

Grand Manan & the War of 1812



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This small booklet was produced as a supplementary companion to the five commemorative plaques which the museum received funding for in the spring of 2013 through a grant from the Government of Canada through the Department of Canadian Heritage 1812 Commemorative Fund. The plaques were erected in the summer of 2013.


It is hoped that the information contained herein provides some context for the many events on land and sea which took place in the Bay of Fundy near and on Grand Manan during the span of this war (1812-1814). The plaques contain a condensed version of the information found here.

Laurie Murison, Chair of the Swallowtail Keepers Society and Director of the Whale & Seabird Research Station, was invaluable as a primary motivator in the application for the grant. She also assisted with the grant writing and helped to design the plaques, one of which is situated at Swallowtail.

Thanks to board member Greg McHone for producing this booklet through his home publishing business at cost.

Island artist Janie Hepditch-Vannier graciously agreed to do some interpretive ink and watercolour paintings for us, illustrating three stories relating to events which took place on and near Grand Manan during the War of 1812. They help to bring the stories alive for us.

Thanks to Ava Sturgeon of the Grand Manan Archives for her assistance with the photographs, maps and diagrams for the proposed Net Point Fortifications and the Machias Seal Island lighthouses.

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M.J. Edwards, Grand Manan Museum, July 2013.

War of 1812

Introduction

From June 18, 1812 to February 16, 1815, Canada was the battleground in a war between the United States and Great Britain. If the American invasion of 1812-1814 been successful, Canada would not exist. The war ended with the signing and ratification by the United States Congress of the Treaty of Ghent, beginning a long period of peaceful relations which remains to the present day.

Causes of the War

The United States declared war on Great Britain because of a number of factors: the Royal Navy's practice of impressment of American merchant sailors into the Royal Navy; trade restrictions resulting from Britain's war with France; British support of Indian tribes attempting to block westward expansion; and an interest in annexing Canada. They were met with more resistance than expected and their invasion was defeated, however the practice of impressment did finally end with this war (*Adapted from Wikipedia: War of 1812*).

The War of 1812 and Grand Manan

"During the period of 1812-1814, the Bay of Fundy was infested with privateers. Settlers of the island saw much hardship during these years, as privateers from both sides occasionally raided villages along Grand Manan's east shore and plundered their belongings. Much of eastern coastal Maine near Grand Manan was occupied by British military forces during and after the war, with Eastport not freed until 1818" (Wikipedia: Grand Manan).

Each of the five plaques that are situated around the island tell a small part of the tale of what occurred in these waters, in this part of the Fundy and Passamaquoddy Bays, during the War of 1812. At this time in history, the boundary between Maine and New Brunswick was fluid in every sense of the word. Families often lived split between the two countries, and many island settlers arrived here from Massachusetts and Maine. Trade between the two countries was abundant and war was seen as an inconvenience and an economic disaster for many.

The privateers who participated in this war, however, were those who profited most. Many personal fortunes were made, some banks and universities founded, with the profits from legal plunder of enemy ships. A "letter of marque" was the official document of a privateer vessel that granted permission from their government to chase down, capture and seizure an enemy's ships and their goods, and it mattered not if they were naval ships or merchant ships. Dalhousie University in Halifax and the Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce (CIBC) were both founded with privateer money.

Occasionally American privateers would harass Grand Mananers and steal their boats, hide from British cruisers behind the smaller islands of the archipelago, or take shelter in its many natural harbours. The British Navy would also send recruitment boats to shore looking for and seizing able-bodied men to impress into their navy. Life in the British Navy was not something to be desired, and many a sailor jumped ship and took refuge on American naval ships. If a sailor was American, but had been born British, the British claimed him and did not recognize his American citizenship. This was a main grievance behind the outbreak of the war.

