

Plummer Point Preserve, South Bristol, Maine - A History of the Land



Plummer Point Preserve lies in the southern part of South Bristol, west of State Route 129 and north of Pine Bluff Lane. The peninsula is a granite ledge that stretches northward into the Damariscotta River, bordering Seal Cove on its western shore and Long Cove on the east. The Preserve includes over a mile of steep, ledgy shoreline and maturing forests of red and white pine, red spruce, balsam fir, and mixed hardwoods. Trails on both sides of an access road from Route 129 lead the visitor down to the water. Parking is on Route 129.

The First Plummers 1763 – 1854

Bedfield Plummer Sr. (17??–1803) and Sarah Plummer, his wife, are believed to have arrived on Johns Bay or Seal Cove by barge from Portsmouth NH in the mid-18th century,¹ when Maine was still a district of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. According to H. Landon Warner,² Bedfield Plummer bought land in 1763 from John Wirling³. Although no record of such a purchase has been found either in the Lincoln County or York County Registry of Deeds, a 1751 map⁴ identifies John Wirling as the former owner of Plummer land between the Damariscotta River and Johns Bay (Appendix A). Wirling, of Scotch-Irish descent, probably came to the area with Colonel David Dunbar around 1729-30 and would have acquired his land under Dunbar's commission, a crown grant from King George II⁵.

In later years, Bedfield Plummer also acquired 35 acres from James Philpot⁶ and 100 acres from Benjamin Rackliff⁷. His land included both Hodgdon's (aka Hodgson's) Island and Farmer's Island, located off the western shore of Plummer Point and formerly known as the "Plummer Islands." Hodgdon's Island was donated in 1989 to the DRA by South Bristol summer resident Ann Stratton, whose family had owned it since the early 1900s and Stratton Island (as many local residents have long called it) now hosts DRA's Menigawum Preserve. All together, Bedfield Plummer's land extended from the Damariscotta River on the west to Johns Bay on the east and from McClintock Hill on the north to somewhere south of Seal Cove.

Warner suggests that Bedfield Plummer built a home on Wirlings Bay/Johns Bay as early as 1763⁸. A mark on the 1751 map in Appendix A indicates a dwelling at the center of the peninsula, but this is not the location that great great great

¹ Landon Warner, interview with Clifton Poole, date unknown.

² Warner 2006, pg.30.

³ Various spellings include Wirling, Wurling, Worling, Wordlin, and others.

⁴ Reproduced in McLane 1994, pg.24, this early map is stored in the Maine State Archives.

⁵ David Andrews, Colonial South Bristol. Presentation at the South Bristol Historical Society, October 18, 2007.

⁶ Lincoln County Registry of Deeds.. Bk 8, pg 198.

⁷ Lincoln County Registry of Deeds Bk 26, pg 140.

⁸ Warner, p. 30

granddaughter Katherine Poole remembers from family stories. According to her, the first Plummer home was built close to the entrance to today's Plummer Point Preserve. Katherine recalls as a child playing on the rocks of the old foundation, trying to imagine what life was like when her ancestors lived there. Unfortunately, when Route 129 was rerouted around 1970, the remains were covered over, and all traces of a family homestead on Plummer Point were lost. The 1751 map in Appendix A indicates another structure on Wirling land, this one overlooking the Johns River, but nothing is known about this building's exact location or lifespan.

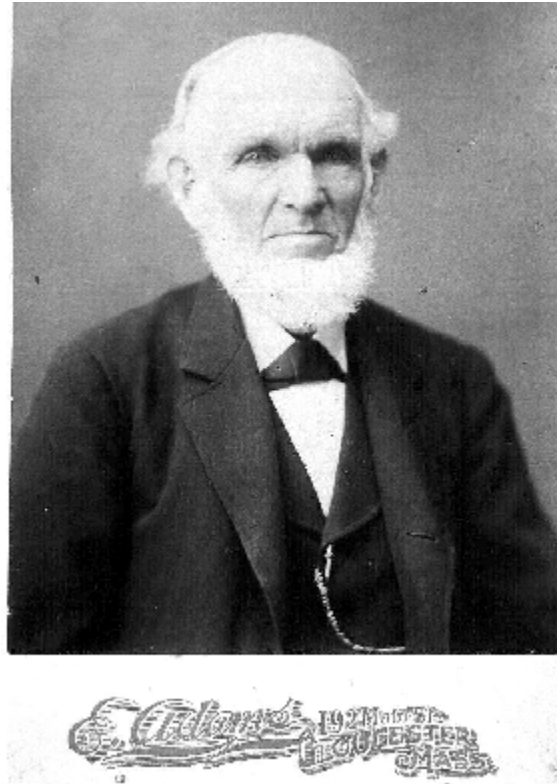


Figure 1 – Photo thought to be of James Plummer.

