



Eagle Island Journal

A Publication of the Friends of Peary's Eagle Island

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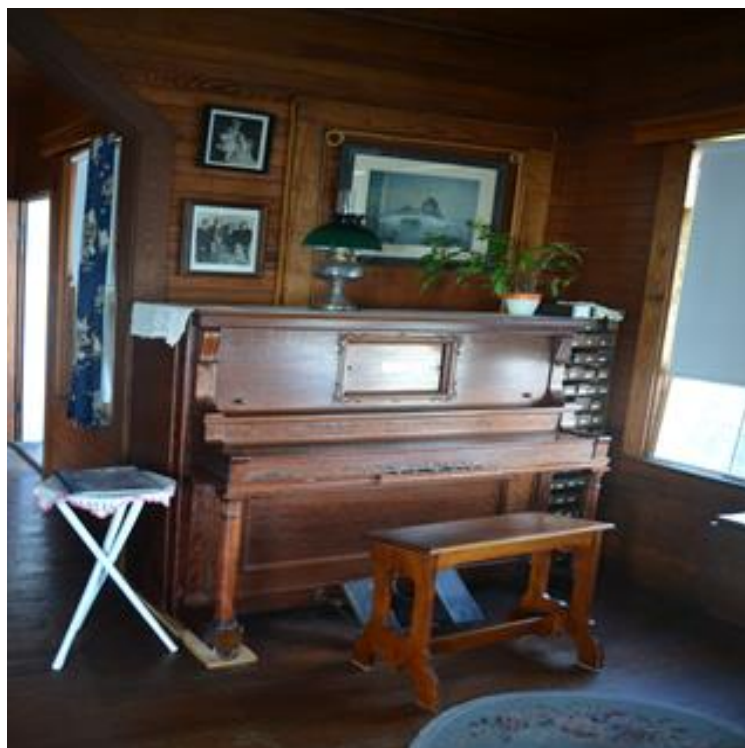
Spring 2019

"Inveniam viam aut faciam."
Find a way or make one

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Welcome to our delayed Maine spring. The President's message is usually to inform our "Friends" of what's happening on and about our beautiful island. I find myself in the delightful position of saying our journal says it all, leaving me at a loss for additional words except, on behalf of everyone associated with our island, we look forward to your visit and support.

Best regards,
Noel



Ever wondered what music Admiral Peary listened to on the pianola aboard The SS Roosevelt?

Now you can hear some of the original piano rolls found on Eagle Island. Go to our website and click on the selections found under "Pianola Music".

Welcome to the 2019 season!

First, I would like to extend a sincere thank you to president emeritus Harry Rich. After decades of dedicated service to Eagle Island State Historic Site, and the Friends of Peary's Eagle Island, Harry Rich honorably resigned from his longstanding role as president. Taking on the new chapter of leadership for the Friends of Peary's Eagle Island is Noel Yacobian. Congratulations, Noel!

With the opening day of Eagle Island State Historic Site rapidly approaching, I have been very busy preparing and planning for this season. This spring, Eagle Island will receive a new 5000-pound mooring which will enable larger vessels to visit the island. Our maintenance goals this year include water sealing the 230-foot pier, designing and constructing new winter shutters for the library, painting the museum porches, and installing new windows at the caretaker's cottage. In addition to the ever-revolving list of maintenance projects that volunteers help with, there will be group volunteering days which are a great way for you to directly contribute to the success of Eagle Island State Historic Site.

The annual cleaning day was May 28. On cleaning day, volunteers spruced up the museum, library, gardens, and beach in preparation for the island's first visitors.

This year, the Eagle Island Gardening Team will host several workdays throughout the season. Volunteer gardeners prepare flower boxes, assist with the removal of invasive plant species, and tend to Josephine Peary's historic gardens.

The annual trail day will be held around July 13 after the island's nesting birds have fledged. Our projects this year include woodchip spreading, erosion repairs, trail clearing, basic stone work, and south beach trail reconstruction. Tools, transportation, and lunch is provided!

The Friends of Peary's Eagle Island Docent Program is currently seeking new volunteers. Eagle Island volunteer docents serve as guides to Eagle Island's many visitors. As a volunteer you get to enjoy a scenic boat ride from Harpswell to Eagle island and spend the day absorbing the views from a historic Casco Bay island. No experience is necessary and all ages are welcome to join us. For additional information email the friends.

