

Eagle Island Journal

A Publication of the Friends of Peary's Eagle Island

Volume XXV, Number 1

Spring 2020

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

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE Spring 2020

As this Spring 2020 Journal is being prepared and sent to you, you are most likely still under your state guidance to 'stay at home' and practice social distancing whenever you are not at home. And most likely by now this interruption of daily routines is getting 'old' and no longer a welcome change of pace. Perhaps it would help to think of the contrast between our longing to 'break away' and the longing that Admiral Peary must have felt for just the 'stay at home' directive we now have. After more than a year in the frozen north, he must have been impatient to return to Eagle Island, to 'hunker down' in his library, in a self-isolation that even the family couldn't interrupt without first a knock for permission. If anyone has to be in isolation, can you think of a better place than the Peary library on Eagle Island?

At this writing, it is not clear what will be the status of Eagle Island come summer. Currently, the State is planning to open on June 15th, but this is dependent on the State response to the coronavirus pandemic and the restrictions that are in place at that time for travel and for group gatherings. The Friends will try to keep all readers of the Journal informed of the summer status of the island as soon as it becomes final. Refer to the Friends website for up-to-date information.

The sad news to report is that Friends President Emeritus Rear Admiral Harry Rich left us in January with many fond memories of workdays on Eagle Island and Friends Board meetings presided over with gracious good humor as the face of strong leadership. The spirit of cooperation and coordination with the Maine Bureau of Parks and Lands and his example of a committed volunteer has characterized the Friends for his 20 years of guidance and leadership. The welcome that greets all visitors to Eagle Island is a legacy he leaves to all of us and to all who love the island.

A realignment of the officers of the Friends Board of Directors will attempt to carry forward the Adm. Rich legacy. Nick Knight is Vice President and Treasurer, Lisa Blanchard is Secretary, Marnee Small has assumed the important role of Trading Post Coordinator, and Diane Friese has agreed to take on responsibilities for promotion and public relations. Steve Harding will continue as Journal editor, Web Master and Jack-of all-trades for the Friends.

The most exciting news is the new CDs that Diane has imagined, scripted, and produced for use this summer. A short promotional CD and full-length CD focus on Eagle Island as a National Historic Site and its role as the summer get-away for the Peary family.

We are happy to report that the notable work done the last few summers by a committed group of master gardeners will continue under the coordination of new Board member Kim Payne. Kim was recognized for her work on Eagle Island and elsewhere with the Beautification and Enhancement Certificate from the Master Gardener Extension Program in Falmouth. In addition to Eagle Island, the Harvest for Hunger Program, Oxford Gardens and Tidewater Gardens have benefitted from her attention. Congratulations, Kim!

Finally, we are trying to bring our membership file up to date. We have over 1200 names and addresses in our file, but over the past three years have heard from only a fraction of that number. If you want to continue to receive our Journal as a member of the Friends, we hope to hear from you.

We look forward to welcoming you to Eagle Island again this summer. Stay well!

Steve Ingram, President

P.S. As this issue of the Journal is going to press Eagle Island Park Manager, Owen Blease, has been promoted to Manager of Maine's Sebago Lake State Park. We will miss his management of Eagle Island, his guidance to the Friends and his friendship. A tribute to Owen and his two years as Eagle Island Park Manager appears elsewhere in this issue.

We look forward to welcoming a new Park Manager for an exciting summer 2020.

President Emeritus of The Friends of Peary's Eagle Island Admiral Harry G. Rich



In lieu of flowers, the family suggests that memorial donations be made in his name to:

**The Friends of Peary's Eagle Island
P.O. Box 43
Harpswell, ME 04079
Or
Brunswick Naval Aviation Museum
179 Admiral Fitch Drive
Brunswick, ME 04011**

Harold "Harry" G. Rich (U.S. Navy Retired), 94, of Harpswell died on Monday, Jan. 20, 2020 at Mid Coast Hospital. Born in Searsport, on Jan. 2, 1926, he was the youngest of four children of Irving P. and Loretta S. Rich.