Two of Bedfield Plummer Sr.'s sons, James (1760-1854) (Figure 1) and Bedfield Jr. (1766-1818), played important roles in Plummer Point Preserve history. By 1793, the brothers had acquired their father's home and most of his land, from the Damariscotta River on the west to Johns Bay on the east, for a sum of one hundred pounds⁹. In turning his lands and home over to his sons, Bedfield Sr. assured his own future well-being by bonding his sons in a legal document detailing how the new owners were to care for their father and mother for the rest of their days¹⁰. See Appendix B for full statement of the bond.

⁹ Lincoln County Registry of Deeds, bk 30 pg 105

¹⁰.Lincoln County Registry of Deeds, bk 40 pg 69

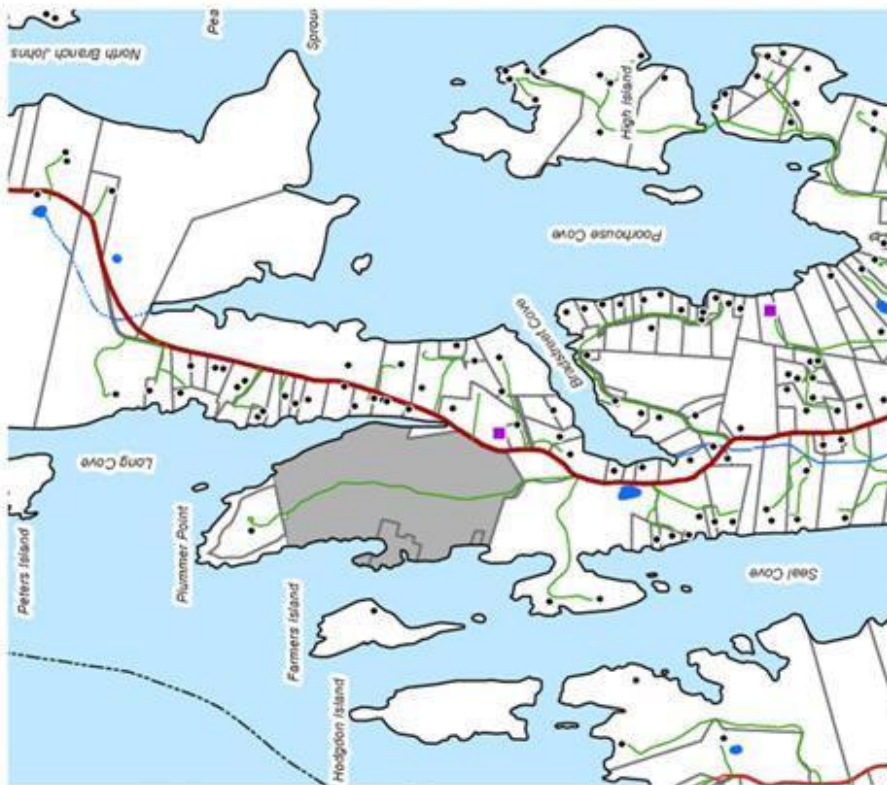


Figure 2b. Map showing current tax parcel boundaries from April 2006 and the extent (shading) of the DRA's Plummer Point Preserve.

