

South Bristol Historical Society

NEWSLETTER

South Bristol, Maine 04568

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Spring 2022

Capt. R. Corliss Farrin—1965 Rescue at Sea



Ralph Corliss Farrin Photo by Ann Hillis

There are many notable men and women of South Bristol. One such man was Ralph Corliss Farrin (1918-1991) who lived and worked on the ocean most of his life. December 10, 1965 was certainly one day on the ocean he would never forget.

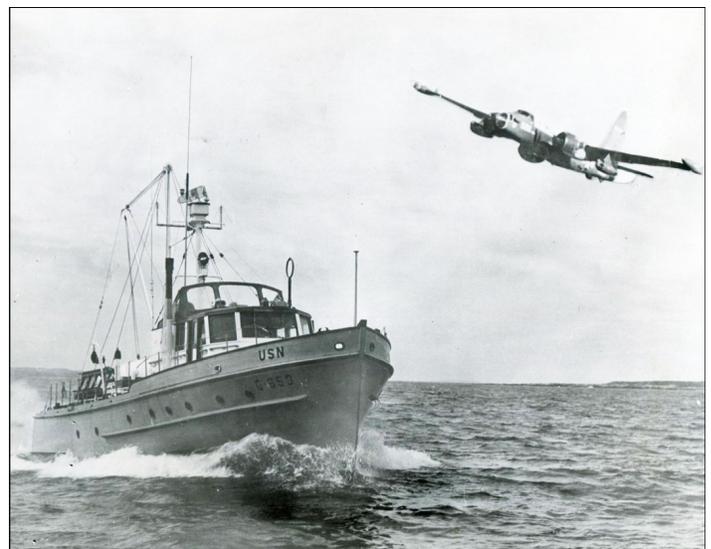
In 1941, at age 23, Corliss joined US Army, 43rd Division, serving until his discharge in 1945. A year later he married Pearl Gilbert and they had two daughters, Janice and Karen. Corliss was a South Bristol town selectman for 18 years and an active volunteer for the SB Fire Department.

During the 1960s and 1970s Corliss worked as a boat captain for the US Navy sonobuoy testing range which was installed at Rutherford Island. Many people now still remember the company "Vocaline" that first operated the testing facility in 1963, conducting research and analysis of antisubmarine devices. The operations tower and buildings were on the top of the ridge, off John Gay Road and Osprey Drive. Vocaline crew operated two Navy vessels of 65 feet and 144 feet and one private vessel of 43 feet.

On Dec. 10, 1965, while working offshore with the testing crew, Corliss got word on the radio that a Navy patrol plane with a six man crew had ditched at sea 25 miles east of Brunswick, and to proceed to the location to assist in the rescue. The plane, a P-2 Neptune, while on a local training flight, had fired a rocket that hung up and ignited the wing. The pilot had just enough time to radio their location. A Coast Guard helicopter and Navy vessel headed for the scene as did Corliss and his crew who were already in the vicinity. Later they received a Navy commendation for their prompt action and skill in helping to save five of the six men. One man died due to exposure to the 42 degree water.

Sonobuoy Testing Procedure The vessels stationed at South Bristol would rendezvous with a Navy patrol plane from Brunswick Naval Air Station in the test area at sea. The boat crew usually put out smoke markers to

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Navy Q 653 vessel and patrol plane

SBHS BOARD MEMBERS

Co-Presidents – Larry Kelsey & Nancy Adams; Vice President – Wayne Eugley; Historian – Scott Farrin;

Secretary – Deb Storch; Treasurer – Betsy Graves;

*Trustees – Dave Andrews, Mary Avantaggio, Jason Bigonia, Wendy Jackson, Carol Kelsey
Carolyn McKeon, Jack Speranza, Warren Storch, Ellen Wells*

