

Fort McDonough of Westport Island

"Fort McDonough seems to be the sole survivor of the 11 Maine Militia works of 1814, the others having been lost to post - 1815 development over the years. . . . To say the least, the [Archeological Survey] rediscovered the site of Fort McDonough not a moment too soon."

That was written in 1985 by Dr. Robert Bradley of the Maine Historical Preservation Commission. He returned the following year to do a detailed survey with measurements, contours, and photographs. He sent it to Washington DC to be "computerized." There it ends. His work has not been found, he passed away and the trail grew cold.

History does not write itself. It takes people who care enough to search nooks and crannies for little pieces of pieces and then try to put them together in a way that tells the story. Westport Island's History Committee and Friends of Westport Island History are some of those folks.

There is a renewed effort to find more pieces and add to the considerable information the Committee and Friends have already compiled. There are some ideas for new leads and we'll be knocking on doors in Augusta, Boston (Maine was still, reluctantly, part of the State of Massachusetts at the time), Wiscasset, Edgcomb, and Fort Edgcomb.

And of course, we are knocking on your door. We still don't have any drawings or plans of the fort prepared by the engineers at the time of construction. The only drawings found so far are two very tiny field sketches with a very general outline, one by a friend of Dr. Bradley. We know they exist. We just have to find them. There must also be photographs. We know that folks in the late 1800s and early 1900s would visit the site. It provided beautiful vistas of the river and Island.

If you have any photographs or drawings from past generations that show mounds on the island - it might be Fort McDonough. We have descriptions of "gun deck floors," "a magazine," a "chevaux de frisé" - a 360 degree spiked fence running from one side of the island to the other just south of the fort. And of course 6 18 pound cannons. It was built in October 1814 and occupied by a garrison of soldiers. Reportedly at one point British marines approached the fort over the Island from the south attacking some homes but were frightened away by warning bells and the sounds of cannon. A garrison occupied the fort until the war ended with the Treaty of Ghent signed on February 14, 1815. The Ft. McDonough garrison was then transferred to Ft. Edgcomb until August 1816. While on duty at Ft. McDonough, the garrison likely interacted frequently with their colleagues across the river at Ft. Edgcomb.

We're knocking on doors for any stories, drawings, photographs, or artifacts that possibly relate to our own piece of military history - that we might photograph or copy. You may have some missing pieces tucked away in an old shoebox up in the attic. History doesn't write itself and we are all stewards of our heritage. Ft. McDonough is still a "sole survivor". And she's still not done telling us her story.

Please contact John Henderson at 207-607-1822 is my phone/text number Jkhjr1@gmail.com is the email address.



THE WESTPORT ISLAND COMMUNITY NEWSLETTER SEPTEMBER 2021

Westport Community Association
6 Fowles Point Road,
Westport Island, ME 04578

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Fold Here

Friends of Westport Island History note cards for purchase.

Images of island sites by island artists and visiting artists. Sets of 8 cards for \$10, or \$1.50 each, on sale at the History Center.

Continued from **On the History Trail**. Visit Westport Island's Clough Point Preserve to learn more about the early settlements at the North End.

Newsletter Submissions

If you have an interest in contributing to the Westport Island Community Newsletter, please contact **Rose at westportcommunityassociation@gmail.com or 215-7039**. The deadline for submissions is the 20th of each month. I would love to hear from you! I am looking for art, short stories, poems, notes of interest, birthday wishes, and anything else that is upbeat and island-note-worthy.