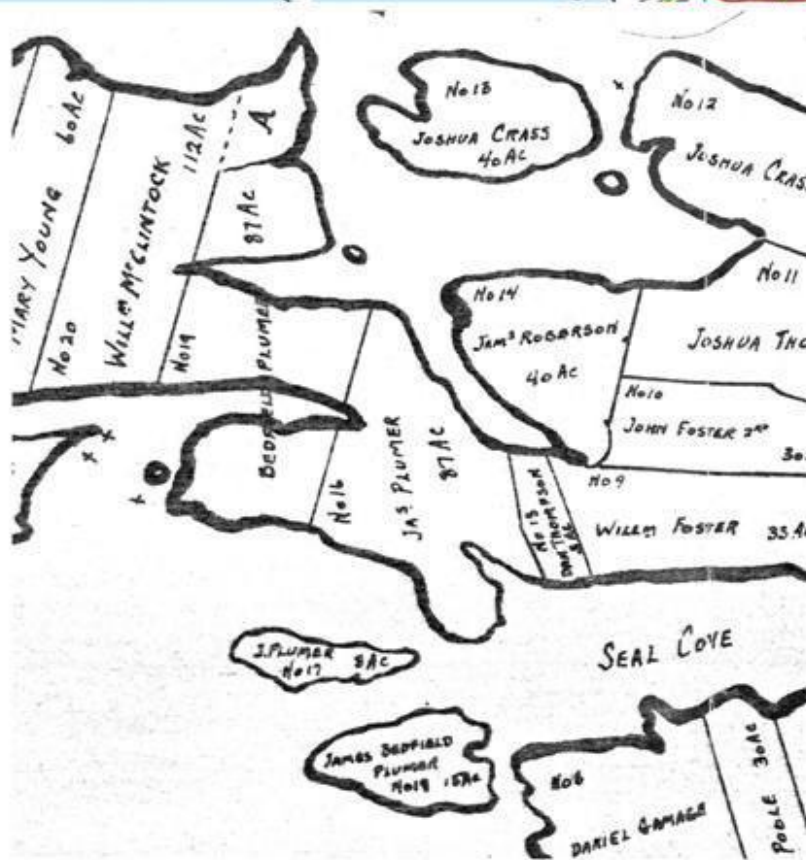


Figure 2a. Portion of the 1815 "Survey of the Town of Bristol ... With All the Lots and Tracts" showing Bedfield Plummer Jr. and James Plummer property boundaries.

Soon after their father's death in 1803, James and Bedfield Jr. subdivided the property in equal parts with a line drawn from the Damariscotta River to Johns Bay, cutting across the southern end of Long Cove. Bedfield Jr. took the land north of the line that extended to the tip of Plummer Point and James the land south of the line, including some of the Seal Cove shore and the southern half of current Poorhouse Cove on the Johns River. This transaction became known as Plummer's Division.¹¹ An 1815 survey (see Figure 2a) maps the division as a straight line from the Damariscotta River to Johns Bay, cutting across the south end of Long Cove close to where the road runs today (see Figure 2b).

Poole family members recall remnants of a wire fence that probably marked the boundary between James Plummer's land on the south and Bedfield Jr.'s on the north¹². For many years, a rough track from the road to the northern end of Plummer Point cut through wetlands and around rocky outcroppings. In the 1950s, it was straightened and graded, eventually to become Plummer Point Road, with access to trails on today's Preserve.

For the next 129 years Plummer Point remained divided, with Bedfield Jr. owning most of the Long Cove shore to the northern end of Plummer Point. James Plummer owned from Seal Cove to the southern side of Poorhouse Cove on the Johns River. Today, a hiker entering Plummer Point Preserve from the road passes first through James Plummer's land and, about half way in, crosses the old division onto Bedfield Jr.'s property. As far as we know, neither brother ever lived on Plummer Point. James married Martha Farnham of Boothbay in 1794 and lived in the family homestead overlooking Johns Bay¹³. Bedfield Jr. built his own house, also on Johns Bay, in 1810, property now owned by David and Gina Riddiford.

Descendants of James Plummer 1854 - 1946

The southern end of Plummer Point passed from the Plummers to the Poole family in 1854 when James died and left his property to his daughter, Martha (1811-1883), and her husband, Ebenezer (Eben) Poole (1806-1896) (Figure 3). The southern subdivision of Plummer Point now belonged in the Poole family, where it remained for the next 98 years. This land includes the southern tip of Long Cove, running across the southern boundary of Plummer Point Preserve along the road entrance and west across today's Robert Gardner property¹⁴. Eben and Martha and their eight children lived in the Plummer family homestead on Johns Bay but lost the house in a fire in 1850. After several years in

¹¹ Lincoln County Registry of Deeds, bk 62, pg 132

¹² H. Landon Warner, p. 31

¹³ Warner, p. 31

¹⁴ Map of Lincoln County, 1857

temporary quarters on Texas Road, they moved back to occupy a new cape-style farm house on the same site¹⁵. Four generations of Pooles lived in that house, making their living as farmers, fishermen, and carpenters. Today it is the home of Richard and Patricia Jackson, summer residents from New Hampshire.