He proudly joined the Navy eight days after graduation from Union High School in Union, Maine in 1943. He completed flight training and was commissioned as a naval aviator in June 1946. His 35 years of active service included flying 127 missions to Berlin as part of the Berlin Airlift and serving as Operations Officer on the recovery ship (USS Wasp) for the Gemini 9 and Gemini 12 spacecrafts.

He retired from the Navy in 1978 and returned to Maine, where he resided in Harpswell for over four decades and was active in civic affairs. While living in Harpswell, he served as a member of the Brunswick Base Closure Task Force in both 1995 and 2005, was a board member of the Cundy's Harbor Library for 15 years, was a founding member of the Board of Directors and then Director Emeritus of the Brunswick Naval Aviation Museum, and served for nearly 20 years as president and then as President Emeritus of The Friends of Peary's Eagle Island. In 2018, a street at Brunswick Landing (former Navy Base) was named after him.

He is survived by his three children, Sally Rich and her husband Adam Hewison of Harpswell, Michael Rich of Chuluota, Fla., and Steven Rich and his wife Bonnie of Oveido, Fla.; as well as by his two grandchildren, Kate Fergus and her husband Colin of Columbia, Maryland and Andrew Rich of Chuluota, Fla.

Harry's family would like to thank the wonderful staff at Avita of Brunswick for all their hugs, kisses, and great care.

A funeral service was held at 10 a.m. on Feb. 25 at Stetson's Funeral Home, 12 Federal Street, Brunswick, Maine

Harry Rich

For nearly two decades Harry had been the president of the Friends and under his leadership the Friends have supported the State of Maine's Bureau of Parks and Lands on many physical improvements on Eagle Island including the preservation and reconstruction of the East Bastion and the Northwest Wall, in the design and construction of the Welcome Center, and in the return to the Island museum of several artifacts and Peary family heirlooms. The production of a CD chronicling the life of Admiral Peary and his love of Eagle Island, its showing in the Welcome Center, and its periodic airing on Maine Public Television have introduced Eagle Island State Historic Site to many Maine citizens and to visitors from across the globe.

Even more significant has been Harry's visible leadership in Friends' on-island projects. His enthusiasm, knowledge of naval history, and outgoing demeanor encouraged a spirit of Eagle Island that assures that every visitor experiences the island's welcome and shares in the celebration of the heroic efforts of Admiral Robert E. Peary in his exploration and research of the far North leading to his discovery of the North Pole – a spirit that continues to make Eagle Island a special place to all of us.

On his retirement as Friends' President, the Board accorded him President Emeritus status as a token of its esteem for his leadership.

A culminating highlight of his presidency was the recognition of Eagle Island as a United States National Historic Site in 2016. Here Friends' President Harry Rich accepts the National Historic designation plaque from the Secretary of The Interior.



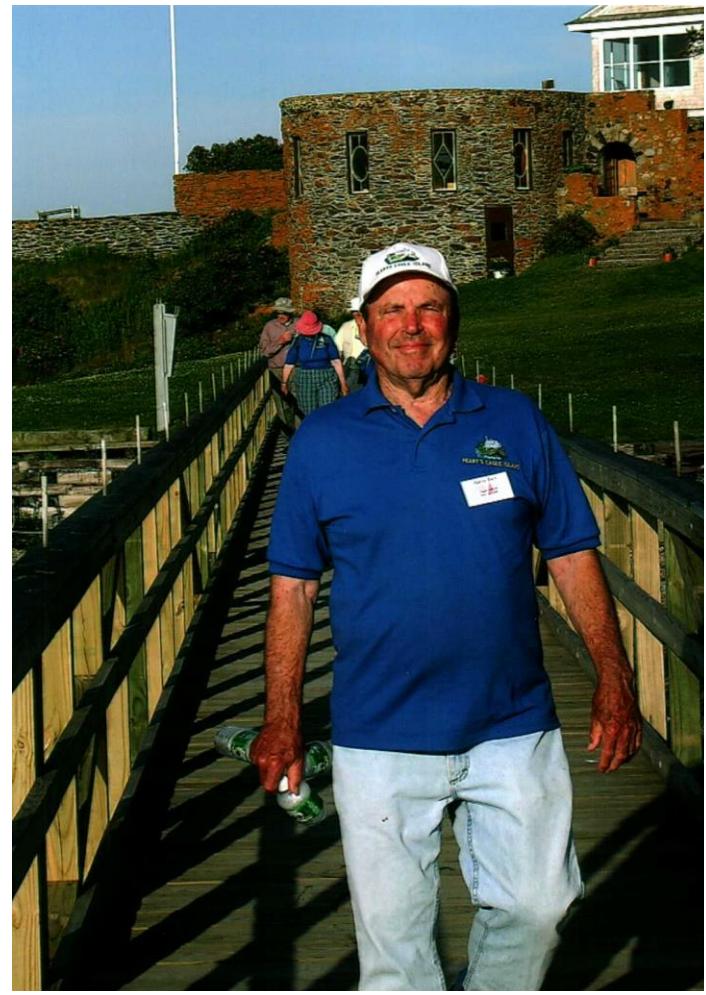
Harry Rich – The President is present – and Leading with Good Humor

