



Eagle Island Journal

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"Inveniam viam aut faciam."

Find a way or make one

PRESIDENTS MESSAGE

Recognition motivates. Obviously, that's not a profound observation on my part, but a universally accepted truism. People feel good when praised for their work. An organization's prestige is enhanced and its members feel pride in being part of a winning team. Eagle Island can't "feel" anything in the traditional sense but its prestige may soon receive a big boost. As you may recall, some time ago the bureau of Parks and Lands in Augusta nominated Eagle Island for designation as a National Historic Landmark. I'm pleased to report that last December the National Park Service Landmark Nominating Committee unanimously approved the nomination and forwarded it to the NPS Advisory Board for review. That Board meets next in late May. If approved by that Board it then goes to the Secretary of Interior for final approval. If granted it will become Harpswell's second National Historic Landmark; the other being the Old Meeting House on route 123. We should hear of the final decision some time this summer. Keep your fingers crossed. I remain optimistic.

Our new Welcome Center was open for business for the first time last September and immediately showed its value in making a visit to the island more meaningful. The Center was constructed in Partnership with the Bureau of Parks and Lands. The Friends share to be the finished building, while the Bureau's was the solar power system and certain interior finish. There are a few touches to be left to be done before the island opens for the season on June 15. We are especially proud of the 24 *Friends* volunteers who spent 2400 person hours over a 2 year period constructing the new building from scratch. Their work involved doing everything from clearing the site, to digging foundation holes 3 and 4 feet deep by hand, to setting the 8" by 8" foundation sills as long as 18 feet that weighed as much as 1000 lbs, plus placing the 10 huge roof beams that weighed 400 pounds each. All this was done under the expert guidance of Project Manager and *Friends* Vice President, Steve Ingram. Our share \$24,000 was paid for by memberships in the *Friends* and several generous grants. We all can be justifiably proud of the attractive and very strong new building. It's fun working with such talented and dedicated people. Thanks.

Harry

DOCENT PROGRAM RECRUITING VOLUNTEERS

The 2014 Eagle Island Season is upon us. With the new Welcome Center fully operational this summer, we need new volunteers to join the ranks of our loyal returning Docents. Our aim is to schedule 2-3 people on the island daily mid- June thru mid- September.

Docents are the Island's ambassadors. The goal of the program is to make our visitors feel warmly welcome and have an enhanced experience learning about Admiral Peary, his house, and his island. Volunteers receive comprehensive orientation material and have the support of staff and veteran docents. It is fun and easy, as you learn more about Eagle Island, to share your knowledge and enthusiasm, answer questions, and direct visitors to various ways of touring the island.

A Docent Day is fulfilling but also a full one. Boat transportation to the island leaves at 9:00AM from the Dolphin Marina riding with the island staff and other volunteers. The return trip leaves Eagle Island at 5:00PM. Volunteers bring all they will need for the day's outing. Bad weather days are cancelled.

For more information and to sign up contact Marnee Small, Docent Coordinator, 833-2853 or e-mail marnee26@comcast.net. The Friends annual Docent Appreciation and Orientation Luncheon is May 10, 2014. New volunteers are most welcome to attend and meet returning volunteers, staff, and members of the Friends as we prepare for the summer.

If you want a great volunteer experience, give this a try!

Christmas at Cape Sabine

By Lieut. R. E. Peary

Reprinted from the New England Magazine - January 1904

In the entire list of Arctic localities there is probably no name which for Americans is more associated with gruesome recollections than Cape Sabine, the barren point of rocks which defines on the west the northern end and narrowest point of Smith Sound.

Bleak and somber, wind-swept and ice-battered, its atmosphere heavy with human pain, despair, contention, and death, when not bound in the iron fetters of the ice, it is resisting the incessant shocks of the constantly southward-surging pack.

Starvation Cove, where the last of Franklin's men met their end, fills a similar place with Englishmen. But in another respect the two localities are entirely dissimilar.

The horrors of the latter, hidden from the world for years behind the inscrutable uncertainty of the Arctic wastes, resulted in the period of greatest activity known in the history of Arctic exploration.

Ship after ship and expedition after expedition were sent out to solve the mystery of the disappearance of Franklin and his men, until at one time some ten or twelve ships were simultaneously engaged in the work, and more of the North American archipelago was discovered and charted than had ever been done before or has been done since.

The horrors of the former, known almost immediately, put a complete damper on government interest in and assistance to Arctic work on this side of the Atlantic; and its influence is felt even today, after a lapse of many years.

