

Genealogical Research in Brooksville, Penobscot Bay Region, Maine

By Russell C. Farnham, CG

Penobscot Bay is one of many places in Hancock County that attracted settlers to northeastern Maine. It was the scene of Revolutionary War land and sea battles. Tradition has it that the first settlers were Archibald Hainey, Timothy Roax, and Ebenezer Leland.

The town of Brooksville, named for the first governor of Maine, was incorporated in 1817. It is almost entirely surrounded by water: on the east and north by Walkers Pond, Bagaduce River, and Castine Harbor; to the south by Eggemoggin Reach; and to the west by Penobscot Bay. In the nineteenth century there were five villages of Brooksville: Brooksville; North Brooksville, West Brooksville, Cape Rosier; and South Brooksville. "The Cape" was named for James Rosier (Rozier), the cartographer on the expedition of Capt. Weymouth, who sailed up the Penobscot in the seventeenth century.

Brooksville has not forgotten its past. With the passage of time, the town fathers saw a need to preserve and maintain the things we all cherish: the written word of families, the lifestyle, the artifacts, and anything else that reminds us of the golden days. And the peaceful and pleasant atmosphere of the Penobscot Bay region, as seen by the eyes of the craftsmen -- blacksmiths, farmers, mariners, ships carpenters, and so on -- is well preserved. The townspeople have been ever mindful of the lifestyle and sacrifices made by their forefathers. The Brooksville Historical Society (BHS) was organized in the early 1930s with the goal of preserving much of the area's rich traditions. It has survived over the years and today remains a small organization, staffed essentially by volunteers. Richard Brownell, Archivist, and his associates have compiled an array of memorabilia and artifacts donated by families that is intended to show the heritage of the Brooksville area and its population. Write to Richard Brownell at the Brooksville Historical Society, Box 9999, Harborside Road, Harborside, ME 04642.

The Brooksville Free Public Library is also actively interested in assisting individuals researching their genealogical links to the region. Librarian Leona Gray (1-207-326-4560) and volunteer genealogist Edna Andrews have an avowed interest in the subject. The Library's archive includes material on local families. As far as possible, Ms. Gray will respond to inquiries via email or mail. The genealogical holdings of the Brooksville Library consist of:

- Brooksville town reports, 1926-1999
- Vital records of 13 towns (more than 33 volumes)
- Histories of 23 Maine towns (32 volumes)
- Genealogies of 36 Maine families (40 volumes)
- Multifamily genealogies (19 volumes)
- 230 single family vertical files
- Maps of 7 surrounding towns
- Local deeds of the 1770s
- Military records (6 volumes and 15 files)
- Post cards and photos of local families and building.

Leona Gray may be reached at 1-207-326-4560 or P.O. Box 38, Brooksville, ME 04617.

Many stories are to be found within the archives of the Brooksville Historical Society and the Brooksville Free Public Library. Some of them concern Published and Oral Histories. The names GRAY, LYMBURNER, TAPLEY, LORD, GRINDLE, STEVENS, STOVER, SNOW, VARNUM (FARNUM), WARDWELL, and WASSON are but a few of the families found in the area and files of the BHS. News releases of the three Polk sisters, who married three Lord brothers, raising families who were double cousins. Henrietta B Lord was 80 when she described how Edwin Lord, sea captain, proposed to her -- the couple journeyed in a rowboat to Castine, where they were married.

Brooksville Maine, a Town in the Revolution (Walter A Snow, 1967), is a nifty little softcover booklet published by the Brooksville Bicentennial Committee to honor the names of leading citizens. It contains biographical information on the citizens who served in the Revolutionary War. The record of Ebenezer Leland, Andrew Gray, Joshua Gray, Archibald Hainey, Hateville Colson, and Matthew and John Lymburner are but a few found in this booklet, which is loaded with many facts. It was written by a "local" with an interest in genealogy and attention to accuracy.

Penobscot Bicentennial, 1787-1987 (1987), an excellent book with much small-town flavor, describes briefly the history of nearby Penobscot, with some detail on leading citizens and recollections of life in the town from some of the older residents. The names of townsmen who served in all of the wars are provided. There are also pictures of homes, the first schools, churches, and other important structures.

Bertha Hutchins Bowden compiled an excellent booklet on the cemeteries in the nearby town of Penobscot. *Penobscot Maine Cemetery Locations* (1971), is a spiral bound, 87-page booklet that includes the names of the many families the author found buried in 68 cemeteries of the region.

The history of the Rainbow Grange, Brooksville, can be found in a 6-page monograph (1975) by Thelma Greene.

Guest Registers of the Baycrest Inn, 1931 and 1933, have been preserved by the BHS; along with the Brooksville Highway tax 1835-1846. There are official pictures taken during World War I; and the usual mementos from local townsmen who served in that war. Many original deeds to old Brooksville properties are available at the BHS. A framed copy of the 1853 Maine State Tax has been saved and framed.

Oral interviews with various local citizens preserved on tape, including impressions during the 1971 moonwalk.

The lengthy *Margaret (Lord) Varnum Diary, 1852-1884* was transcribed by members of the BHS in 1977. There is infinite detail in the author's daily recordings of events and happenings covering a thirty-two year period in this coastal community. A deeply religious woman, Margaret Varnum (who died on 3 January 1885) recorded many events that, in some instances, are at odds with published vital statistics. She also made note of specific reasons for the deaths of many of her neighbors. Again, this is information that may not be found elsewhere. Her diary is 220 pages long, and the last 10 pages of this edition contain an alphabetical listing of all of the deaths, approximately 400 persons, in these coastal towns. The deaths were extracted and published in volumes 17 and 128 of the *Maine Genealogist* (1995-96). The following are typical of her diary entries:

April 18 1862: death has again Come into our town Mrs Hyrum orcut died this week of the quick Consumption She has left her husband and a infant Child and friends to mourn Just in her youthful days She lives in the distant part of the Town So I dont know the particulars

Feb 16 1862: I hav now to record the death of little Flora Maddocks one of my daughters litte twins 3 years old her Cloths caught fir and was was burnt badly but she inhaled the fire and She lived only a days She was a lovely child but She has gone to that butiful world wher ther will be no more death [more]

Oct 19 1862: Ruba Varnum my Sister in law lost her dear little babe he died in my arms he has gone to Join that happy Company of holy Children god bless those parents and may it prove a blessing to them and may they be led to Say thy will be done.