One characteristic of President Rich's leadership was the example he set for all of us. This was especially true with his presence whenever there was a Friends' activity on Eagle Island. But when his physical mobility was unreliable a decision had to be made:

When President Rich told the Friends that he would not making the trip to the island any longer on Friends' work days, I had the uneasy feeling that I may have been partly responsible for his decision. Toward the end of the previous summer, at the end of a Friends' work day on the island, with 'The President Present', we had decided to end the workday early since the wind had picked up and Casco Bay did not treat mariners kindly who ignored its warnings. As we walked down the pier to the ramp and the float, Harry's shaky mobility signaled a need for some support and with one of us ahead and one behind he virtually walked his hands down both sides of the handrail to get down the ramp safely to the float. Then with Bob Johnson on one side and me on the other we negotiated the bucking, rocking ramp to the where the boat was drawn up tight to the float. With the float at one level, the top of the boat gunnel 8" higher and the deck of the boat down about a foot, the next step would be precarious. We waited for a lull in the chop and started the step across. One of us stubbed a toe on the top of the gunnel and in the split second we had to decide whether to try to support the other's falling or to catch our own balance, the decision became immaterial since we all ended up on the floor of the boat in a tangled heap. As a kid, I would have called that flailing mass of aged limbs (the total age of all three of us was over 240 years) a 'pig pile'. But even 'pig pile' was too noble a term for what we had there. As Bob and I got untangled and stood- partly at attention and partly ready to help Harry regain semblance of vertical, Harry straightened up and, not to us specifically but to the group of people who had gathered around first in curiosity, then in concern, for what had happened, he said.

"That is NOT the United States Navy's customary way to pipe an admiral aboard his ship!" Something in the tone of his voice gave the onlookers the license to let forth their giggles and outright belly laughs that initial concern had muffled. The boat ride back to the Dolphin was fun, albeit, somewhat sore. The President was present-and we were all the better for it.

Steve Ingram



"Harry was the first of the Friends' group Gaye and I met, and I was immediately infected with his enthusiasm for Eagle Island. Through our years of service, he has continually been an inspiration, the sign of a true leader. Personally, I don't ever expect to be able to fill those big shoes, but I will always work hard to keep them moving forward."

Wayne and Gaye Miller
Docent Coordinators for The Friends of Peary's Eagle Island.



**"Fair Winds and
Following Seas"**
Harry



**The Friends of
Peary's Eagle Island**

Draft Article II Spring 2020 Eagle Island Journal **by Diane Friese**

This is Part II of the article published in the spring 2019 issue of this journal entitled: "Meet Rupert Baxter White and Robert Edwin Peary III, "Bert". Information for both these articles was collected from 2019 interviews with both Robert and Rupert. See Spring 2019 Eagle Island Journal for more detailed biographies of each man. The time period being discussed in these articles, is between 1946-1949 when Robert Peary Jr. "Bob"(son of Admiral Robert E. Peary), Bob's wife, Inez Kelly Peary and their two children Robert Edwin Peary III and daughter, Josephine Ruth Peary, "Jody", homesteaded on Eagle Island.