Figure 3. Eben Poole with grandson James Poole

In October 1881, Eben Poole sold the family homestead to his son, Everett A. Poole (1857-1946) for two thousand dollars. In lieu of payment, Eben bonded his son to support and maintain himself and Martha “for the rest of their natural lives,” including “suitable clothes, foods, drink, medicine and nursing, and all other things necessary in the house of the said Everett A. Poole¹⁶.” According to Katherine Poole Norwood, Everett had been living above a store in Damariscotta and painting for a living¹⁷. (Many of his oil paintings were sold, but some are still in the family.) In accepting the bond, Everett and his wife, Katherine Cudworth Poole of Round Pond (1861-1929), then moved into the house on Johns Bay, where the couple cared for Everett’s parents until they died in 1883 (Martha) and 1897 (Eben).

¹⁵ Katherine Norwood, 2006

¹⁶ Bond from Everett A. Poole to Eben and Martha Poole. Lincoln County Registry of Deeds, 1881. Bk 268, p. 352

¹⁷ Katherine Norwood, 2007



Figure 4. Everett Poole

The Poole share of Plummer Point, namely the southern portion, now belonged without bond to Everett, along with the house and land across the road on Johns Bay. A dairy farmer as well as a painter, Everett is well remembered for his service as the first clerk of the new town of South Bristol when the town split off from Bristol and incorporated in 1915 (Figure 4). He served in this capacity for 30 years, from 1915 to 1945, the year before he died at age 89. He was also a gifted calligrapher and engraver. For many years, his fine penmanship and steel engravings decorated marriage certificates and other important documents, as well as the cover of the annual Town Report (see Appendix C). Everett's wife, Katherine, was a teacher at the S Road School in the 1880's.

In 1910, Everett set up a steam-powered saw mill on Plummer Point to harvest white pine from his land south of the wire fence line and close to Long Cove. The saw mill is long gone, but Everett's grandchildren, Raymond and Katherine, remember as children finding piles of sawdust and pieces of rusted corrugated iron, the remains of the operation. "Grandpa sold trees to the Pastorus Lumber Company," Katherine recalls. "Often the workers from the mill would go up to Grandpa's house for dinner, and some roomed in the old farmhouse. This was before my time. Dad (Clifton) was just a little boy. "When the Plummer Point mill closed, sometime around 1930, the land was clear-cut for pasture but eventually reverted to forest.

After Katherine's death in 1929, her widower, Everett Poole, continued to live in the house with his son, Clifton (1903-1972) and Clifton's wife, Frances (a.k.a. Fannie) Pinkham Poole (1907-1985). Clifton was a boat builder, employed at Harvey Gamage's Shipyard in South Bristol. In the barn behind the house, he built and sold his own skiffs, some of which continue in use today¹⁸. As a dairy farmer, he also raised cows and pastured sheep on Plummer Point. Their daughter, Katherine, was born in 1930 in the front room of the old homestead. Katherine, along with siblings Raymond and Barbara, grew up on their grandfather's farm, playing in the meadows above Johns Bay and roaming the woods of Plummer Point. Much of what we know about the Poole land on Plummer Point in those years comes from the recollections of Katherine and Raymond. As a boy, Raymond often played with his friends in the granite quarry. Katherine enjoys remembering stories she heard as a child. A favorite story-teller was her Aunt Alys, Clifton's older sister. "It was Daddy and Aunt Alys's job to go over to Plummer Point and chase the cows home," recalls Katherine. "The cow and sheep crossing was across what is now Rte. 129, (near) Bradstreet Lane. Once Aunt Alys thought she heard...a bear. She called to her brother, 'Wait for me! I hear a bear!' It didn't take (them) long to get the cows in the barn that night!"

In 1943, Everett Poole sold the homestead and land on both sides of the road to his son, Clifton¹⁹. Clifton and Fannie continued to live in the family home for the rest of their lives. However, in 1946, Clifton sold the Poole land on the west side of the road, including the south corner of Plummer Point, to Charles F. Lyman of Marblehead, Massachusetts²⁰.

