

Vinalhaven Historical Society

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2018 ANNUAL NEWSLETTER

Swedes, Norwegians, and Finns Work and Settle on Vinalhaven 1850-1940

By Jeannette Lasansky



The exhibit, *Swedes, Norwegians and Finns Work and Settle on Vinalhaven*, focuses on Vinalhaven's Scandinavian population—those who left their homes, friends and families to a new world of opportunity. Movements of large groups of people, have often been the result of war, disease or environmental change; also, by new opportunities. This particular migration started in the mid-1800s and lasted for nearly 90 years, led primarily by young men seeking work, some with a spouse or other family members, some who later sent for family. Many would settle permanently on Vinalhaven, a place that physically resembled their Scandinavian homeland and made them feel “at home.”

Swedes were first recorded in the 1850 Federal census for Vinalhaven. Their occupations during those first decades were diverse: sail makers, lobstermen, a tailor, a milliner and housekeepers; also, quarrymen, stonecutters and paving cutters. From 1900 until the 1940s additional occupations included sailors (some in the merchant marine, fishermen on schooners or trawling), laborers, or as a farm worker, a packer in the local sardine factory, and blacksmiths or tool sharpeners at the quarries. Swedes who noted the specifics of “where” they had come from within Sweden mentioned the northwest coast of Bohuslän and the southern provinces of Blekinge, Skåne, and Småland. They were always the largest group of Scandinavians on Vinalhaven—sometimes at a ratio of 5:1.

Norwegians started coming to Vinalhaven in the late-1880s, although in numbers dramatically fewer than the Swedes or the Finns. The Norwegians were lobstermen, paving cutters, and several were sailors or in the merchant marine. They were from the southern Norwegian provinces. Those Norwegians from Halden often had a spouse or parent(s) from Sweden, indicating their proximity to Sweden and the granite industry that flourished along the northwestern Bohuslän coast.

Photo: Claes Boman, sailmaker, working at Abner Cooper's boat shop which later became Carroll Gregory's boat shop. C.1906

Finns also came in the late-1880s, and in more significant numbers around 1900-1905, attracted primarily by work in the granite quarries. A few became lobstermen, fishermen on schooners, boat builders, and one sold bottled milk. Some had immigrated first to large Finnish communities in Massachusetts and in South Thomaston, Maine, before arriving on Vinalhaven. At the height of the Finns' migration to Vinalhaven, there were over two dozen distinct Finnish households and many single men who were lodgers staying with families or in boarding houses. Quite a few Finns missed being recorded in the Federal censuses but their names are indicated on the backs of photographs, especially around 1905.

The disruption of World War I combined with changes in the granite industry contributed to the steep decline in Scandinavian immigration to America at that time. By the 1930s, no new Finns immigrated to Vinalhaven though Swedes and a few Norwegians continued coming for yet another decade. When the granite work on Hurricane and Vinalhaven collapsed in 1939, many of those who were single moved on. The stone carvers had left earlier.



Rosa Anderson Holmquist netting in her home, Christmas 1946.

Scandinavian families on Vinalhaven both rented or owned their homes on Vinalhaven, while the single men were often boarders. There were private rentals or places to board as well as company housing, some quite close to the quarries where the men worked. The Finns, in particular, lived in neighborhoods such as Starr and Mountain streets near the Sands Quarry, and on Round the Mountain Road. It was in these neighborhoods that Finnish saunas were built.

These Scandinavians left their mark in the formation of the Scandinavian Athletic Club, the Boman's sail making loft, boat building by the Skoogs and Holmstroms, renewed group solidarity among laborers in the face of change,

home industries like net weaving, and cultural exchange particularly in music performed by the Hokansons and Carlsons. These were among the gifts of Vinalhaven's Scandinavian citizens.

Scandinavian surnames still resonate on Vinalhaven: Beckman, Carlson, Hildings, Jameson, Johnson, Kelwick, Lunde, Malmström, Olson, Rosen, and Skoog. Other Scandinavian surnames were dropped as when marrying into non-Scandinavian families; so it was with descendants of the Asiala, Holmstrom, Holmquist, Stordahl, Swanson, Tuomi, and Wahlman families.