Robert Edwin Peary III answered the following question for me: What was it like living on Eagle Island as a young 9 year old boy? "It was heaven. I had access to sabers from my great grandfather's Prussian war service, narwhal tusks to play with (originally 25 tusks, most having the tips cut off) and rifles from my grandfather's arctic expeditions." While living on the Island, Bert's father, Bob, son of Admiral Robert E. Peary, taught Bert how to safely use rifles and knives. Bert had no friends his own age who regularly visited him during the 2.5 years they lived year round on the island. As a result, Bert was free to entertain himself in the natural world of Eagle Island with apparent joy.

Bert's chores included feeding and caring for 25 chickens and two pigeons, all of whom were housed in a woodshed located across the path from the current composting toilets. He also was responsible for hauling buckets of drinking water from the dug well, that was also located behind the house on the path leading to the south side of the island. There was no pump on this well, so Bert had a long wooden pole to which he attached a bucket. The pole with the bucket was then lowered down into the well and when Bert reached water, he scooped water into the bucket and brought it back up to ground. After disconnecting the bucket from the pole, he walked the full bucket to the west porch near the kitchen. Once there, he poured the water into the drinking water container.

Both Rupert and Bert remember eating red seal meat, which is protein rich and very low in fat. After shooting a seal it would be butchered and the skin separated out for tanning. Bert remembers the fires they built down on the Eagle Island beach, where they would melt down the seal blubber into liquid form. The latter was used to lubricant machines and burn for fuel. Historically, along with seal meat, the liquid blubber has been consumed by indigenous people as a high protein supplement. However, the latter did not happen in Bert's immediate family when they homesteaded on Eagle Island. Bert describes the taste of liquid blubber as: "castor oil on steroids".

Bert also remembers that cod, dog fish and pollack were also a regular part of their diet. They didn't frequently eat lobster. The 22 pound lobster currently hanging on the Eagle Island dining room wall (seen below) was given to his grandfather by a local lobsterman, who found it hanging on the outside of one of his traps. The Admiral cleaned the lobster of its meat and then set it on an ant hill for cleaning of the tiny lobster shell crevices by the ants. The shell was then sent to the Smithsonian for mounting.

As many of you readers knows, Admiral Peary was also a self- taught taxidermist, getting licensed in Maine as a teenager. He eventually had a part-time taxidermy business, in addition to working as a surveyor, in Fryeburg, Maine when he first graduated from Bowdoin College. Visitors can still view many of his bird mountings today, throughout the Eagle Island house.



Unlike the summer months when Bert's family slept upstairs, winter sleeping arrangements in the uninsulated island house were quite different. Bob and Inez slept in the small uninsulated room off the west porch. Prior to retiring to bed, in order to stay warmer at night, they used 12" round long handled metal bed warmers which contained hot embers from the woodstove. Bert slept on a cot in the dining room next to a small Franklin woodstove. The kitchen contained the large woodstove that still remains there to this day.