Thanks to many volunteers, docent coordinator, Wayne Miller, and Chris Oberholtzer, from the University of Southern Maine's, Jazz Studies program, Admiral Peary's aeolian pianola rolls—which are over 100 years old—were digitally recorded in 2018. For the first time this year, the Admiral's music collection will be played on a wireless speaker and on the self-guided tour wands. This technology allows us to enjoy the Admiral's historic collection every day while extending the functional life of the pianola. Thank you to everyone who contributed to this important preservation project.

To all our returning volunteers—welcome back! If you haven't volunteered before, make this year your first. Cheers to another great season, and I look forward to seeing each of you soon!

Owen Blease, Eagle Island Park Manager

Friends of Peary's Eagle President Emeritus Retired Admiral Harry Rich is honored at The Brunswick Naval Museum.

The Brunswick Naval Museum held a street-naming dedication ceremony for Admiral Harry Rich Drive on Wednesday, December 18, 2019. Admiral Rich, a 92-year-old native Mainer, attended the ceremony and spoke briefly, thanking everyone for attending and for the honor.

Congratulations Harry! – from all involved with The Friends of Peary's Eagle Island.



The Friends of Peary’s Eagle Island welcomes new board member Kim Payne.

Kim:

I am a native Mainer and grew up in the mid-coast (Thomaston) where many of my family still lives. My affinity for Maine islands began early on with my mother’s childhood island, Monhegan. We spent time every summer out there with family and this is still one of my most favorite places to be. We are also lucky to share a small island in St. George where we have a small camp that we enjoy when we can. These places led me to become a marine biologist and botanist, and I have worked for Normandeau Associates Environmental Consultants for over 40 years. I’ve always loved putting in my own gardens and my husband Joe and I always enjoy visiting botanical gardens wherever we travel. I took the Master Gardener course in 2010. Most of my volunteer time has been at the Gardens at Tidewater Farm in Falmouth – this is a teaching and demonstration garden started from “scratch” and now includes a large Harvest for Hungry Garden, an orchard, a children’s garden, a cottage garden, and pollinator garden with honey bee hives. Fellow Master Gardener Sally Wright invited me to join a group out at Eagle Island for a “work day” last summer with Barb and Nadia and Lisa Blanchard and others – I was instantly hooked and also intrigued by the idea of bringing Josephine’s, Maria’s, and Inez’s gardens back to life with many of the plants these ladies loved. I am happy to join the Board as the representative of the gardening group and working towards restoring these historical gardens.

WELCOME KIM!

From The Friends’ garden group

The volunteer group that has formed to restore the gardens of the Peary women has developed the following Mission Statement:

The Peary’s Eagle Island volunteer gardeners’ purpose is to assist the Friends of Eagle Island with gardening related projects on the Island with focus on the gardens of Josephine, Marie, and Inez. Our goals include: honoring the founders of the Eagle Island gardens- Josephine, Marie, and Inez Peary, enhancing the beauty of Eagle Island, educating the public, and supporting volunteers and staff. To reach these goals, best practices are used including: historic purpose, sustainability, organic methods, and wildlife considerations. All projects will be approved by the Friends of Eagle Island and the State of Maine Park Service.

The garden group has met a few times since the work day last summer. As we strive to learn more about the gardens and the history of the Island, we have been gathering historical records from the Peary home on Eagle Island, the research libraries at Bowdoin and St. Joseph’s College and we hope to get to the University of New England where many of Josephine’s writings are held. Other sources of information have included: the Guide to Eagle Island Nature Trails, Images of America [Eagle Island Admiral Peary’s Harpswell Home](#), and the invaluable contributions from Barb Tucker, Nadia Harris, and

members of the Friends of Eagle Island Board of Directors. We have attained plant lists for each of the flower gardens as well as for plantings along the trails and detailed planting-to-harvest records of the vegetable gardens. Our long-term plans for the gardens include: redefining the perimeters of the beds, building up the soil, and installing plants that were in the gardens when Josephine and her daughter and daughter-in-law were on the island. We will select plants that are suitable for current conditions and introduce non-invasive, non-aggressive native species as appropriate. In addition, we plan to update the plant lists and pictures for each plot, and install identifying tags for each plant species. This summer we will focus on defining the beds where needed, weeding trimming and amending the soil, and maybe do some planting.