Today on Vinalhaven—those of Scandinavian descent—represent all of these nationalities.

EXHIBIT and PROGRAM CREDITS:

Large exhibit scrim and flag border designs: Emily Blair; Labels and photo mounting: Elizabeth Bunker;

Loan of a map of Finland and a sauna display: Finnish Heritage House, South Thomaston; Loan of family items and Finnish display: Taina Litwak, Scott and Lois Candage; Logistical support: Bill and Paul Chilles; and Program sites: the Washington School, the American Legion Hall, the Vinalhaven Public Library, the Pleasant River Chapel; and Christa Mattson

The VHS' new reference notebook, Scandinavians on Vinalhaven has personal information arranged in chronological order of arrival to Vinalhaven and based on the Federal Census records augmented by the VHS's family files and cemetery-, obituary-, and photo-notebooks. Thanks for special help on this:

Tullio Lasansky: for reading and recording period cursive records

Helen Litwak: for written narratives about Vinalhaven's Finnish community that provide insight into their island lives

Lauretta Chilles: for finding interesting photos of individuals and period clippings

Elizabeth Bunker: for her work on, and knowledge of, Vinalhaven cemeteries

Additional thanks to a group with Swedish backgrounds: Ann Lunde, the late Astrid Rosen Philbrook, Henrietta Anderson Winslow, and her husband Charles, and the late Marion Swanson Woodcock, who have met annually since 2007 to share their most recent Scandinavian visitors and experiences and joined Sharon Philbrook and Finnish descendants on Vinalhaven: Lois Candage, Beth Healey, and Becky Jameson.

GRANITE FOUNTAIN FOUND

In early December we received an email from Steve Ala in Westfield, MA, who works for the water department. While digging in the city yard they had discovered three pieces of granite, one of which had a plaque attached that read: 1910, Presented by the National Humane Alliance, Herman Lee Ensign, Founder. After a quick search online Steve found the VHHS and emailed us pictures. We put him in touch with our friend Jack Walsh who has done considerable research and created a website for all of the Ensign fountains. Over 125 fountains were carved in Vinalhaven and sent all over the US as part of Ensign's vision as the President of the Humane Alliance.



Later in the month we received an update that a total of five of the six pieces had been found! With a recent snow and the temperatures getting increasingly colder, search for the final piece may have to wait for spring. Steve would ultimately like to see the fountain rebuilt

YEAR IN REVIEW

Again this year we were very happy to be the recipients of Vinalhaven treasure! Over the summer we received a water color painting of the Engine House and Old Reuben given by David Silsby, a Bodwell Granite Company pitcher and saucer, many (but all different) collections of newspaper articles, a wooden box with travel trinkets collected by John Wheeler while he was captain of the schooner *Cherokee* of Vinalhaven (c1840s), the 1965 Harold Vinal edition of *Voices* along with his book *Voyage*, carousels full of slides, 1891 "Village of Vinalhaven" and "North Haven, Vinalhaven, and Hurricane" maps, acetate prints of the Flagg estate, and a crock with an Osprey Brand cured fish label, just to name a few.

In June we were visited by Lyle Griffin and his wife, Nancy, who brought with them a collection of over 280 digital images he had made from old glass plates that had been in the attic of Lyle's former home on Lanes Island. Included were amazing images from Lane and Libby Fisheries that we had never seen before; interior, exterior, and workers.

Bruce Morehouse gave us a sign from the *Castine*, that now hangs above the office door.

And we were graciously given a Brud Clayter painting by James MacDonald. No one quite knows how many paintings Brud did, so we are always excited and surprised when we see another beautiful illustration.