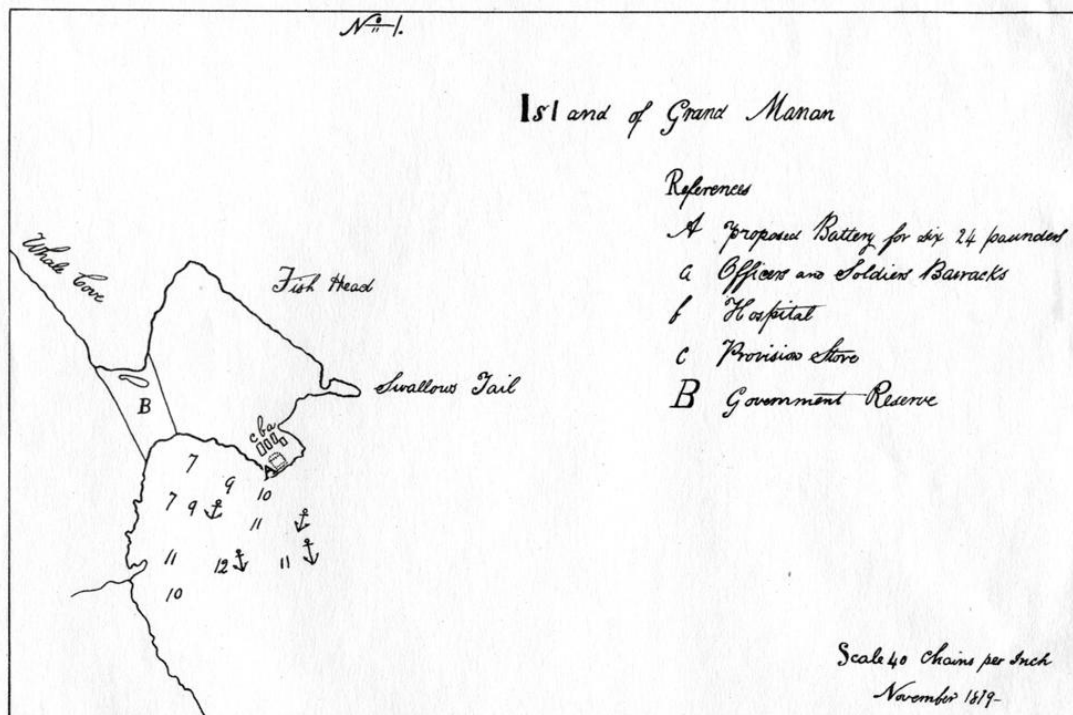
NET POINT PLAQUE

There is a commemorative plaque at Swallowtail Peninsula facing Net Point. Net Point is situated between Pettes Cove and Flagg's Cove.

PROPOSED FORTIFICATION FOR NET POINT AND SWALLOW TAIL – 1819

Fortification of Grand Manan was considered as early as June 30, 1808, when Capt. Nicholls of the Royal Engineers wrote to Lt. Gen. Sir George Prevost as follows: *"I cannot omit remarking that the Island of Grand Manan is settling fast, population reconed [sic] between 4 and 500, Militia at 60, is healthy and possesses a good harbour for small vessels, and, as from its situation it may be considered as the key to the Bay of Fundy I should think it worthy of very serious consideration"* (Buchanan 27).

In 1875 another writer demanded *"that the island be fortified and developed, claiming that its situation, either for commerce or war, is strategically as valuable as those of the Isle of Man, Guernsey, and Jersey, and that it would make a fine point of attack against Portland and the coast of Maine"* (Buchanan 27).



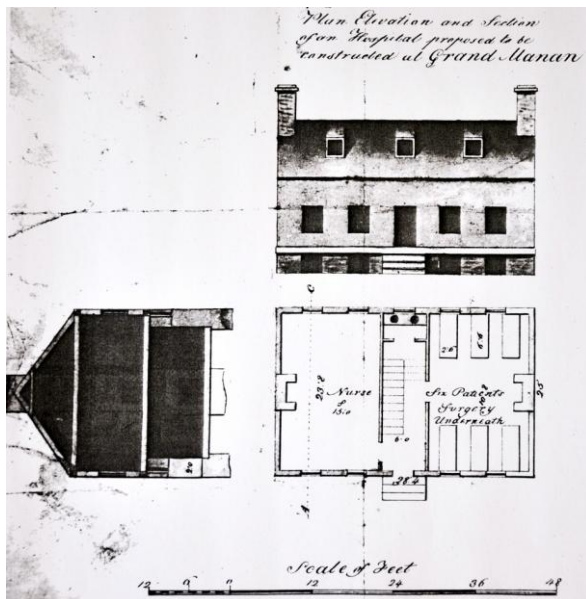
PLAN OF FORTIFICATION PROPOSED IN 1819
(Reduced about one half)
From a tracing of the original in the Department of Lands and Mines
Supplied by J. H. Ramsay, Chief Draughtsman