On the History Trail

Westport Island's Stone Garrison House and the Decker/Clough House

Prior to "King Phillips War" between the settlers and the natives from 1675-1678, trade with the natives was a profitable business, and relations with the Wabanaki tribes were good here. However, a series of wars, over the next fifty years, spread from Massachusetts and drove all would-be settlers from Jeremisquam, and most of Maine. Westport Island's lucrative fur trading business appears, then, to have gone to a Mr. Delano who continued to operate the trading post and improve and fortify the site. The Delano family arrived in Plymouth in 1621 and were well-known loyal Puritans and merchants in the Plymouth Colony. A stone "garrison house" was constructed by Mr. Delano near the original trading post site. Little is known about the building. However, garrison houses were common as defensible buildings for settlers to seek shelter during times of hostilities. The garrison house remained thru the "French and Indian" war (1755-1759). Mr. Delano eventually acquired a legal title to the building in 1754.

A permanent settler, Joseph Decker, came to the north end by 1751 as hostilities were easing. Decker was one of Westport Island's earliest permanent settlers. In 1772, his son, Captain Joseph Decker acquired title to the stone garrison house. He had started a successful shipping business, delivering lumber and spars to France. Unfortunately, the garrison house soon after burned down and was lost. However, with his growing wealth, Captain Decker commissioned the construction of a stately new mansion, in the southern tradition.



Westport's Garrison House was constructed of stone, at least at the lower level and located at Clough Point. (Artist's rendition)

It was built for him by Moses Davis of "Folly Island" (Davis Island in Edgecomb now). It is alleged to be of "oak framework." That house is the "Decker/Clough House," which was moved by barge to Edgecomb's "The Eddy" in 1838. The house was known as the "Marie Antoinette House," but that is another story. Little is known of these buildings. Development of the northern end of Westport Island has now eliminated most of their footprints.

However, in 1884, before the development of Clough Point, a group from the Sagadahoc Historical Society visited the site. They reported:

"But the most interesting work of some of the members was done on Squam Point (Clough Point), head of Westport. The mines of the old Walker trading house of 1676, and of the stone garrison of Delano, 1754, the outlines of a considerable establishment are apparent, north of the cellars of the old Clough homestead."



"The Decker/Clough House," referred to as the "Marie Antoinette," house located at the northern end of Clough Point until relocated to "the Eddy" in Edgecomb in 1838



MY ISLAND HOME

*The Recollections of
Verlie May Colby Greenleaf
of Westport Island, Maine
(1891-1992)*

CURRENTLY ON EXHIBIT AT THE
WESTPORT ISLAND HISTORY CENTER
38 FERRY ROAD

SUNDAYS 11 AM TO 1 PM

BY APPOINTMENT, CONTACT
FOWIH19@GMAIL.COM

ZIP ODES

The starting place is taking your area zip code and writing a 5 line poem using the number of words each number in the zip code suggests. Zero is a "wild card" of sorts and the poet could choose any number of words when zero appears.

Example 04578.

0 any # of words: A zip ode to the green-eyed fly

4 words Zip! Across the lawn;

5 words Zap! Sting to the arm;

7 words Look out! They chase with a mission;

8 words Ugh! This horsefly season has
caused double vision.

by - DB

Westport Island Community Association

We would love to have you join the WCA as a volunteer member! We meet monthly to plan events to get the Westport Island community together. Many wonderful friendships have been cultivated while fostering a sense of community and having fun doing these events. WCA owns and maintains the Old Community Church and offers Student Awards to our younger and older community members. Our volunteer members have planned outside events during this Covid time and will continue to do so in the future. Please reach out if you would like to join our committee. The next meeting will be on **Wednesday, September 1, 2021**, on the porch at the Lorensen's House at 781 Main Road. (Outside if the weather is nice) Here are some ideas we will be discussing at the next meeting.

An outside concert at the Ferry Landing featuring local musicians
Trunk or Treat for the Island children on the lawn between Old Town Hall and Old Community Church
We are looking forward to hearing your ideas too, let us know or come to the meeting!

Our current active Directors on WCA:
Co-Presidents Debbie Lorensen and
Rose Bodmer

Co-Treasurers - Art Weber and Dick Barker
Secretary - Jim Hatch

Drew Porter

John McBee

Christy Hopkins

Barbara Cray

Sarah Griffiths

Donna Curry

email:

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