This hydrangea tree on Eagle Island originally planted by Josephine Peary is one of the largest you'll ever see. Every year it blossoms to its fullest. Our expert gardeners do an amazing job with the historic gardens originally planted by Josephine, Marie and Inez as well as with the flower boxes around the house and Welcome Center. Want to help? Contact us through our website.

Meet Rupert White and Robert Peary III

This is the first of several articles about life on Eagle Island, stories about activities and visits by the Peary family and their friends. The content of this series is based on recent interviews with Rupert Baxter White and Robert Edwin Peary III, Eagle Island archives and Peary family diaries.

Rupert Baxter White, born in Brunswick, Bowdoin class of 1955, is a current docent on Eagle Island. He is a direct descendent of James Phinney Baxter, Bowdoin College Overseer in 1894 and whose son, Percival Baxter, Bowdoin class of 1898, became Governor of Maine in 1922 and was Rupert's great uncle. During his life, James also was Mayor of Portland for 6 years and created Baxter Boulevard in the back bay. Rupert and his wife, Ruth, originally from Bailey's Island, currently live in Brunswick and have been friends of the Peary family for decades.

Robert Edwin Peary III, "Bert"; son of Robert Edwin Peary Jr "Bob", Bowdoin class of 1925, is a grandson of Admiral Robert E. Peary, Bowdoin class of 1877. He currently lives in Victoria, British Columbia with his wife Marjorie. Bert lived with his parents and sister on the Eagle Island for two and half years, the only Peary family members who ever lived year-round on the Island. In 2009, Bert helped drive the pianola from his home in Canada, back to the Eagle Island living room, where it remains today in its original location.

In 1946, Rupert, (14 yrs old), and his father, Bruce, were fishing for cod, dogfish or pollock in a favorite spot, not far from the ledges on the east side of Eagle Island. At one point, they looked up and saw a man and his towhead son watching them from their Eagle Island front porch. They all waved to one another. It was at this moment, the Whites decided to drop in and introduce themselves to these friendly islanders. The father on the porch that day was Admiral Peary's son, Bob Peary and his son, Bert Peary III. This was the beginning of a friendship between the Whites and the Pearys that has lasted for decades.

Bob married Inez Ruth Kelly in 1931 and they had two children, Jody and Bert. Like all the Peary's, they treasured Eagle Island and decided they wanted to try homesteading and living off the island. So, the idea of raising angora rabbits became their plan for financial security as part of their homesteading, self-sufficiency adventure. Rabbit feed cost \$3. per hundred weight and angora rabbit wool was selling for \$16. an ounce.



The angora rabbit company was named WABASSO ANGORAS – the original sign still hangs in the house on Eagle Island.

So, in 1946, off they went from Pittsburgh, PA, to live year- round on Eagle Island. Bert was 9 years old and Jody was 12 ½ yrs old. When they arrived, their car, a 1936 Studebaker, was left at Potts Harbor in Harpswell, which was their launching off point to the island. According to Bob's diary, they arrived on Eagle Island about 10pm on May 6. Joining them on this first night, were Bob's sister, Marie Peary and Bert's Uncle Vince and his wife, Aunt Belle, from his mother's side of the family. Bob's diary entry for that evening states: " Upon arrival we celebrated with a champagne toast and turned into bed by 11pm." Bob also writes, that "the next day broke sunny with an offshore wind and they took the day off and didn't accomplish anything at all."

However, after one day of rest, on the second day they began in earnest to turn over the ground next to the sunny east side of the house to start a vegetable garden. It was on this day, they discovered that the timbers on the sod roof of the East Bastion had rotted and would need to be replaced before the angora rabbits arrived at their new home. The East Bastion roof was sod and designed by Bob's father, Admiral Peary, to replicate the sod roofs of military forts. The latter were made of sod to absorb the energy of cannon balls landing upon them. Bob framed the new East Bastion roof with wooden beams and boards and attached tarpaper on top to keep the shelter dry for the rabbits.

During the rabbit project, the West Bastion, the Admiral's former library, was a storehouse of arctic gear and other household possessions. The West Bastion roof never was sod and originally was built at the same level as, and an extension of, the west side porch. Bert remembers eating meals, watching storms move across Casco Bay and watching stars at night while sitting at a table on the library roof.

