



EAGLE ISLAND JOURNAL

A Publication of the Friends of Peary's Eagle Island

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

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President's Message

This unusually long Journal is devoted entirely to a single story written by our good Friend John Davis. Normally we would edit the story to a couple of pages to make it fit, but this story was just too good to edit in any way. John has exhaustively researched a little known part of the Admiral's career: his purchase of a number of islands in Casco Bay.

John, as you may recall, wrote the script and produced our uniquely successful 2005 DVD, "Admiral Robert E. Peary: The Man and His Island." We are truly blessed to have a Friend like John, a gifted writer willing to share his unique talents with us. Congratulations John, and again our sincere thanks for another major contribution.

Three important announcements: 1) MPBN (Maine Public Broadcasting Network) has decided to show our 48 min. DVD on their stations at 11 am, Saturday, May 29th and again at 10:30 pm on Sunday, May 30th. 2) Dolphin Marina and Restaurant are undergoing major renovations including a new wharf and expanded outside eating areas. We understand that Claire Ross plans to operate her cruise boat, the Marie L. from the Dolphin, with twice daily trips to Eagle Island. When more information is available it will be published on our website, www.pearyeagleisland.org. 3) You now have the option of making your membership donations on line by credit card. For information about this go to our website and click on "Become a Member."

With the potential for an increase in the number of visitors to the island we need more volunteers, particularly docents. To sign up or learn more visit our website or call our docent coordinator Marnee Small at 833-2853 or email: kooka-burra@suscom-maine.net. We'd love to have you join us.

Harry Rich

Peary and His Steamboat Agent

---Buying Islands—Quietly---

By J. D. Davis

(Incorporating, with permission, excerpts from the correspondence file of Admiral Robert E. Peary in the Robert Edwin Peary Collection, George J. Mitchell Department of Special Collections & Archives, Bowdoin College Library, Brunswick, Maine)

When Robert E. Peary returned from his unsuccessful 1906 attempt to reach the North Pole he realized there would be a lengthy wait while his ship the *Roosevelt* underwent significant repairs and improvements before another expedition could be mounted—one for which he held high hopes of making it to the Pole. The work was even more extensive than he anticipated, and the next trip North would have to wait until 1908. The intervening months were certainly filled with essential fund-raising meetings and lectures. Despite these demanding tasks he turned, in addition, to another program—buying islands in Casco Bay.

Peary regularly reached Eagle Island by scheduled steamer of the Harpswell Steam Boat Company from Portland to South Harpswell where he would be met by the Eagle Island caretaker for the run to the Island. During these trips Peary formed a friendship with Captain Charles B. Morrill, regularly in charge of one of the company's vessels running down the Bay. In conversations Peary probably expressed a desire to buy some islands in Casco Bay, and Captain Morrill ultimately agreed to help by providing a convenient cover as an intermediary for this otherwise well known individual. This, Peary hoped, would avoid undesirable rises in prices if it became known that the notable Arctic explorer was the buyer. Substantial correspondence followed, a portion of which was saved by the Peary family and is now preserved in the George J. Mitchell Special Collections of the Hawthorne—Longfellow Library of Bowdoin College. The Collection extends from

March to July 1907. It appears to have commenced earlier and perhaps went on subsequently, but no other letters have been discovered. The first letter in the Collection was dated March 22, 1907. It reads as follows:

My Dear Capt. Morrill:

I have your favor of the 20th with enclosure. Have deed for Mark Island made out in proper form in readiness for signature, and write Mather to come up and execute the deed and get the cash. Or perhaps it may save time if you are able to take the deed to him (I, of course, paying your traveling expenses). I shall send you my check for \$500.00 Wednesday, by which time I assume you will have the affair about in readiness for the cash.

I hereby authorize you to offer \$3,500 in cash for Basket Island (assuming of course that the title is straight) and if accepted, get the acceptance in writing, and I will attend to the matter when I come on the next time about the first of April. Thanks for your information about the boat. I have particularly decided to take her.

I hope you have not talked with Mr. Reed or any others in regard to our matters, beyond Mark Island. I do not care to have whatever I may do in the matter a subject for general talk. When you write next in regard to Basket Island, address to #2014-12th St., N.W. Washington, D.C.

Very sincerely, (R. E. Peary)

Capt. Chas. B. Morrill, c/o Harpswell Steam Boat Co., Portland Pier, Portland, Me.

P. S. Enclose Mather's letter which I shall mail again after the transaction is completed. I also enclose check for \$25 for covering expenses of which keep on account of Portland National Bank will cash it.

