courtesy, SPNEA)

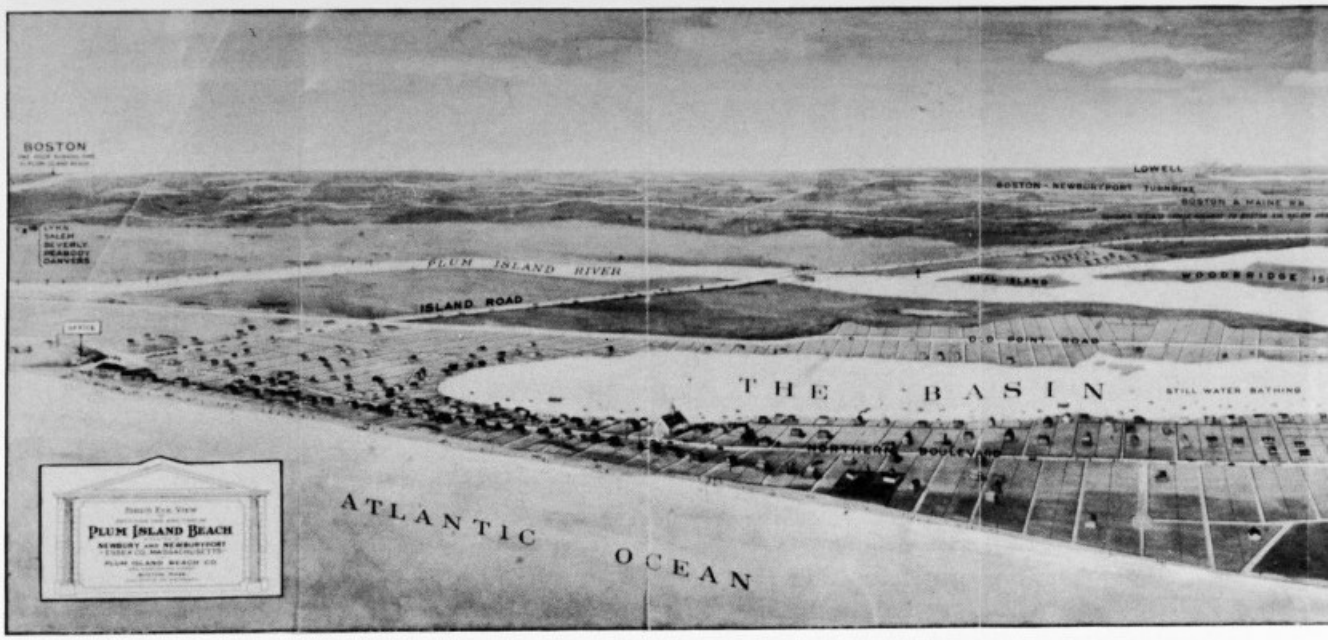


The second dance hall was surrounded by a piazza ten feet wide. It had a stage for the orchestra, and the accoustics were said to be outstanding. Dances were held every Wednesday and Saturday night during the summer season. It was one of the island's most popular attractions for more than thirty years. (Courtesy, Charles Davis)

a fire in the kitchen range had been allowed to die out overnight. When he returned from outside with a fresh supply of wood, crackling sounds from the storeroom above and thick smoke seeping into the kitchen made him realize that a fire was spreading rapidly. He raced from room to room to waken the occupants, all of whom escaped safely.

Barney telephoned for help from Newburyport and a chief's call was issued, but streams of water from the fire equipment had little effect on the flames, and the firemen and the people aiding them were helpless in the face of the strong wind that was blowing. In less than two hours, the hotel, a large barn, a carriage house and an ice house — not yet filled — were in ashes, destroyed because of a defective flue in the kitchen chimney. Only two chimneys and some hen houses were left standing. Immediately following the fire, Barney expressed his hopes of rebuilding, but they never materialized and the hotel became history.

Although the hotel was not replaced, a new dance hall was built in 1915 by Paul Currier, and for many years it attracted hundreds of young people who wanted an evening of dancing. An old-timer who frequented it recalled that "a thousand paid admissions on a Saturday night was not unusual." The charge for a couple was ten cents per dance "under the crystal ball," and there were also performances by professional dancers. One of the orchestras to play at the dance hall was that of Roy Smith, a long-time resident of the island and builder of the Beachcomber at the Center. On May 18, 1933, this dance hall, by then the property of Michael Twomey and John (Jack) Kelleher, was also destroyed by fire. Mr. Kelleher, who later became mayor of Newburyport, replaced it with a new ballroom called Jack-O-Land, offering roller skating during the week and an orchestra for dancing on the weekends.

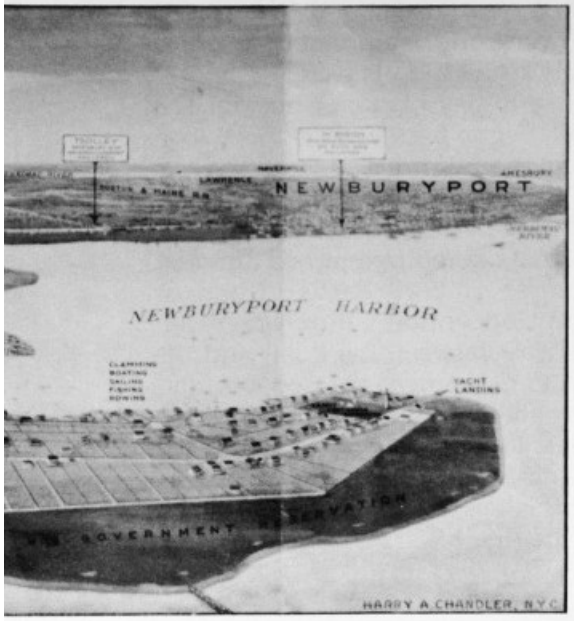


The above map, taken from a Plum Island Beach Company brochure, shows both the lot divisions and the buildings that existed in the mid-1920's. (Courtesy, Newbury Historical Commission)

In 1920 the heirs of Moses Pettingell agreed to sell their Plum Island land to J. Sumner Draper of Milton, Massachusetts. The property, except for fifty acres deeded to the U.S. Government at the northerly end, was later that same year sold to the Plum Island Beach Company for the purpose of development. At the time of the sale, this part of the island contained approximately three hundred and fifteen houses for which the owners were paying a modest land rent. Writing in the *Newburyport Daily News*, Roy Smith said, "If you lived on the Old Point Road side of the Basin, you paid $5 a year. On the west side of the plank-walk or car track, you paid $10 and on the ocean side of the car track, you paid $13 a year."

The new company proceeded to survey the land, laying out lots and streets. A valuation was placed on each lot, and owners of cottages were given the opportunity to purchase the land or to sell their cottages to the corporation.

Not everyone was enthusiastic about the new development. The lots were small, and many of the cottage owners who had previously taken for granted their open space and ocean views now found themselves surrounded by new cottages.



(Right) The proposition made to the cottage owners by the Plum Island Beach Company as it appeared in the local paper

COTTAGE OWNERS
OF
PLUM ISLAND

We wish to announce that the weather conditions now having become settled, and the snow gone from the Island, our surveyors have begun to make definite plans, showing the location of each cottage together with the amount of land belonging to each lot. Just so soon as this work has been finished, we will be ready to make definite arrangements with the cottage owners and give them proper guaranteed deed for such lot as they may purchase.

We are also beginning at once to build the new macadamized road, starting from the old hotel to just beyond the light house. From time to time we will make such other improvements (entirely at our own expense) as may be deemed necessary.

Our proposition to the present cottage holders will be as follows: We will put our valuation on each lot. Such cottage holders as are not satisfied with the price, may so state; we will then choose a referee, they may choose one, and those two will then pick a third. Whatever price those three men agree upon as fair, we will accept in full payment. Further, if the cottage owner is not then satisfied with that price, we will agree to purchase his cottage at a fair appraised value. In this way there can be no possible chance of any present cottage owner losing any advantage or money through our having purchased the Island.

Further, we will accept as first payment fifty (50) dollars, taking a mortgage for the balance payable fifty (50) dollars a year, until entirely paid for.

Our one first object is to maintain the friendliest possible relations with every cottage owner, and have each and every one of them feel perfectly satisfied that under our management and ownership the Island will be a much finer place to live upon than it ever has been.

PLUM ISLAND BEACH COMPANY,
MARK TEMPLE DOWLING, President.

The Plum Island Beach Company issued illustrated brochures to promote the resort and maintained an office near the Center for prospective buyers. Lots were offered for as little as $350, with an "easy-to-pay plan" for buyers. The construction of a paved road, begun by the developers soon after purchase, opened up the island to access by car, thereby attracting people beyond the local area, and the island underwent another period of tremendous growth.

The company is said to have offered free lots to different religious groups. In August of 1920 Father Ryan of Newburyport's Immaculate Conception Church revealed plans to build a church midway between the Point and the Center. For this purpose the Parish purchased two lots, and two others were donated by the corporation, thus creating the site of St. James' Chapel. Two years passed before the church was completed, and in the interim, Mass was celebrated at the Pavilion. St. James' Chapel was completed in the summer of 1922, and the first Mass was offered on the 26th of June of that year.

A view of the ocean beach in 1920 as seen from the sandbar that ran parallel to the shore at low tide. Note the many sizeable cottages built along the beach front. (Courtesy, Historical Society of Old Newbury)

An early view of St. James' Chapel. The exterior of the wooden structure had a stucco finish when it was first built. (Courtesy, Betsy Woodman)

Construction of the macadamized road now called Northern Boulevard began in June of 1920, the roadbed paralleling the rail line. The foundation stone was delivered by lighter from the granite quarries of Rockport to a landing pier that was built at the Point. The pier was equipped with rails from the car line to aid the unloading of the stone. The foundation rock was topped by crushed stone, also brought by boat, and tarred. During the first summer, only one lane was completed in order that the rail line could continue to provide transportation to cottage owners. Within two years, however, the rails had been removed and service discontinued. For those without a car, Boutin's Bus Line provided service from Newburyport.

In the 1920's and 30's the area between the Point and the Center grew into a thriving summer community with rental cottages available to those who did not own their own place. Charles Barker's cottages, which were identical in plan, were particularly well known. Most of them were located on the Basin side, and each included a dory in the rental price. The island had its own newspaper, and for a while it had a two-team baseball league to provide entertainment on Sunday

Northern Boulevard under construction at the bend of the road at the Center. The building in the background is the dance hall. The car tracks are out of sight between the dance hall and the structure opposite it. After completion of the road, the tracks were removed and the road was widened. (Courtesy, Historical Society of Old Newbury)

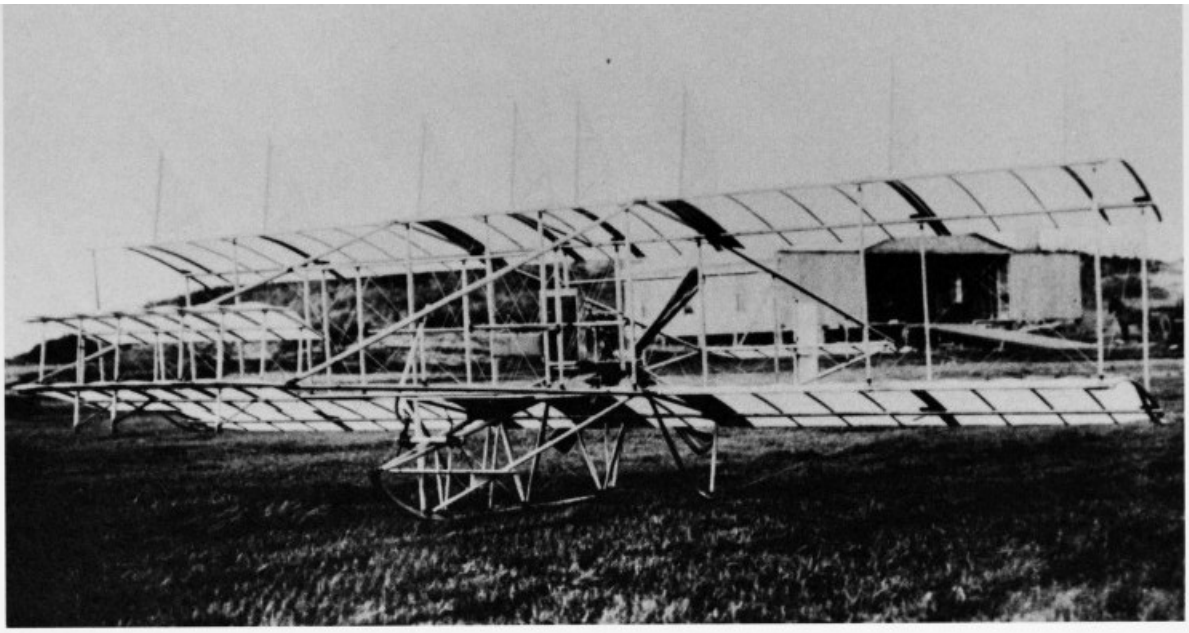
When the Pavilion shown on the opposite page was destroyed by fire, it was replaced by a new dance hall called Jack-O-Land. (Courtesy, Christopher Snow)

afternoons. The teams, called the Sandfleas and the Bush-whackers, played their games on the beach above the dance hall while their fans perched on the then-high dunes. The season's end was marked by a carnival at Labor Day "when the Center would be lighted by Japanese lanterns," stated a columnist in the *Newburyport Daily News*.

In the mid-1930's Dr. Arthur Hewett built the Plum Island Casino directly opposite the newly rebuilt dance hall. The casino contained a bowling alley, flying horses, an ice-cream stand, and a penny arcade. However, there was never any serious attempt to turn Plum Island into an amusement center, and it continued to be a family-oriented summer resort. The dance hall, Jack-O-Land, and the casino eventually suffered similar fates to those of the previous buildings on the same sites and were destroyed by fire.

At the Point, boat rentals, bait and party-boat fishing were available. Malcolm Hudson got his start in the party-boat business as a young man when he rowed fishermen outside in a dory for a day's sport at the cost of a dollar. In 1935 Al Kezer, also a party-boat owner, was the first to land a harpooned tuna at Plum Island, soon followed by others. Sports fishing for tuna by harpoon or rod and reel in the waters off Plum Island quickly became an important yearly event in which many local fishermen participated.

Al Kezer with the 595-pound tuna he harpooned in 1938. At that time it was the largest tuna that had ever been landed at Plum Island. (Courtesy, Barbara Kezer)



The Herring–Burgess biplane on the marsh near High Sandy. The hangar can be seen in the background. (Courtesy, Bartlett Gould)

Growth south of the Center was slower, but the marshes west of the dune called High Sandy played a fleeting yet important role in the development of the airplane. In 1910 a young yacht designer from Marblehead, W. Starling Burgess, who had become interested in aviation, decided to use Plum Island as the testing ground for his aircraft designs. A hangar that provided living quarters for Mr. Burgess and his wife was erected nearby, and the Herring–Burgess aircraft was brought by boat from Marblehead.

The first of several flights occurred on April 17, 1910, when the Herring–Burgess plane took to the air. This was the second flight to occur in New England, the first having taken place on the ice of Chebacco Pond. A second biplane designed by A. H. Pfitzner was flown on June 15, 1910, and travelled for a distance of seven miles before it crash-landed on the marsh. Mr. Pfitzner died soon after, an apparent suicide, and later that year, the Plum Island site was abandoned.

Lightkeepers and Lifesavers

The entrance to the Merrimack River with its bar and shifting channels has always been treacherous to mariners, and some of the earliest activity at the river mouth centered on providing navigational aids to those wishing to enter the harbor. At first the devices were crude, including wood fires on the beach and torches fastened to poles. But by the end of the eighteenth century the increased amount of shipping in the harbor required something more effective.

The building of two small wooden lighthouses on the island was authorized by the General Court in 1787, the cost being underwritten by Newburyport merchants to avoid delay. In 1790 these lighthouses and the land on which they rested were ceded to the Federal Government, and Abner Lowell became lightkeeper. Three generations of Lowells were to serve as lightkeepers; one of them, Lewis Lowell, died at his post, asphyxiated by the charcoal fire he had lighted to keep the whale oil from congealing.

The octagonal lighthouse that preceded today's round tower (Courtesy, Historical Society of Old Newbury)

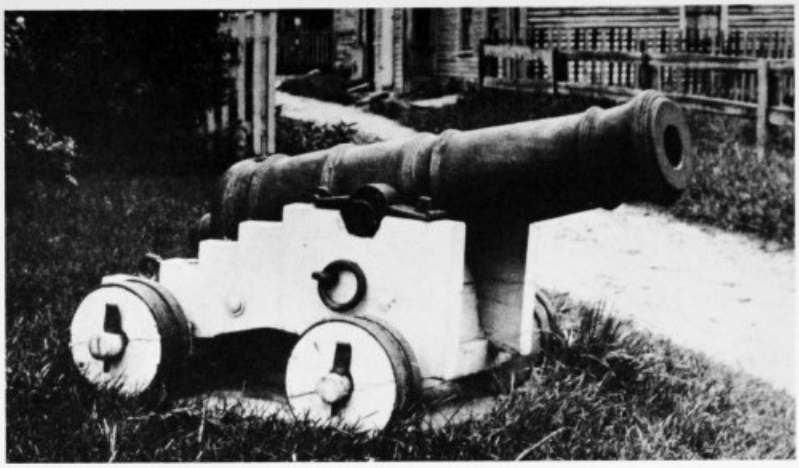
(Right) The range light, or Bug Light, was aligned with the lighthouse to guide ships into the harbor. (Courtesy, Historical Society of Old Newbury)

(Below) A new lighthouse was built in 1898. A catwalk connects the old light with the new structure at right. When the new lighthouse was operational, the earlier one was torn down. (Courtesy, Arthur and Barbara Woods)

A view of the new lighthouse shortly after its completion. The keeper's house is at right beside the light. (Courtesy, Historical Society of Old Newbury)

In the days before the advent of kerosene, the lamps were fueled primarily by sperm oil, but as whaling decreased, other oils were experimented with, including lard, rapeseed, coal and porpoise oils. These fuels generated a tremendous amount of soot, and the lightkeeper was constantly cleaning and polishing the glass and reflective surfaces and trimming the wicks to ensure an evenly burning flame. Kerosene, a fuel that gave a cleaner and steadier flame and one that did not congeal in cold weather, was introduced in 1878 while Henry Hunt was keeper. Kerosene remained the fuel of choice until 1927, when the light was electrified during the tenure of George Kezer.