The house kitchen held a gas refrigerator and a gas generator was located under a trap door, on the east porch just outside the east kitchen window. Rupert and Bert both remember the difficulty of getting the tall gas cylinders out of the 16 ft rowboat and rolling them up hill, all the way to the house. Carrying or rolling supplies arriving by boat, up the hill to the

house, was not a favorite chore of Bert's. There was no pier at this time on the island, so all boats had to be dragged up onto the yard, turned upside down and secured well with a rope.

When needed, the generator was used to electrify three large movie flood lights mounted flush against the windows of the front porch. Bob, also being an accomplished engineer like his father, wired the lights to a morse code machine. When an emergency arose, the generator was turned on and a morse code message could be sent to to Harold Laws in Harpswell that they needed help on the island. The generator also was used to provide electricity to one bare light bulb that hung down from the kitchen ceiling. This bulb also was wired to the generator, so that when you pulled the bulb string the generator would start and electrify this single bulb. The lighting in the rest of the house was a variety of oil, kerosene and gas lights.

During this same first homesteading year, Josephine Peary, Bert's grandmother, bought him a Labrador puppy from a family in Harpswell. Paying \$50. for a puppy in 1946 was a considerable sum of money and quite a gift. Bert called him Brutus and today there remains a photo of both Brutus and Bert on the fireplace mantel in the living room on Eagle Island. I will share more stories about Brutus in the next journal article.

Bert was homeschooled by his parents during the first full year on Eagle Island. During the second fall and winter, Bert was sent to a boarding school in New Hampshire for 5th grade and returned in the late spring to live on the island again until the next school year. Bert's sister, Jody, who was 3 ½ years older than he, attended school in Washington DC during both school years of the island adventure. During this time, she lived with their Aunt Marie Peary, Bob's sister. Each summer, Jody returned to her parents and brother on Eagle Island.

Fast Forward to 1948: In August 1948, Rupert set sail to Eagle Island on his sail boat, named Ruth, and stayed for a month with Bob, Inez, Rupert and Jody. According to Rupert, Inez was an outgoing, warm person who was a fantastic cook and so spending a month eating her cooking was a definite plus. During his stay, Rupert helped Bob and the rest of the family replace the roof over the dining room and kitchen. They had to peel off seven layers of shingles and tarpaper to get to the roof! According to Rupert, the old shingles and tarpaper were made into rolls, which Bob burned in the fireplace during the winter.

The second major project that month was repairing and shoring up of the sea wall in front of the house. Walter Norton, a Harpswell mason, and his son, Andy, were hired to direct and implement this project.

The entire family were "gophers" for this project. Rupert remembers hauling considerable amounts of sand to make the cement for the sea wall repair.

Stay tuned for the next installment of conversations with Rupert Baxter White and Robert Edwin Peary III coming in the Fall 2019 Journal.



by Diane Friese current docent and board member of The Friends of Peary's Eagle Island

News from Eagle Island:

The Friends of Peary's Eagle Island is in need of a Treasurer. This is a volunteer position. We need someone who can file the tax documents and prepare treasurer reports for the board meetings usually held about 4 times a year. Would you like to be that someone or know some who is qualified? Contact us through our website for more information.

The Friends of Peary's Eagle Island is also looking for a volunteer to run the EI Trading Post on Eagle Island. Duties include ordering supplies, monitoring inventory, making deposits, and maintaining the display of merchandise. No experience necessary. We'll help you set up and get ready. Transportation to and from EI is provided. Here's your chance to get involved and make a difference on Eagle Island. Contact us through the website at friendsofpearyseagleisland@gmail.com.

As a reminder your donations to the Friends of Peary's Eagle Island are tax deductible and ALL of the money received goes to help maintain Eagle Island for all to enjoy. We have a growing list of projects to tackle this year. Any contribution you can make is appreciated.

We continue to monitor our mailing list for our bi-annual journals. Please let us know of any changes in address, whether or not you want to continue receiving the journal by mail, ideas for future articles, etc. Perhaps you would like to submit your own article for publication or suggest a topic you would like us to cover. Please let us know.

The Bowdoin alumni group's visit to Eagle Island has become a popular annual tradition. This year Eagle Island will host visitors on May 30, 2019.

Trail Day is scheduled for July 13. Want to help? We tend to the historic gardens, trim the trails, do some painting, and restore south beach among many other tasks. No experience necessary. There are jobs for all abilities and all ages. Contact us through our website friendsofpearyseagleisland@gmail.com to sign up.

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