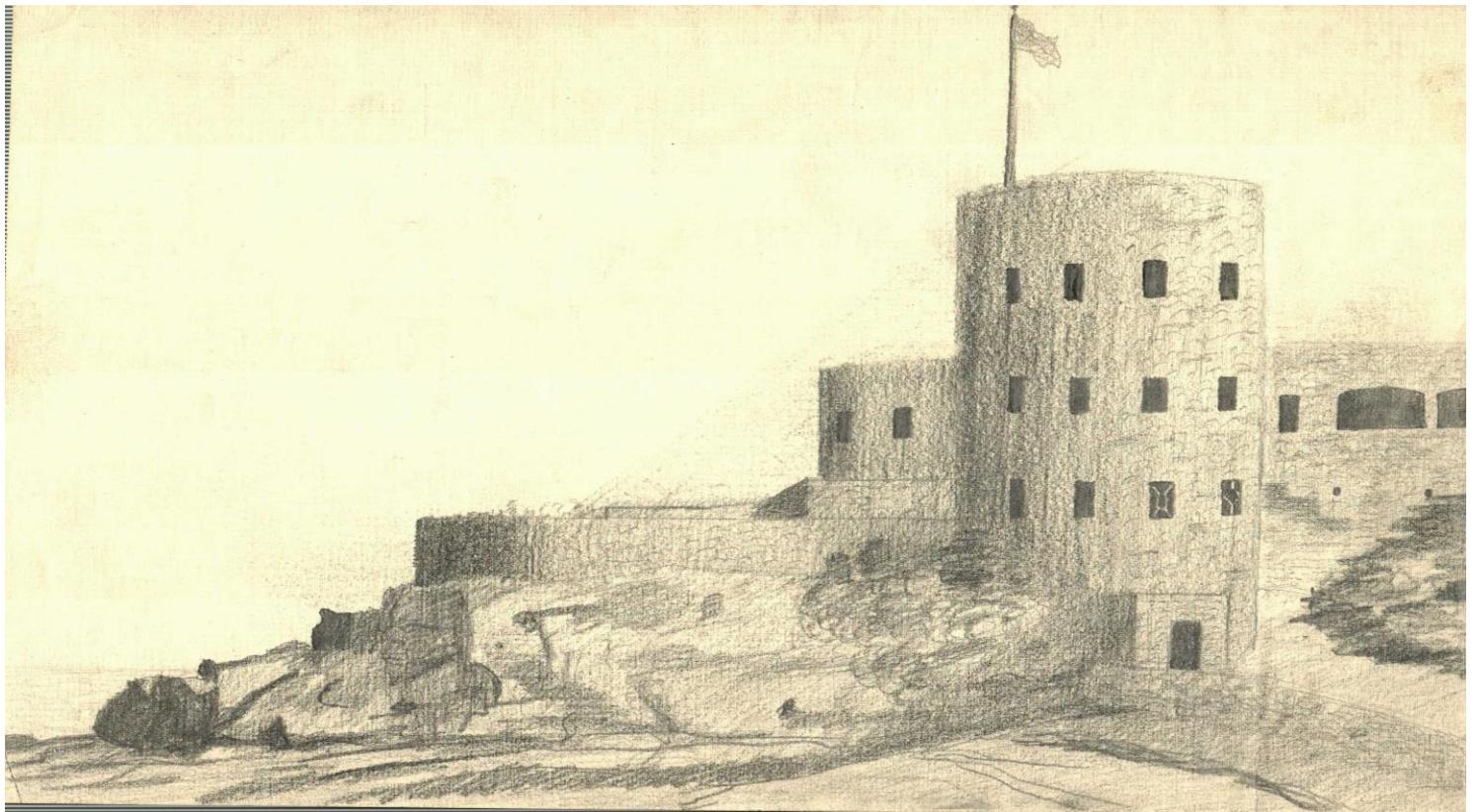
Miscellaneous homesteading memories include:

Bert remembers that candles were forbidden in the house for safety reasons, except at Christmas time.

The 2-holer outhouse behind the house was called the "greenhouse" because it was painted green.

A beautiful bronze sun dial which was located on the library roof (West Bastion). It was adjustable and so well calibrated you could set your watch by it. (If anyone reading this article knows where this sun dial eventually went, please let us know. Both Bert and Rupert remember it fondly and would like to know where it eventually landed.)

Stories about Bert's Grandfather's love of buying at auction interesting used windows and doors from churches and old buildings. According to Bert, the old church door (as seen above) found a couple years ago in the island house basement by Friends of Peary's Eagle Island volunteers was most likely one of the Admiral's many auction purchases. Bert said that his Grandfather told him he wanted to build a castle on the island and the Admiral had drawn up sketches of this proposed castle structure. Bert said he once saw these castle sketches. The unique windows and doors would have been repurposed into the structure of the castle. As life evolved, it ended up being just another one of the Admiral's dreams.



One of Admiral Peary's sketches of his "castle" on Eagle Island

In Sept 1949, after the Angora wool market had collapsed, Bob and Inez decided it was time to end their homesteading experience on Eagle Island. By this time, Bert was going to a boarding school in New Hampshire and Jody was studying and living in Washington D.C. Bob and Inez had no plans where to go, so Rupert White's parents generously offered to have Bob and Inez come live with them at their home on Brunswick's Mere Point. Bob and Inez lived with the Whites for about 1.5 years.

Inez, being a fantastic cook and known as "the pie crust queen" was hired to work at the Stow House in Brunswick, which was a private inn owned by Rupert's mother. Bert remembers living for a while in the Stow House with his mother and Jody, while his dad was working in Greenland. He said people would come from all over to eat his mother's pies.