While Plum Island Light is today only a few minutes away by car from the center of town, at the time the first lighthouses were built, they were accessible from the mainland only by boat. The life of the lightkeeper and his family was isolated and at times dangerous, requiring great personal commitment. The keeper did far more than tend the lights. He hoisted the signal flags for pilots when their services were needed and handled the distress signals to summon help from the town at times of accidents or disasters. When an emergency occurred at night, or if visibility was poor, he fired an alarm gun to alert the public that help was required. Before the establishment of the Life



The gun used by the light-keeper to summon help from the mainland when poor visibility or darkness made signal flags ineffective (Courtesy, Historical Society of Old Newbury)

Saving Service, the lightkeeper and his family were often the only persons on the scene at the time of an emergency. Frequently the lightkeeper was actively involved in rescue operations, and his home was often used to care for survivors. Even after the establishment of the Life Saving Service, the lighthouse keeper continued to assist in rescues. In 1881, the Merrimack Humane Society provided keeper Henry Hunt with a metal lifeboat and oars for this purpose.

The northern tip of Plum Island has always been unstable, and the sand often shifted dramatically during a violent ocean storm. During one of three severe storms in December l839, the tide rose to such heights around the base of the easterly light that the keeper of the twin lights, Phineas George, was unable to reach it. The early lighthouses were placed on blocks to facilitate moving in case of erosion and to make it easy to keep them properly aligned, since they served as range lights to guide ships through the channel.

Wind was another hazard, and in 1808 a "whirlwind" toppled the twin lighthouses, each heading in a different direction. The two towers were reconstructed in 1838, and in 1856 were equipped with powerful Fresnel lenses. In August of that year, one of the lighthouses was struck by lightning and burned. It was not rebuilt; instead, a range light built the year before and called the "bug light" took its place.

The move from Old Point across the Basin seems to have occurred in 1869 when records show that the lights were moved one third of a mile northeast. With the exception of the present light, the lighthouses were moved several times. Captain Henry Hunt stated that during his service as

lightkeeper from 1870 to 1882, the light was moved two times and the "bug light" four times.

The old octagonal lighthouse was replaced by the present cylindrical tower in 1898. A lightning rod was installed at the top, perhaps in recognition of the disaster that had befallen one of its predecessors. In 1910 during the tenure of Arthur Woods, the care of the range lights at Black Rocks was added to the Plum Island keeper's responsibilities.

In 1939 the Federal Government assigned the management of lighthouses to the U. S. Coast Guard, thus ending a long and proud tradition. Most of the keepers had served for a number of years and played an active role in island affairs. Descendants of two of the more recent keepers, Arthur Woods and George Kezer, continue to live on the island.

George and Elizabeth Kezer and their tame pigeon. They kept the light from 1924 to 1935. (Courtesy, Barbara Kezer)

The coastline between Cape Ann and Hampton River curves inward, making it a dangerous area for any ship under sail caught in a severe northeasterly storm. Many a sailing ship has been swept onto the shores of Salisbury or Plum Island or one of the offshore bars, soon breaking apart in the pounding surf, and her captain and crew washed overboard.

One of these disasters occurred in October of 1805 when the sloop *Blue Bird*, bound from Boston to Newburyport, was wrecked on the beach during a violent storm. The captain and crew were saved, but her cargo of books, hardware, and woolen goods, valued at $100,000, was lost.

In November of 1837 the schooner *Lombard*, often called the "grindstone schooner" because of her cargo, went ashore in dense fog a short distance from the Point. Her captain,

A view of the first and second Life Saving Station buildings. At left is the original station, first located at High Sandy. In the photo Captain Maddock and his crew are about to launch the surfboat. (Courtesy, Historical Society of Old Newbury)

who was lashed to the rigging, was the only one rescued after the storm; her entire crew was lost.

One of the most tragic of the shipwrecks was that of the brig *Pocahontas*, lost on December 24, 1839. *Pocahontas* was a Newburyport ship returning from Cadiz and in sight of home when she foundered a half mile offshore just east of the hotel during a severe storm. The high winds and surf made it impossible for help to reach the thirteen or fourteen seamen on board, and all perished.

In 1871 the Federal Government established the Life Saving Service, and three years later a small station was built on Plum Island near High Sandy, about a mile below the Center, and put under the command of Captain Robert Floyd. This location proved to be too far from the mouth of the river, where many wrecks and strandings occurred, and the station was moved northward in 1881 to be closer to the river mouth. After nine years it was replaced by a much larger building, the old one serving as a boathouse and storage area. (The original structure, now a private cottage, still stands on 45th Street.) The Plum Island Life Saving Station, as it was first called, later had its name changed to the Merrimack River Station. In 1890 another station was built toward the southerly end of the island.

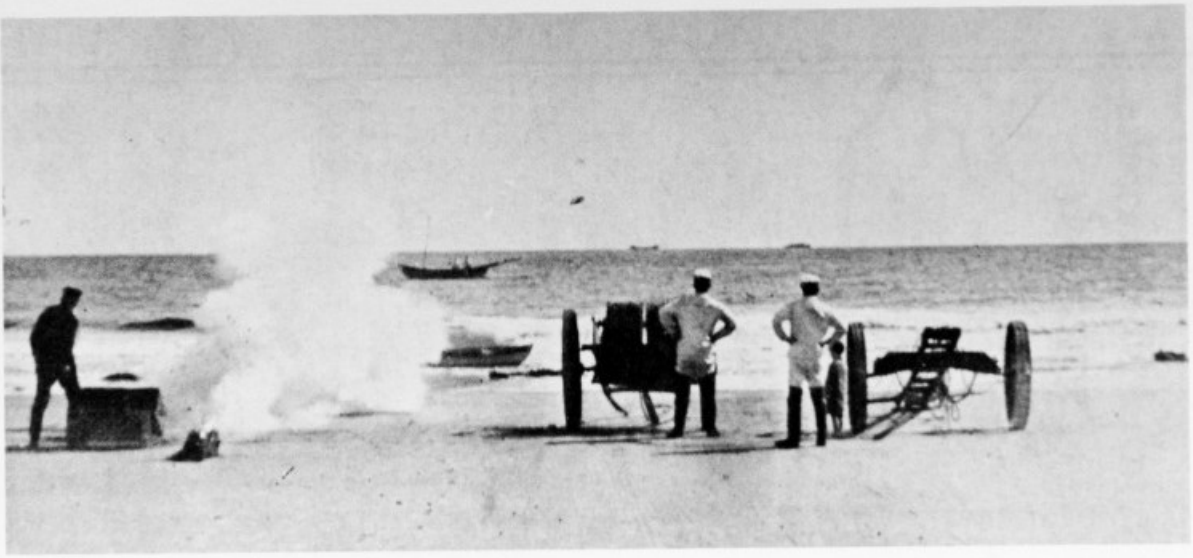
In the early days the stations were staffed only during the winter months, but later they were kept open year round. The man in charge was called captain and was required to be an experienced mariner. One of the most respected of the captains was Captain James Elliott, a ship's master for many years, who took command in 1879. Captain Elliott's tenure was broken by a brief return to sea, but in 1884 he resumed command and was in charge until his death in 1894. The surfmen were also skilled seamen who were well drilled in rescue procedures. Many of the men were from local families, including some from Grape Island.

The second station, commissioned in 1891, was at Knobbs Beach. Frank E. Stevens, who had been the No. 1 surfman at the Merrimack River Station, chose the site of the new station that he was to command and remained in charge there for twenty-one years. Captain Frank participated in the rescue of the crews of over a hundred wrecks and strandings during his thirty-three years with the Life Saving Service. Two of these wrecks, those of the *Brave* and the *Josie*, occurred during the summer months when his crews were off duty and he was forced to round up volunteers to man the equipment.

Captain Frank E. Stevens of the Knobbs Beach Life Saving Station (Courtesy, Custom House Maritime Museum)

The stations were built with a tower from which a crew member kept watch from dawn to dusk. If a ship in distress was sighted offshore and the surf was not too heavy, the men would launch the surfboat, a self-bailing self-righting craft pulled by six surfmen with oars. If the ship was near the shore and the weather too rough for boats, the men would haul their breeches-buoy gear to a point on the beach close to the wreck. Usually there was a horse available to pull the equipment, but if not, the men provided the power. The equipment included a cannonlike gun, called the Lyle gun, which could shoot a projectile up to six hundred yards. The projectile carried a small line by which the sailors were able to haul out a heavier line. Once this line was secured, a pulley arrangement made it possible to send out the breeches buoy, a life-preserver ring with canvas pants into which a sailor could step and be hauled to safety. Most shipwrecks occurred during the worst possible weather conditions, and the rescue operations required not only skill but great courage. Over the years the men were responsible for saving countless lives.

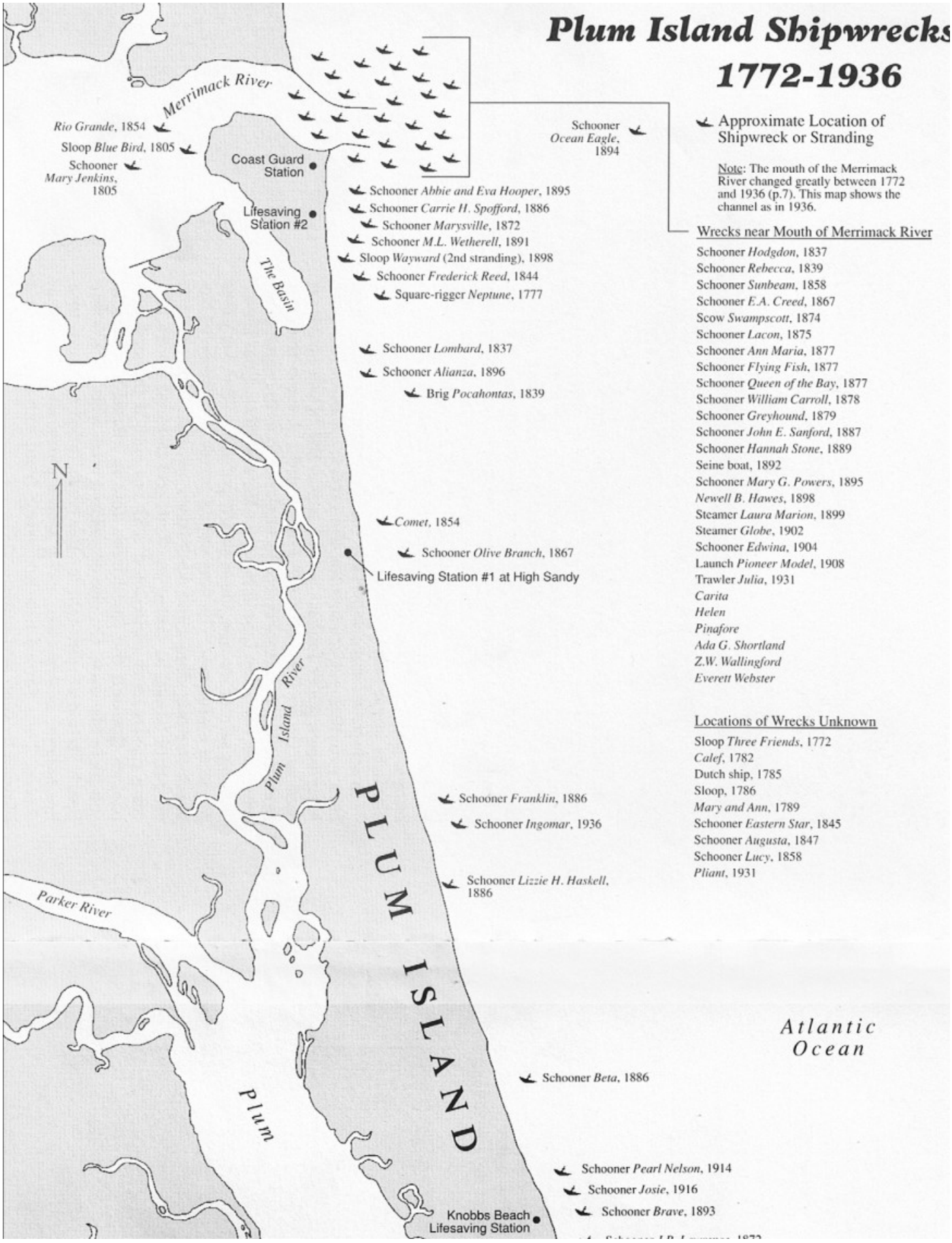
Back from a rescue or drill, the surfmen haul their boat out of the water. The horse at right was used to pull the heavy equipment between the boathouse and the beach. (Courtesy, Peter Atherton)

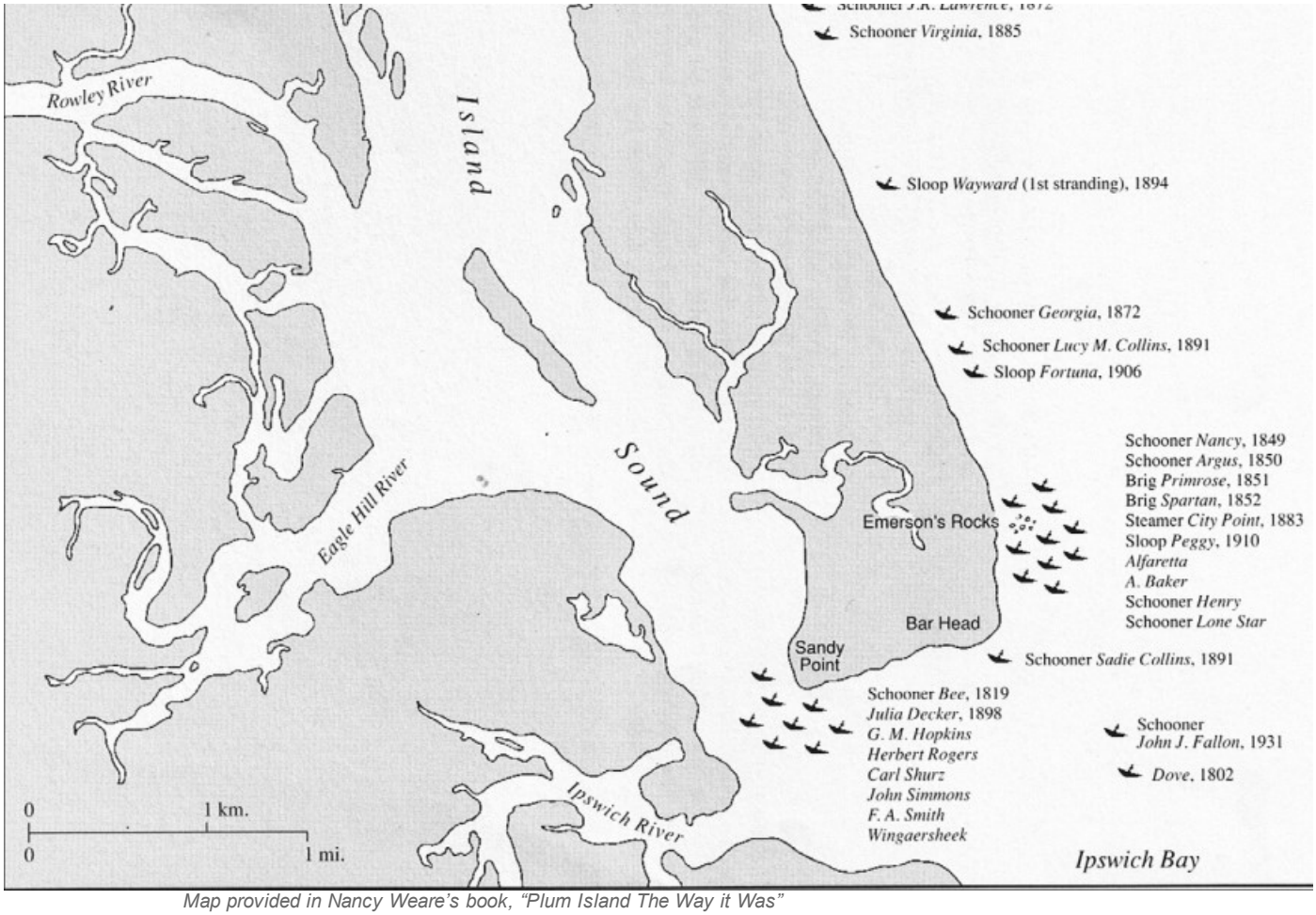


The Lyle gun has just shot a projectile to the ship offshore in order to send out the breeches buoy. Drills were frequent and kept the crew at a high level of efficiency. (Courtesy, Christopher Snow)

