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

Eagle Island Journal

A Publication of the Friends of Peary's Eagle Island

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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

It is with great excitement and honor that I sit here and write my very first letter to our many Friends of Peary's Eagle Island.

It was 19 years ago on a Casco Bay cruise I caught my first glimpse of Eagle Island which left it's indelible impression. As my luck would have it, the Harpswell Anchor had a small clip requesting docent volunteers, and as they say, "the rest is history."

I have been extremely fortunate to have worked with Admiral Harry Rich and now thank him for both his knowledge and passion about our Island, and more importantly, for his continued support in my new role as President. Though his shoes can never be filled, I look forward to creating my own footprints.

To me, our Island has evolved into the most magical jewel in Casco Bay. It is the Friends' symbiotic relationship with the State of Maine, Gary Best, Southern Regional Manager, Maine Bureau of Parks and Lands, and his staff, which has afforded us the ability to continually restore and maintain Eagle Island commensurate with its well-deserved status as a National Historic Landmark and its designation on the National Register of Historic Places. I welcome our working future together.

Most sincerely, I thank the Board of The Friends of Peary's Eagle Island for its support and encouragement in helping me with my new responsibilities in preserving the legacy of our cherished Eagle Island.

Have a wonderful winter, warm or cold, and I look onward to our 2019 season.

Best regards,
Noel Yacobian

New Friends' President Noel Yacobian holding one of the porthole windows found in the basement of Admiral Peary's house on Eagle Island. This was used as a template to make the replacement window surroundings for the windows in the basement of the house. Many projects like this are planned as part of the Friends' involvement on Eagle Island.

The Pianola Project

In 1904, Robert E. Peary was the recipient of an unusual gift – a 64-key player pianola. The benefactor was H.H. Benedict, president of the Aeolian Piano Company of New York. The intent was for this smaller version of a piano to travel on board the Roosevelt, Peary's new Arctic exploration ship, to provide exercise and entertainment for expedition members as they spent months frozen in the ice of northern Greenland awaiting the trek to the North Pole. And indeed, the pianola did travel to the Arctic on the 1905-06 and the 1908-09 expeditions, filling one wall in Peary's small stateroom. When the Roosevelt was sold, the pianola was moved to Eagle Island, and nestled against a small wall in the living room where it was enjoyed by generations of Pearys until the Peary family gave Eagle Island to the State of Maine. The pianola was moved to the home of Robert E. Peary Jr. in Augusta, and remained there until his passing in 1994. The pianola was then passed along to Robert E. Peary III, grandson of Admiral Peary, who lived in Victoria, British Columbia, and the pianola was off on another long journey. In 2009, the centennial celebration of the successful 1909 expedition to the Pole, the Peary family decided the best location for the pianola was in the living room of the Eagle Island home. Bert Peary, the Admiral's grandson in Vancouver, and Greg Stafford, a great-grandson, drove a U-Haul trailer 3,400 miles in four days, delivering the piano to South Freeport for transport to the island. It was placed on the same small wall where it had sat for so many years.

Bert stipulated that the pianola should be played so that the public could hear and enjoy this wonderful old artifact, and to the great enjoyment of visitors, many of the docents gladly demonstrated the pianola by playing a tune or two. In 2015, it was decided that the fragile original music rolls that accompanied the pianola were too valuable as historic artifacts to risk damage by playing them. The pianola is a 64-key instrument, not 88 keys like a regular piano, thus music rolls are not easy to come by. Fortunately, former Park Manager Zane Wallace was able to locate a few playable rolls, and the demonstrations continued. It seemed such a shame that the great old music played for so many years would never again be heard. At that point, an idea was born: If permission to play the rolls one last time could be obtained, they could be digitally recorded. Serendipitously, Dr. Christopher Oberholtzer, music professor at the University of Southern Maine and a frequent visitor to Eagle Island, after hearing the pianola played, eagerly became involved in the planning of a project to record all the rolls in the collection. Park Manager Owen Blease was able to obtain permission to play the pianola rolls on a one-time basis, and on September 12, 2018, using a digital recorder provided by Dr. Oberholtzer, a group of volunteers gathered at the Island for a marathon session of playing and recording. Under the direction of docent co-coordinator Wayne Miller, forty tunes were successfully recorded on that day. Two days later, Wayne returned to the Island, and with the help of Owen, recorded fourteen more rolls, finishing out the recording of the entire collection. Fifty four songs previously enjoyed by Peary family members and the brave Arctic explorers aboard the Roosevelt are now digitally preserved.

Playing fifty-four rolls would be an impossible feat for one or two people, so special thanks go out to the following: Zane Wallace, who happily played many of the rolls; Steve Harding and his many guests, who collectively provided many pairs of fresh young legs to pump the old pianola; Steve Ingram and Nick Knight for providing boat transportation to the island; Diane Friese and Joyce Gordon for secretarial services keeping track of recorded rolls; and to several others who sat to play one or two tunes. A grand time was had by all, and the finished product of this project will be enjoyed by many for years to come.

Under the watchful eye of Park Manager Owen Blease, Wayne Miller instructs Nate Pablo on how to pump the pianola's pedals and play one of the original piano rolls that was enjoyed by Admiral Peary and his crew. The tempo and volume had to be manually adjusted according to the directives printed on each roll.