Next is a letter dated three days later and addressed to the Commander. It was not what he wanted to see as it indicated his island hunting was not the secret he had hoped for.

*R. E. Peary
Grand Union Hotel
New York City*

Bath, ME March 25, 1907

Dear Sir: I am told that you are looking for a club hotel site. If you want the finest outlook on the New England coast with beach rights and a two-mile beach where 50 teams can be driven abreast, I would like to show you a tract. After nightfall you have a view of 8 lighthouses. The ocean view extends through an arc of 280 degrees. John Calvin Stevens, Architect of Portland, Me., pronounced it the most picturesque spot for a first class summer home on the whole coast. If you want anything in this line, I should be pleased to show our property to you.

*Yours, truly,
(Signed) Geo. W. Hunt*

A day later the Commander penned a brief note on Fort Pitt Hotel stationery (Pittsburgh, Pa.). He seems to have been on a lecture tour and some days would pass before he received Hunt's intrusive letter.

My Dear Captain Morrill:

March 26, 1907

I enclose my check for \$500 for payment for Mark Island. Letter from Morrison is just at hand. As soon as I hear from you whether the offer of \$3500 cash for Basket Island is accepted I will communicate with you again. I shall, if possible, get around there the 1st or 2nd of April.

Peary

P.S. Wire to address in my letter when you have definite answer from Barker.

Obviously, the Commander was very interested in Basket Island.

My Dear Captain Morrill:

New York, April 1, 1907

I write now to say that if possible, I shall arrange to make a flying visit to Portland day after tomorrow, Wednesday, and I would like to have you, on receipt of this, endeavor to find a speedy motorboat that can take me for a short trip down the harbor on that day. What I wish to do, if I can arrange it, is this: I shall arrive in Portland at 10:50 in the morning, going direct to Portland Pier, and take the launch there and go down to Basket Island for a brief inspection, returning in time for the afternoon train back to Boston. I cannot be absolutely sure in regard to this until I reach Boston, tomorrow night, when I will wire you so that the telegram will reach you immediately upon your arrival in Portland at 9:30.

I enclose copy of a letter which will indicate to you that someone has got wind of my various inquiries.

*Very sincerely,
R. E. P.*

Basket Island is located mid-distant between Cumberland Foreside and Chebeague Island. Presumably the "letter" was that which Peary had previously received from the real estate dealer Hunt. Still, Peary's next three letters indicated continued confidence.

My Dear Capt. Morrill:

New York, April 6, 1907

I have your copy of my letter also the memorandum note from Mr. Reynolds and as I have written Mr. Reynolds, the postponement of the transfer of Basket Island is no objection to me, as long as it is assured that the transfer will be effected.

I enclosed a paper which I think will be clear to you, and am going to ask the favor of your signature upon it. I do not think that you will regard it as throwing any responsibility upon you, but if you do, why do not sign it. If, however, you do feel like adding your signature to my own and Mr. Reynold's kindly hand the paper to Mr. Reynolds who will understand about it.

Very sincerely,

R. E. Peary, Grand Union Hotel, N. Y. City

With handwritten note: The requirements are a state resident owning real estate.

My Dear Capt. Morrill:

New York, April 9, 1907

I shall pass through Portland tomorrow, Wednesday, on my way to Waterville, arriving at Union Station at twelve, if the train is on time, and leaving at half-past. If it is convenient, will be glad to see you there at the station and go over the ground with you.

Very sincerely,

R. E. Peary

My Dear Capt. Morrill:

New York, April 14, 1907

As matters progress with you, you may keep me informed by wire to the Grand Union Hotel. For instance, when you get the signed acceptance in regard to Basket Island you can wire me "Basket closed." The final exchange of papers and money in connection with Mark Island can be noted as "Mark deeds executed."

R..E. Peary

Grand Union Hotel

There follows in the file an undated memorandum listing features of Basket Island:

- # The Island has an area of about ten miles. It is distant in a straight line seven miles from Portland Yacht Club wharf, and about a mile and half from Underwood Park on the Falmouth Foreside, Sunset Landing on Big Chebeague and Cousin's Island
- # The view from the island in every direction is as charming as can be found anywhere in the Bay.
- # It's just right for yacht or motor boat to run down there in the afternoon for supper, spend th early evening and return at a comfortable hour.
- # About half of the island is covered with magnificent grove of beech, birch, spruce, fir, and interspersed with a number of magnificent great oaks.
- # The soil is said to be the most fertile of any of the Bay islands, and a small patch of the island would yield an ample supply of fresh vegetable for the club's kitchen throughout the entire season.
- # There is a good anchorage at the island and fine facilities for bathing.
- # The water supply is ample and of first class quality, and there is abundant room for a few cows and chickens in connection with the club's kitchen, and a tennis court for recreation of the members.
- # There is direct water approach from outside through Hussey's Sound or from the eastward from Broad Sound.
- # The wood supply obtained in grooming the island, together with the drift wood which comes to the shore, will be sufficient to keep a spacious fire place in the club house for several years.