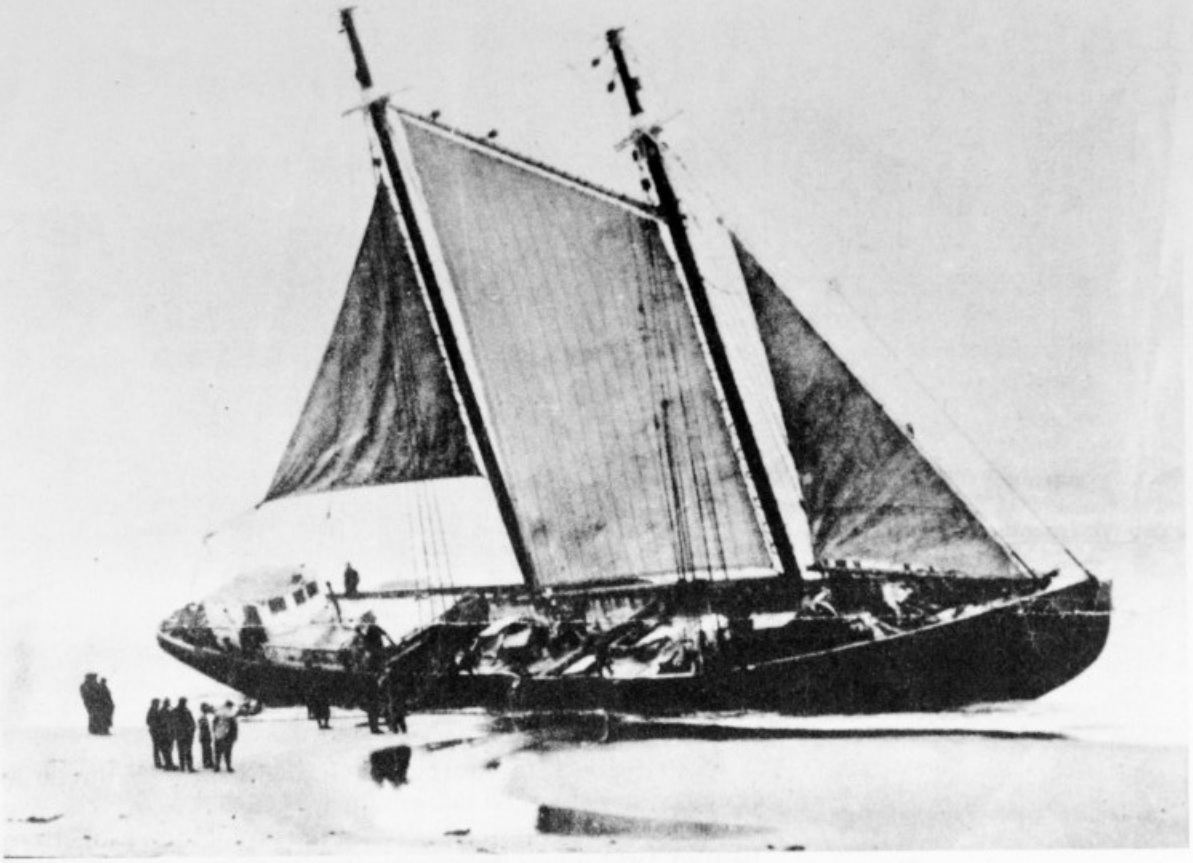
In the beginning, pay was low and the men were obliged to provide their own bedding. They were also separated from their families for days at a time. The Knobbs Beach Station (officially called Plum Island Station) was particularly isolated. No good road led to the southern end of the island, and in winter it was necessary to lay in stores for several weeks at a time. The government required an itemized inventory each year, and these logbooks are very interesting. Along with blizzard-patrol lanterns, breeches buoys, sails and jibs, they list items as disparate as horse blankets, sugar bowls, castor oil and hot-water bottles.

Beach-patrol duty, especially during winter storms, could be a grueling experience for the crews. A man from the Merrimack River Station would patrol the beach south on foot as far as the post near High Sandy. A crew member from the Knobbs Station would walk north to the same post, while another man would head for the key post at Bar Head. During winter storms these beach patrols called for great physical endurance. The surf would break at the base of the beach-fronting dunes and sometimes beyond. The crewman on patrol would be forced to climb and descend dunes that were frozen hard and coated with ice and, if the surf had broken through the foredunes, detour inland in order to complete his route. On one occasion a man who left Knobbs Beach Station at midnight for Bar Head failed to return four hours later, as expected, and a search party was sent out at dawn. They found him suffering from exhaustion and blinded by sand and snow.


Plum Island Shipwrecks
1772-1936
Approximate Location of Shipwreck or Stranding
Note: The mouth of the Merrimack River changed greatly between 1772 and 1936 (p.7). This map shows the channel as in 1936.
Wrecks near Mouth of Merrimack River
Schooner Hodgdon, 1837
Schooner Rebecca, 1839
Schooner Sunbeam, 1858
Schooner E.A. Creed, 1867
Scow Swampscott, 1874
Schooner Lacon, 1875
Schooner Ann Maria, 1877
Schooner Flying Fish, 1877
Schooner Queen of the Bay, 1877
Schooner William Carroll, 1878
Schooner Greyhound, 1879
Schooner John E. Sanford, 1887
Schooner Hannah Stone, 1889
Seine boat, 1892
Schooner Mary G. Powers, 1895
Newell B. Hawes, 1898
Steamer Laura Marion, 1899
Steamer Globe, 1902
Schooner Edwina, 1904
Launch Pioneer Model, 1908
Trawler Julia, 1931
Carita
Helen
Pinafore
Ada G. Shortland
Z.W. Wallingford
Everett Webster
Locations of Wrecks Unknown
Sloop Three Friends, 1772
Calef, 1782
Dutch ship, 1785
Sloop, 1786
Mary and Ann, 1789
Schooner Eastern Star, 1845
Schooner Augusta, 1847
Schooner Lucy, 1858
Pliant, 1931
Merrimack River
Rio Grande, 1854
Sloop Blue Bird, 1805
Schooner Mary Jenkins, 1805
Coast Guard Station
Lifesaving Station #2
The Basin
Schooner Ocean Eagle, 1894
Schooner Abbie and Eva Hooper, 1895
Schooner Carrie H. Spofford, 1886
Schooner Marysville, 1872
Schooner M.L. Wetherell, 1891
Sloop Wayward (2nd stranding), 1898
Schooner Frederick Reed, 1844
Square-rigger Neptune, 1777
Schooner Lombard, 1837
Schooner Alianza, 1896
Brig Pocahontas, 1839
N
Comet, 1854
Schooner Olive Branch, 1867
Lifesaving Station #1 at High Sandy
Plum Island River
PLUM ISLAND
Schooner Franklin, 1886
Schooner Ingomar, 1936
Schooner Lizzie H. Haskell, 1886
Parker River
Atlantic Ocean
Schooner Beta, 1886
Plum
Schooner Pearl Nelson, 1914
Schooner Josie, 1916
Schooner Brave, 1893
Knobbs Beach Lifesaving Station



Map provided in Nancy Weare's book, "Plum Island The Way it Was"



The Ingomar *was the last large sailing ship to end her days on Plum Island shores. She was an Essex-built fishing schooner from Gloucester. In 1936 she was returning home with a full load of fish when she lost her way in thick fog.*

The stories of many of the shipwrecks have been told in Currier's *History of Newburyport* and more recently in a small book, *Incomplete Journeys*, by Will Van Dorp. These books, along with articles in the Newburyport and Ipswich newspapers, give detailed accounts and make fascinating reading.

The captain and crew of the stations were always ready to serve in other emergencies as well. They were usually the first on the scene in any fire, and while they lacked the equipment to stop a major blaze, they were instrumental in saving surrounding cottages that were threatened by flames and sparks. Captain T. J. Maddock and volunteers under his command are credited with preventing further spreading of the fire at Plum Island Center in 1913. Several of the captains had homes on the island. Captain Maddock's home on Northern Boulevard is still remembered by many old-timers because the entrance to the pathway was marked by two enormous whalebones joined together to form an arch.

The Merrimack River Station above, located near the jetties, replaced the one built in 1890. It was itself replaced in 1973 by the present station upriver. (Courtesy, Historical Society of Old Newbury)

In 1915 the Life Saving Service and the U.S Revenue Cutter System merged to form the U.S. Coast Guard. The two stations were highly active during the Prohibition years from 1920 to 1933 when liquor on offshore ships was smuggled into the Ipswich and Merrimack Rivers. High-speed patrol boats went out each night from both stations, and in one tragic incident, a Coast Guardsman lost his life.

With the passing of sailing ships, the need for two stations declined. The Knobbs Station was kept open during World War II but closed soon afterward. A few years later it became the site of a camp established for victims of the polio epidemic, and as Camp Sea Haven it continued to serve as a summer camp for the physically handicapped. The last Merrimack River Station located on Plum Island was vacated when it was threatened by erosion, and a new station was built farther up the river near the center of Newburyport in 1973.

The Marshes

The salt marshes of Plum Island were a tremendous asset to the colonists. The decomposing plant and microscopic animal life that washed into the coastal waters fed both shellfish and finfish, and they in turn nourished large numbers of waterfowl. The settlers were thereby insured an abundant supply of fish and fowl. Even more important, at a time when pastureland had to be created by cutting trees out of the wilderness, the open meadows on both sides of Plum Island River filled with acres of succulent marsh grass provided the colonists with salt hay for their livestock. It was not uncommon for a farmer living many miles inland to own or lease the rights to a piece of island salt marsh, and what hay he did not require for his own use could be sold.

Thatch that grew on the banks near the low-water mark was also harvested, but ownership of the thatch banks was held in common, and the right to harvest was either sold or auctioned off each year. Thatch was used for roofs in the

Haystacks dotted the marshes on both sides of Plum Island River as far as the eye could see. (Courtesy, Newburyport Public Library)

Few farmers owned gundalows, so the scows were engaged many months in advance. (Courtesy, Susan Howard Boice)

seventeenth century, and for many years afterward it was utilized as bedding for both cattle and gardens. Thatch was also banked around the cellars of houses for insulation.

From June to September the salt meadows were the scene of great activity as the crews cut and stacked the hay. The cutting of the marsh was determined by the tides, often beginning about two or three days before the lowest run of tides. Since the marsh flooded during peak or spring tides, which occurred when the moon was new or full, the timing was critical, and the crew labored long hours in order to complete their work in the nine to twelve days before the next high run of tides was due.

There were different varieties of marsh grass. Black grass, which grew at the highest point of the marsh, was usually cut early in the season and hauled home by wagon. The grass growing on the lower marsh was stored on staddles, or circles of posts, and brought home during the winter months when the frozen marsh could safely bear the weight of the loaded sleds that were pulled by teams of oxen or horses.

For inland farmers for whom there was no overland access, the hay was brought home in scows or barges known as gundalows. These were flat-bottomed boats that could rest on the marsh or creek bottom and rise with the tide. The gundalows were propelled by long oars called sweeps and usually carried a mast from which a yard, or square sail, could be hung when the wind was favorable.

There were various landing places for the gundalows, depending on where the farmers lived. In Ipswich the

unloading place for Plum Island hay was Green's Point, not far from the present boatyard, and some of the hay unloaded there went as far inland as Boxford and Topsfield. Farmers from the Rowley area unloaded their hay at Warehouse Landing, while Newbury farmers landed their hay at Pine Creek or at the Settlers' Landing Place on Parker River. Some took the gundalows through Plum Island River into the Merrimack River. The last gundalow known to be used on Plum Island went from Ipswich Bluffs to West Newbury in l899, a distance of fifteen miles.

Cutting the marsh hay was an art and took many years to perfect. A farmer often hired the same crews to work for him year after year, some of whom had started as boys to do the raking and poling. For over two hundred years this work was done by hand as men with scythes worked side by side to cut the hay. A man was judged by his skill with the scythe, which was kept razor sharp by use of a whetstone. The cut hay was left to dry for several days. It was then raked into cocks, or mounds, under which two long poles were slipped to form a litter and was carried to the site of a staddle. The staddles, made of cedar posts sunk into the marsh in a circular formation, provided a platform to keep the stacks above tidal water.

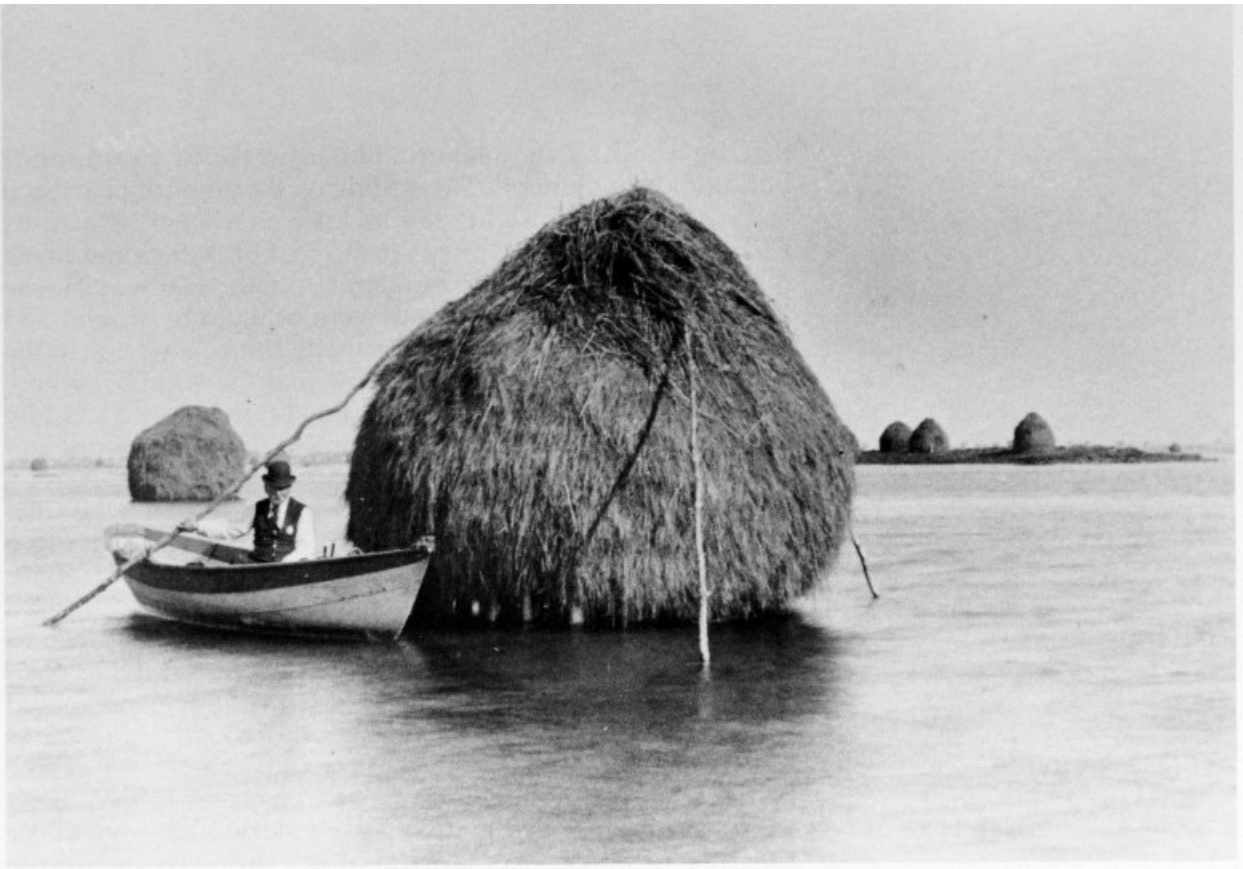
The first cocks of hay had to be positioned carefully around the outer edge of the wooden staddle; the next cocks were tipped upside down in the middle until the stacker was able to stand in the center. He then continued to place the cocks around the growing stack, with the center always a bit higher, until the stack was finally completed.

Men getting a staddle ready for the stacking of hay (Courtesy, Susan Howard Boice)

(Left) Stacks might be eighteen feet high; it took skill to keep them symmetrical.

(Below) The Burt Brown camp at Hale's Cove was built for use during haying season. (Photos courtesy, Daniel Brown)

Using the drag to pick up cocks of hay to be taken to the staddle (Courtesy, Newbury Historical Commission)



Posts were needed under both haystacks and camps located on the marsh to keep them above high water during the flood tides that occurred twice each month. (Courtesy, Historical Society of Old Newbury)

In the late 1800's the invention of the bog shoe made it possible for horses to be brought onto the marsh, and machinery soon took over much of the handwork. Joseph Dodge of Rowley and George Randall of Newbury both invented wooden shoes shaped like dinner plates that could be clamped to a horse's hooves, enabling the animal to pull the mowing machine and horserake without sinking into the spongy marsh. The equipment and techniques used to harvest the marsh grass are described in detail by Betsy Woodman in an excellent article, "Gathering the Salt Hay: A Measure of Men and Marsh," in the 1983 Antique Show magazine published by the Newburyport Maritime Society.

