

DIVISION VIII / *The Inner Bay, Castine, and Eggemoggin Reach*

THE ISLANDS treated in this division span six townships, and so have little in common, except for the cluster near Castine. Castine is the oldest non-Indian community in Penobscot Bay and settlers were on the islands in Castine, or Pentagoët, Harbor before written records existed to help us identify them. Castine takes its name from Baron de Castin, a French settler of the late seventeenth century. The name of the river, or estuary, that empties into Castine Harbor, the Bagaduce, formerly Majabigwaduce, has a more obscure origin. Fanny Eckstorm (page 193) traces it to Micmac for "big tideway river"; she ridicules all other explanations, including Williamson's (I, 71) suggestion that it is after a French major who once lived in the area. Whether she is right or wrong, the various spellings given to the river by early cartographers and mariners confound any amateur in Indian place-names: e.g., *Majebeguadeaux*, *Mecha Baguadooz*, and, within a page and a half of one voyager's journal in 1776, these three variations: *Margarbagadooze*, *Margerbagadooz* and *Majorbagadeuz*.¹ Eggemoggin Reach similarly had many strange spellings: *Algomogin*, *Alga-*

molgen, *Edgemaroggan*, and so forth. Fanny Eckstorm (page 204) believes this means "fish weir place." Naskeag, said to mean "extremity" in local Indian dialect, had white settlers at the end of the seventeenth century and was one of the most frequented harbors in the region before the Revolution; its multiple spellings include *Nusket*, *Neskege*, *Naskig*, *Nascheague*, and for many years in eighteenth-century charting, *Nesky*.

THE islands are dealt with clockwise around the eastern periphery of Penobscot Bay, beginning with Sears Island and ending with Mahoney in Jericho Bay.

SEARS

THE Indian name for this island, Fannie Eckstorm tells us, was Waggsunkeag, meaning "bright sandbeach," evi-

¹ Joseph Holt's journal of a Penobscot voyage, *New England Historical and Genealogical Register*, X, 1856, p. 30.

dently for such a beach on the eastern shore that Indians making in to Stockton Harbor from the open bay used as a landmark. The island was settled by a Frenchman named Gaulin in the early eighteenth century, and he appears to have been a figure of some influence in the region: following an assault on a family at Naskeag, two Portsmouth men were dispatched to “Awassawam-kick or Hazle Nut Island” to make representations to “monser Gaulin.”¹ Joel Eastman² finds that the name Wassumkeag was used by English and colonial visitors to the area as late as the mid-eighteenth century—among them Governor Thomas Pownall, who applied the name to Cape Jellison as well. I do not, however, discover the name on any early charts. Captain John Smith, on his rough map of the mouth of the Penobscot River in 1616, calls both this island and the larger island up the river (Orphan, now Verona) Gunnell’s Islands (Map 1616 Smith). We know that Smith intentionally anglicized all “savage” names in the region, so the latter designation—which is never found again—may have been after a member of his expedition. The only other names I find associated with the island in charting before the 1760s appear on a map drawn in 1754 (Johnson): here two names that mean nothing to me are shown on the east and west sides of the island respectively, one evidently designating Stockton Harbor and the other Mack Point: *Giles Habr* and *Goose Faro*. The name Brigadier, after Brigadier General Samuel Waldo, appears on British Admiralty Map 1777 “Atlantic Neptune,” surveyed on the eve of the Revolution. Samuel Waldo, the owner of the

¹ Eckstorm (page 68), citing manuscripts of Samuel Penhallow, historian of the Indian wars, printed in *New England Historical and Genealogical Register*, 34, 1880, pp. 90ff. The circumstances of the Naskeag episode are not explained.

² Joel Eastman is the island’s principal historian. (See Bibliography for full listing.) I draw much data in this notice from his excellent pamphlet and question only a few of his interpretations.

Muscongus or Waldo Patent, which included Brigadier Island, was an active promoter of settlement in the region; he died in 1759, the year Fort Pownall was built at the mouth of the Penobscot River at his suggestion.

The erection of the fort and the Treaty of Paris four years later, which ended the French and Indian Wars, opened the inner bay to colonial settlers, and it was not many years before they reached Brigadier Island. The “Atlantic Neptune” chart shows no settlers, but it is likely that one or two families were there by the mid-1770s. Alice V. Ellis, historian of Stockton Springs, writes (page 23) that an early settler in the area, Samuel Griffin of New London, Connecticut, arrived in 1775 and “the first winter he lived for a while with the family of Job Pendleton on Brigadier Island.” It is likely that she confuses the Pendletons: the only Job Pendleton I know of in this era settled in 1769 on Job’s Island off the southern end of Islesborough, and to my knowledge he never lived elsewhere (Farrow, 239); Peleg Pendleton, however—not a brother, but undoubtedly a cousin—is believed to have built a cabin on the shore facing Brigadier in about 1775. At approximately the same time, James Nichols built a home on the south end of the island (Eastman, 18), and if this information is correct, Nichols would be the first known settler on the eve of the Revolutionary War.