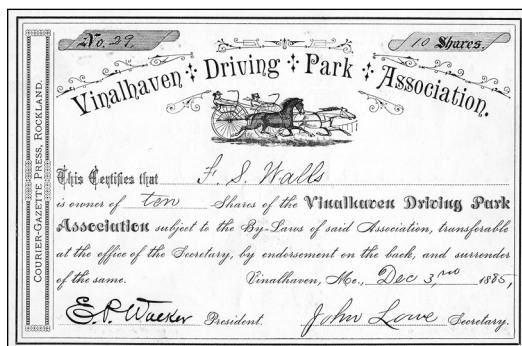
If any of our readers have visited the Marshall Point Lighthouse Museum, you may have seen their display of mini pot buoys painted for each local lobsterman. This inspired us to create one of our own for Vinalhaven lobstermen, past and present. Board member Torry Pratt started to paint some of these buoys herself, buying many shades of buoy paint, but the job became overwhelming. Instead, we're asking the lobstermen themselves to paint a mini buoy for us to include in our display. We'd like to thank Island Lobster Supply for helping us distribute buoys!



Among the many projects going on currently, the office girls have been chipping away at four file boxes full of Bodwell Granite Company "script." We are attempting to sort them alphabetically by worker's names so we might glean a better understanding of how large the granite workforce was. We have also been combing scrapbooks full of newspaper clippings for announcements and interesting articles. We're also getting very close to the release of a second edition of *Remember When!*

VINALHAVEN DRIVING PARK ASSOCIATION

Surely before 1884 informal horse racing was taking place all over Vinalhaven, but in November members of the community decided to make it official. E. P. Walker, F. S. Walls, John Lowe, Charles Berry, and Joseph Black (just to name a few), were among the first to purchase shares, at \$10/share, in the Vinalhaven Driving Park Association. Land owned by Watson Vinal, known as the Vinal Meadow, was purchased with stock. Almon and Frederick Hall also leased their southern portion of the Vinal Meadow to the Association for fifteen years, at \$15/year, with the first five years to be paid in advance. The Association retained the option to re-lease the land with the same terms and price at the end of the first lease.



There are few original documents left from the Association, but we know from writings by Sid Winslow that much of the construction of the track was done by men *after* they had worked their regular 9-10 hour jobs in the quarries or out fishing, with the exception of a few receipts that show work done by the Bodwell Granite Company. When completed, the track was 30 feet wide and a half mile around.

Men, and their horses with names like Topsy Knox, Gray Stranger, Wait-awhile, Tom Patchen, Granite Boy, and Jip, came from Bangor, Belfast, Lincolnville, and Camden to try and win purses of up to \$125. The fare from the mainland, including admission to the park was 75¢. There were no flashy advertisements, but, as Sid Winslow put it, "News spread like snowflakes before a nor'easter."

Sid Winslow also tells of races held on Carver's Pond, Old Harbor Pond, or down the length of Main Street in the winter. Many of the finest sleighs were made at the Sate Prison in Thomason. In a newspaper dated November 1893, the "Prison News" stated that a half dozen covered sleighs were being manufactured for the winter demand.

Lucky Strike, Lady May, and an unnamed horse driven by Billy Smith, were the last to race at the park in 1909. For unknown reasons, no more formal races were held at the park.

A racing sulky on loan from the J. S. Black house, East Main Street, will be on display this summer. It is in beautiful condition and was most certainly used for racing here on Vinalhaven.

FUN ON ICE.

The trotting here Saturday afternoon was something unusual for this place. There being quite a large purse of money raised for the occasion. Much interest was manifested and about 200 people assembled to witness the contest between the players. In the second class there were four starters, best three in five.

Kittredge's Hannah, driven by Fred Killman.

Walker's Buttercup, driven by E. P. Walker. Webster's No Name, driven by George Webster.

Hopkin's Charlie, driven by Justin Hopkins.

The interest in this race was centred on Hannah and Buttercup. The first heat all four started, Buttercup losing a shoe was obliged to fall out of the heat.

