



# 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

In this issue of the Journal, I am pleased to present an article by Steve Ingram reporting on the program to restore the northwest wall enclosing the lawn in front of the Admiral's home on Eagle Island. This program illustrates the devoted efforts of our volunteers and also adds to the long list of accomplishments made possible by the generous financial support of our Friends' membership.

And now, a special word about our Docents. The idea of putting volunteer Docents on Eagle Island first came up more than 10 years ago. There was considerable skepticism at that time and I was one of the leading skeptics. Who on earth would show up at the Dolphin Marina at 9 AM to catch the boat to the Island, stay all day, and not return until 5:30 or 6:00 in the evening? Oh yes, and bring your own lunch plus whatever you want to drink all day.

Six or seven years ago we somewhat reluctantly decided to give it a try. Sort of a "test run" if you will, knowing full well it might just fail. Much to my amazement our trial run was a complete success and the program has gotten bigger and better ever since.

In 2010, thanks to the dedication and hard work of Jeanie Dorrington, Park Manager and Marnee Small, our Docent coordinator, we had 36 volunteers, many of whom spent multiple days on the Island. We had at least one Docent on the Island every weekday and two on Saturday and Sunday.

I've asked many of our Docents why they like doing it. Some of their replies: "It's a magical place," "You feel like you are part of history," "You feel the Admiral's presence there," "It's a joy to meet the many visitors and their enthusiasm is contagious," "It's always a learning experience," "It's fun and I love it."

There are no words to adequately express my admiration and appreciation to our wonderful Docents and to Jeanie and Marnee for making the program so successful. We constantly hear praise from our visitors that our program has made their visit more meaningful.

I have never felt so good about being wrong.

*Harry Rich*

P.S. We will likely need more Docents when the proposed Welcome Center (see page 4) is completed. Anyone interested, please contact Marnee Small at 833-3853.

## Eagle Island Northwest Wall Restoration

The Friends of Peary's Eagle Island have committed to the restoration and preservation of the Northwest Wall of the North Bastion, the wall that encloses the flagpole lawn in front of the museum. The 47 feet of stonewall, averaging four feet in height, extends north from its junction with the Library (the West Bastion) for about 38 feet and then bends east to its terminus at the North Bastion stairway remnants. The wall, during its first 100 years, has cracked and

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yielded to the internal pressure from the front lawn, canting outward as much as 15 inches at the top where it curves from north to east. Gravity would soon have won its tug-of-war with stone and mortar had the Friends not taken action to begin a process to straighten, reconstruct, and preserve the wall.

Working with local seawall masons and with guidance from the Maine Bureau of Parks and Lands, a multi-year proposal was developed and initiated to first put the wall under traction to pull it back to vertical. Then an interior wall of reinforced concrete will be poured to provide backing support. The existing stonewall will be repointed and repaired as necessary to maintain its internal integrity. Drainage will be provided under both walls and both walls will be secured back to the central bedrock by a bolt and chain system.

This summer, Friends work groups dug out the inside of the wall to provide access to the interior of the wall for the entire length of the reconstruction. Vertical angle irons, pinned to the ledge at the exterior base of the wall, with a chain/turnbuckle system tying the top of the angle irons back to the central bedrock beneath the flag-pole, are in place and provide traction on the wall, pulling it back to vertical. A 'V' section of the wall at its greatest curvature was removed to allow the wall to return to vertical. At this publication date, as the pictures show, the wall is back to near vertical, except at the northwest corner where continued traction will be applied to complete the final 7 inches of its 15 inch return to vertical.

It is possible that the interior reinforced concrete supporting wall can be poured before cold weather makes further progress impossible. With luck, much of the reconstruction work will be completed by opening day next year and the Northwest Wall will again stand at attention in reverence to Admiral Peary and his legacy-and to welcome visitors to his island.

The Friends are indebted to the many volunteers who offered many hours of hard labor on this project, to George Waterman, Chris Blum, and other masons who offered insights and advice, and to Carter Becker and Falls Point Marine Services for again coming to the aid of a Friends project. Special thanks go to Chris Blum, a Yarmouth seawall mason, for committing his enthusiasm, energy and professional experience to this project!



Northwest Wall, beginning of project, July 2010



Wall under traction



'V' cutout to allow wall to return to vertical

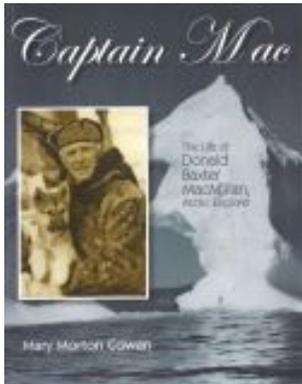


Northwest wall, October 2010

*Steve Ingram*

# *Captain Mac-The Life of Donald Baxter MacMillan, Arctic Explorer*

By Mary Morton Cowan



Maine author Mary Morton Cowan first introduced Donald MacMillan to young readers in *Ice Country*, an historical novel based on MacMillan's explorations and adventures in the Arctic regions. *Captain Mac* is a comprehensive biography of Donald MacMillan for young people that maintains the sense of adventure of the novel, even for this 'young reader' well over 60! Author Cowan uses a familiar, story-telling style, as if telling bedtime stories about Grandpa to a younger generation, to relate the adventures and contributions of MacMillan as mentee, then colleague, then successor to Admiral Peary as one of America's early Arctic explorers.

Using many of MacMillan's own photographs to complement her simple sentences in rapid, staccato succession, Cowan captures MacMillan's early fascination with sailing and with the tales of exploration in the far North. The individual commitment and effort it took to translate that fascination into sufficient preparation and expertise to be invited by Peary to join his 1905 expedition to find the North Pole is an early theme of the book.