Bob was an engineer by trade. Among several jobs he worked after leaving the island was designing fish ladders for the Maine Fish and Game Dept. He also did a stint testing winter boots for the U.S. military. These boots were the forerunners of what are currently known as the large white "bunny boots". In 1953 Bob was hired by the contractors, Metcalf and Eddy, to help build the U.S. airbase in Thule, Greenland. During his time in Greenland, Bob met and got to know his half-brother, Kali Peary. Bob's father, Admiral Peary, fathered Kali with Aleqasina, an Inughuit woman who birthed two children with him. According to Bert and Rupert, Bob openly shared with his family and friends his relationship with Kali.

Bob and Inez eventually bought a "fixer upper" house at 25 McLellan St. in Brunswick for \$1000. The house is still occupied today and according to local historians is one of the oldest in Brunswick. The house was originally a pub in downtown Brunswick and was relocated to McLellan St. In later years, Bob and Inez moved to Augusta, where Bob worked designing bridges until his retirement, as an engineer for the Maine State Highway Dept. In the tradition of taking care of family, Marie Flora Diebitsch, the youngest sister of Bert's grandmother, Josephine, lived with Bob and Inez until her death.

**Friends of Peary's Eagle Island
2020 News Letter**
Owen Blease, Maine Bureau of Parks and Lands

Before I discuss our plans for 2020, I would like to honor and recognize the passing of a dear friend to Eagle Island. A friend who loved and served the island for over two decades and strived, throughout his entire life, to give back to his community, country and world. Rear Adm. Harold "Harry" Rich was born and raised on the coast of Maine. He joined the Navy in 1943 and after thirty-five years of service he retired and moved to Harpswell, Maine. Throughout his retirement, Harry proudly served as the president of the Friends of Peary's Eagle Island (FOPEI) for nearly twenty-years in addition to other civic leadership roles. After decades of dedicated service to Eagle Island, the FOPEI and the Maine Bureau of Parks and Lands (MBPL), Harry honorably resigned from his longstanding role in 2018. As president emeritus, he continued to provide guidance and support for the FOPEI until his passing on January 20, 2020. On behalf of the MBPL, I offer my sincere condolences to Harry's family and close friends, and I share my deepest gratitude for the immense generosity, loyalty and appreciation that Harry inspired with each and every breath.

In the time that I have served as park manager at Eagle Island State Historic Site, many people have asked me what I enjoy most about the island. As park manager, I witness the changing of the seasons, entire life cycles of wildlife, dramatic storms and surfacing whales. These experiences are amazing but the one thing that truly separates Eagle Island from the other rocks in Casco Bay, are the visitors and volunteers who bring vitality, inspiration and enthusiasm to Eagle Island and its programs. To me, the best part of Eagle Island is you.

While serving you over the past two years, I have gained valuable leadership experience and established a strong foundation upon which I have grown. I am honored to inform you that I have been promoted within the Maine Bureau of Parks and Lands. In my new park management role, I will supervise the operations, maintenance and staff of Sebago Lake State Park. In the coming weeks, a new Eagle Island Park Manager will be selected. Throughout this transition, preparations for Eagle Island have continued. This year our primary focus will be on improving Eagle Island's online resources, maintenance projects, and a seabird nesting study by graduate students of the University of Maine's, Ecology and Environmental Science Program.

In these challenging times, leaders from across state government are working with the MBPL to identify how we can enjoy Maine State Parks amid COVID-19. As always, our top priority is the health and safety of each visitor, volunteer and park employee. Our goal is to respond proactively to eliminate the spread of COVID-19 at Maine State Parks while also serving the recreational needs of the public to the greatest extent that we can safely do so. At this point, Eagle Island is tentatively scheduled to open on June 15, 2020. However, in response to public health guidance related to COVID-19, services will be curtailed, and the opening date is subject to change. Before visiting the park, please visit the MBPL Eagle Island webpage for important updates regarding the availability of services at Eagle Island State Historic Site.