The war disrupted the normal development of Brigadier Island. Fort Pownall on the adjoining peninsula was razed in 1777 to keep it from falling into the hands of the British; in 1779 the British occupied Castine across the bay and the American expedition sent to recover the town suffered disaster. One of the fleeing American vessels, the brig *Defense*, sought refuge in Stockton Harbor, but was pursued there by a British frigate and sunk (Map 1779 Penobscot Expedition). The English remained in the area for several years after the war, awaiting settlement of

the eastern boundary—that is whether the St. Croix River or the Penobscot—but by the mid-1780s earlier settlers were returning and new ones arriving. Six families are believed to have been residing in 1790 on Brigadier Island, by then a part of Frankfurt Plantation, incorporated in 1789. They were those of Nathan and William Griffin, William and Jonathan Staples, Alexander Young, and William Pendleton (Eastman, 19).

Henry Knox, some years before he retired as Secretary of War in 1794, had acquired the Waldo Patent through his wife, a granddaughter of Samuel Waldo; much of the early history of Brigadier Island revolves around his intense personal interest in it. In 1792 he commissioned a French mineralogist to prepare a report on his Maine lands, including Brigadier Island, on which the Frenchman reported seven families in residence; in 1794 or early 1795 Knox himself came onto the island for the first time. He reportedly paid the squatters six shillings each for their labor and gave them a year to leave.¹ By 1797 he had established a “grazing farm” there, which to judge from letters from his supervisor, John Rynier, was an elaborate operation, destined to become a profitable venture: a 100 head of cattle within four or five years, 200 to 300 sheep, extensive crops of corn, oats, barley, rye, and so forth, plus the fishery to defray initial expenses (Eastman, 24 ff). The farm, needless to say, never achieved this level of productivity. It does not appear that Rynier actually settled on the island but the farm manager, John Witherspoon, did;

he was there for several years at the turn of the century before acquiring an island of his own in 1802, Butter Island, where he lived for half a century.

Knox’s empire, of which the farm on Brigadier Island was merely one small part, soon ran into severe financial difficulties, and in 1804 he was obliged to yield the island to a creditor, Benjamin Carpenter of Salem, in satisfaction of a note for \$8,000 that he could not meet. Two years later Carpenter sold to Israel Thorndike of Beverly, Massachusetts, a land investor in the Penobscot region, and Thorndike sold shares in the island in 1807 to his two partners, William Prescott and David Sears. Sears was apparently as beguiled by Brigadier Island as Henry Knox and from the outset was the most active of the three partners in its development: an 1807 “Plan of the Town of Searsport” at the Maine Maritime Museum lists only Sears as proprietor of the island. It was not until 1813, in reality, that he bought out his partners’ interests and became sole owner of Brigadier—three years before he died. The island remained in the Sears family for nearly a century and in due course took the family name, as the town itself did when it was incorporated in 1845.

David Sears, Jr., inheriting his father’s far-flung properties both in the Waldo Patent and elsewhere, never lived on the island, but, as his father had, he maintained and expanded Knox’s farm. A series of managers ran it—William Richie in mid-century, for example, with his wife, ten children, and three paid hands. A Pendleton, William, apparently worked for the Sears, possibly as a sea captain, but he drowned in 1825, crossing the bar between the island and the mainland (Pendleton, 219). According to the agricultural census of 1850, there were 150 acres of improved land on Sears Island, 4 oxen, 17 cows, 8 of them milking, 56 sheep, and assorted crops—something less than Henry Knox had envisaged, but a very respectable farm

¹ The exact number of settlers and who they were is uncertain: Eastman puts the number at seven: the six listed above, from the 1790 census, plus Benjamin Carver; Dr. Noyes, citing a 1794 “deed,” notes six residents: Thomas Pendleton, William and Nathan Griffin, and William, Jonathan, and Alexander Staples (the conveyance explicitly notes Benjamin Carver is not a resident), and says that the “sale” price was ten shillings to each (Noyes, *Family Histories*: Staples).



Photograph of a painting of farm buildings on Sears Island as they appeared in about 1916; the painting is by Gertrude Sylvester Gordan, who spent several years on the island in that era. (Photo by Little Letterpress, Searsport.)

nonetheless for that era. David Sears III *did* live on the island—at least he summered there; his residence, built on the southern tip in 1853, appears on the 1859 topographical map of Waldo County. The family lived in a certain style, one gathers from an account of an 1871 cruise in the region that refers to a stopover at Brigadier Island “where Mr. Sears had sent his yacht” to greet the cruise party (letter at Northeast Harbor Library). A map surveyed in the 1870s shows a road down the center of the island linking the two clusters of farm and residence buildings, various other roads branching off to the shore, and half a dozen weirs at the southeast tip (Map 1882 CGS 311). These were presumably salmon weirs, salmon having been netted, speared, and weired from the island during their annual run since the time of earliest settlement. An 1873 map in the possession of David Littlefield-

Taylor shows six salmon weirs on the *west* side of the island—whether meant to be the same ones as above I do not know.