Insects could make life miserable for both workers and animals. Midgets and mosquitoes were ever present on calm days, and during the height of the greenhead season in July, it was necessary to protect the horses by draping them with netting or burlap. This was only partially effective, and both men and animals suffered through the greenhead season.

The marsh lots were usually located some distance from home, and a few farmers built barns or small camps to provide shelter for themselves, their crews and their animals

during the haying season. Those without permanent buildings brought tents. Depending on the amount of acreage to be cut, a crew might stay as long as a week at a time. Richard Knight of Newbury related that his father and uncle regularly cut twenty acres of marsh from the Halfway House to the Knobbs. Food and drink were brought by wagon and often supplemented by chowder made from clams dug in the nearby river and creeks. At places like the Knobbs, where shelter was available, cutting the hay often became a family affair, with the women and children sharing in the work and finding time for pleasure as well.

The hay was left on the staddles until winter when the marsh was frozen. Winter trips to the island were often memorable. Richard Knight recalled, as a boy of eight, going with his father and others to the Knobbs to bring back a load of hay. On the way down they volunteered to transport food supplies from Fogg's Market to the crew at the Knobbs Beach Life Saving Station. A recent snowfall had prevented normal delivery, leaving the men short of food.

The little group left in darkness at 4:00 A.M. in -14 degree cold, traveling down the turnpike and over the bridge. Their two sleds, each pulled by two horses, skirted the edge of the marsh and battled snowdrifts along the way. Inside the sleds the food was packed beside lighted lanterns and covered by two layers of canvas to prevent freezing. At 10:00 A.M. they reached the station, where a grateful crew served them hot drinks.

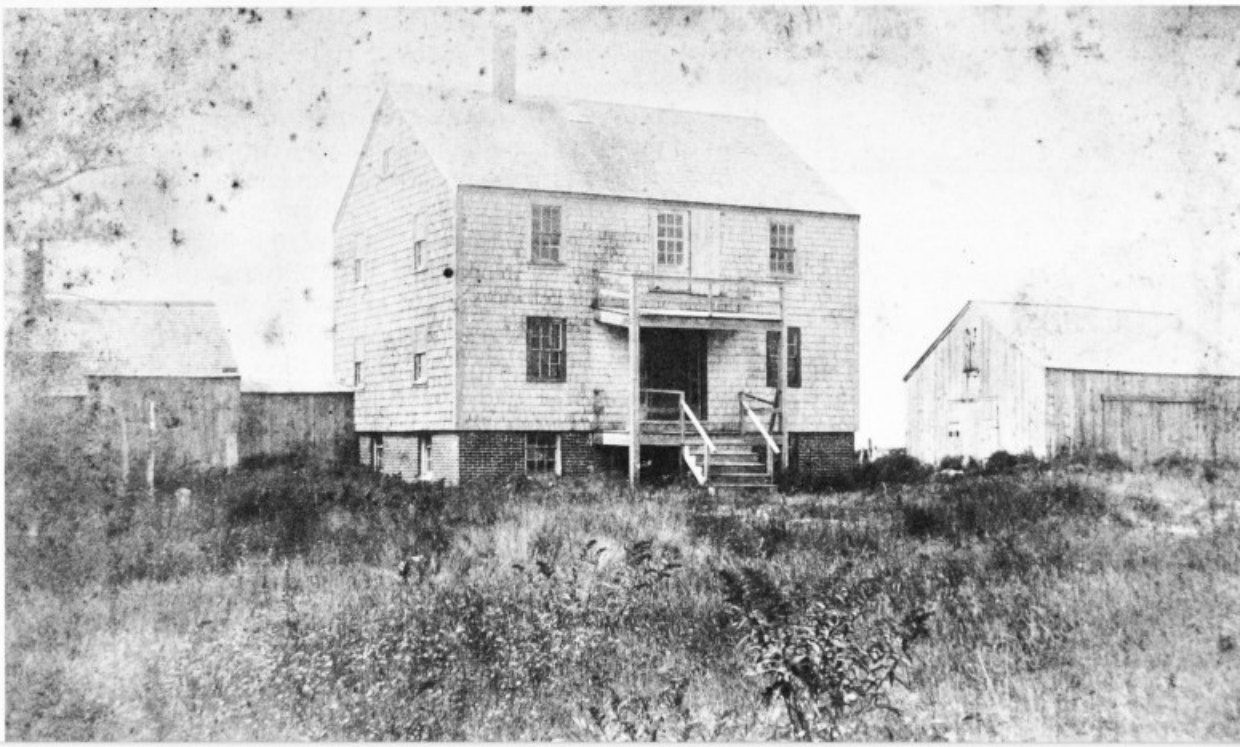
It was a short drive from the Station to the Knobbs, where they proceeded to load the two sleds with hay. On the way back they crossed the frozen Plum Island River just beyond Hale's Cove and returned home via the Pine Island Road. Mr. Knight remembered the trip vividly since his ears were frostbitten!

Cutting the hay was hard work and often unpleasant due to insects, yet pride and camaraderie offset the discomfort. By the mid-1930's, however, the cutting of the salt marshes had nearly ceased. The number of local dairy farms had dwindled, and the demand for salt hay was minimal. Some mechanized harvesting continued into the 1940's and beyond, but the once-familiar haystack had become a thing of memory.

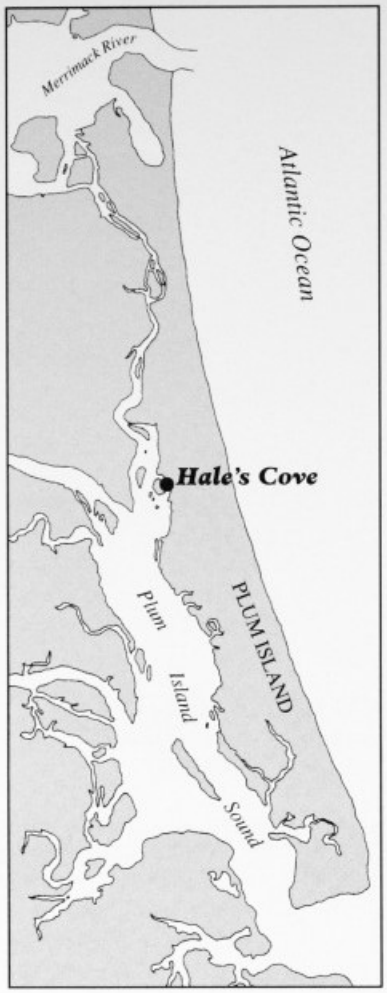
Hale's Cove

Hale's Cove lies opposite the mouth of the Parker River, and its proximity to Old Town made it a natural landing site. There was sufficient upland to support some farming, and a pre-Revolutionary chart places a structure there. A mid-1800's map also shows a building there that belonged to "Mrs. Dr. Proctor," the remarried widow of Daniel Dole. This was undoubtedly the farmhouse called the Halfway House because of its location at the midpoint of the island.

An early proprietress of the farm/boarding house was Marm Small. She was justly proud of her excellent cranberry crop, and she was a familiar figure to gundalow men. In an article about the Merrimack River gundalow, Wallace B. Ordway, a local historian, includes a chantey sung by old-time gundalow men upon sighting the Halfway House as they came through Plum Island River: "Old Marm Small is dead/and the last words she said/were Johnnie take care of my cranberry bed."



The Halfway House and out-buildings early in this century (Courtesy, SPNEA)



The bogs east of the farm were probably the finest on the island. In 1886 Mary Stevens of the Halfway House harvested nearly three hundred bushels of the red berries, all top quality. These bogs, which were cultivated to produce an important cash crop, have not been maintained for years, but some of them still yield superior cranberries.

The Halfway House was equally well known as a boarding house. In summer the surrounding meadows were filled with men cutting and stacking salt hay, and the crews could always find food and drink there at the end of the day. In winter the farmers returned to the marshes with their oxen and sleds to load and haul back the hay, and the Halfway House, because it was close to the point at which farmers crossed the frozen Plum Island River, was a natural stopping place for them.

The last known residents of the Halfway House farm were Leonard Rogers and his family. When Leonard died in 1904, his wife, Jessie, daughter of Reuben and Augusta Jackman of Cross Farm Hill, moved her family to her parents' home, and the house was left vacant. The barn and outbuildings disappeared early in this century, but the abandoned house stood until the 1940's, when it was demolished.

Occupants of the Halfway House were often first on the scene in winter storms that drove ships into the breakers. John Stevens and William Small helped rescue the captain and crew of the schooner *Franklin* in 1886. A line tied to a fender was thrown overboard, which the men on shore retrieved and made fast, enabling the crew to ride it to safety. The vessel was less fortunate. Her cargo, nine hundred casks of lime, interacted with the seawater that poured in over the sides of the stricken ship, and she was consumed by fire.

In April of the same year, John Stevens was walking along the beach following a severe storm and came upon an abandoned ship. He organized a search party, which soon found a group of men, women and children in a hollow of the sand dunes, suffering from exposure, huddled around a small fire. They were from the schooner *Beta,* bound for Boston with a cargo of wood. These were the fortunate ones; others had been swept away and drowned in the night.

Hale's Cove was a favorite destination for many local outings and picnics, and although it was never a resort like Grape Island or Ipswich Bluffs, it had its own landing pier. In addition to the Halfway House, there were several small camps. Most were used as gunning camps; others, like the Browns' camp, just to the south, were used primarily during

the haying season. Hale's Cove was noted for the quality of its well water, and many a jug was filled there.

One camp was occupied by Charles Safford, a market gunner and game warden. Another was owned by a long-time summer resident, Harley Noyes of Newburyport. He was a watchmaker by trade and spent much of his early years riding the rails, stopping off in different parts of the country, working for a time, and then moving on again. He had many stories about his travels and welcomed visitors warmly. But, always conscious of the tides that left the boat landing-place a mud flat at low water, Harley would, after a while, invariably say, "You'd better get your boat out now. She's going out like a bullet!" The William Steele family from Rowley occupied another cottage, and slightly north of the Cove was a sportsmen's camp known as the Bass Club.

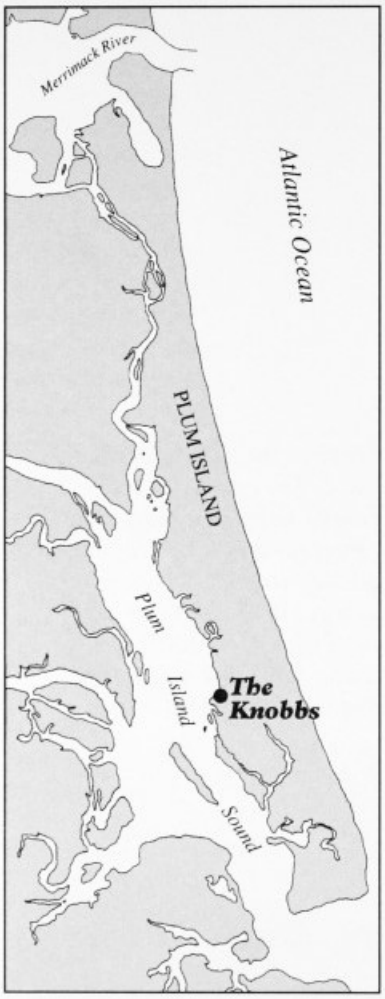
For a few years after the establishment of the Parker River National Wildlife Refuge, the Stanwood family lived at Hale's Cove as on-site caretakers. Later the camps were razed and replaced with the present storage buildings.

Hale's Cove marks the northern end of the dike built by the Refuge to create the North and South Pools, a fresh-water habitat for waterfowl. Before the dike's construction, the area fringing the marsh was a tidal region, and it was not uncommon to see thatch grass and sea wrack at the base of the dunes near the present road to Camp Sea Haven.

South of Hale's Cove is a boggy area bearing the colorful name of Hellcat Swamp. The origin of the name is lost in history, but the area's impenetrability before the road was built through it perhaps invited thoughts of wild creatures. Its many sizeable trees, thickets and pools attract a great variety of migratory birds in both spring and fall.

Three of the camps at Hale's Cove. The one at the left belonged to Harley Noyes. In the foreground is Edith Stanwood, whose husband, Mose, served as a resident caretaker when the Fish and Wildlife Refuge was established. (Courtesy, Francis Stanwood)

The Knobbs



The Knobbs is the name given to the shallow cove and sandy beach fronting on Plum Island Sound. No one knows for certain how it came to be called the Knobbs, but perhaps the name was prompted by the "knobs" of sand, or dunes, found there, which in earlier times were much higher than they are today.

Surrounded by marsh and meandering creeks on both sides, it is the only interruption in the great expanse of salt meadow that runs from north to south along the western shore of Plum Island. The beach offers a convenient landing place for small boats, and at this particular spot, a low ridge above tide level extends inland toward the center of the island. A roughly defined road curving along this ridge provided land access, first for teams of horses or oxen and later for cars.

For many years farmers from the mainland made use of the Knobbs when they came each summer to harvest the salt-marsh hay and in winter to load it onto their sleds. Eventually some of them put up barns to store equipment and shelter their animals and built camps to house the men and their families. Others pitched tents there during the haying season.

The Knobbs was seasonally occupied by sportsmen as well as farmers for more than a century. No one is certain when the first structures appeared there. An article in an 1882 *Newburyport Herald* states that a house belonging to a Mr. Prescott of Rowley had formerly stood there, and the lease that granted permission to Alfred and Lemuel Rodigrass to place a gunning camp on a piece of land at the Knobbs in 1892 refers to the plot as Long Reach, Cellar and Garden. The term "Cellar and Garden" suggests that there had been a dwelling in the vicinity years earlier. Thomas F. Waters, in his history of Plum Island, wrote that the plot "bore the name . . . in 1788 and probably long before."

The Knight family of Newbury cut hay there regularly and built two camps in the late nineteenth century. One of the buildings, with a barn for horses, was located near the

southernmost end of the present dike, and the other, with an imposing tower, was closer to the shore. During the haying season, the men stayed in the camp nearer the dunes while the wives and children stayed in the other.

Sportsmen found their way to the Knobbs since shore birds and waterfowl were abundant in the marshes and waters of Plum Island Sound, and the Knobbs was in the midst of this area. Fishing was also excellent. Flounder and tom-cod, as well as mackerel in season, were all plentiful in the bay. The creeks offered a steady supply of eels (called ribbon fish when served to the squeamish), and the beach provided all the clams needed for a chowder.

Two and possibly three of the camps that remained until recent times were built by sportsmen. The site of many lively bachelor weekends, the Knobbs was nicknamed Bean Point to commemorate the burying of left-over baked beans that had been prepared by wives.

The Knobbs around 1906. The photograph shows five camps and a barn; a sixth camp, closer to the dunes, is out of camera range.

(Right) A group of friends who called themselves the Bean Pointers are shown on a Knobbs weekend. They enjoyed singing and on this occasion brought along a melodeon. The mast was removed from the deck to make room for it.

(Below) The Rodigrass camp, built in 1892, was first used as a base for duck hunting. A basket of clams is being shucked for a chowder, and there is a lobster on the bottom step.

Members of a house party early in this century at the Knobbs. At left is the Burnhome camp, which is said to have been designed by William Graves Perry.

One of the early sportsmen's camps in the l890's belonged to the Perry family of Newburyport. This camp, which had a cupola, was called Little Argentina because business interests caused Mr. Perry to spend much of his time in Buenos Aires. The Perry camp was sold to Arthur Atwater of Rowley early in this century and remained in that family until the late l930's when the rising waters of the sound threatened to topple it. The camp was moved back and remodelled by the Kenneth Knight family and was the last survivor of the little colony at the Knobbs.

There is agreement among old-timers that another camp at the Knobbs was an early project of one of the Perry sons, William Graves Perry. Mr. Perry became a greatly respected architect and is remembered particularly for his contribution to the restoration of Colonial Williamsburg. This cottage, probably designed while young Mr. Perry was at Harvard, was built for the Burnhomes of Newburyport and later sold to the Phister–Atchley family. In the late 1930's it became the property of three sisters of the Knight family and was shared by the Taylors, Batchelders and Spaldings until it was swept out to sea in the great storm of l978.

The Rodigrass camp, built in l892, had nearly suffered a similar fate during the Portland storm of l898 when the enormous tides lifted it off its foundation. The camp came to rest on the marsh, fortunately, and was recovered. The Rodigrass/Weare camp, which had been built on the mainland and taken by raft to the Knobbs, survived storms and erosion for nearly a century until it was razed in 1989.

Although the camps at the Knobbs were originally built for the purposes of gunning and haying, they evolved into greatly loved summer camps. The gently sloping beach made it a safe place for bathing, and several generations of children learned to swim and sail there, dig for clams in the soft sand, and catch minnows in the nearby creeks. Few children brought up there will ever forget their first astronomy lessons, for in the isolation of the marsh, the night sky became a natural observatory. The Knobbs was also popular among boating families who found it a convenient overnight anchorage and a congenial destination for a picnic and swim on a summer day.

Until the island road was built by the Refuge, the Knobbs was reached primarily by boat. Preparations for a weekend were similar to those made today for a camping trip. All provisions — food, ice, and drinking water — had to be taken along and carried ashore. Large cakes of ice in an insulated wooden ice chest kept the food fresh, and water from the melting ice was heated and used for washing dishes, supplementing the water caught in a rain barrel.

A group of friends coming ashore at the Knobbs in the sloop Crackerjack *following a successful morning of duck hunting*

The gently sloping beach at the Knobbs was a favorite bathing spot for old and young for many generations. These bathers are wearing the latest in swimsuits around 1910. In the background are the Perry–Atwater–Knight camp at the left and at right, the Rodigrass camp.