About 2 miles south of the point of Cape Sabine a group of rocky islands forms a small bight, discovered by the English expedition of 1876, and named by them Payer Harbor. Brought into prominence a few years later from being the shelter from which *Proteus* started out to her destruction, it has since been a familiar name to Arctic students.



WINDWARD IN WINTER QUARTERS

Here my ship, the *Windward*, was caught by the ice in September, 1900, and compelled to winter, with Mrs. Peary on board, I being north at Fort Conger at the time. Here I joined her on May 6, 1901; and here I determined to establish

my winter quarters for the coming season, the locality being the southern key to the Smith Sound line of approach to the pole. In pursuance of this purpose the *Windward's* deckhouse was unshipped, hauled over the harbor ice, and set up in a favorable location overlooking the harbor. All stores and equipment which could be spared from the summer walrus-hunting were landed and secured.

Late in August both my ships, the *Windward* and the *Eric*, steamed away for home, leaving me and my party just below Eric Head, on Ellesmere Land coast, some twelve to fifteen miles south of Payer Harbor.

Not until September 17 did the cementing of the inshore ice permit us to reach Payer Harbor, and scarcely were we settled down when the Angel of Death came amongst us, and remained for nearly 3 months.

December of 1901 found me with my faithful Esquimaux decimated by the ravages of a fatal disease, and my party slowly recovering from our passage through the "Valley of the Shadow of Death." Naturally our Christmas was not a specially hilarious one. My party at this time comprised my colored man Henson, or Matt, as he was generally known; Charlie, my cook, a fine, big specimen of the Newfoundland fisherman: and the following Esquimaux: Ahngoodloo and his wife Ekaresah; Ahngmaloktok and his wife Ionah; Ahngodoblaho, and his wife Siutikahtui, and two children; Ahahgiahsu, an old deaf mute, and her daughter Ahmemi, and two orphan boys Koodlooktoo and Arkao.



ESQUIMAUX MEMBERS OF LIEUT.-COMMANDER PEARY'S EXPEDITION

Henson and Charlie were quartered with me in the deckhouse, which I had landed from the *Windward*. This contained a small sleeping room for each of us, a kitchen, and a dining room. The Esquimaux were quartered in "Fort Magnesia," the old Stein headquarters. Both habitations were walled in completely with snow blocks, and the entrances still further protected by snow vestibules. Only by such means can comfort be secured in the vicinity of Sabine, which is a region of strong incessant winds summer and winter.

The sun had long since left us, and we were shrouded in continual darkness. The ice, which all through the preceding months had been surging slowly past us, was now at rest, fettered by the intense cold.

The extremity of Cape Sabine, the northern end of Brevoort Island, and the northern side of every projecting point, were piled high with ice masses torn from the floes as they passed.

East and southeast lay the still unfrozen expanse of the north water, its inky waves supporting a stratum of air heavy with condensing vapors, which at any breath of wind settled in upon us in a freezing pall of more than Stygian darkness, through which slowly filtered minute spiculae of ice.

Five days before Christmas Matt and three Esquimaux men had started for the head of Buchanan Bay, fifty miles distant, to bring out the meat of some musk oxen killed there in October, and which the illness of my entire party had made it impossible to bring out before.

I wanted, and at first intended, to make this trip myself. I was anxious to get out and away for a breathing spell from the place where the illness and death of my devoted people had held me prisoner for so long. I felt that I needed the change and separation from the saddening associations. But after thinking the matter over carefully, I felt that the uncertainty of finding of finding the meat cache in the darkness of the Arctic night, and after the snows of two months, simply from description, was too great an uncertainty for me to risk.

Three days before Christmas occurred the winter solstice, and it was cheering thought in the darkness which shrouded everything to know that the sun had reached the limit of his southern swing, and though he would be invisible for weeks to come, was slowly returning to us. Jackson in Franz Joseph Land complained of sleeplessness during the long winter night, increasing with each successive winter. I did not experience his trouble, although this was my fourth successive winter. But I did have great difficulty in sleeping at the right time. I was always wide awake during the greater portion of the night, and then dead sleepy at breakfast time.

The day before Christmas was cloudy, with a strong northerly wind, increasing in the afternoon to a wild gale with suffocating drift. Evidently there was open water close off Brevoort Island, though there was not enough light to allow it to be seen.

In the evening I opened a box of candy, fruit, etc., from home. Charley was busy cooking and cleaning house for Christmas, and I passed the hours dreaming of the far-distant faces, knowing there were many loving and anxious thoughts for me at home even though one tender, fond heart was still forever.