2022 Programs & Events

- **May 18, 7pm.**—Hotels and Boarding Houses of South Bristol. This is a presentation by the students of South Bristol Elementary who have been under the direction of teacher and SBHS Trustee Jason Bigonia, as well as Trustee Dave Andrews. A display of hotel artifacts will be included. Location: South Bristol Elementary School.
- **June 11, 10 - 12 noon**—Cemetery walk at Old Walpole Meeting House. Located one half mile south of the split of Rte 129 and Rte 130. The cemetery is across from the Walpole Meeting House, a short distance down an unpaved road, bounded by stonewalls on the left.
- **July 13, 6:30pm**—Historical Society Annual General Meeting, followed by a talk about the South Bristol fishing industry. At Union Church Parish Hall.
- **August 17, 7pm**—“Postcards from Gus” with Cathy Phillips Jewitt & John Meader. At Union Church Parish Hall. This program looks at how brothers Luther and Augustus (Gus) Phillips created important historical Maine imagery for future generations. “*Postcards from Gus: A modern travelogue through Maine’s past*” with multiple episodes so far, can be seen online at www.sandboxatlas.org.
- **September 14, 7pm**—Historian Jayne Gordon will return this year to speak again about South Bristol history. Specific topic to be announced. At Union Church Parish Hall.
- **October 12, 7pm**—David Andrews will speak on pre-1700 South Bristol history. At Union Church Parish Hall.

Summer Hours for Local Historic Sites



S Road School and Smokehouse

The S Road School was originally built in 1860 and served as a one-room schoolhouse for eighty-three years until its closure in 1943. It has been renovated with many original items returned for display. The Smokehouse was moved to this site from the north side of the South Bristol Gut. Each year, herring are smoked here by the Lincoln family and friends, using traditional methods. The smoked fish are then sold locally, with proceeds donated to SBHS. Open Saturdays 1pm-4pm July 2nd through August 27th

Historical Society Museum

The Museum is located south of the bridge on Rutherford Island. It is home to our collection of artifacts & historical memorabilia. The Museum was originally built as the Rutherford Library in 1934-1935 with donations and money provided by the Federal Emergency Relief Administration (FERA), a program established by President Franklin Roosevelt in 1933. A new library was built in 1998 north of the current grammar school. The SB Historical Society opened the museum at the old library in the summer of 2000. Open Saturdays 1pm-4pm, June 4th to Oct 1st.

Old Walpole Meetinghouse

Built in 1772, this historic building at the head of the South Bristol peninsula has served as a center of both civic and religious life for 250 years. The builder is believed to have been Samuel Woodward, a shipwright from Scituate, Massachusetts who later moved to Bristol. Of special interest is the superior design and workmanship of the pulpit, and the paneled balcony with its boards over 30 inches in width, a surprising feature since at the time of building all trees over 21" in diameter were to be saved for masts for the Royal Navy. Open Saturdays 1pm-4pm July 2nd through August 27th (*Hours may vary if a private event is scheduled*)

Ashley Eugley Awarded Watson Fellowship



Ashley Eugley

Bard College senior and South Bristol native Ashley Eugley has been awarded a prestigious Thomas J. Watson Fellowship, which provides for a year of travel and exploration outside the United States. Ashley will travel to South Africa, Brazil, Australia, and Ireland to work directly with communities and nonprofit organizations, seeking to learn how participatory science can monitor change and combat environmental injustice.

Developing the potential of remarkable young leaders, the Watson Foundation selected Eugley as one of 42 students to receive this award for 2022-23. Each Watson Fellow receives a grant of \$36,000 for 12 months of travel and independent study. Over the past several years, 24 Bard seniors have received Watson fellowships. Congratulations, Ashley!

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Corliss Farrin

designate the target area for the plane to drop the sonobuoys, which, when entering the water, floated with an antenna on the top, and hydrophone hanging below. Special cables had been installed on the sea bed to connect “sound projectors” and more hydrophones with the shore station. The 200’ tower controlled communications and received

signals from the sonobuoys up to 12 miles away. Much of this work was classified.

Vocaline was replaced by VAST, which was in 1975 replaced by Tracor Marine who had won the Navy contract to continue operations at South Bristol. Most employees were able to continue working with the facility’s new operating company.

United States Atlantic Fleet
Naval Air Force
Patrol Squadron ELEVEN

17 December 1965

Letter of Appreciation

From: Commanding Officer Patrol Squadron ELEVEN

To: Mr. Ralph Corliss Farrin

Letter of Commendation

On December 10, 1965 at about 0940 Eastern Standard Time a Navy Patrol Plane from this squadron with six aircrewmen on board ditched at sea. At this time you were the captain of one of two boats operating in the area, which reported to the scene, and effected rescue operations in company and cooperation with Coast Guard and Navy Units.