I cannot express how grateful I am to have had the opportunity to laugh, share stories and celebrate our successes together over the past two years. Thank you for all that you have shared with me. I sincerely look forward to crossing paths with you at some point in the many years that I plan to visit Eagle Island, and in the meantime, I wish for nothing less than happy, healthy and safe days for you and your family.

Best regards,
Owen Blease, Maine Bureau of Parks and Lands



Gary Best Southern Regional Parks Manager State of Maine Bureau of Parks and Lands, Harry Rich President Emeritus of The Friends of Peary's Eagle Island, Owen Bleasdale Maine Bureau of Parks and Lands

Location; Responsibilities; Skills; Character A Match Befitting the Promised Land



Adm. Peary called Eagle Island his ‘promised land’. For the past two years Eagle Island has seen its island location in a perfect match with its Park Manager’s responsibilities and Owen Blease’s seamanship, managerial acumen, and personality – a match befitting his promised land.

Owen applied for an Assistant Park Manager position a few years ago, thinking it would be an interesting and unusual summer job. He wasn’t prepared for the hook that the island sets in people’s future planning. In the spring, 2018, the Eagle Island Park Manager position opened; the position description covered his many interests and he applied. The search committee saw on paper compatibility between the position expectations and Owen’s training and experience. But Owen’s greatest strength was not revealed on paper. Conversations and interviews foretold the interpersonal skills that have made the past two years a memorable experience for island visitors of all ages, volunteers on his many island projects, and his coworkers.

Just a composite sample: You arrive, as a visitor, at an Eagle Island mooring in your 6-figure sailing

yacht or motor launch. A smiling Park Manager motors out in an aluminum skiff and cuddles up to your investment as if he owned your boat to ferry you to the float. An easy conversation gives you the highlights of the island park and how to get the most from your visit. You meet the docents who seem to take their cue from their Park Manager and strive to assure you feel welcome. What you see on your visit is a testament to the care that Owen, his assistants, and volunteers give to the island: the manicured lawns; the flowers and gardens reflecting the care and efforts of volunteer professional gardeners; the house and museum artifacts carefully protected from their island environment; rugged, but worth-every-step, walking trails to the far end of the island; and, yes, the composting toilets with uncharacteristic sea-air freshness.

What is not obvious to most visitors is equally important to the island and its State ownership. Identification of deferred maintenance projects, renovations of the Caretaker's Cottage, credit card access for island fees and Trading Post purchases, ecological knowledge of invasive species, bird populations, and global warming effects, and technological innovations to protect the island and its artifacts and to improve the visitor experience. Some ideas he has left for the future: an island video security camera system and live webcam visuals of nesting ospreys.

How can all this happen in two summers? Management via recognition of and appreciation for the work of others; seamanship that inspires the confidence and ensures the comfort of patrons; and a personality that makes you the center of effort in an environment that would otherwise command all attention.

What a match!

From the board of The Friends of Peary's Eagle Island

Thanks for your commitment to Eagle Island, Owen and best of luck as Manager of Sebago Lake State Park!



FOPEI Updates

Donating to the Friends is easier than ever now. We have made donating to the Friends possible through our website *The Friends of Peary's Eagle Island*. Just click on the “Donate to the Friends” tab on the home page and enter ANY amount. Thank you in advance for any donation you are able to provide.

Our website is currently being revamped and updated. The hand held wand tour narration is now available, our new video is an exciting introduction to visiting the Island, updates on how to safely visit the Island will be provided, the bi-annual Journals are uploaded, and to lift your spirits, enjoy one or two songs from the era of Admiral Peary’s excursions to the Arctic.

We intend to follow the guidelines in place from the State of Maine and will monitor any changes that will affect our involvement with Eagle Island. The 2020 season on Eagle Island will certainly be different from any other year. During these uncertain times the Friends remain committed to providing support to the Bureau of Parks of Lands for the State of Maine. Although we have suspended our docent program for 2020 until it is safe to send volunteers to the island, we intend to maintain the historic gardens with small garden crews and do our periodic maintenance on the structures and grounds. As of this writing Trail Day is still in the works scheduled for mid-July. Check our website and Facebook page for updates, and again:

**Thank you for supporting
The Friends of Peary's Eagle Island**

The Friends of Peary's Eagle Island
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Bailey Island, ME 04003

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