The following four paragraphs are quoted in their entirety from *The Grand Manan Historian*, No. V, Charles Buchanan (Ed.), pp. 26-27, 1938:

“During the war between Great Britain and the United States, from 1812 to 1814, the Bay of Fundy was infested with American privateers, and the commerce of the provinces suffered in consequence. The waters surrounding Grand Manan were a famous lurking place for these rapacious corsairs until British cruisers became numerous on the seas, when their occupation ceased. The return of peace was hailed by the people of both countries, but the boundary controversy began, and for years threatened to involve the two countries again in war.

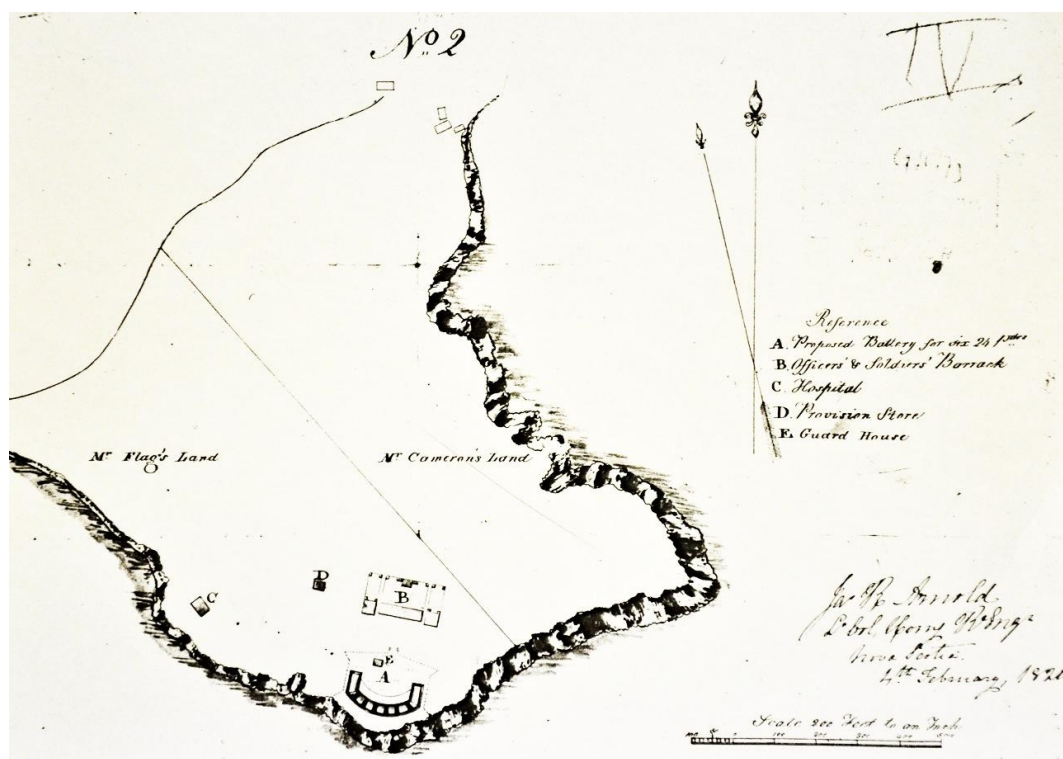
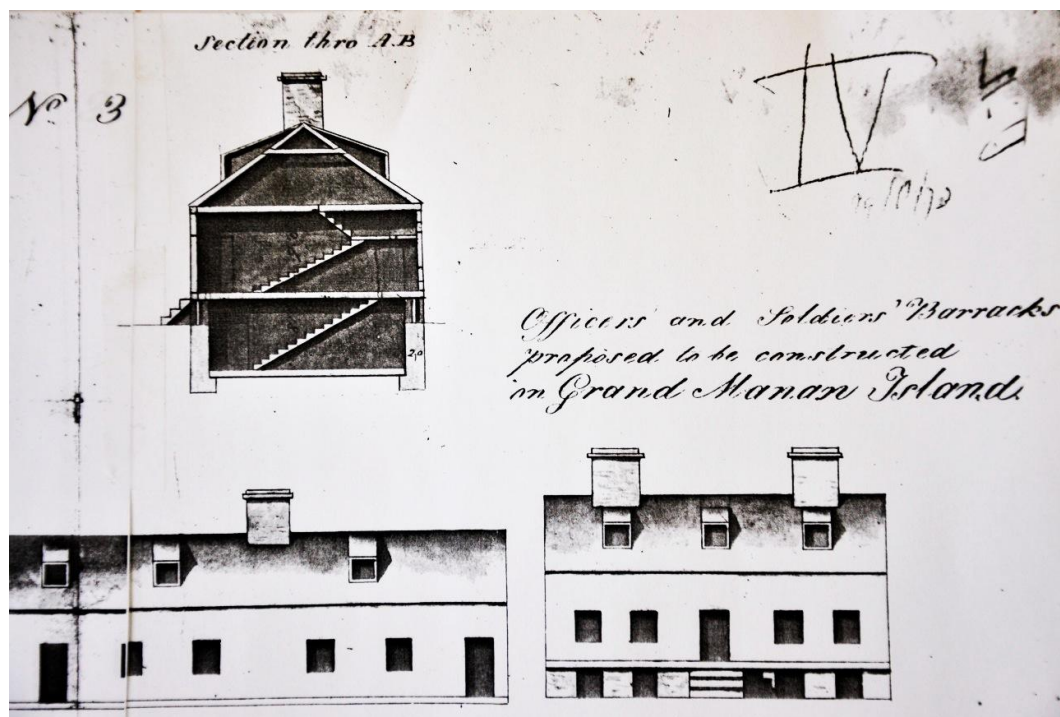
In 1817 Grand Manan, and other islands in Passamaquoddy Bay claimed by the British, were declared a part of Great Britain. In 1819 it was decided to fortify Grand Manan, for which purpose 40,000 lbs. was voted by the imperial parliament, and on September 14th, 1819, Colonel Lord, with two officers of the Royal Engineers, proceeded to the island to select a suitable position. In reference to this matter the St. John [N.B.] Courier of November 6th, 1819, contained the following:

*‘The intended fortifications on Grand Manan are, we understand, to be immediately commenced at that point of the island called ‘Swallow Tail,’ being the spot most approved for that purpose, and establishing a depot, in the vicinity of which there is a spacious bay and safe anchorage for ships, secure from all winds except the eastward.’*¹



The commanding situation of Grand Manan, and the many places of natural strength it possesses, made the retention of the island by the British of great importance, hence the determination to fortify and defend it if necessary. But fortifications were fortunately not required on Grand Manan, the rightful claims of Great Britain to the island were peacefully conceded, and the key to the entrance of the Bay of Fundy remained under the British Flag” (Buchanan, 26-27).

¹ Although the location of the proposed fort is given as “Swallow Tail”, Net Point is clearly the location of the intended fort, as the Royal Naval Engineer drawings show.



The photos showing the plans for the Net Point Fort are taken from a collection of drawings by the Royal Naval Engineers housed in the Grand Manan Archives.

WHISTLE LONG-EDDY PLAQUE

There is a commemorative plaque at the end of the Whistle Road, beside the bench which overlooks Passamaquoddy Bay and faces the coast of Maine.

PRIVATEERING: THE WEAZEL INCIDENT AND GRAND MANAN

In New England, Maine suffered the most from the war. Early in the war there was Canadian privateering action and harassment by the Royal Navy along the coast. On September 1813, there was combat off Pemaquid between HMS *Boxer* and USS *Enterprise*, killing both commanders and gaining international attention. Largely unprotected by the U.S. Army and small U.S. Navy, in 1814 the district was invaded and large parts of coastal Maine were occupied by the British. Legitimate commerce all along the Maine coast was largely stopped, creating a critical situation for a shipping dependent area. An illicit smuggling trade with the British soon developed, especially at Castine and Eastport. Maine's extreme vulnerability during this war gave impetus to its movement toward statehood which occurred in 1820 (Adapted from *Wikipedia: History of Maine*).