The next letter indicated that the Peary family was now in residence at Eagle Island.

My Dear Capt. Morrill:

May 9, 1907

We are all very much pleased with the chickens you so kindly sent over for "the man." They have already laid 4 eggs much to the youngster's delight.

If you are able to get anything definite in regard to "Shelter Island" you can pencil the figures on a slip of paper and hand it to Percy tonight or tomorrow night and if they are satisfactory we can close the matter before I go back to N.Y.

I will this week see Mr. Reynolds and ask him if he knows any bright young lawyer who has not so much practice but what he could leave the City for a day or two and go down to see Morrison and find out just how matters stand there. If the other deal has not yet settled, there are two possibilities; one is to have a man right here on the spot with the papers and the check to take over the island at once if the other parties are not ready with cash right on the dot, the 15th. The other is to see if the matter is in such shape that in consideration of the agreed price, Morrison can't get out of the other arrangements and take the chances of a suit. If Reynolds knows of such a man, go to him, put him in possession of all the facts, tell him how best to get down there and have him start to deal.

I will pay the man for his time of course whether he succeeds or not and if he is able to pull the thing through for the figures I gave you, mainly \$3200, I will give him \$100. Names of course, as usual, are to be kept quiet though, if the lawyer goes down there he is to let Morrison know that he comes from you.

Yours truly, R..E. Peary, USN

Shelter Island lies between Harpswell Neck and Upper Goose Island and figures in the next letter along with one of the Freeport islands.

My Dear Capt. Morrill:

New York, May 15, 1907

I have yours of May 13th. I enclose my check for \$100 which deposit and draw your own check for the hundred dollar payment on the option, and payment to be made when Mr. Reynolds pronounces the title to Shelter Island good. I think I wrote him while at Harpswell to look up the title of this island. If so, go ahead and clinch the matter.

Close also with Waldron & Co. for Pettingill at \$1,200. If they try to raise the price on you, tell them that it is all that your party intends to give. That he is willing to give that if they want to dispose of the island. If not, let the matter go. If a deposit is needed there, wire me and I will send my check. Before making deposit have Mr. Reynolds see that the title is clear. The three weeks option of Shelter Island is as good as thirty days. If the title is clear, I will take over the whole matter next week.

Very truly

R. E. Peary, U.S.N.

The next letter (handwritten) suggests that as matters progressed the Commander's appetite for islands was growing.

My Dear Capt. Morrill:

Eagle Island, May 22, 1907

I note the following memoranda in regard to various islands. Where the memoranda are in the form of questions please write tonight giving me the information as far as possible, and give it to Pye (?) to bring to the affair in the morning.

Pettingill Island: Handle this as you think best, and whenever owners are ready to accept \$1200 close for it with conditions that title is good. It seems to take so long for all of these deals that you will have to get at this as soon as you get a definite answer.

Mark Island: Is there any further news about this?

Williams and Sister Islands: What have you learned already there?

Shelter Island: Have you paid the \$100 deposit on this, and if yes on what date?

Great and Little Mark Islands: Find out what you can about these.

Inner Green Island: Cannot tell about this till I have more on it.

Outer Green Island: Same as former.

Kindly keep the woman question in mind and report to me any promising leads. The check last night was a payment on account. When we get through and know how much business we have accomplished I shall endeavor to make matters satisfactory to you.

Very sincerely,

R. E. Peary

We can only wonder about the "woman question." The next letter was handwritten on stationery from Arthur Palmer's store in West Harpswell, where Peary placed a phone call and utilized the local "stationery" for his letter.

My Dear Captain:

June 5, 1907

I have phoned Mr. Reynolds that you will be there between 3:30 and 4:30. You and he will arrange the matter of Shelter Island and I shall come up tomorrow or send a check. In regard to Pettingill's, make an offer of \$1200, and if acceptable make deposit and receive option. If not accepted, get authoritative price.