There was no electricity, so light for reading and games was provided by kerosene lamps. A wood stove gave comforting heat in cool weather and served as a cook stove by day. For fuel there was an endless supply of driftwood.

Although the Knobbs is a place of happy memories for most, it has also witnessed tragedy. In 1882 the Huntingtons of Amesbury, together with a family friend, were returning home from a week's camping trip on Grape Island. The group was using two boats, wherries that could be either rowed or sailed. Because of the very strong winds that day, the friend, who was in charge of the first boat and carrying three of the Huntington children, decided to row rather than sail, and he set forth across Broad Sound well in advance of the others. The second boat, containing Mr. Huntington, his wife and their other four children, started out under sail. When the latter boat reached a point opposite the Knobbs, the wind freshened, and Mr. Huntington attempted to go forward to lower sail. As he did so, the boat capsized, throwing everyone into the water. The rest of the party, a half-mile ahead, witnessed the accident and turned back, but by the time they reached the scene, it was too late. The bodies were subsequently recovered on the beach and taken overland by wagon to Amesbury.

In 1896 the body of a suspected victim of poisoning was landed at the Knobbs to be taken by wagon to Newburyport for an autopsy. Although this death initially caused a great furor and was featured in newspaper headlines, it was later found that the woman had not been murdered, as had been feared. She had been on a boating trip with a friend and, when she complained of not feeling well, had been left at Grape Island where she died of an excess of alcohol.

Most of the camps at the Knobbs were on land that was leased from mainland farmers who used their lots only for the harvesting of the salt hay. Leasing land for camps provided additional income for them and did not interfere with the original purpose. One exception, however, was a narrow tract of land running from Plum Island Sound to the ocean beach that was owned by a group of local men who called themselves the Knobbs Beach Associates and used the land solely for recreation. One of the men maintained a large wooden locker, containing camping gear, on a platform atop a dune on the ocean beach. It was an easy matter to land at the Knobbs by boat and walk to the ocean front. One of the members of this group was the well-known author John P. Marquand, who occasionally made day trips to the Knobbs in his boat.

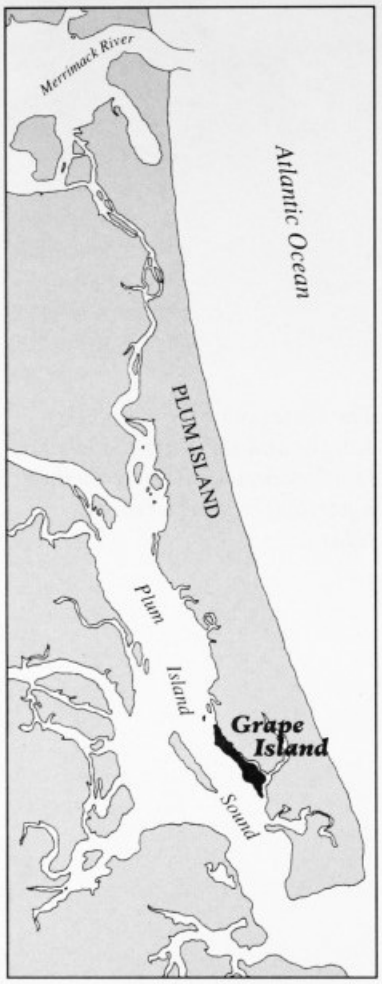
The Knobbs was a special place for children. In these photos young Richard Knight sails his boat in the flooded roadbed (above) and rests in a haycock (left) while his father cuts salt hay nearby. The Knobbs Beach Life Saving Station can be seen in the distance. (Courtesy, Elizabeth Knight)

The cottages of the Kenneth Knight and the Knight-Haley families became islands during a particularly high run of tides.

Since the Knobbs lies opposite the location of the former Life Saving Station on the ocean front, for many years until the closing of the station at the end of World War II, the Coast Guard kept a boat at the Knobbs, first on shore and later at a mooring. This was particularly important during the days of Prohibition when the Coast Guard had the responsibility for the interception of rumrunners.

Although erosion is less dramatic at the Knobbs than at Grape Island and the Bluffs, it has taken its quiet toll there. The dunes that appear in photographs dating from earlier in this century are gone, and each year the rising waters erode more of the salt-marsh bank. The Rodigrass camp, originally located where the channel is now, was moved back three times in ninety-seven years, and the erosion continues.

Grape Island



Grape Island, a long, narrow strip of upland that faces Great Neck in Ipswich, lies along the southwest edge of Plum Island. Bounded by deep creeks that separate it from the main island except along the western shore, it is virtually accessible only by water. This natural fencing protected its fertile upland from the free-grazing livestock placed on Plum Island by early settlers and made it a desirable area for farming. By the 1670's some Ipswich families had acquired parcels of land and established the beginning of a very small settlement that survived until the death of its last resident, Lewis Kilborn, in 1984.

Of its many inhabitants, the Perkins family, among the first residents, and the last resident were the best known. In the 1680's Luke and Elizabeth Perkins fled from their Ipswich neighbors and settled on Grape Island. Elizabeth had been taken to court for accusing the local minister of immorality and for speaking ill of her parents. Found guilty of being a "virulent, reproachful and wicked-tongued woman," she was sentenced to sit in the meetinghouse at the time of a service "with a paper pinned on her head, written in capital letters, for reproaching ministers, parents, and relations." She was also ordered "to be severely whipped on her naked body," but corporeal punishment was cancelled for a 3-pound fine. When her husband fell afoul of the law soon after, the couple moved with their worldly possessions to an island farm. They were still there in 1701, for a deed conveyed to Francis Wainwright includes the year's rental fee of 5 pounds from Luke Perkins for his use of the farm.

Over the years other families made their homes on the island and new dwellings were built. The land was fertile, game abounded in the marshes, and the nearby waters offered a plentiful supply of fish. Names of many old Ipswich families appear in the records as lots of land changed hands, including Perkinses, Pulsifers, Treadwells, and Wainwrights. John Appleton became the sole owner in 1789. His untimely death from a fall nine years later caused the land to be divided among his heirs, who then sold to

others. In this way parcels of land eventually changed hands many times; one person acquired large holdings only to have them split later through inheritance.

By the 1840's there were enough children on the island for the town of Ipswich to order that a school be built. The one-room schoolhouse opened in 1843. It held ten double desks and provided education to several generations of island children through the sixth grade. Miss Edith Staniford, who later married William Dole of Ipswich Bluffs, was for a time the teacher of the island school, followed by Miss Cora H. Jewett from Ipswich. Miss Jewett was appointed in 1881 and continued to teach at the island school each summer for over thirty-five years until its closing. During the early years, Miss Jewett often boarded with an island family for the school term; in later years, she made the crossing daily by mailboat. She clearly enjoyed her children and provided a unique treat for the end of school. On the last day of school in August of 1883, Ida Leet Small, an island resident, noted in her diary that Miss Jewett "carried her scholars out on the steamer. I made ice cream." It was not easy for the pupils to keep their minds on books when children from the mainland were on the island enjoying their summer vacation. Some of the older

A view of the head of Grape Island. The camps along the bank were for summer rental. A wooden bulkhead to prevent erosion is shown at the left. In time, the banking gave way, and all of these buildings fell into the water.

children, when opportunity presented itself, were known to move the hands of the schoolroom clock ahead.

In the 1840's the Adams family of Newbury acquired a large tract of land on the island. Records indicate that they built a substantial house as well as other buildings near the head of the island. In l880 members of the Adams family conveyed this property, which consisted of sixteen acres and buildings, to Captain Thomas Mackinney, a sea captain from Newburyport. His son, Herbert, was a mason contractor who had been severely injured during the loading of blocks of Italian marble aboard a ship in San Francisco. Captain Mackinney settled Herbert and his family in the former Adams house on Grape Island, where they soon began to attract summer guests to their small hotel. The *Ipswich Chronicle* reported on July 23, 1881: "Grape Island is presented to pleasure seekers in new attire — several fine, new, and substantial buildings having been erected on it, and the new wharf is hardly inferior to that at the Bluffs." A later issue of the *Chronicle* noted: "Several large parties to Grape Island where friend Mackinney is ever ready to tend to wants of visitor of both outer and inner man."

The people in the background are waiting for the steamer. Directly behind them is the hotel. The building at right later became the dance hall. (Courtesy, Fred Mackinney)

(Left) When this photo of the Mackinney Hotel was taken, there was open pasture on both sides of it, and livestock was kept in the barn. Later the hotel bar was located there.

Although sail was still the mode of travel for individual families, the arrival of the excursion steamer made it possible to transport large groups. In August of 1883 the *Chronicle* reported that the "Steamer, *Carlotta,* made an excursion [from Newburyport] to Grape Island on Wednesday. She had all the passengers she could carry and also had two boats loaded with passengers in tow." Grape Island was a favorite recreation site for pleasure seekers coming from upriver, including Haverhill, Amesbury and Newburyport. Some of the island's permanent residents were from the latter community, and there are scenic postcards in existence that are incorrectly labelled "Grape Island, Newburyport, Mass."

The *Carlotta* and other steamers made daily scheduled stops at the island, and special excursions were almost a daily event during the summer. Guests could camp out in tents, rent one of the cottages, or stay in the spacious main house. Meals were available in the dining room, with Mrs. Harriett Mackinney supervising the kitchen. According to the *Chronicle,* the cuisine met with great favor. Business was excellent, but Herbert Mackinney, the proprietor, lived only three years. For a long time the hotel was managed by Mrs. Mackinney's brother, John Post, but in 1896 he purchased the former Leet property at the southern end of the island and established his own hotel. By this time the Bayleys/Baileys were also offering cottages for rent.

For years life for permanent residents was much like that on any rural salt-water farm. Each family had a vegetable garden, and there were fruit trees and berry patches. Onions and turnips thrived especially well in the island's soil and

(Below) John Post with his sister, Maria Ormsbee, who helped him with the running of his hotel for many years (Courtesy, Fred Mackinney)

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(Below) John Post with his sister, Maria Ormsbee, who helped him with the running of his hotel for many years (Courtesy, Fred Mackinney)

(Right) An island calf greets Bertha Bailey Mackinney. (Courtesy, Fred Mackinney)

(Below) A view of the Bailey cottages. The family home is in the center; the buildings near the shore were rented. Charles Bailey, the owner, was a fisherman for most of his life and lived on the island for sixty-five years. He died in 1936 at the age of ninety.

In 1896 John Post opened his own hotel at the southern end of the island. In the ell at left, which was constructed from lumber salvaged from a ship wrecked on the ocean beach, were the dining room on the first floor and guest rooms above. The hotel had its own pier with a ramp, which Maria Ormsbee is shown descending. (Courtesy, Fred Mackinney)

climate and in some cases provided a cash crop. There were eggs to be gathered and cows to be milked. Except in mid-winter, when ice prevented boats from crossing Plum Island Sound, there was much visiting back and forth to the mainland. In the summer there was the additional work of looking after summer guests, and the girls waited on tables and made beds. Several of the island men were fishermen, and they and the boys furnished fresh fish, clams, and lobsters for the hotel dining rooms. In the fall they helped with the salt-marsh haying as well as the harvest at the nearby Jackman farm. The islanders were always quick to provide aid to ships that came ashore on Plum Island's beach; in fact, Captain John Small, a long-time island resident, was in charge of the relief hut near Emerson's Rocks. At least two Grape Island men joined the Life Saving Service, which later became the Coast Guard, serving at the Knobbs Beach Station two miles away.

The diary kept by Ida Leet Small, wife of Charles Small, during the year 1883 gives a day-by-day account of island life. The women visited often and sewed together: "I cut out Sadie's dress. . . . Sewed seven squares in my patchwork." Ida and Charles "went to Ipswich and brought back a sewing machine." There was constant washing and starching and ironing to be done. Washing, in particular, took much planning, for water was scarce. Grape Island wells were poor, and most families had deep cisterns filled by rainwater from the roof. During a particularly dry period Ida wrote,

Cows grazing in the pasture at the head of the island. The tall building at left behind the fence is the hotel.

"We did not wash. All water gone." Later she noted, "Charles brought me water from the Neck, and we washed part of my clothes." Trips off-island could be eventful. "Charles and I went to Rowley in the morning. Saw the circus." When a late-afternoon thundershower prevented their return to the island, the couple spent the night on the mainland.

The men had their own work. "Charles and his father went out fishing. Caught quite a number." Later Ida recorded, "Sam went to Mr. Jackman's haying." The Jackman farm onion crop was harvested and the men took it by gundalow up to Old Town.

One entry noted that Carrie, who lived nearby, had a baby girl. Childbirth presented special problems. Most women chose to have their babies on the mainland but did not always reach their destination in time. On one occasion an islander rowed his pregnant wife all the way to Parker River, then up Little River to Knight's Crossing, where they intended to board the train for Newburyport. The baby would not wait, however, and was born in the house at the Crossing.

After John Post's departure the Mackinney Hotel continued with a new manager until 1906 when it was sold to James Cammatt. By 1915 business was sufficient for him to add a dining hall/dance pavilion at the head of the wharf. Before Prohibition, there was also a bar located in the barn.

Two Grape Island boys: Charlie Bayley, above, in a game of ring toss, and Sam Kilborn, right, in his new Coast Guard uniform (Courtesy, Fred Mackinney)

(Below) At the right is the one-room school, where island children were educated up through grade six. (Courtesy, Susan Howard Boice)

Later, part of the hotel complex may also have served as a casino: the *Ipswich Chronicle*, in a 1935 article about the hotel, referred to it as Cammatt's Casino. The dance hall became a well-known attraction for groups or couples who wanted an evening of dancing, combined with a boat ride, and even though the *Carlotta* had ceased running by 1914, there were other excursion boats that provided transportation to Grape Island from Ipswich and Parker River. George Fuller became the next owner of the hotel and cottages and had extensive repairs made on the old buildings. During his tenure, the hotel was known as Grape Island Inn.

Lew Kilborn, the last person to live on the island, received much publicity in newspaper and magazine articles as the "hermit of Grape Island." A big man, whose strength was legendary, he was in fact a friendly, gentle person who kept up with world affairs through his reading and battery radio and welcomed visits from friends. Lew resented being called a hermit. He did not seek to be alone; it was simply that everyone else had moved away, some from choice and others because of the Refuge policy that prevented families from passing on to their heirs the occupancy rights to a former family property.

Herbert Mackinney, Jr. in his mailboat, Skidoo, *on his rounds to Little Neck, Ipswich Bluffs and Grape Island (Courtesy, Fred Mackinney)*

Lew Kilborn stands in front of his island house. (Courtesy, Ipswich Chronicle*)*

Lew was born in Newburyport and was taken to the island when he was only a week old. He went through the six grades of the island school, but many of his skills were self-taught. He was a good carpenter and plumber as well as a fisherman, lobsterman, and clammer. During his lifetime he owned a number of large fishing boats, including the *Islander* and the *Victory,* and fished offshore from the Isles of Shoals to Boston. Most of his boats were about forty feet in length. Although Lew often fished alone, he felt comfortable in a large boat since he, like most of the island men, could not swim.

While life was simpler on the island than on the mainland, Lew was familiar with some of our conveniences. For a time the island had a pay telephone, and Lew had a gas refrigerator, which he gave up after his kitchen was struck by lightning. Occasionally he watched television at the home of a summer resident who had a generator. But he declared that he had no wish to leave his home for the mainland despite numerous offers from friends and family. His death in his home in 1984 came suddenly, and he was found a short time afterward by his nephew, who had come to deliver supplies.

Lew Kilborn's death marked the end of three hundred years of continuous settlement on this small island. The resort business, which had once been so popular, faded with the coming of the automobile. Prohibition also contributed to the loss of business, since part of the hospitality offered at local hostelries depended upon a liquor license. Younger members of the island families sought their future elsewhere, and the early 1920's saw a dramatic decline in the number of year-round residents. By 1933, the heart of the Depression, the Baileys were offering cottages at half price. That same year the Fullers closed their hotel. Two years later, in August of 1935, the unoccupied building burned to the ground from a fire that began in the barn. John Post gave up his hotel in the fall of 1935.

At Grape Island today, there are few traces of its former inhabitants. A lilac bush or a forsythia blooming in spring is all that remains to mark the homes of the island families — the Kilborns, Smalls, Baileys, Mackinneys, Posts, Leets, Stevenses — as well as the houses of others who came only in summer. At the island's head, erosion has undermined the steep bank and claimed nearly all the cottages once skirting its edge. Remnants of the pilings from the bulkhead placed there in the l800's to prevent erosion are visible at low tide far out on the flats, providing dramatic evidence of the amount of land washed away by storms and rising waters. The wharf has also disappeared. Neglect and fire took some homes, and those remaining were destroyed, allowing the island to return to a nearly impenetrable thicket.