David Sears II and III died within a few years of each other in the 1870s and the island passed briefly—for eleven days, to be precise—out of the family’s hands, but was re-acquired by David Sears IV and his brother Henry. David IV continued to summer there and to maintain the farm, Eastman tells us; indeed, the farm expanded during the 1870s, to judge from the agricultural census of 1880. Thereafter, however, the Sears’ interest in the island appears to have waned. The farm was leased during the 1880s and 1890s to Levi A. Dow, a cattle-breeder, who evidently kept a magnificent herd of longhorns, but it was a herd he brought with him, not native to the island. In 1893 the Sears summer home burned and this ended the family’s residence on the island. A dozen years later, the Bangor Investment Company, a subsidiary of the Bangor & Aroostook Railroad, bought Sears Island from David Sears IV for \$55,000 as part of a proposed mammoth rail and ocean terminal extending from Cape Jellison to Searsport. Franklin W. Cram was the architect of the grand plan, and it projected for Sears Island a recreational and resort area. Pending materialization of this project, the farm buildings were kept intact and leased to Charles Cayting, who hired local farmhands to run the still large establishment. Fire struck the island again in 1917, destroying most of the buildings at the farm; they were rebuilt by the Bangor Investment Company, at Cayting’s request, but Cayting became bankrupt in 1922. A succession of leases during the next ten years brought other transient occupants to Sears Island, most of them more interested in pulp-

wood—or possibly rumrunning—than in farming. In 1934 the farm buildings, having fallen into disrepair through neglect and vandalism, were razed to reduce the fire hazard. Since then the island has gradually reverted to its natural state; it is still owned by the Bangor Investment Company, periodic options and offers since the 1930s having come to naught.

If the history of Sears Island in the twentieth century is depressing, a project under consideration in the 1970s has been positively blood curdling to conservationists: a nuclear generating plant for the Central Maine Power Company. Perhaps Samuel Waldo and Henry Knox would have approved—they were, after all, among the great developers of their era—but the project needless to say has raised grave questions for the present-day residents of the region.

NAUTILUS

THIS island had several names before Nautilus. One, according to Castine's historian George A. Wheeler (page 40), was Bank's Island, after a pre-Revolutionary settler in Castine named Aaron Banks. Another was Cross Island, because a Jesuit priest is said to have been killed and buried there as early as 1654 (Doudiet, 102). This is the name used in some accounts of the Battle of Castine in 1779 (see Calef), but other accounts of the siege give the island its present name, after one of the three British warships initially assigned to defend the town. Why the name of a British war sloop should have been honored *after* the Revolution is something of a mystery, but must be due in part to the loyalist sympathies that persisted for some years in Castine: the *Nautilus* was a gallant ship in an historic battle, after all, and deserved to be memorialized.¹

The island itself, which was evidently uninhabited at the time, played a strategic part in the struggle for Castine—not by British but by the Colonists: a small British battery was routed soon after the arrival of the American force and the island was then fortified, causing the British defenders to retreat farther up the Bagaduce. Paul Revere is said to have played a part in this operation. The American battery remained in place until the arrival of British relief vessels three weeks later, at which point the entire American expedition was withdrawn and its ships scuttled in the Penobscot River, in what has been described as the greatest American naval disaster before Pearl Harbor.²

I have little information about residence on Nautilus Island before the middle of the nineteenth century. Any settlers there would have been counted in the census of residents of Castine—and after 1817 of Brooksville—and undistinguished from them. (When Brooksville was incorporated, all unbarred islands like Holbrook were assigned to Castine, while barred islands like Nautilus were assigned to the communities to which they were barred, in this case Brooksville). The dimension of commercial activity in Castine in the decades after the Revolution makes it a certainty that the island was used extensively, but I have no record of this use before the 1830s. A farm, still standing, was built in 1835, according to the present owner, and a fish-drying

¹ In London recently I looked up the subsequent career of the *Nautilus* at the Public Records Office: in June 1780 it was judged no longer in serviceable condition and so was scuttled by its then master, Thomas Farnham, in Halifax—less than a year after the famous battle (letters from Thomas Farnham).

² Accounts of the ill-fated Penobscot Expedition abound, both by historians and participants. The most authoritative of the latter are those of the American commander Gen. Solomon Lovell (*Weymouth Historical Society*, No. 1, 1881) and a Loyalist named John Calef. See Bibliography.