Your personal actions in this endeavor significantly aided in saving the lives of five members of the aircrew, and the recovery of the remains of another. Your contribution to the above successful effort demonstrates the highest qualities of prudent seamanship as well as the highest regard for the “Tradition of the Sea”. Without your personal assistance, the affected aircrewmen would have been extremely hard pressed to survive. By your gallantry and unselfishness in the interest of helping other men, you distinguished yourself. I and the survivors are sincerely grateful.

As a token of our appreciation for your distinguished service in the effective rescue of four downed airmen of this squadron from the frigid sea near Seguin Island, Maine on December 10, 1965, this letter and the enclosed Squadron Plaque are presented to you on behalf of the Officers and Men of Patrol Squadron ELEVEN. May your own life, and the lives of your loved ones, be all the more enriched as a result of your meritorious deed.

J. E. Klause
Commanding Officer
Patrol Squadron ELEVEN



Photos & letters courtesy of Janice Farrin Seiders

Old Walpole Meetinghouse—Built 250 years ago



The Board of Trustees for both the Old Walpole Meetinghouse and the South Bristol Historical Society have been discussing ways the two groups can forge a working relationship for the care and use of this magnificent historic building. Currently the OWM lends itself to use for meetings, concerts, weddings and other events.

HISTORY www.oldwalpolemeetinghouse.org

The Old Walpole Meetinghouse has been maintained for 250 years and is still used for various services and activities. It stands today in its original 1772 form, appearing virtually as it did to our forbears. OWM was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1976.

The original hand-shaved shingles are still on the walls and when, in 1872, extensive repairs of the structure were undertaken, they were found to be so far superior to modern shingles, it was decided not to disturb them. Nails and hinges throughout the building were all handmade. The windows were easily the most expensive parts of the building, since they were imported from England; each window is said to have cost the price of one cow.

The following are excerpts from John Johnston, 1873 *A History of the Towns of Bristol and Bremen*. “November 1, 1764, at a meeting of gentlemen from Walpole, Harrington, Pemaquid, Broad Cove, and Round Pond, James Boyd was chosen moderator, and Thomas Johnston, clerk. Measures were taken to procure an act of incorporation *(for the town of Bristol)*

Mary Hunter Bowers, deaconess of the Walpole Meetinghouse and vice president of its non-profit building maintenance Board, addressed the SBHS Board in March with her thoughts on the current status of the meetinghouse. She talked about the Hunter family’s involvement with the meetinghouse from its inception in 1772 down through the years, and her concern that, even though ownership of the building passed to the Town of South Bristol several years ago, it has struggled to be embraced by the community as a whole. She would like to build a relationship with SBHS and is reaching out for thoughts and ideas on how to generate more community interest and involvement in its care and upkeep. A few years ago the large arched window behind the pulpit was preserved, and three years ago the roof was renewed with donated funds. The rest of the windows are next in line for preservation. There are 28 in all, each with their original panes and frames (see history below).

Generous donations have been received over the years, but an ongoing fundraising effort is needed. Stay tuned for information about how the SBHS will help with efforts to involve the community in this very important preservation project.

and James Boyd and Wm. Miller were appointed a committee to draft a petition for the purpose, procure signatures and forward it to to the legislature.

At the same meeting it was also agreed, that the new town should include the three districts of Walpole, Harrington, and Broad Cove each of which should build its own meeting house, and each have its proper share of the ministerial performances when a minister should be obtained.”



1908 Postcard

Oral Histories Online

South Bristol Historical Society has been conducting interviews with current and past residents, both local and "from away." Board member Carol Kelsey has managed the project for years and compiled digital recordings which will be made available on our website.

The interviews will be presented with audio and photos, linked from our website to our YouTube Channel. To find the interviews, go to our website southbristolhistoricalsociety.org, click the Research menu, then click Oral Histories.