James Small's house leaves the island by raft on its way to a new location at Parker River. (Courtesy, John Dolan)

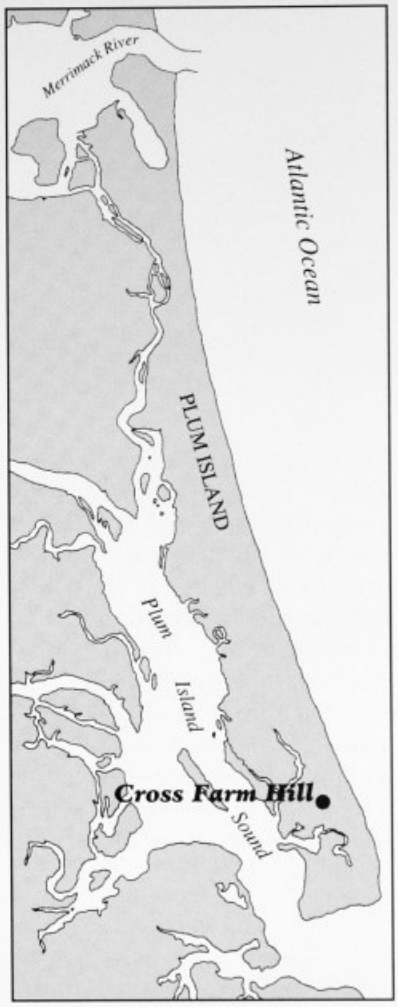
Cross Farm Hill

Cross Farm Hill, shown on early maps as Middle Island, is really not an island at all but a glacial drumlin located toward the southern end of the Refuge. Rising from the marshes just east of Grape Island, it is one of the highest points on Plum Island and from its top commands a view of the full horizon. Standing on its crest, one can still conjure up a picture of the farmhouse and great barn, the animals, the pastures and apple orchard that existed there until the 1920's when the farm was abandoned.

A farmhouse and barn were built on this site by John Pengry soon after he acquired the land in 1695. It was a choice location not only because of its fertile soil but also because of its proximity to the deep-water cove at the junction of Stage and Pine Creeks. Pengry added to his holdings, and when he sold the property to Nathaniel Emerson in 1713, it included twenty acres of upland and marsh with house, barn, fences, springs, and trees.

The Emersons had a large family, four sons and four daughters. After the sons married, they made their home on Middle Island. All of them were at some time farmers, and at least one acquired land adjoining his father's. Two of them were also fishermen and established a fish-processing business. The land behind the Emerson farm sloped gently down to a protected inlet that provided a safe harbor for their fishing sloops. For use in the landing and processing of the catch, they built a wharf, a fish house for storing such supplies as salt, and staging for drying fish. But after one of these sons drowned at an early age, the business was declared bankrupt. Nathaniel Emerson died in 1738, and in less than two years the Emerson holdings on Middle Island were sold. The Emerson name did not completely disappear, however, since the rocks projecting into the ocean just north of Bar Head are still called Emerson's Rocks.

Ralph Cross, a Newburyport shipbuilder, became the new owner in 1740, and although no members of the Cross family actually lived on the farm, they held it as rental property for four generations; hence the name Cross Farm Hill. Over the



The Cross/Jackman farm in the 1890's. The figures are probably Reuben Jackman and his wife, Augusta. This was not the original farmhouse on the site but was built sometime after Daniel Dole took over in 1835. The house was painted barn red, and a front porch was later added. A long shed connected the house to the large barn, which was 30 by 60 by 14 feet. (Courtesy, Historical Society of Old Newbury)

years Ralph Cross and his descendants enlarged their holdings substantially by purchasing additional upland and marsh, and they leased the farm and land to numerous individuals. A family named Spiller were long-time tenants. Jonathan Spiller was born at the farm in 1796, and in 1831, near the end of the Cross ownership, a daughter was born there to Jeremiah and Elizabeth Spiller.

The property was acquired in 1835 by Daniel Dole, who promptly advertised it for lease. His early tenants are not known, but Reuben and Augusta Jackman, who leased the farm from the Doles in the early 1860's, lived there for about forty-five years. Many people still refer to the property as the Jackman Farm. A grandson of the Jackmans, in a letter to the *Newburyport Daily News*, described life at the farm in 1905 when he was a boy: "They raised all their vegetables, kept seven or eight cows, a flock of sheep and several kinds of barnyard fowl. . . . The cattle used to feed along Bar Head, and I well remember I used to go down there and drive them back to the farm when night came." He also spoke of attending school at nearby Grape Island.

The farm stock and crops undoubtedly varied with the times and with each occupant. In the 1880's onions were grown as a market crop and probably apples as well.

Cranberries from the nearby bogs were harvested each fall and taken by horse and wagon to Newburyport. The farm provided eggs, milk and produce for the hotels at Ipswich Bluffs and Grape Island as well as for the Knobbs Beach Life Saving Station.

The families who lived at Cross Farm Hill within sight and sound of the sea witnessed many shipwrecks along this vulnerable shore and were frequently called on to give assistance. Even after the Knobbs Beach Station was opened, they supplied additional manpower and horses on more than one occasion.

When old age and failing health forced Reuben Jackman to give up the farm, he was followed by Albert Leet, who lived on the farm with his family while he also served at the nearby Knobbs Beach Station. The last known occupants of the old farmhouse were Carl Fyrberg and his family. Their departure in 1925 ended two hundred and thirty years of continuous farming at this location. The house and barn soon became derelict, although they stood for many years.

In 1931 the Dole Middle Island property, then owned by Mrs. Bianca Clement, was acquired by the Massachusetts Audubon Society as part of the Annie H. Brown Wildlife Sanctuary and remained in their hands until taken over by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The house and great barn were razed in the mid-1940's, and the crest of the hill was used to provide fill for the present island road.

Daniel Dole placed this notice in the Newburyport Herald *in 1835 after purchasing all of the southern end of the island. He grouped the properties of Cross and Bar Island Farms in this notice although they were later leased separately. The house under repair "to accommodate boarders or transient visitors" probably became the Ipswich Bluffs Hotel. (Courtesy, Joanne Lowell Johnson)*

To Let,

FOR the term of five years, the Farm of the subscriber, situate on Plum island, in Ipswich. Said Farm comprises what has heretofore been known as the Cross and Bar island farms, and contains about 50 acres of excellent field land, 200 acres salt marsh, 300 do. of beach and pasture. and 25 of clam flats. There are on the premises 3 dwelling Houses, 3 large Barns, with many out buildings in good repair.

The stock consisting of 40 head neat cattle &c. will be leased with the farm if desired--the farming tools are sufficient and in good order. One of the dwelling houses is now being repaired, and is well calculated to accomodate boarders or transient visitors, as many persons resort to the island during the warm season, both for health and pleasure.

Apply to the subscriber on the premises.

DANIEL DOLE.

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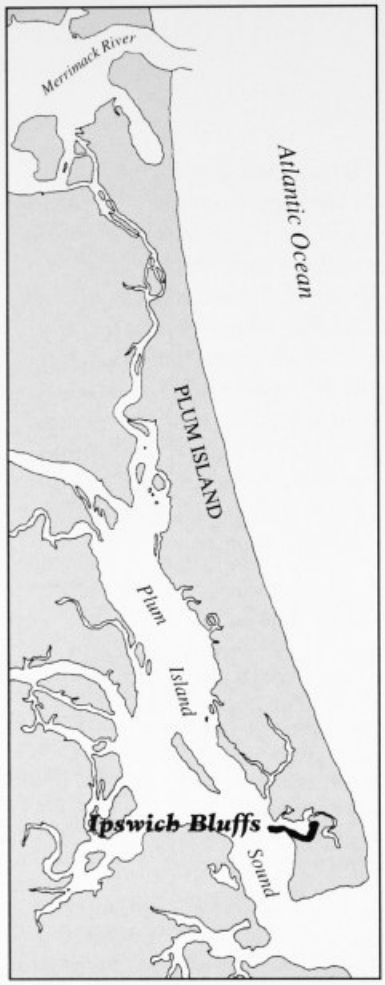
Ipswich Bluffs



Pleasure seekers who preferred to take their sea air surrounded by green lawns and shade trees found Stage Island a perfect spot for a day's excursion or holiday. More commonly known as Ipswich Bluffs, in its heyday no other part of Plum Island was more beloved. A small peninsula extending out into Plum Island Sound, with commanding views of the nearby dunes and river, it was cool on the hottest of summer days. Visitors could watch in comfort while a constant parade of sailboats and excursion steamers passed up and down the river. The lovely crescent beach leading to Sandy Point was only a few steps away, and for those who wanted a longer walk, a footbridge nearly five hundred feet long offered access to miles of ocean beach. Although not a true island, the Bluffs had the feel of one, since there was no easy way to reach it except by boat.

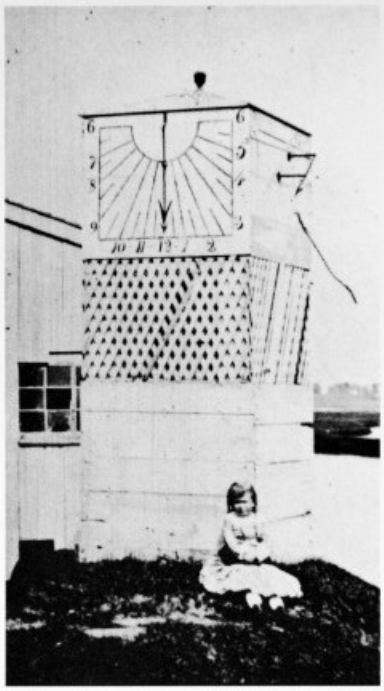
Ipswich Bluffs did not start out as a summer resort. In colonial days its fertile upland was sought for farming. John Pengry, who in 1695 bought land and built a farmhouse on nearby Cross Farm Hill, also acquired several lots of land on Stage Island in the 1690's and built another dwelling. By 1747 the Bluffs property had passed into the hands of a wealthy merchant, William Dodge, who had various commercial interests and conducted part of his lucrative fishing business there. The Bluffs' location beside a deep-water channel made it a desirable area for unloading and drying fish, and for many years the western tip, which was later called Sutton's Point, was covered with the slatted racks, or stages, built to accommodate the drying fish. It is these platforms that are believed to have given the area its name of Stage Island.

By 1793 the Bluffs property had been purchased by Ebenezer Sutton, who lived in the old farmhouse for the rest of his lifetime. Nearby was the well-known Willow Cottage, said to have been built in 1781. This sturdy old house, which was constructed by Enoch Dole for Beamsley Perkins, boasted a room lined with plaster made from clamshells that was as smooth as marble. The house also included a

A group of excursionists arriving at the Bluffs around 1910. The Anchorage, built by Nathaniel Dole on Sutton's Point, is at the head of the wharf. This house is now the only dwelling left at the southern end of the island. (Courtesy, Doris Fyrberg)

hiding space next to the chimney that is believed to have been used in later years to shelter runaway slaves who were attempting to make their way north to Canada during Civil War years.

Upon the death of Ebenezer, Stage Island was inherited by his son, Captain Ebenezer Sutton, a mariner and pilot. This was at the time of the War of 1812, and the Bluffs was the scene of the only local landing of the British. Although the upper end of Plum Island was prepared to repel an invasion of British forces, it was the Bluffs and its cattle that attracted the British. Apparently needing a fresh supply of meat, they sailed their warship into the mouth of the Ipswich River and sent a landing party ashore. After killing a cow and dressing it, the seamen were seen by a boy in Captain Sutton's employ, Robert Pitman, whose excitement overcame his judgment and who shouted to them that Captain Sutton would be after them. The British shot at the boy, who fortunately escaped without injury. By chance, across the river a group of men was visible, and the British, fearing the worst, ran for their boat, leaving the carcass behind.



The old sundial at the Bluffs was a landmark for over a century. It is believed to have been built around 1830 for the saltworks that existed for a brief period in the marshes behind the Bluffs. (Courtesy, Newburyport Public Library)

In 1829 a Frenchman whose surname was Gilshenon proposed developing a saltworks operation in the marsh between Stage Island and Bar Head. Salt was in great demand as a preservative in those days before refrigeration, and numerous small saltworks had been tried in nearby communities. Gilshenon, an entrepreneur who had been seeking a suitable location for such a venture along the New England coast, believed that he had found it on Plum Island, and capital was soon raised to fund the project.

At that time a salt-water creek extended well into the marsh area behind the Bluffs, and it was felt that this would provide a constant source of salt water. A canal was dug along with smaller ditches leading to a series of twenty-eight vats that had been dug out of the peaty marsh. Windmills were built to generate the power to pump the salt water into the air; it then trickled down through brush into the shallow pans beneath. It was assumed that through the process of evaporation, salt crystals would accumulate in the vats to a goodly amount. When the wind did not cooperate, water was scooped up from the canal by buckets on the outside of a large overshot wheel that was turned by a bull walking inside it as if on a treadmill. In order to protect the area from flooding at times of abnormally high tides, several dikes were constructed. While much of the plan was ingenious, there was no practical way to protect the vats from being diluted by rainwater, and after a year during which the rainfall was especially heavy, the project was abandoned.

In 1832 all of the land and buildings that had been part of the salt company holdings, including the two dwellings and barns on Stage Island, were advertised for sale under the name Bar Island Farm; two years later, in 1834, this property was sold to Daniel Dole of Ipswich. Mr. Dole lived at Willow Cottage for a time, and his son Nathaniel was born there in 1841. Daniel, and later his sons, continued to enlarge the family holdings on Plum Island, leasing the farms and marshland to others and selling sand to the Boston market. They were responsible for establishing the cranberry bogs, located in hollows all along the island, that for many years were harvested commercially.

From the mid-1800's to the early 1920's the Dole family were in possession of all the upland and much of the marshes from the southern end of the island up to the land of Moses Pettingell, who owned most of the northern end of Plum Island. They built homes on Sutton's Point and for many years spent their summers there.

Looking toward the hotel from Sutton's Point, where the steamers docked. A cement walk led to the hotel. (Courtesy, Isabelle Dole)

Willow Cottage hosted many house parties, including those of the Bluffs Association. Some of its walls were of plaster made from clamshells. The posts that supported the porch roof were left rough-finished so that game could be hung from the projecting branch stubs. Above is a view of one of the fireplaces. (Courtesy, Joanne Lowell Johnson)


Steamer Gen'l Bartlett

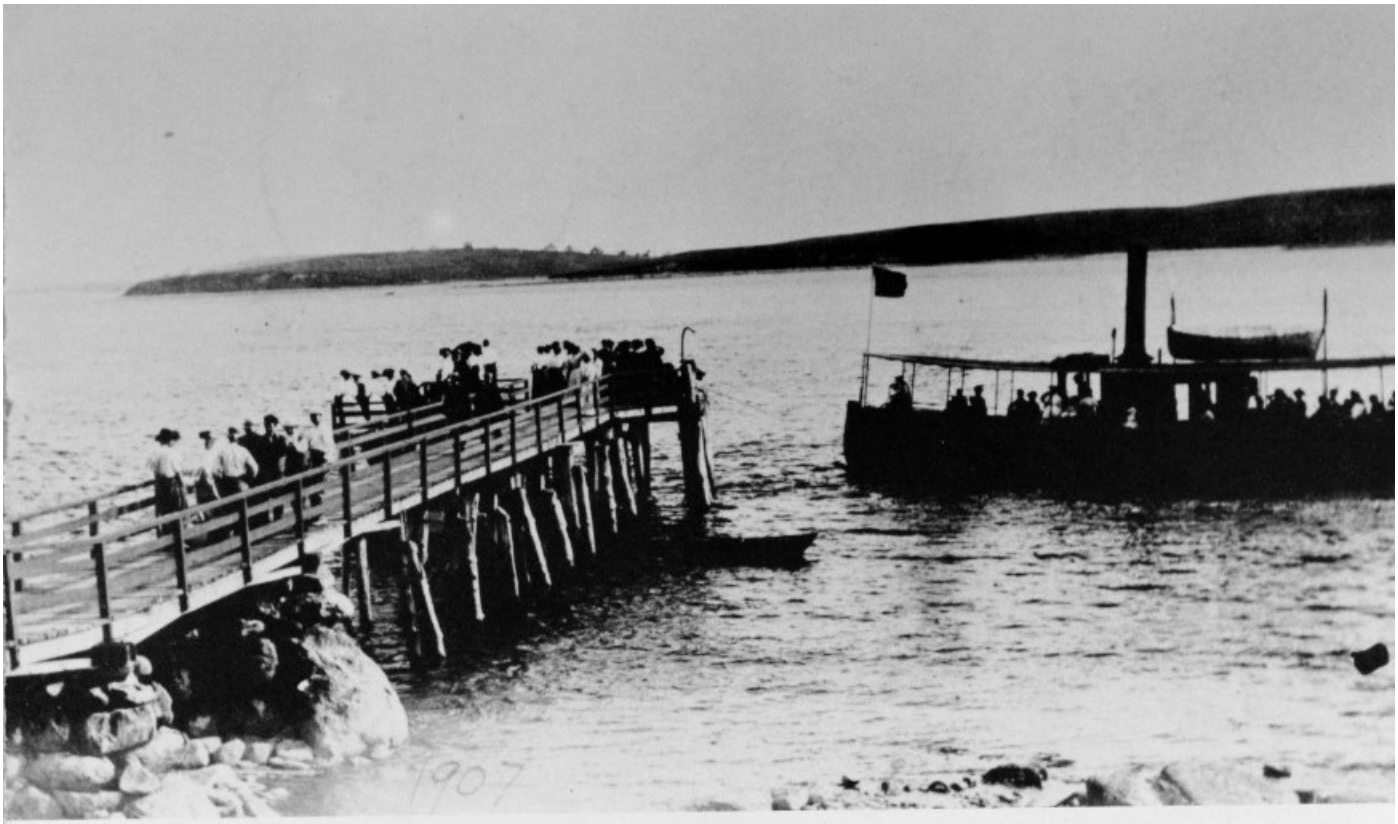
On Wednesday, September 6th,
an excursion will be made to
IPSWICH BLUFF,
starting from City wharf at 11 a. m.

