

1

Thole Pin Rhythm

*Thole-pin rhythm up the sound,
Leathern fingers grip eight foot oars,
Keen eyes watch along the shores
For bobbing bottles and wooden buoys
Carved with a name and a number that
Holds a tarred warp to a bedroom trap.
Drop and swish, then up the sound,
By noon to row the string around -
Thole-pin rhythm up the sound.*

Richard O. Bickford*

If you came to this book looking for historical accuracy, scholarly references, and the like, you are perhaps in the wrong place. This is an informal kind of history; some of it fact, some speculation, some consisting simply of things that I enjoyed writing about. Out of necessity, it is occasionally repetitious, and perhaps seems somewhat disorganized because the subject matter does not lend itself to a straight timeline. In all instances I have tried to be honest, to not overly exaggerate (even though there is a temptation to do so in Down East Maine), and to fill in and flesh out the historical record whenever possible. Some parts are merely lists, but it is expected that some people will go to those lists to seek records of their friends or relatives. It is hoped that everyone who tries will find something here to his or her liking.

In 1994, a few months prior to the centennial of Winter Harbor, I published a small book entitled *A Summering Place, Winter Harbor, Maine: The Early Years*, which described the beginnings of the town and emphasized the importance of the Grindstone colony in shaping the direction that Winter Harbor has taken since those promising years of the late 19th century. Some of the content of that book is also included in this one, but here I have attempted to broaden the scope, using published articles, anecdotes, and other sources of information that I felt add to the historical texture, to give a face to some of the people who made a significant impact on village life, to collect in one place some of the important records, and to trace some of the influences that caused the town to be what it presently is. Unless otherwise noted, the facts and figures of town affairs and accounts came from Winter Harbor town records rather than from state and county interpretations of those records.

In most cases I found the town records to be more accurate, mainly because they had not been interpreted by some bureaucratic entity. For instance, in the early 1990s the town was pressured by the state to enter into some laborious and expensive planning activity based on the state's interpretation of Winter Harbor's Vital Statistics Reports. One year, for example, there were over thirty births recorded in Winter Harbor, with fewer than ten deaths. On that basis, somewhere in state officialdom it was determined that Winter Harbor was one of the fastest growing towns in the state and, by implication, was not deemed capable of recognizing this trend on its own and making appropriate plans. The fact of the matter was that all but three or four of those births were to transient Navy families while the deaths all occurred among local residents. Also, for every military dependent born that year, another was probably transferred out. In actuality, there was a net loss of resident population rather than the astonishing increase that the state predicted was the trend. The year-round population has probably not changed appreciably over the 110 years of the town's existence, but the methods used for doing the arithmetic sometimes led to very questionable conclusions.

As another example of the statistical problems encountered, a number of town residents, who were employed each year to handle the knockabouts or other pleasure boats at the Yacht Club for a couple of summer months, listed their occupation as "Yachtsman" for the 1910 Census. For the remainder of the year — the greater portion — these men dug clams, cut firewood, and worked at subsistence jobs and general labor. The designation of "Yachtsman" seems excessive and misleading, but the census

takers of the time apparently were not in the business of interpreting or making realistic judgment calls. I mention these things because, if, in generations to come, one goes to the official records for information about the town and its people, a very different picture may emerge.

Many people may not be familiar with thole pins. They were early oar locks for rowing boats, two wooden pins or dowels a few inches apart on each rail of a dory, which, if one were skillful enough, held the oars in place. Their rhythm was a regular ca-thunk, ca-thunk sound that carried soothingly over still, early-morning water or groaned and squealed when the sea was rough and the rowing was strenuous. The success of the rhythm depended a great deal upon the skill and the art of the rower, just as a contented life in the village of Winter Harbor depended a great deal upon a person's ability to keep up with the rhythm, particularly the rhythm of the seasons. For it is a seasonal life in Winter Harbor. The summer people come and the summer people go; the lobster traps go out and the lobster traps come in; the summer moorings are dropped in the cove in the spring and come out again in the fall; the houses were once banked with brush (evergreen bows), and in the spring the brush was removed and burned in a pile in back of the house; the storm windows went on and the storm windows came off; wood was "manufactured" (sawn, split) and tiered, then burned, and ashes were carried out; the lamp chimneys were soiled in the evening, cleaned in the morning, dirtied again the next night; Eastern Star met on Monday evenings, Masons on Wednesdays. Town meeting was always the first Monday in March, every March, school began the day after Labor Day, and Memorial Day was always observed. And thus it went, the rhythm of the days and of the seasons, sometimes gentle and soothing, sometimes protesting with agonizing squeals and groans like the thole pin rhythms on the sound.

In all events described here I have tried to be as objective as possible, presenting the facts as they were reported and without making judgments about the people involved. I apologize if some events described seem repetitious and are mentioned more than once, but sometimes the event being reported impacted several aspects of town life and therefore has to be understood in more than one context. For instance, the partitioning of Gouldsboro and the creation of Winter Harbor, as monotonous and inconsequential as it may seem today, had a significant impact on both towns at the time, and is of major importance when trying to research and understand Winter Harbor history. One must always keep in mind that much changed in 1895, and all the earlier records exist elsewhere. Many

people have contributed to the content of this book, as was true of my first book. It is my hope that this book will serve to memorialize their lives and leave a record for those who come after.

*Richard Bickford was a Winter Harbor native and a graduate of the Winter Harbor schools. Before moving to Pennsylvania, he taught at various Maine schools as well as at Winter Harbor High School, where he also coached basketball. He worked on Grindstone Neck for many summers, at the golf course, swimming pool, and yacht club. He died at age 69, after twenty years of teaching at Harrisburg Academy in Pennsylvania, where he was honored with the Freedom Foundation Award, the school Alumni's first-ever Distinguished Teaching Award, and, posthumously, by the establishment of the Richard O. Bickford Memorial Faculty Fund. He had taught children of both Pennsylvania Governors Scranton and Thornburgh. He was a distinguished member of the Maine Poetry Fellowship.