Do you recognize any of these titles?

Maple Leaf Rag ~ Mosquito's Parade ~ Ragtime Violin ~ Tickled To Death
Smoky Mokes Cakewalk ~ Strike Up The Band ~ The Glow Worm ~ Peter Piper

This project is a perfect example of how The Friends help preserve artifacts, recordings, paper material, house belongings, etc. so future generations can experience all that Eagle Island has to offer. To read the article about how the pianola returned to Eagle Island check out the Eagle Island journal from 2009 found on the website friendsofpearyseagleisland.org.

We hope to have all of the pianola roll recordings available for listening on our website soon. Plans are to make available for purchase a CD with recordings from the Admiral's personal musical pianola roll collection. Stay tuned!

Recapping the 2018 Season on Eagle Island

The 2018 summer season on Eagle Island was constructive, rewarding, and proactive. In addition to performing routine maintenance needs, Eagle Island's staff, the gardening crew, docents, and volunteers completed an impressive amount of projects this year. Steve Ingram, Nick Knight and other Friends Group volunteers finished the new tool shed, water sealed all of the wood decking and handrails, and applied fresh trim paint to the Welcome Center. The volunteer gardeners did a superb job this year planning and executing the gardening days, and ensuring the gardens and flower boxes received proper care throughout the season. The maintenance coordinators from the Bureau of Parks and Lands performed functional repairs to the stonework and resurrected the old water system, which now provides fresh water to the cottage for handwashing. In addition to cleaning the cottage, the assistant park rangers and I sorted through decades of clutter, reorganized, and transformed the kitchen with fresh paint from top to bottom. In September, volunteer Joyce Gordon and I removed dozens of brown tail moth nests in an effort to reduce the prevalence of browntail moths in 2019. At the very end of September, Maine Conservation Corps volunteers and I loaded the float with approximately two tons of building scraps, washed up trash, and littered refuse that the assistant park rangers and I collected from the Island landscape this season. While the undertaking was arduous, the reward is a cleaner, more aesthetically pleasing Island, with healthier wildlife habitat.

This year, thanks to a collaboration between the Bureau of Parks and Lands, the Eagle Island Docent Program, and Chris Oberholtzer, from the University of Southern Maine's Jazz Studies Program, docent coordinator Wayne Miller and I were able to host volunteers after the season to digitally record each historic pianola roll from Admiral Peary's original collection. This successful recording project captured and preserved the historic music, which will be made available to all of Eagle Island's visitors.

This year Eagle Island was very fortunate to have assistant park rangers Kaylyn Kuni, and John Burgess. In addition to coordinating boat traffic, performing endless operational maintenance, and enforcing rules, both of them came to work with a positive attitude, a willingness to learn, and a desire to enhance the experience for the island's visitors.

I extend my most sincere appreciation to all who contributed to the Island this season, through donations, membership, and volunteer hours. Thank you for another great season and I hope that you continue to support Eagle Island in 2019.

Owen Blease
Park Manager Eagle Island

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In Memory

Kristin Westra was a teacher at The Chebeague Island School from 2004 until 2018.
She was in contact with the Friends several times about field trips to Eagle Island for her students. Her enthusiasm for Eagle Island was infectious and her knowledge of Admiral Peary and his accomplishments as well as The Peary family's life on Eagle Island was impressive. The Friends of Peary's Eagle Island would like to extend their condolences to all who knew Kristin.

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Introducing Nick Knight
Eagle Island's Newest Board Member

Nick Knight of Cumberland first came out to Eagle Island in 1990 and we are not sure why, but it took him 22 more years before he began as a regular work crew volunteer. He began when the Welcome Center was being built in 2012 and quickly became known for his willingness to do whatever was asked of him. His height came in handy and over the years his boat has also helped to bring other volunteers out and back too. He says enjoying days on the Island is not at all difficult to do, but being able to feel productive at the same time makes volunteering on Eagle Island a truly wonderful and rewarding experience! As a new member of the Board he looks forward to helping bring fresh new ideas to the Friends' joint efforts with the State of Maine to manage and help Eagle Island become very memorable to even more visitors!

Want to help?

The Friends of Peary's Eagle Island welcome volunteers from all walks of life, no experience necessary. Maybe you would like to be a docent, help out in the historic Peary gardens, join our work crew, be a part of our annual Trail Day, or just be a part of our Friends' family of volunteers? Contact us using the enclosed envelope, through our website, or even write us a letter.

FROM THE ARCHIVES

The Eagle Island Welcome Center built by The Friends was designed after Robert Peary Jr.'s workshop which can be seen in the background on the right in this photo. Very few photos of the original workshop exist. The larger windows in the workshop faced west allowing ample afternoon sun to keep the workshop lit. This photo shows Robert Peary Jr. tying up to a mooring just off Eagle Island. Similar historic photos can be seen in our book "Eagle Island, Admiral Peary's Harpswell Home". Contact us though our website friendsofpearyseagleisland.org to purchase a copy.

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In an effort to control costs the Friends of Peary's Eagle Island is in the process of culling our mailing list for our bi-annual journals. If you are interested in continuing to receive a paper copy of the journal, please return the enclosed pre-paid envelope indicating your decision. Thank you for your continuing support.

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The Friends of Peary's Eagle Island

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