Descendants of Bedfield Plummer Jr. 1818 - 1856

Bedfield Plummer Jr. married Betsy Fossett in 1808 and had two sons, William (1803-1877) and David (1808-1876). In 1810, Bedfield Jr. built a house overlooking Johns Bay. When he died in 1818, the northern subdivision apparently went to David, who would have been ten years old at the time, but no deed has been found. David's land would have included the tip of Plummer Point and the Long Cove shore where the Brown, Vaughan, Hirsch, and McKeon homes are today. Known as "Captain" David as an adult, he went on to trade in livestock and to run a hotel and meat market in Damariscotta. Although David and his wife, Nancy Goudy Plummer (1808-1896), reportedly had seven sons, he sold the 150-acre property, including the northern end of Plummer Point, to Thomas Erskine in 1856 for \$2,500²¹.

¹⁸ Raymond and Lillian Poole, October 2007

¹⁹ Lincoln County Registry of Deeds, Wiscasset. Bk 446, p. 335

²⁰ Lincoln County Registry of Deeds, Wiscasset. Bk 466, p.286

²¹ Lincoln County Registry of Deeds, Wiscasset. Bk 209, p.376

Thomas Erskine to Herman Kelsey 1856 to 1946

Thomas Erskine was a successful farmer and land speculator in the Bristol area²². Little else is known about him, and his use of Plummer Point, but during his ownership there were several small quarrying operations along the shore²³. In 1873, Erskine sold the former Bedfield Plummer, Jr. land from the river to the bay to William T. Kelsey (1847-1911)²⁴. The deed gives us another clue to the use of the land at that time for timber, with its stipulation that "William H. Wheeler (will have) the privilege of taking the wood now standing or cut on the northwesterly part of the Westerly Point of said land as now marked to him by spotted trees."

"William was quite a businessman," says his great grandson, Lance Kelsey²⁵. In addition to farming, he was ever alert to business opportunities, one of which was the quarries on Plummer Point. Although not a quarrier himself, William developed the quarry operation into a small but successful business. His son, Herman, eventually joined him in the business as a quarry worker. Since dynamite was too powerful for these smaller quarries, Herman had to use a hand drill to make holes in the rock seams. He then filled the holes with water, plugged them, and waited for the water to freeze and split the rock. For young Herman, it was a way to make money: four cents for every six-inch-deep hole. Once broken out, the blocks of granite were dragged to the shore on wooden sledges for additional chipping and shaping before being loaded onto ships. Plummer Point granite was taken by barge or schooner to Boston and sold as paving stones²⁶. Short drill holes can be seen today on the granite cliffs off the Shore Trail of Plummer Point Preserve. Nearby are the remains of the cutting fields, jagged blocks tumbling down toward the river.

Lance Kelsey tells us that his great grandfather's business ventures extended to ship building, brick making, and mail delivery by stagecoach. Every year for about 20 years William built a schooner at the Kelsey Farm on the river (now site of the Wawenock golf course), then ballasted it with granite cut by Herman for the trip to Boston. After selling both the schooner and its cargo, he took a steamer back to Bristol, where he began construction on his next ship.

It is testimony to this remarkable man that while a Selectman for the Town of Bristol, he also served as Overseer of the Poor. Although he maintained a residence on Johns Bay for the indigents who worked on his farm, he continued to live in the Kelsey homestead, which today is the clubhouse of the Wawenock Golf Course.

²² Warner, p. 38

²³ Lance Kelsey, October 2007

²⁴ Lincoln County Registry of Deeds, Wiscasset. Bk 248 p. 314

²⁵ Lance Kelsey, October 2006

²⁶ Lance Kelsey, October 2006

William Kelsey died in 1911, leaving the land to his wife, Sarah Hodgdon Kelsey, who died in 1915. In her will, she divided the total parcel of 150 acres among her five children. "The Point" was left to her son, Herman (1873-1961), who had worked its quarries with his father. By this time, however, the demand for granite paving stones had declined and the quarrying operation was no longer a profitable business. Herman lived in South Bristol village, where he was a well-known lobsterman (Figure 5). During the 73 years that the land was in the Kelsey family, many people referred to the point as Kelsey Point, a name that some continue to use today.



Figure 5 Herman Kelsey and son Louis Kelsey painting pot buoys.