That MacMillan had to decline that invitation, because he had recently signed a contract and thereby made a commitment to teach at Worcester Academy, was poignantly recounted by Cowan in her quote from MacMillan, "Neither Peary nor Captain Bob Bartlett knew that I cast off her (the Roosevelt's) lines from the (Portland) dock and sat there long after everyone had gone, watching her steam out past the breakwater and on past Portland Head out to sea. My one opportunity-and I had refused it!" Fortunately for MacMillan and Peary a second chance came in Spring, 1908, when Peary again invited MacMillan "...to be in command of one of my supporting parties." People familiar with Peary's successful 1909 discovery of the North Pole know the contribution MacMillan made to that effort. At one point Peary gave MacMillan credit for saving the expedition when several days delay waiting for the 'Big Lead' to freeze over eroded the enthusiasm and confidence of the Inuit team members. MacMillan, using his teaching skill and expertise, got the Inuit involved in physical contests and games to pass the time constructively and history has recorded the ultimate success of that expedition.

Cowan, with her gift for story-telling, goes on to portray MacMillan as a physically athletic, intellectually curious, culturally sensitive and politically astute individual who committed his years after the Pole expedition to continued research in the far north. Like Peary with the Roosevelt, MacMillan designed and oversaw the construction of his research sailing vessel, the Bowdoin, named after his undergraduate alma mater. He commanded the Bowdoin on summer and multi-year research trips to the Arctic regions until well into his seventies. Scientists from many disciplines including biology, botany, chemistry, anthropology, and meteorology became sailors under MacMillan's guidance. Contributing as a deck hand became a requirement for any scientist invited along. Eventually students became contributing members (both as sailors and research assistants) of each scientific expedition. When the Bowdoin was decommissioned after WWII, MacMillan, with the help of many 'alumni' from his research trips, resurrected the Bowdoin for use as an educational training vessel. The Bowdoin is now a training vessel for Maine Maritime Academy.

MacMillan may have pioneered the concept of building schools for disadvantaged subcultures by raising the funds and providing the materials and building expertise to construct a school for the Inuit in Nain, Labrador. Between polar region research expeditions, MacMillan served on active duty in both World Wars as a naval aviator and used this experience to pioneer air flight to explore Arctic regions. He retired from the Navy as Rear Admiral in 1954. Captain Mac died at age 95.

Cowan has recounted a life full of adventure and commitment- a commitment to research and exploration for the common good. Can it compete for the attention of modern youth with today's video games and technology's assaults on the senses? That she has tried is clear indication that all hope is not lost!

*Captain Mac-The Life of Donald Baxter MacMillan, Arctic Explorer* by Mary Morton Cowan; published by Calkins Creek, Honesdale, PA., 2010.

*Reviewed by Steve Ingram*

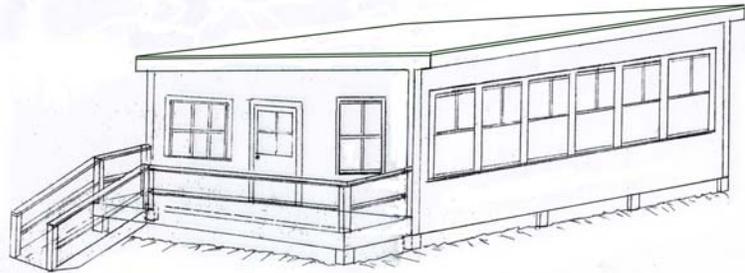
## Proposed Welcome Center

For several years we have been thinking about a center near the pier where we could welcome the many visitors to Eagle Island and introduce them to this unique Maine Historic site. This center would allow us to show the 12 minute Documentary film on Admiral Peary as well as distribute the Audio tour Wands to each visitor or in some cases gather small groups together for a Docent's guided tour. Visitors could also pick up a copy of the self guided tour book here. The building would be big enough to seat 30 visitors for viewing the film. It would also house a small souvenir display (Trading Post).

By removing the TV and benches now in the dining room we would return that room to the Museum. This would even out the flow of visitors through the Museum so that there would be far less congestion. We would start the Audio Tour at the head of the pier where it was intended to start.

The funny looking building above is based on a building that once was there for nearly 40 years. When Robert E. Peary Jr. was 16 he asked his father if he could build a workshop overlooking the anchorage. Under his father's supervision, he built a substantial workshop similar to the sketch above. Based on the picture we have, it had a slanting roof about 13 feet high in the front and 9 feet in the back. It had a row of windows across the front with a workbench the full length of that wall. Inside he had all kinds of machines including a forge and anvil and a sit down peddled grinding wheel.

The building was 22 to 24 feet wide and 16 to 20 feet deep. It was supported on concrete posts at the corners with stone supports in between. The outside was finished with cedar shingles and it originally had a tar paper roof. We have found evidence of the dimensions at its site (the concrete posts are still there). It's about 70 feet from the end of the pier. The entrance was in the back. We would have to change that so that it is more accessible to visitors and have a handicapped ramp. We may also have to add solar panels to the roof in order to power the TV and to run the chargers for the wands as well as some simple lighting.



Proposed "Welcome Center" for Peary's Eagle Island

The Bureau of Parks and lands is most enthusiastic with the plan and Gary Best of the Bureau is already working on State approvals. We look forward to working with the town of Harpswell to get the necessary local permits and approvals. We would like to have it ready by the 2011 opening of the Island. We hope to fund it with grants (We already have a promise of a large portion of the lumber needed) and donations from interested parties. It will be a long hard road to get all the approvals, so wish us luck.

*Ned Dewey*

Published by the Friends of Peary's Eagle Island, P.O. Box 70, Bailey Island, ME 04003

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