Hannah winning easily, with Charlie second, No Name third. In the second heat No Name withdrew, leaving but three to finish the race. In the meantime, Buttercup having had her lost shoe replaced, was ready for the start, and on receiving the word in this heat Hannah was somewhat in advance, but Buttercup hunted her closely to the finish. Hannah winning the heat, Buttercup second, Charlie last. The third heat was also captured by Hannah. Buttercup losing a shoe in the heat, but coming in very closely to the leader, with Charlie in the rear. Hannah winning the race in three straight heats, no time given. Summary as follows:

Hannah,	1 1 1
Buttercup,	4 2 2
Charlie,	2 3 3
No Name,	3 0 0

The second event was the free-for-all, best three in five, with five starters.

Hoyt's Gray Stranger, driven by L. M. Crockett.

Hopkins' Jip, driven by W. Hopkins.

Berry's stallion, Johnnie Morgan, driven by Charlie Berry.

Vinal's Jumbo, driven by Emery Ladd.

Walker's Dick, driven by Edward Ladd.

The first heat the stallion went to the front and won the heat easily, with Jip second, Stranger third, Jumbo fourth, Dick fifth. In the second heat it was an exciting race to the finish. Dick breaking near the finish, the stallion winning the heat by half a neck only, with Jip close up for third, Stranger struggling for fourth place, Jumbo in the rear.

The second heat was followed by a rattling race. In the third the race was a hot one to the finish between Johnnie Morgan and Dick, Johnny winning, however, by a slight lead, with Stranger well nigh in third place. Jumbo closing in for fourth with Jip in the rear for the first time in the race. The trot was a good one from start to finish. The summary was as follows:

Johnnie Morgan,	1 1 1
Dick,	5 2 2
Jip,	2 3 5
Stranger,	3 4 3
Jumbo,	4 5 4

FROM THE BEGINNING

"I've always felt as if I'd been here 'from the beginning,' and now I know why." -Phil Crossman, Working Waterfront. Just missing the mailing of our 2017 Newsletter was the release of *From the Beginning, Vinalhaven from 1760 to 1850*, the latest publication from Ken Reiss. Copies are available at the Museum.

Hello all...

...and thank you for your support and trust in helping From the Beginning see the light of day. Much to my surprise, hardly a week goes by that someone on the island (or in winter quarters elsewhere) doesn't send us their compliments on it. Actually, "surprised" doesn't do it... "gobsmacked" is more like it!

We all know the old chestnut about the stone carver and the eagle...the visitors enthralled as they watched the leathery old carver put the finishing touches on a magnificent granite eagle he had just carved...and after listening to their praises for a while, finally said, "Ain't nothing to it...bird was in there all along...I just let it out."

Well, I feel a little bit like that about this book. It was "in there;" It just needed to be dug out.

Dig we did, a process that continues to become ever more interesting and rewarding, as more and more ancient records and half-forgotten histories become available. Vital records, family trees, classics last published two centuries ago now are at one's fingertips, along with arcane private blogs like the Online Institute for Advanced Loyalist Studies. Some may bring entirely new perspectives to the table, but most do the invaluable work of bridging gaps between primary sources that are here at hand.

What was different about this book was that, the deeper we dug, the more familiar it began to feel; mostly, I think, because we felt more and more at home with the people who popped up along the way. Perhaps that is not unusual with an island community; I don't know. But our story began with early settlers like the Ames and Youngs and a couple dozen more families with names in between, all of whom came here in search of opportunity, and now we are telling that story to the Ames and Youngs. They may find their story interesting; I hope so. But I don't think they will find it surprising. We began the book with stories of 18th-century men who came to this island to hopefully buy a future for their sons. And we recall just last summer having concerned conversations with fishermen who, with fingers crossed, were stepping up with a starter-boat and some gear to launch the career of a son or a nephew.

Theirs are the families that have adapted again and again as opportunities shifted from farming to fishing to stone cutting, and back again to the sea. No doubt, someday they will want to adapt again, and they will do it as successfully as they always have. That's just who they are.