Charles F. (Fred) Lyman to Ingram Richardson
and the Damariscotta River Association
1946 - present

In 1946, Charles F. Lyman (1899-1989) and Elizabeth Lyman (1903-1994) of Marblehead, Massachusetts purchased the former James Plummer sub-division from Plummer's descendent, Everett Poole; from Herman Kelsey they bought the land once owned by James' brother, Bedfield Plummer, Jr. Thus Plummer Point was once more under single ownership. Fred Lyman, a well-known yachtsman and boat builder, as well as a veteran of two world wars, designed and built 68 boats in his career²⁷. By 1946, the Lymans were ready to leave Marblehead for a simpler, more tranquil life. Thinking they had found it on Plummer Point, they cleared a track through the dense forest large enough for their Jeep and opened up a house site close to the end of the point. One year later, according to daughter Joan,²⁸ they decided on a more practical option for their growing family. They sold the Plummer land without building and moved up from Marblehead to a house on Biscay Pond in Bremen. Compared to Boston and Marblehead, rural Lincoln County was sparsely populated in those days. Joan recalls arriving for the first time at her new home and asking her mother, "Where are all the people?" Her mother's reply was, "Dear, you just have to look a little harder." The Lymans continued to live year round in Maine, relocating from Bremen to South Bristol and eventually to Rutherford Island, where the deep water coast was ideal for the family's boats. Fred Lyman, Jr. still occupies the family home in Christmas Cove.

The new owners of Plummer Point were Ingram (1907-1993) and Helen (1907-1999) Richardson of Mendham, New Jersey, who now had approximately 45 acres north of the Poole's fenceline (the old "Plummer Divide"). An additional 42 acres south of the fenceline was acquired by the Richardsons in 1961. The land that once had been logged and then grazed now had reverted to a dense spruce, oak and pine forest. By the 1950s, the forest had regenerated sufficiently to allow limited pulpwood cutting over 2/3 of the property. White pine and spruce were cut, while red pine and selected large diameter trees were left standing.

With no buildings on Plummer Point, the Richardsons and their three children spent their first summers there in World War II surplus army tents, cooking outdoors and hauling fresh water from a spring at the bottom of a steep ledge. In 1950 and 1951, they built and moved into two cabins at the edge of the clearing that the Lymans had left. A Richardson daughter was married in one of the cabins in 1959. The cabins are still there today, summer home to four generations. Early in this period, the track from State Route 129 to the end of the point, a length of .8 mile, was rerouted around low lying areas, then graveled and graded.

²⁷ Joan Lyman Niles, 2007.

²⁸ Joan Lyman Niles, 2007

In 1964, Ingram and Helen left New Jersey to become year-round residents in a small house they built at the end of the point. Water from an artesian well and a propane-powered generator supplied their basic needs. But in March 1967 while Ingram and Helen were away, an explosive fire, probably caused by a spark from a generator, burned the house to the ground. Firefighters from Damariscotta, Pemaquid, and surrounding towns pumped thousands of gallons of water from the river to saturate the trees and save the forest, but the house and everything in it were gone. The couple moved back into the cabins to live while builder Raymond Poole and his crew erected a Deck House near where the former home had stood.

Between 1963 and 1973, the Richardsons donated most of their Plummer Point land to The Nature Conservancy (TNC), eventually deeding 71 acres to establish the Plummer Point Preserve and donating a conservation easement on the point's remaining nine acres, where the new house was built. When the Richardson Family and TNC cut a trail from the center of the point to the shore, it did not take long for local walkers to begin discovering the beauty of Plummer Point. Adjoining property owners to the south, Robert and Adele Gardner, later expanded public access by granting a conservation easement to DRA and agreeing to the building of connecting trails along their Seal Cove frontage.



Figure 6 Ingram Richardson with his oysters at north end of Plummer Point

In one of the earliest oyster-culture trials of the University of Maine's Darling Center, Ingram Richardson began raising European oysters in the 1970s in trays under his float at the end of Plummer Point. The results were impressive in both quantity and quality, until a record cold spell one winter killed most of the harvest. Ingram never went back to oystering, but he and his neighbor, Chester Brown, who also had participated in the University of Maine initiative, had demonstrated that it is possible to raise oysters on the lower Damariscotta River. In Figure 6, Ingram shows three sizes of Belan oysters.