I am willing to pay a fair price for certain of these islands, but I shall pay no more fancy prices as on Basket Island nor shall I submit to having prices run up on me because of the Basket Island matter becoming public. Will meet you at the Steamer tonight at South Harpswell.

Peary

At this point Peary appeared to fix attention on Freeport waters. The first is Crab Island, located roughly mid-distant between Wolfe's Neck and Moshiers Island. The second wasn't really an island but an extension of land generally named Little Flying Point.

My Dear Captain:

July 3, 1907

In regard Crab Island, kindly mark out the following program. Write Nayer and tell him you have written your party that he is willing to sell for \$800 and ask him to send you at once all information that will be needed in looking up the title. Then I want you to see if you can find a tenant for the island for two seasons for \$100. If you succeed, I should want you to have Nayer come in to see you, and have him include the furniture in the cottage, bedticks(?) mattresses, stores, tables, chairs, dishes, etc., in the purchase price. Then we can conclude the matter, and the rental for this summer would enable me to put the cottage in repair.

[Additional text described the nature and merits of Crab Island]

The Island as you know is said to contain 2-1/2 acres, steamboat landing 3/4 mile distant. Steamer passes it several times a day. It is covered with a good growth of grass and has 3 fine oak trees, a willow and a fir on it.

The house has two rooms and a kitchen and attic, cellar and piazza. There is a small outhouse (combination wood shed and water closet) also a well and brick clam oven.

The Island is only a short distance from Freeport and Bibber's Island [Bustin's Island], has a fine view in every direction and gets every breeze that stirs.

There is fishing off the rocks on the north and east sides, and abundance of clams in the cove on the south end. A great place for a family with children. There is driftwood for fuel.

I have bought Pound of Tea for my daughter Marie. I shall have no time to do anything with it this year. See if you can find anyone to pay \$25 for exclusive camping rights on the Island for the entire season. The location of the Island is at the entrance to Freeport Harbor, directly in front of Casco Castle. Together with its own natural beauty makes it an ideal place. The steamers, as you know, pass within a biscuit toss of it. On both of these matters I will pay you the usual rental commissions.

Peary

My Dear Captain:

New York, July 6, 1907

I think I should like to know something in regard to Little Flying Island, just off the mainland north of Sister Island. I have been informed by a man who said he himself sold Upper Goose (said to contain about 100 acres) that it is owned by a man of the name of Day in the firm of Emery, Waterhouse and Co. Kindly see if you can verify this and if any price is placed on the island.

Hope you are making some progress in regard to a club for Basket Island. Referring to our conversation of the other day, the matter is general is this: should any first class reputable club or association be willing to have a nice bungalow type of club house put up on the island, repair the landing pier and groom the island into an attractive shape. There is no other island in the Bay which for location and natural beauty is better suited for such purposes than Basket.

Very sincerely,

R. E. Peary, Grand Union Hotel, N. Y. City

“Little Flying Island” is not an island. It is extension of Flying Point in Freeport and is connected to the mainland by a strand that is overtopped in extreme high tides. It is correctly called “Little Flying Point. Then this, the final letter in the collection.

My Dear Captain:

New York, July 17, 1907

Confirming my hasty note from the Union Station last night, I write to say that it seems to me as if a coalition of the Portland Yacht Club and the Portland Motor Club should promise very practical results in regard to Basket Island.

My idea is to make the whole thing an entirely first class proposition, to groom the Island into the very effective shape of which is susceptible, to rebuild the landing pier, and to put up a thoroughly first class and commodious club house (preferably of the “bungalow type”) and then to charge such a rental as shall give a fair return upon the total investment.

The Island, as you know, in many respects has no equal in the entire circuit of Casco Bay, and I should want to have it in a shape that would be a distinct credit to Portland, and the Bay, to the club leasing it, and to myself.

If the general idea is favorably regarded by the two clubs, I should imagine it would not be a difficult thing to quickly get on common ground as to the size and character of the building desired, and a fair and equitable rental for the same, for a period of three to five years.

I feel that Portland organizations should have the first chance at the Island. Then if they do not care to avail themselves of it, organizations from farther away should be given an opportunity.

I now expect to return to Portland Friday morning, and hope to see you sometime between 8 and 9 o'clock at the pier.

It will be desirable, if you have the opportunity, to endeavor to sound the representatives of the clubs and try and get their ideas as to the figures which they would feel like paying for annual rental.