Christmas Day came even thicker and darker than the day before, with the wind swung round into the south, and howling viciously over the rocks and across the ragged ice which filled the harbor.

In the absence of the men, the feeding of the dogs left behind devolved on me, and under the conditions of darkness and wind was a matter of considerable time and some difficulty. These faithful animals were fastened in knots of five and eight, wherever the buildings afforded a lee from the biting wind. Some forty in all, the work of feeding was by no means a matter of a few minutes. They knew as well as I that this was feeding time, and ever since Charlie started the fire for breakfast, and the wind had carried the coal scent broadcast, they had been on the *qui vive*, even the apparently sleeping ones having an ear wide open; and as I came out clad in my worst clothes, with old cloths kept for the purpose, and, hatchet in hand, walked towards the pile of frozen walrus meat, which was kept

replenished from my big caches across the harbor and on Brevoort Island, every dog was on his feet.

When, having pulled a big frozen flipper from the pile, I began dragging it towards the nearest group, the neglected ones broke into a wild chorus of barks, howls, and screams, interspersed with snarls and cries of pain as vicious but short-lived battles showed that irritated impatience could hold out no longer.

Every dog in the team which I was approaching was straining forward to the utmost limit of his trace, his eyes, which shone in the darkness, fixed on the walrus meat, his whole body quivering; and the barks and howls had given way to low whines, coughs, and the chattering of teeth in eager anticipation.

Kneeling or stooping as the ground required, just in front of the dogs, with back to the wind, the frozen meat was chopped off in big chunks, until at last each dog, with a long-drawn sigh of satisfaction, refused any more, and I turned to the next team. Though all were thoroughly fed, of course, I had my favorites. These were the ten beautiful grays forming my own team, fastened in two lots of five each in the lee of one of the buildings. With their long legs, bushy tails, and pointed ears and noses, they looked like a pack of timber wolves. But the affectionate dog nature showed out as I approached in low "woofs," the lifting of a paw as if to shake hands, the standing upright to stretch out both paws toward me, and numerous other little canine expressions of welcome.

Better trained than some of the others, there was no fighting, each one knowing that he would get his full share, and standing alert like a veteran first baseman to catch each piece that came his way.



ESQUIMAUX DOG TEAM

After the meal was over I busied myself with untangling the traces, and there were rubbings against my legs, playful seing of my hands, and contented growls.

Then there was "Miss Whiteface," born under the house at Fort Conger two years before, now with five beautiful gray pups of her own, comfortably located on a bed of grass in a little snow house; and "Sin," Marie's red dog, which, though an abomination from her color, was treated with every consideration for her little mistress's sake. She, too, with her four coal-black pups, had a bed and a house of her own.

When at last of the work was completed, it was with a feeling of thankfulness that my meat supply was ample to enable me to feed my faithful assistants full rations; and I entered the house with a glow of satisfaction that, with their stomachs filled to repletion with rich, heat-giving walrus meat,

they were all curled up among the rocks, warm and comfortable within their furry coats.

Dinner, the chief features of which were a fine musk-ox steak and a plum duff, was a triumph of Charlie's skill. His success in this, a present of a generous box of candy, and the fact that his foot, which he had scalded severely the first day of the month, was now completely healed, made the day much more than mere name to him.

Hours later, after Charlie and the Esquimaux had gone to bed, we had our Christmas---I and my pictures of the home folk--with a cake, a small bottle of Moselle and a cup of coffee before us.

We looked into each others eyes, dreamed of the past, each drop of the favorite wine a vignette and a reminiscence of some bygone pleasant experience; speculated as to the future, and what another Christmas would bring, till the fire went out, and I turned to my narrow bunk, where the roar of the gale lulled me to sleep, and I followed in dreams my waking thoughts.

Matt and his party returned three days later. They had groped their way to the head of the bay through the darkness and deep snow, only to find that the greater portion of the meat cached in October had been eaten by the numerous and ravenous foxes.

Fortunately, on Christmas Day, they came upon and killed two musk oxen. They were going from their camp to the meat cache, when not far away, the rush and clatter of hoofs in the snow and over the rocks were heard. Several of the best dogs were quickly cut loose, and, the natives following, with senses scarcely less acute than the dogs, the animals were run down and brought to a stand up the slope of the cliffs, and shot with the muzzle of the carbines almost touching them in the darkness.

What with the success and excitement of the hunt, the abundance of fresh meat and a small flask of our precious brandy , which I had packed for them when they left, these members of my party passed Christmas night by no means unpleasantly in a comfortable snow igloo in the heart of Ellesmere Land.

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