In his role as a governor of the Nature Conservancy, Ingram was instrumental at this time in organizing a conservation group that formed initially to encourage the protection and stewardship of local lands. In 1973, this group was legally chartered as the Damariscotta River Association, a non-profit conservation organization. The DRA did not decide to become actively involved in lands protection until 1986. Then some of the same individuals, joined now by others dedicated to land preservation and with the close guidance and support of the Maine Coast Heritage Trust, took the legal steps necessary to formally establish the DRA as a regional land trust. By this time, failing health prevented Ingram from taking an active part in the rapid development of the organization he had helped to start, but as long as he lived he recalled with pride that the first meeting leading to establishment of the DRA was held in the living room of his home on Plummer Point.

After Ingram's death in 1993, The Nature Conservancy transferred the Plummer Point deed, along with the adjoining conservation easement, to the DRA. Since DRA stewards were already managing Plummer Point Preserve and monitoring the easement under a cooperative agreement with TNC, this was a smooth transition that was encouraged by Ingram's widow Helen Richardson and their three children. Trails that had been blazed by TNC were now extended on both sides of the access road, enabling walkers to traverse the point from the Seal Cove shore to Long Cove, visiting the old granite quarry along the way. Canoes located on the Gardner Easement invite visitors to explore the rocky inlets along the shore.

When Helen Richardson died in 1999, her children became the owners of the family home and nine acres inside the DRA easement. Today the Richardson children and grandchildren continue to work with the DRA to maintain Plummer Point Preserve for the enjoyment of generations to come.

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November 2007

Appendix A



"Map of Bristol and Bremen, ME. With names of some of the families residing there in 1751," included as a frontispiece in Johnston, John. A History of the Towns of Bristol and Bremen in the State of Maine, including Pemaquid Settlement. Albany: Joel Munsell, 1873.



1751 "Plan of a Survey of Tract of Land Lying Fifteen English Miles on Each Side of the Kennebec River... Laid down by John North." Capt. John North was an agent for the Kennebec Proprietors. This early document provided the landowner names that appear on the map to the right.

Appendix B

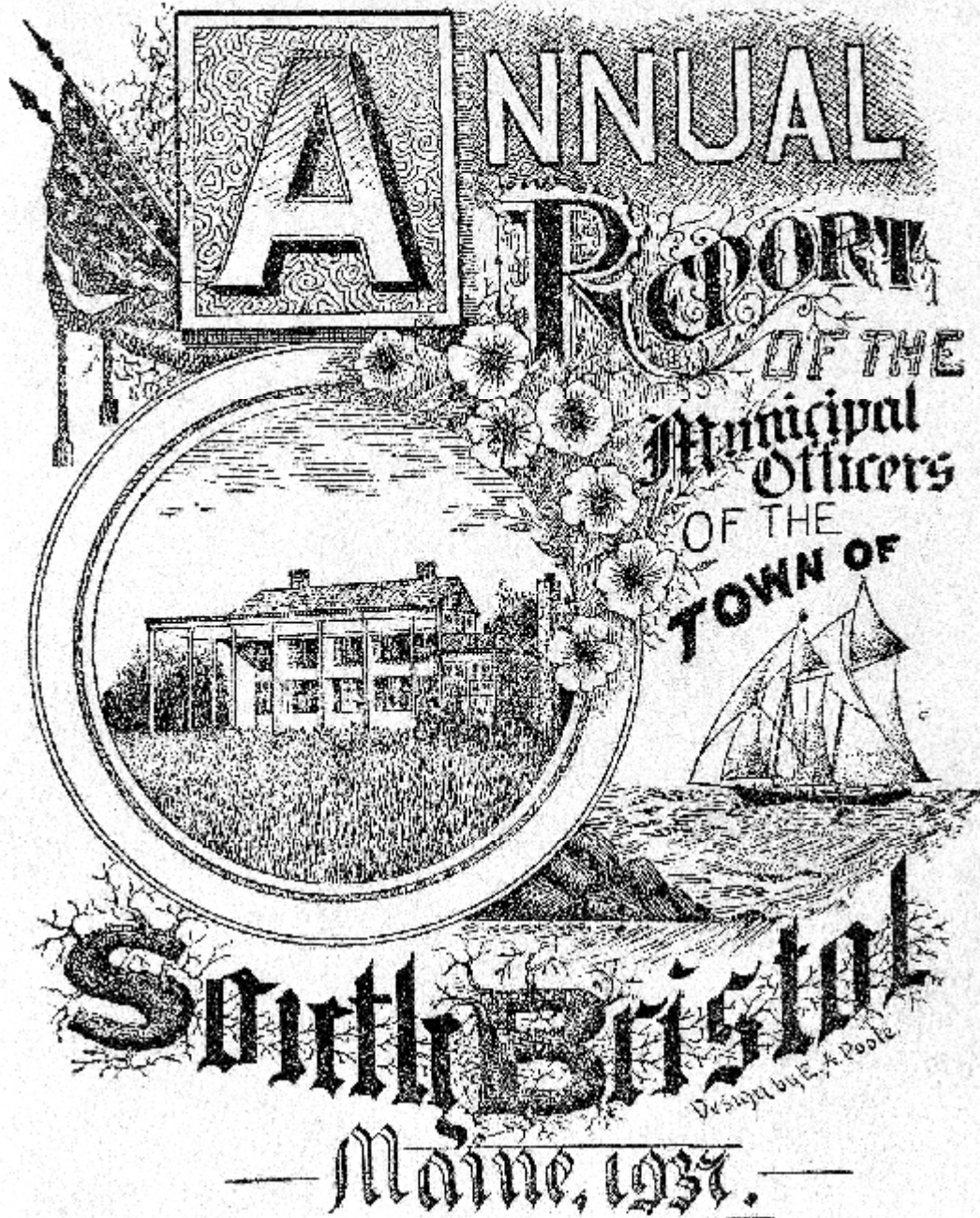
Text of bond from James Plumer and Bedfield Plumer Jr to Bedfield Plumer Sr. dated September 2, 1797. Lincoln County Registry of Deeds, Wiscasset, book 40, page 69.