Very sincerely,

REP, USN Grand Union Hotel, NYC

P.S. With a fine club housed on it, what a fine place Basket Island would be to take the Boston or other visiting yacht club on an occasion like the present rendezvous at Portland. Peary

With this letter the file comes to a close. On the basis of the available data, it appears that the Peary family collectively (Robert E. Peary, Robert E. Peary, Jr., Josephine Peary, Marie Peary Stafford and Edward P. Stafford) owned a total of eight islands in Casco Bay. They were Eagle Island, Basket Island, Pound of Tea Island, Pettingill Island, Crab Island, Upper Flag Island, Shelter Island, and Outer Mark Island.

Eagle Island was purchased by Peary in 1881 when he was a young man and it remained in the family subsequent to his death in 1920 until the family transferred it to State of Maine ownership in 1968. Tax records in the towns of Cumberland, Freeport and Harpswell and confirmation through the Registry of Deeds in Portland provide an accurate record of the Peary family Island ownership. With the exception of Eagle Island, all the other islands owned by Peary or other family members

were acquired in 1907 and in the immediate following years.

Commander Peary was well into his second month of correspondence with Captain Morrill when he began his Casco Bay island purchase program. On April 12, 1907, he purchased two parcels of Upper Flag Island, one constituting a quarter of the island and the other one a sixth of the island. It turned out that Upper Flag Island actually had six separately owners, and Peary found that if he were to own the entire island he would have to settle separately with each owner. After acquisition of the two portions noted above, the Commander managed to acquire another parcel, defined as one twelfth of the Island, on August 5, 1907. A month later, on September 10, 1907, he obtained another piece of the Island—a one twelfth of the island. Two parcels still remained in other hands. But now other matters intervened, particularly successful achievement of the North Pole. It was more than two years later when he was able to turn his attention again to Upper Flag Island. Another one quarter of the Island became his on July 7, 1911 and the final piece, also one quarter, brought the entire Island into his hands on September 10, 1912. At last he had the entire island as a home for the sledge dogs brought home from the Arctic. Forty-six years later Admiral Peary's daughter Marie Stafford sold the entire Island in a single transaction on March 20, 1958.

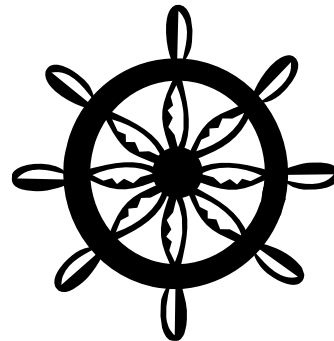
Peary's acquisition of other Casco Bay islands involved no significant delays and was all completed during the summer of 1907. The next two islands purchased by the Commander were Basket Island, located in Cumberland waters off the Cumberland Foreside and Outer Mark Island located in Harpswell waters east of Eagle Island and south of Haskell Island. On May 21, 1907 Basket Island was purchased and immediately transferred to his wife, Josephine Diebitsch Peary. A week later, May 28, 1907, Outer Mark Island was purchased and also transferred to Josephine Peary's ownership. Josephine Peary died in 1955, and in her will she gave Basket Island to her son Robert Peary, Jr. and Outer Mark Island to her grandson Edward Peary Stafford. Robert Peary, Jr. sold Basket Island December 27, 1958 and Edward P. Stafford sold Outer Mark Island February 7, 1966.

Two more islands joined the Peary collection in June 1907. The first was Shelter Island, located in Harpswell waters between Harpswell Neck and Upper Goose Island. Once purchased, Peary transferred this island to daughter Marie's ownership where it remained until she sold it December 24, 1950. The other June purchase was Pound of Tea Island, located in Freeport waters at the entrance to Harraseeket Harbor. Again the Commander transferred ownership to daughter Marie, in whose hands it remained until she sold it November 30, 1956.

Two more islands in Freeport waters were purchased a month later. The first was Pettingill Island located east of Flying Point and not far from Bustin's Island. It turned out that this island had two separate owners, but the situation proved no problem and Peary purchased both halves on the same day, July 15, 1907. This island was sold by Marie July 14, 1958. The other island was Crab Island, located between Bustin's Island and Staples Point. The island was purchased by Peary on July 20, 1907, and was sold by the Peary estate October 26, 1951.

John D. Davis

(This work would not have been possible without the cooperation of the following: The Harpswell Historical Society, Harpswell, Maine; the Freeport Historical Society, Freeport, Maine; the Prince Memorial Library, Cumberland, Maine; the Assessor's Office, Cumberland, Maine; the Assessor's Office, Freeport, Maine; the Cumberland County Registry of Deeds, Portland, Maine; the Sagadahoc County Registry of Deeds, Bath, Maine. J. D. Davis)



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