The first interview available online was recorded by Carol Kelsey and Julie Sgarzi in 2018. South Bristol native William A. Rice, then age 95, talked about growing up in South Bristol, enlisting in the Navy during WWII, getting married, and working at Gamage Shipyard. William passed away on Dec. 22, 2020.

There is an ongoing list of potential interviewees and SBHS is asking for volunteers to help with this important and timely project. Please contact us if you'd like to help!



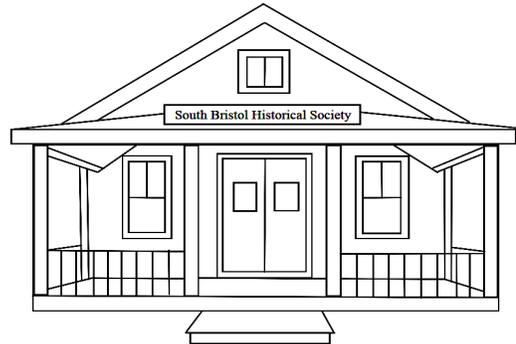
William A. Rice
WWII Navy Veteran and Shipbuilder

Museum Accessions

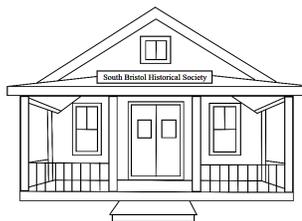
William Rice and his wife Gertrude Gamage Rice passed away recently within a year of each other, at age 97. Both South Bristol natives, they grew up in our small town, attended our schools and witnessed the incredible time period before, during, and after World War II. With their passing, the Rice family generously donated many items belonging to William and Gertrude, to our museum. Our Fall 2021 newsletter highlights some of these items in "Accessions". (See "Newsletters" in the "About" menu of this website.) The cover story "Summer Return of the Wabanaki Basket Weavers" features two baskets of ash and sweetgrass, from the collection of Wanda Rice.

This March, William and Gertrude's three daughters, Wanda, Joleen, and Cheryl visited the Historical Society museum. Wanda offered to donate one of the featured baskets in memory of her mother. "This beautiful basket shouldn't be left out collecting dust. After reading your newsletter article, I really think it belongs in your museum."

In addition, the Rice sisters brought more family photos and answered some questions we had regarding their previous donations. These Rice family treasures are most appreciated and are wonderful additions to our museum.



William & Gertrude Rice's three daughters
(L to R) Wanda, Joleen, Cheryl



South Bristol Historical Society

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South Bristol Historical Society—Spring 2022

PLEASE JOIN OUR MEMBERSHIP

\$10	Individual
\$20	Family
\$40	Sustaining
\$250	Individual Life
\$350	Family Life

Join Online
southbristolhistoricalsociety.org

Or

Send a check by mail to:
PO Box 229
South Bristol, ME 04568

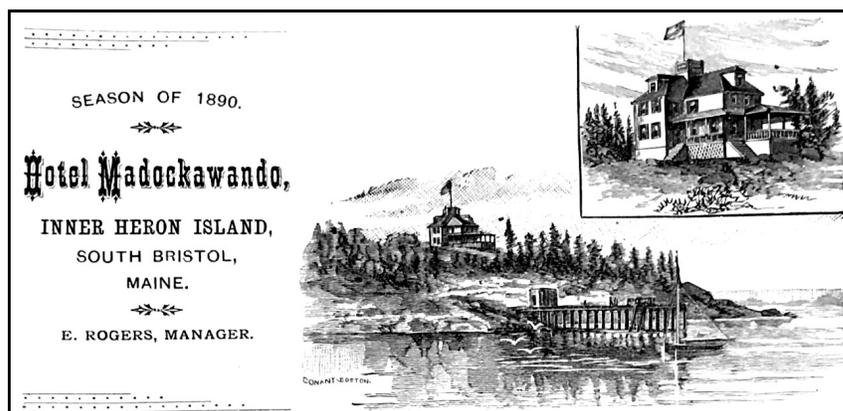


Image courtesy of Heron Island Village Improvement Society, Steve Signell

“Hotel Madockawando is named for a Chief of the Penobscot tribe whose daughter married the French officer, Baron de Castine.”
(From “TWENTY YEARS AT PEMAQUID”, by J. Henry Cartland, 1914)