Know all men by these presents that we JamesPlumer and Bedfield Plumer Junior both of Bristol in the County of Lincoln yeoman do bind ourselves and our heirs in the penal sum of one thousand dollars and acknowledge ourselves justly indebted to Bedfield Plumer and his wife and his heirs in the said sum of one thousand dollars...and bind ourselves...to pay the said sum of one thousand dollars unto the said Bedfield Plumer and his wife or their heirs upon demand.

The condition of the above bond...is as follows: to deliver unto Bedfield Plummer and his wife one room and the privilege of the cellar and chamber as far as is needed for them during their natural lives, with sufficiency of firewood cut by the door during said times, likewise to find and deliver unto the said Bedfield & wife twenty four bushels of corn, one hundred and fifty w Pork, one hundred and fifty w Beef, also to deliver unto the said Bedfield & wife eight p of coffee, six p chocolate, one quarter of an hundred of sugar, two gallons of Molasses, four p of tobacco, two gallons brandy & one gallon of wine yearly and every year during the lives of the said Bedfield and wife, likewise what sauce of every kind may be wanted yearly, likewise to deliver and keep for the use of the said Bedfield and wife two cows and six sheep during their lives, likewise to pay or deliver unto (Neby Venum) one cow in one year from date hereof. Also to find a sufficiency of cloathing of every kind suitable to the degree of the said Bedfield & wife during life. Also one acre of tillage land to be for the use of said Bedfield for life. And when either the said Bedfield or wife is sick or infirm, to find a doctor and nurse for them. And when either the said Bedfield or wife is deceased, the one survives to have one half the aforementioned articles during life . And when the said Bedfield and wife is called hence by death, then the above bounden James Plumer and Bedfield PlumerJun and their heirs do well and faithfully perform every of the above articles, then the above bond to be null and void otherwise to remain in full force power and virtue.

Appendix C

Cover of 1937 South Bristol Town Report with steel engraving by Everett Poole.



Sources

Maps

1751 "Plan of a Survey of Tract of Land Lying Fifteen English Miles on Each Side of the Kennebec River...Laid down by John North."

1815 Survey of the Town of Bristol ... With All the Lots and Tracts.

1857 Topographical Map of Lincoln County claimed by Settlers and Others with the Number of Acres Contained in Each Lot. (Copies available \$15 from the Bristol Historical Society.)

1873 "Map of Bristol and Bremen with Names of the Families Residing here in 1751," in Johnston, History of the Towns of Bristol and Bremen in the State of Maine, Including the Pemaquid Settlement.

2006 custom map prepared with GIS using parcel boundaries from April 2006 and preserve boundary (courtesy of Mainely Earth Images).

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