On Thursday, September 7,
the steamer will make an
OCEAN VOYAGE,
starting from City wharf at 11 o'clock a.m. 85

(Above) A steamer excursion notice in the Newburyport Herald

(Below) The Warren Lufkin family were among the first proprietors of the Ipswich Bluffs Hotel. (Courtesy, Edward Plumer)

The Oldtown Farmers' Club held annual outings at the Bluffs, with entire families taking basket lunches. If the crowd was too large for the steamer, the overflow would board a scow and be towed. (Courtesy, Historical Society of Old Newbury)



The steamer Carlotta *arriving at the Bluffs wharf. One group is waiting to board the steamer, while another is just arriving. (Collection of Dorice Knowles, Courtesy, Muriel Dorr)*

Sometime in the 1830's the Bluffs began to be visited by pleasure seekers. Coming at first in their own boats, they brought tents and probably purchased food and drink from the families living in the farmhouses. Later a few rooms became available in the old Pengry house, which had been enlarged by the Doles, and by the 1850's the farmhouse had grown into a small hotel. The first family known to have run the hotel were the Lufkins, who were there until 1866, when Warren Dockumn advertised in the *Newburyport Herald* that he had taken over the lease, had repainted and refurbished the house and was "ready to receive Visitors and Boarders, with hearty cheer and good welcome." The charge for camping was given as twenty-five cents per tent per day. The next manager was A. W. Emerson, who took over in the 1870's, and the *Ipswich Chronicle* reported favorably on his shore dinners. During this period the old wharf that had been located on the creek was replaced by a new pier that extended out into the deeper water of Plum Island River.

The hotel in the 1890's. The building at the left with the strange silhouette was made from a windmill used at the old saltworks. It housed the hotel store, where guests and day trippers could buy small items such as soft drinks. Note the swing in the foreground. (Courtesy, Isabelle Dole)

In the l880's Conley D. Cullen became proprietor and ran the hotel for approximately seven years before being replaced by Mr. and Mrs. Abram Fowler from Newbury, who were its best-known managers. Together, they ran the hotel and its adjoining annexes for nearly thirty years.

The popularity of the Bluffs grew rapidly. Its sheltered anchorage appealed to cruising yachtsmen, and many local people came by private boat. Others made use of the regularly scheduled steamers or the special excursion boats that advertised almost daily in the local papers. The Bluffs was very popular with people from Haverhill, Amesbury, Newburyport and Rowley. When the latter town held an end-of-the-season party to celebrate the 237th anniversary of Rowley's founding, at least fifteen hundred people were assembled at the Bluffs and their needs met by the hotel. The steamer *May Queen* from Newburyport, towing a scow, brought five hundred, including the Boxford Brass Band.

The steamer *Beatrice*, and later the *Carlotta*, made two trips daily from Ipswich to Parker River, stopping at Little Neck, the Bluffs and Grape Island. At the height of its popularity, as many as fifteen boats carried passengers to the Bluffs, some of them offering moonlight cruises complete with music. The steamers furnished transportation for couples attending the square dances held in the great barn, where "with fiddle and harp" Daniel Thurlow and Josiah Dyer provided the music. Mr. Dyer acted as caller for dances such as the Virginia Reel, Lady of the Lake, and Portland Fancy. When the dancing ended at midnight, the couples enjoyed a steamer ride back to the mainland.

Included in the hotel complex were rooms for boarders, a dining room, an underground dairy, and separate cottages that could be rented. The white building in front of the hotel housed the store and was called the Bandwagon. Here tenters and day trippers could buy sarsaparilla, root beer, milk, eggs, bread and other supplies. The store also contained a billiard table and, later, one-arm bandits.

The hotel was noted for the excellence of its shore dinners. For many years the cook was Mrs. Mary Conway from Newburyport, and it is said that each morning she made a washboilerful of chowder. The dinner usually began with clam chowder, followed by fish, fried clams or lobster, potato and vegetable. Great care was used in preparing the fried clams. Mrs. Fowler insisted that the clams be dry before being dipped into the egg batter, and they were placed on wooden dowels in order to accomplish this. The hotel was one of the first places to serve Golden Bantam corn on the cob. Prior to the turn of the century, the variety ordinarily eaten by humans was white, similar to our Silver Queen of today, yellow corn being then regarded as animal fodder. The new corn, which was supplied by Knight's farm in Newbury, was a huge success, and the guests would beg for more of the "hen corn."

The dining room accommodated fifty people at a sitting, and on a busy Sunday it was not unusual for several hundred people to be served, shore dinners being the specialty. There were seven or eight waitresses, including girls from Grape Island as well as girls from the mainland, to serve the guests. There was no refrigeration in those days, but a cooler called the Dairy was built into the bank behind the hotel. Lew Kilborn, who lived on Grape Island, told of cutting ice in the winter from a nearby pond that would carry the islanders through the summer, and presumably this

Harold Pritchard, who was the manager of the hotel in 1921–22, is pictured here with Mary Conway, the hotel cook for many years. (Courtesy, Elizabeth Pritchard Horton)

was done for the hotel as well. Hens and cows were part of the farm in the early days of the hotel, and additional eggs and milk were available from the nearby Jackman farm. When the supply of homegrown produce was insufficient, the steamer as well as the hotel's own boat brought any items needed from the mainland.

The hotel offered summer work for many of the clammers and fishermen of Grape Island as well as for the girls and women who waited on tables and did chamber work. Since Grape Island and the Bluffs were separated by a wide creek, the island girls and women commuted to work by rowboat.

Many prominent people were guests at the Bluffs. It was not unusual for a family group or party of friends to occupy several tents and take their meals at the hotel. These were the days before indoor plumbing and electricity, so tenting did not seem primitive. Often there was a baseball game on the level field behind the hotel complex, and there were greased-pig contests and games of horseshoes.

Following the retirement of the Fowlers in 1920, Mr. and Mrs. Harold Pritchard leased the property for two years. At this time guests were no longer accommodated in the main building, but they rented rooms at Willow Cottage and at nearby Sunset Cottage at Sutton's Point.

The hotel buildings as viewed from the water. The store is in the foreground. Dancing was held in the great barn at far right. (Collection of Dorice Knowles, Courtesy, Muriel Dorr)

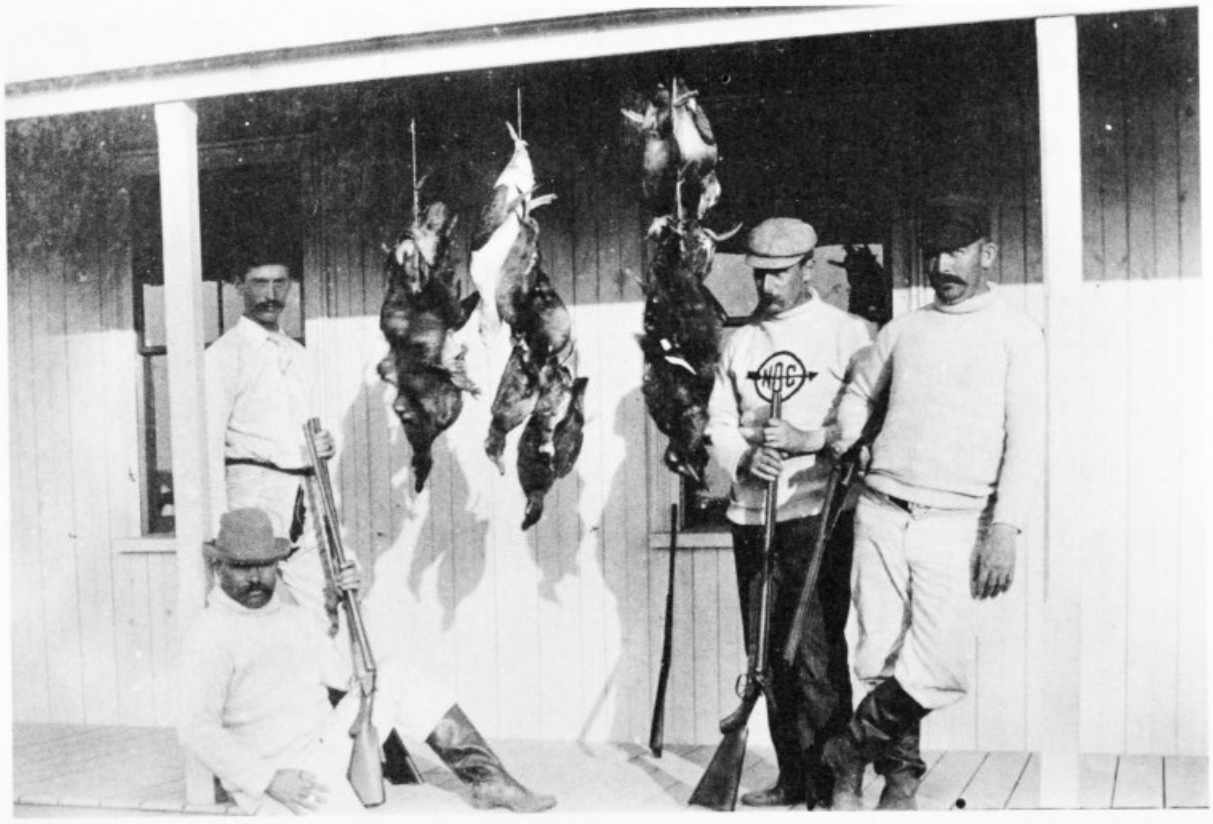
The interior of the hotel dining room where the staff await the arrival of guests. The dining room could hold fifty people at one sitting. (Courtesy, John Dolan)

Gunners and Birders

Plum Island with its marshes and surrounding tidal waters has always been a natural feeding and resting area for migratory waterfowl. Every year in the early spring and fall Canada geese and black ducks can be found in the thousands, along with a large variety of other waterfowl. Many years ago the numbers were far greater than they are today and the birds much less wary. Early records show that on November 4, 1733, on Plum Island, Moses Bradstreet killed sixty wild geese during a violent storm using only a club as a weapon.

The island's beaches and marshes also attract shore birds in large numbers. Over a century ago, in August 1877, the

A group of sportsmen looking pleased with the results of the day's hunt



Newburyport Herald stated that "Capt. Edward Thurlow, on Saturday afternoon on Plum Island River, shot eighty birds, consisting of upland plovers, brown-backs, yellowlegs, snipes, and sand peeps." In 1881 Mr. Emerson, proprietor of the Ipswich Bluffs hotel, claimed to have killed forty birds with only two discharges. These large kills give some indication of the vast quantity of birds that were formerly found on or near the island.

The varied and plentiful bird life made Plum Island a mecca for hunters seeking game for food as well as sport, and during the late nineteenth century a number of small camps and duck stands were built to accommodate hunting parties. Along the marshes fringing Plum Island River and Broad Sound could be found both permanent and temporary duck stands, structures that were built on posts to avoid flooding during high runs of tides. These duck blinds were camouflaged with marsh grass, and to entice the wild birds to come within shooting range, wooden decoys were placed nearby. For many years, before regulations forbade the practice, live decoys — domesticated geese or ducks, often

Robert Wilkinson at left and a friend outside his duck blind on the Rowley shore of Plum Island Sound. The building is covered with marsh grass held in place by chicken wire. (Courtesy, C. G. Rice)

hobbled or with their wings clipped — were used as well. Some of the camps were not intended to be duck blinds but served as headquarters during the hunting season from which the sportsmen could launch their gunning floats or other boats.

A number of sportsmen stayed at the Plum Island Hotel, which was located close to the marshes and tidal flats of Plum Island River, the Basin and the adjacent Merrimack River. It is said that the hotel chef was glad to cook and serve the results of the day's bag for dinner.

Until late in the nineteenth century there was enough game to provide a number of men with a good livelihood as market gunners. The birds were shipped by train to Boston, where game was a highly prized food item. Some of the professional hunters, like J. W. Goodridge, who had a camp near the southern end of the island, were taxidermists as well and sold their birds for specimens in museums and private collections. Another prominent gunner, who at one time had a goose stand near the Bluffs, was Charles A. Safford. In common with many other market gunners, Mr. Safford was a keen observer of bird life, and he created beautiful carvings of ducks and geese. Indeed, many of the gunners made their own decoys.

One of the most interesting and notable of the market gunners was Robert H. Wilkinson. Bob was from Maine, of half-Indian heritage, and during the year he would travel along the coast from Maine to North Carolina, hunting, blueberrying, or trapping muskrat, depending upon the season. For many years Bob had a camp near Emerson's Rocks as well as a duck stand in the nearby marshes and is credited with instructing many young local men in the art of shooting. Although he had never been taught to read or write, his knowledge of the world of nature was enormous, and his skill at both calling and shooting is legendary. Bob organized gunning parties for many years and would, if called on, supply all the equipment that was necessary. For sea-duck hunting, boats would be launched from the beach at Emerson's Rocks, where the ducks were attracted to the nearby mussel beds.

Bob was a well-known and respected figure in this area for many years. In his later life a stroke, which left him without speech and with a paralyzed right side, forced him to return to his home in Maine; yet when some local friends stopped to see him on their way to shoot pheasant, he elected to accompany them. Bob sat on the running board of the car

Charles A. Safford, shown here as a successful market gunner. Later he lived year-round at Hale's Cove as resident game warden for the Annie H. Brown Sanctuary. (Courtesy, Candace Erickson)

while the others in the party went off hunting. Upon hearing two shots, the group rushed back to the car, where they found him smiling, his shotgun resting in his lap. Since he was unable to speak, he pointed first in one direction and then in another. A dog was sent out and retrieved a bird at each spot that he had indicated. This remarkable man had shot them one-handed! Bob died two weeks later, so this turned out to be his final hunt.

Because both waterfowl and shore birds were so abundant, there was little or no protective regulation for many years. Birds could be shot at any time of year, and there was no limit to the number that could be killed. By the late 1890's, however, as the bird population began to decline dramatically, it was clear that loss of marshland through development combined with overkill all along the coast was taking a devastating toll. It was obvious that the time had come for drastic measures.

In 1909 the spring shooting of ducks was banned in Massachusetts, and in 1912 a law was passed prohibiting

Alfred Rodigrass stands beside his gunning float inside the Basin sometime in the 1880's. The barrackslike building in the background is unidentified.

the sale of all game birds. Although this stopped the selling of birds on the open market, many hunters had local customers whom they continued to supply quietly. This was a far cry, however, from the heyday of market gunning when game birds were sold by the barrel or even by the cart load. It was not until the Federal Migratory Bird Treaty Act was passed by Congress in 1918 that effective protective regulations were put in place. For another decade the shooting of certain shore birds was permitted, but in 1932 these were also placed under protection, and in 1935 the use of live decoys was prohibited. Subsequent laws extended the restrictions, and today nearly all birds are protected in some way. Strict regulations govern different aspects of hunting, such as the start and duration of the open season and the limits to a day's bag.

Plum Island's wealth of bird life has long attracted the interest of ornithologists, and their records make it one of the best-documented areas on the East Coast. Edward H. Forbush, State Ornithologist of Massachusetts and author of the three-volume *Birds of Massachusetts and Other New England States*, was well aware of Plum Island's importance and stated, "Secure Plum Island and make it a bird sanctuary, for in my opinion it is the most important region on our coast."