Sincerely, Ken Reiss

VINALHAVEN PHOTOGRAPHY PROJECT

Since beginning this project last October, Richard Howard has made great progress photographing many island residents! Richard has been visiting Vinalhaven for many years, but taking on this project has brought him here at least once every month. Each visit Richard sets up his white backdrop at a variety of locations - the school, lumber yard, along the waterfront, and Main Street - and with the help of student Emma Van Dyne, has coaxed smiles out of (sometimes) reluctant participants.

The Historical Society has a large collection of photos from around the granite era (early 20th century), but Richard's project will help record the island's character, economy, scenery, and most of all, its people, in the early 21st century. As the project continues, photos will be displayed around town, and can always be viewed at:

vinalhavenphotographyproject.org



LYON'S SCRAPBOOKS

Vinalhaven - It was the place that my mother loved to tell stories about because it was where her father grew up, and her grandfather, Thomas J. Lyons, spent many years. "His picture hangs in the library to this day!" she would exclaim. It was 1955... the earliest I remember hearing the stories. "He and his brother, Owen, came to the island as young men in their late teens from New Brunswick to work the quarries," the story went. Their parents were Irish immigrants to Canada, who had also emigrated in order to work, their father as a soldier in the British Army and their mother as a domestic.

My husband, Fred, and I recently visited the island in November, and it was a life-changing, magical event for me. When my mother passed 6 years ago, we found amongst her belongings a collection of scrapbooks in a box. When we examined them, we realized that they had been saved and passed down at least 3 generations. I could only guess who carefully pasted years of clippings from the Island newspaper. I assumed it was my grandfather, but it could have been his father. They date from the 1880s. There was a historical wealth of news clippings about nautical events, social activities, obituaries, and an article about my mother's visit with her parents as a girl. These seemed too precious for me to keep. As it was, in the frenzy of cleaning out my mother's house, they were almost lost. It was only by chance that we looked in the box. They needed to go home. But to whom?

It occurred to me that there might be a Historical Society on the island and perhaps I could contact them. Googled it, and there it is, complete with an email address. Bill Chilles responded promptly and seemed very enthusiastic about receiving the books.

People thought we were crazy to plan a trip in November to an island off the coast on Maine, but I really wanted to go off season to get a true feeling of what it was like for my grandfather to grow up there. From the moment we got on the ferry mid-day on Friday, I felt like we were going back in time. I wanted to see the quarries, and spend time with the islanders in the town restaurants and shops. The next day was brisk and sunny and we headed downtown for breakfast at The Homeport Restaurant. Recently renovated and cozy, we were greeted warmly and had some of the best Benedict ever!

After breakfast, we walked up to the library and I was thrilled to see my great-grandfather's photo hanging above the reception desk. Even more exciting was the stone placard by the door that has Thomas J. Lyons at the top of the building committee list. After chatting with the librarians, we got directions to the Historical Society and headed up the hill.

We were able to spend about an hour and a half with Bill in his office. He had done some digging into my family's history and had treasures for us. There was a photo of my grandfather Owen as a boy and his big sister Jennie. I had never seen this. I named my daughter Jennie after my mother's aunt, we called her Aunt Dot, so this is a very precious photo. He had information on when Thomas and Owen worked in the quarries. It turns out that Bill and I are actually related though marriage by way of Thomas's wife Julia Arey. We went into the museum and saw my great-uncle Owen's cornet, and information about the Vinalhaven Band that he started. I am also a musician, and according to my mother, this is where that talent came from.

Next on my to-do list was a visit to the quarries. Bill suggested we see if Jeannie (the local Taxi) might take us "the long way" around the island. We had a wonderful adventure to the quarries with a full historical narration along the way. Jeanne even managed to find us a piece of granite with a portion of a drill hole on the side as a souvenir for me. We saw the oldest tree and unbelievable vistas.

The best adventure of all was getting stuck on the island. The ferry couldn't run on Sunday on "account 'a tha' weatha'." Vinalhaven didn't want to let us go! This connection to my ancestors meant so much to me and I was deeply moved to feel such a strong connection to the island.