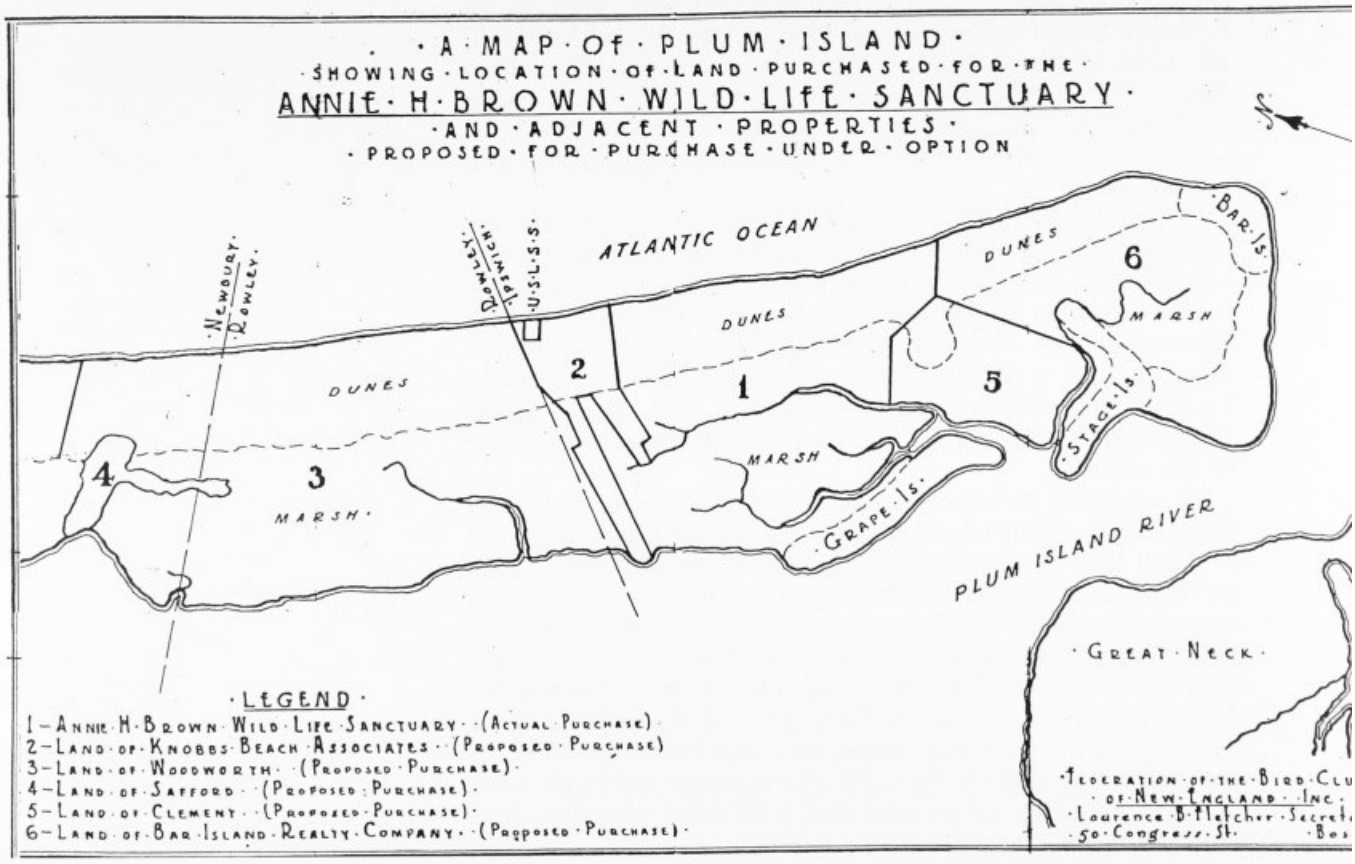
As early as 1872 Charles J. Maynard, a well-known ornithologist, taxidermist and collector, is believed to have visited Plum Island from Ipswich, and for many years he led bird walks on the island in May and October. It was Maynard who discovered the great rookery of over a thousand pairs of Black-crowned Night Heron in Hellcat Swamp. This rookery was destroyed, unfortunately, when the present Refuge road was constructed through the middle of the area.

In addition to having a great variety of waterfowl and shore birds, Plum Island is also a stopping place in spring and fall for migratory songbirds, and many of them remain to nest. Over three hundred species of birds have been recorded on the island, making it one of the most-favored birding areas in the country. It was no accident, therefore, that in 1929, when Miss Annie Hamilton Brown of Stoneham left funds in her will to the Federation of the Bird Clubs of New England "for the purchase of a suitable tract of land in this commonwealth to be used as a separate reservation for the preservation of animal and bird life," the directors selected Plum Island.

The purchase of land began almost immediately, starting with a parcel of six hundred acres that included both beach and marsh and extended northward from land of the Cross Farm to just below the Knobbs Beach Coast Guard Station. The Federation was also successful in securing options on a number of adjacent properties. By 1931, with assistance provided by the Massachusetts Audubon Society, several hundred more acres had been acquired, including the Cross Farm Hill property.

Not long afterward the Federation of Bird Clubs merged with the Massachusetts Audubon Society, which had also received a large bequest under Miss Brown's will. The Society continued the purchase of land and, by 1936, had acquired most of the southern end of the island, including the historic Willow Cottage and the former hotel buildings at Ipswich Bluffs. The Audubon Society soon had possession

A portion of the map prepared for the Federation of the Bird Clubs of New England showing both proposed and actual land purchases. At the time this map was made in 1930 only one purchase had been completed. Bar Island and Grape Island did not become part of the sanctuary.



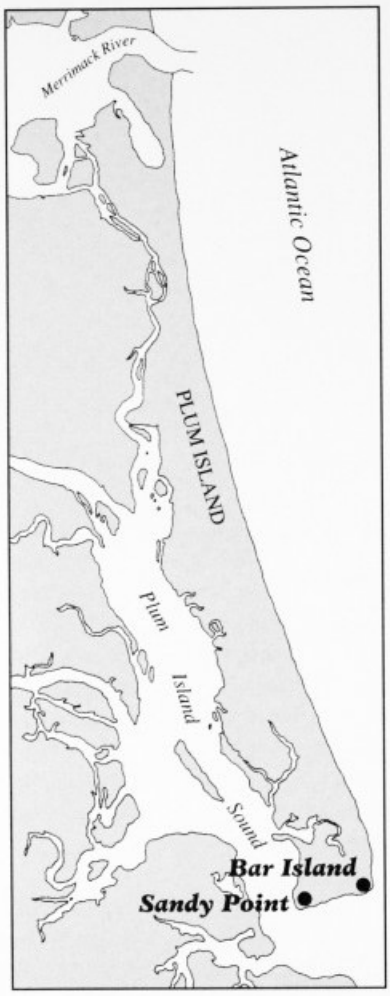
of "all the eastern beach and the sand hills from the end of the tarred road [near the present Refuge entrance] to the head of the southern bay," and it made a standing offer of five dollars an acre for adjoining marshland. The new reservation was called the Annie H. Brown Wildlife Sanctuary in honor of the donor.

The Society hired two on-site wardens to patrol the sanctuary, on which all hunting was prohibited. Both were former professional gunners. One was Charles A. Safford, who built a house for himself at Hale's Cove and soon became a familiar figure as he patrolled the reservation on horseback; the other was Clifford Brocklebank, who in the fall lived with his wife at Willow Cottage. In addition to patrolling the sanctuary, Mr. Safford kept a log of all the birds he observed as he made his daily rounds. Policing the sanctuary was no easy task, since many local gunners saw no good reason to stop hunting in areas that had previously been open to them.

Within the confines of the sanctuary were a number of existing cottages used by private individuals. The Society was content to allow occupants to remain as long as they observed the sanctuary rules. But the establishment of the reservation prevented any further development of the southern end of the island except for a few cottages at Sandy Point where land was privately owned. Grape Island also remained in private hands.

The slightly more than fifteen hundred acres of the Annie H. Brown Wildlife Sanctuary formed the nucleus of the Plum Island land that in 1942 was incorporated into the Parker River National Wildlife Refuge. Miss Brown's name is unfamiliar to most people today, yet her generous legacy, which preserved miles of unspoiled wilderness of thicket, beach and dune, continues to offer sanctuary to wild creatures and to provide beauty and pleasure to thousands of visitors each year.

Bar Island and Sandy Point



At its southern end near the mouth of the Ipswich River, Plum Island soars to a dramatic headland not unlike its neighbor, Castle Hill, directly across the river. Bar Island's upland was once covered with trees, but because lumber was a useful resource for the early colonists, the trees soon disappeared. At one time the terrain supported wolves. Old records of the town of Newbury show that in 1703 two wolves were killed at the southern end.

The land on Bar Island was first apportioned in 1664, and ownership of its lots changed several times over the years. It is believed that many of the lots served solely as farmland or pasturage. But records show that Jeremiah Nelson and his family lived on his holdings of about thirty acres in the mid-1700's. His farmhouse and barn were apparently no longer standing, however, when the land was conveyed to a new owner in 1768.

Bar Head has witnessed many shipwrecks at the base of its towering cliffs, and a number of bodies have been found there. Nathaniel Dole — son of Daniel Dole, who had acquired ownership of the land in 1834 — spoke of "old graves marked with a simple stone on Bar Island Head." Mr. Dole once made a startling discovery while walking the beach after a storm. He came upon a pair of stout boots jutting out of the sand, soles upward. Upon touching them, he found that they contained "the remains of felt stockings and the bones of leg and foot."

Ipswich Bar, a short distance offshore, caused many a ship to founder, and Emerson's Rocks, just to the north, was also a graveyard for ships. At least twenty shipwrecks in this general area are well documented, including the *City Point*, the *Nancy*, and the *Lucy M. Collins*.

While the Knobbs Beach Life Saving Station was in operation, Bar Island Head was the end of the beach patrol, and a telephone was installed there so that the surfman on patrol could report back to the station. Standing on this headland in a winter storm with the surf crashing and thundering below was, and still is, an awesome experience.

John White Winder, his wife, and a friend seated on the wreck of a ship on the beach at Bar Head in 1890. Winder, a fine photographer, took the picture himself. (Courtesy, Institution for Savings)

Until the Knobbs Beach Station was built in 1890, the only assistance available to seamen wrecked in this area was that volunteered by the residents of Grape Island, Ipswich Bluffs and Cross Farm, and over the years they aided in numerous rescues. Since a ship's cargo and remains were often strewn for miles along the beach, wrecks provided many useful items. A number of island homes included a door or an addition made from lumber salvaged from a stricken ship.

Emerson's Rocks, a cluster of boulders extending from the beach into the ocean, lie near the northern end of Bar Head. These rocks are named for the Emerson family who once lived on Cross Farm Hill. In the dunes close to Bar Head were two camps that were used by sportsmen through the 1930's. One of them belonged to Robert H. Wilkinson, the well-known market gunner, who found this beach a good location for launching his boats when hunting sea ducks. A short distance northward, closer to the Cross Farm, were two more cottages, one of them occupied for many summers by the Tingley family.

On its western edge Bar Head slopes down to marsh and sand dune. This marsh area, lying between Bar Head and the Bluffs and adjoining Sandy Point, is the site of the unsuccessful saltworks and more recently the scene of a serious treasure hunt. Stories of buried treasure haunt many coastal islands, and Plum Island is no exception. In this case, Ralph Campbell of Ipswich came into possession of an old document written in Japanese characters that appeared, when translated, to give clues to a buried treasure on Plum Island. Research into the age and source of the paper seemed to confirm the authenticity of the map, and Mr. Campbell and a group of Ipswich men banded together to provide the resources needed to search for the treasure.

According to an illustrated article that appeared in the *Boston Sunday Herald* in October of 1956, the early diggings took place in an area between Bar Head and Sandy Point. Mr. Campbell was quoted as saying, "The author of the map had lived in Ipswich. I knew there were outstanding things that had to be found. There was a long river barrier, the bridge, certain meadows, marshlands, ditches and a hill at the end of the bridge. . . . The treasure was taken there by wagon. . . . The map definitely states that treasure — great wealth — is there. . . ."

A number of objects were indeed found that matched the clues on the map, but unfortunately they pointed to a location that placed the treasure well within the confines of the Refuge. By the time Mr. Campbell and his associates had found the spot where they believed the treasure was buried, their permit to dig had expired, and the government declined to renew it. Men who were involved in the search are convinced that the treasure does exist and that they would have recovered it had they been allowed to continue the dig.

Traces of another possible treasure surfaced in 1907 when Albert Leet, an island resident who was then serving at the Knobbs Beach Station, discovered an old silver coin dated 1749 near the water's edge about a mile south of the station. Several days later he found other pieces of silver in the same location, suggesting that his find was part of a buried treasure. A summer resident is said to have found some silver buckles of ancient Spanish design not far from where the money was discovered and where the body of a man is rumored to be buried.

Legend has it that pirates did bury treasure on Plum Island. One story persists that many years ago an islander observed four men land on the shore, two of them supporting

a heavy chest slung between two poles. Some time later, watching them leave the island, he noted that there now were only two men. Were the other two men murdered and buried with the treasure? Apparently the witness was too fearful to investigate, so one can only speculate about the truth of the tale.

The area of dunes and beach known as Sandy Point has always been popular with bathers and picnickers, and the local steamers brought excursion parties there. The steep beach enabled boats to come close to shore except at extreme low tide. This made Sandy Point an ideal loading place for sand droghers, and for many years two or three were often lined up at one time, loading sand for Boston.

The sand droghers were usually old fishing schooners that were no longer serviceable for offshore duty and were used to convey sand for the building trade. Both Plum Island Point, at the mouth of the Merrimack River, and Sandy Point, at the

Sand droghers being loaded at Sandy Point in 1891. (Courtesy, Historical Society of Old Newbury)

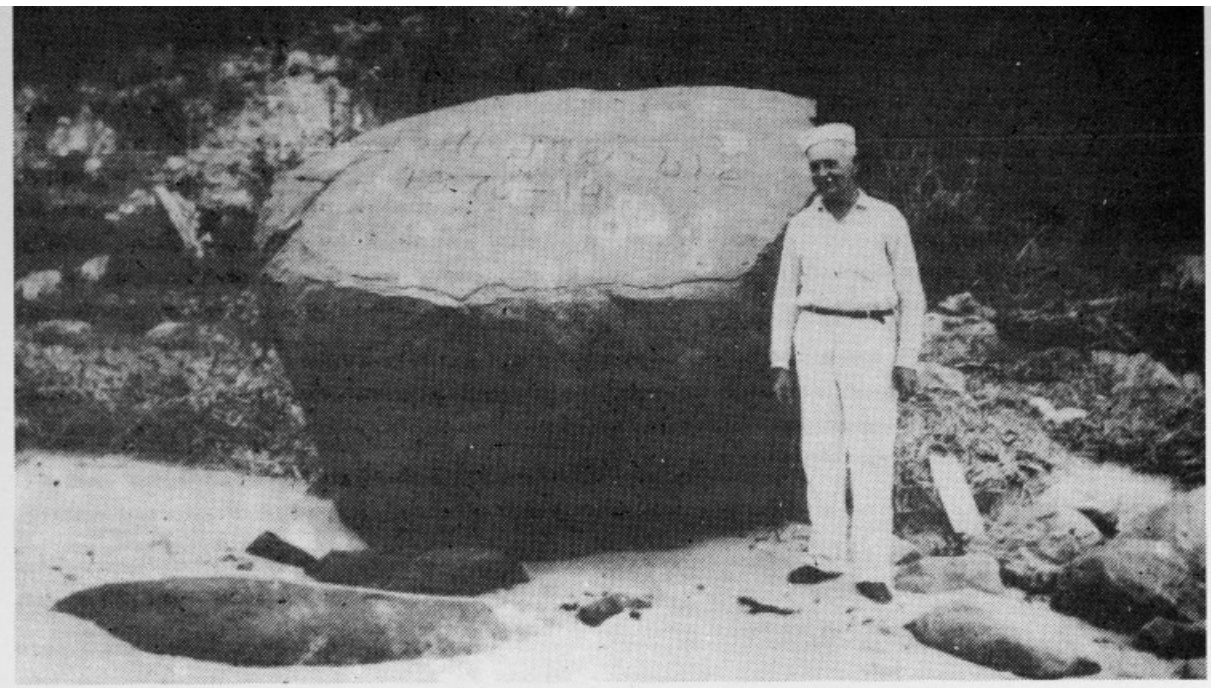
southern end of the island, were favored destinations for the droghers, and thousands of tons of Plum Island sand were sold for the making of mortar, providing the owners of the beach with a steady income. The supply was inexhaustible, since the sea quickly replenished the amount of sand that had been removed. The sand varied in consistency, ranging from the coarse sand at the mouth of the Merrimack to the whiter, finer sand at Sandy Point, and was harvested according to the needs of the trade.

The drogher, which carried a crew of from three to five men depending on the size of the vessel, was anchored close to shore at high tide in such a way that she would heel, or tilt, toward the shore as the tide fell. Planks were laid from the ship to a keg on shore and from the keg to a digging site. According to local historian Robert Cheney, each of the men was expected to shovel fifty tons of sand in two tides. "An extra tide killed the profit." The wheelbarrows that were used were specially designed for the work and had a capacity of up to a thousand pounds. A man would wheel a load along the planks to the open hold on the deck of the ship, where one of the side boards on the wheelbarrow would be removed, allowing the sand to empty into the hold. Balancing such a heavy load on narrow planks required skill, and many a barrowful was lost en route.

Sandy Point, before its acquisition as a state park, was the site of several summer cottages, some of them — the Rogers, Thurlow and Jaques camps — dating back to the early part of this century. Carl Fyrberg, who once lived on the Cross Farm, also had a camp at Sandy Point. Others were more recent, built when lots were offered for public sale in the 1950's. Approximately ten cottages were removed when the land came under the jurisdiction of the state. Those parcels of land that are still owned by the town of Ipswich are now on long-term lease to the Commonwealth.

In the 1930's a Newburyport native and well-known engineer, Oscar Thurlow, whose family had long owned a cottage at Sandy Point, purchased land at Bar Head with the idea of creating a scenic highway to extend the length of Plum Island. A plan was presented for building a bridge across the mouth of the Ipswich River. It was a serious proposal, but the project never came to fruition.

Bar Head and Sandy Point have always attracted those who wish to get away. Sandy Point became the home of a hermit who claimed to have been shipwrecked there. He built himself a shelter from lumber found on the beach and lived in



Bill Marble standing beside the boulder he chose to mark his grave site (Courtesy, Ipswich Today*)*

it one winter before being evicted. Many will remember Bill Marble, who renovated the former Woodbury camp and spent his summers there. Bill loved Sandy Point so much that he carved his name and birthdate on an enormous boulder at the base of the bluff, and when he died in 1953, his ashes were buried there. During the service for him, friends read his favorite poem, "Outward Bound," which would have pleased him greatly.

Sometime at even when the tide is low
I shall slip my moorings and sail away,
With no response to the friendly hail
Of kindred craft in the busy bay.
In the silent hush of the twilight pale
When the night stoops down to embrace the day,
And the voices call at the water's flow,
Sometime at even when the tide is low
I shall slip my moorings and sail away. . . .

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