Carol Kingsbury, great-granddaughter of Thomas J. Lyons

SUMMER HOURS

June 18 - September 21
Monday - Friday 11-4pm
(Open Monday - Saturday in July and August)

SUMMER PROGRAMS

May 5 - Scandinavian Genealogy Session - VH Town Office Meeting Room, 10:30am-1pm - Bring a bag lunch and family information. Free, but donations to the Finnish Heritage House are encouraged.

June 23 - Community sharing of Swedish/Norwegian/Finnish traditions; Finnish baking demo.
American Legion Hall, 9:30am - Vinalhaven residents share memories and recipes of their Scandinavian families and Jackie Harjula from the Finnish Heritage House in South Thomaston demonstrates Finnish baking; Nissau (coffee bread) and Pannukakku.

June 26 - Exhibit Opening Reception - Vinalhaven Historical Society, 3-5pm - Open discussion with island Scandinavian descendants and contributors to the summer exhibit.

July 28 - Finnish Coastal Maine Settlements - Vinalhaven Public Library, 9am - One hour program with Steve Gifford of Warren, followed by **Scandinavian Neighborhood Walks with Vinalhaven Finnish Descendants** - Round the Mountain Rd., High Street, and Sands Rd.

August 16 - Sauna Traditions - With Charlie Heino of Belgrade, ME. Vinalhaven Public Library, 7pm

September 22 - Musical Event: Finnish Kantele and Swedish Nyckelharpa - Pleasant River Chapel, 1pm - With Kantele (lap harp) players from South Thomaston and Warren.

ANNUAL APPEAL

Please consider donating so we can continue all the work highlighted in this newsletter and much more! The Vinalhaven Historical Society is a non-profit organization. We do not receive annual operating funds from the Town of Vinalhaven. We exist solely because of your donations!

The discussion of fire suppression systems became a very important topic after two false alarms over the winter. We are very grateful for the impressive turn out of our dedicated volunteer fire fighters to our back-to-back calls. The museum has several outdated smoke detectors located in the office, exhibit space, basement, and nearby Boy Scout Hall, all of which report to Sea Coast Security, but no sprinkler system.

This is an issue that has jumped to the top of our list. We have been in contact with, and have estimates from, a company that installs a clean agent suppression system safe for museums. We know this will be a huge undertaking, but it's something that absolutely needs to be done.

The Museum building was built in 1838 in Rockland and transported here in 1875. The Historical Society began use of the space over 50 years ago. Not only does the building itself have a fascinating history, but what is contained within it's walls is more valuable still.

We appreciate any donation, and value your continued support and membership!

William D. Chilles, Pres.	Amy Lear, Vice Pres.	Lucy Bickford, Treas.	Lorraine Bunker, Sec.
Elizabeth Bunker, Dir.	Dallas Anthony	Niall Conlan	Roy Heisler
Alan Lazaro	Torry Pratt	Susan Radley	Priscilla Rosen
Marion Tolman	Roger Young		

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MILESTONES

The 100th Exile will be published this year! In 1918, Vinalhaven High School published the first Exile, titled from their exiled condition over the 1917-1918 winter.

In February 1918, Penobscot Bay was so completely frozen that no steamers could get to the island. Grain for livestock was gone and grocery shelves were bare. The lighthouse tender *Zizania* was able to get through with a small amount of supplies and mail, but it would take six more days, and a telegram sent to President Wilson, before relief would come.

The telegram from the Selectmen reads: *"Immediate relief needed at Vinal Haven, Maine owing to the blockade. Supplies are low. Have had but one small boat of provisions and mail in 14 days. Horses and cattle entirely without grain. Have appealed to the Gov. Milliken. Received many promises but no results. We appeal to you for immediate relief from a condition that grows more serious each day."*

The icebreaker *Favorite* was finally able to get through the ice and bring much needed grain, supplies, mail, and passengers that had been stranded on the mainland.

The 1918 Exile is full of poems, stories, and statistics by students and, lucky for us, commemorates an event that has yet to occur again since!