Grand Mananers historically have had strong ties with Maine, and many island settlers originally came from Massachusetts or Maine. After the war the islanders kept close and good relations with their Maine coastal neighbours because of strong commercial trade and family ties.

21 September 1814: The British establish a Customs Office at Castine, District of Maine, which becomes a designated commercial headquarters of the occupied territory.

Announcement that trade with the enemy was legal through Castine made the mercantile communities of Saint John, New Brunswick and Halifax, Nova Scotia very happy. Customs officials amassed £10,000 in the eight months that they were there. After the war, the "Castine Fund" was directed by the British government to be used for public improvements in Nova Scotia, where it built a new library for the British garrison and Dalhousie College (now Dalhousie University). (Adapted from *Canada's Historic Places, "War of 1812 Timeline: July 1814-December 1814"*.)

Privateering

The Bay of Fundy was a secondary theatre of the war where "hunting warfare", whereby each side attempted to capture enemy merchant ships and protect their own from seizure, was the common practice. These activities were carried out by small naval vessels and *privateers*, privately owned vessels granted government licenses (known as "letters of marque") to seize enemy ships and their cargo during war time. This hindered the enemy's economy but often allowed friendly cargo vessels and fishing vessels to proceed.

The summer of 1812 saw the capture by the British of 24 American privateer vessels comprised of 18 schooners, 2 sloops, 2 brigs, 1 revenue cutter and 1 ship of the line in or near the Bay of Fundy. Privateering was a profitable business for those who owned the boats, and crew members shared in the profits. The goal was to interfere with British shipping leaving the ports of St.

Andrews and Saint John. Others saw the privateers as a costly nuisance that interfered with essential shipping trade and the distribution of food and goods. (Adapted from Smith 32-39).

The Weazel Incident and Grand Manan

“Many privateers were apparently no better than pirates, and one such man was Edward Snow, commander of the *Weazel* and a preacher of the gospel from Hampden, Maine. On June 9th, 1813 he sailed to Beaver Harbour, NB, robbed Captain Young’s house of 15 barrels of sugar, his family’s clothing and even the children’s toys. Later the same night he captured a vessel bound for St. Andrews from Saint John, but when news of his exploits reached Campobello the next day, two boats were sent in pursuit. The stolen vessel was soon recaptured and the *Weazel* chased to Grand Manan, where Snow and his crew were driven into the woods on the south western shore, and one crew member was captured. The men found their way to Seal Cove where they stole a large boat from Alexander McLane, and presumably made their escape to Cutler, Maine” (Buchanan 60-61).

“Before the incident with Snow and the *Weazel*, British cruisers in the Bay of Fundy had never interrupted American fishing boats in their pursuits, but Captain Gordon of the ‘Rattler’ now ordered them off, and gave notice that such as were found beyond certain prescribed limits would be captured and destroyed” (Buchanan 61).



*“The Weazel Incident”
watercolour on paper,
18”x18”, by Janie
Hepditch-Vannier, 2013.*

BONNY BROOK PLAQUE

There is a commemorative plaque near the White Head Ferry landing at the end of the Ingalls Head Road.

PRIVATEERING, GRAND MANAN, AND THE BONNY'S BROOK INCIDENT

"During the period of 1812-1814, the Bay of Fundy was infested with privateers. Settlers of the island saw much hardship during these years, as privateers from both sides occasionally raided villages along Grand Manan's east shore and plundered their belongings" (Wikipedia: Grand Manan Island).

History of Bonny Brook, Ingalls Head: Named for Joel Bonney, one of Grand Manan's earliest settlers: In 1779 Loyalists Joel Bonney, Abiel and James Sprague and their families moved from Machias, Maine to Grand Manan seeking peace and shelter. In **1780**, Joel's son, Alexander Bonny, was reported to be the first white baby born on Grand Manan. However, the families found living on Grand Manan too difficult and so returned the same year to Digdeguash, NB where they had lived before.

The Sally Incident at Bonny's Brook: "In the American War of 1812, Grand Manan, from its isolated position, became a favourite rendezvous for privateers and piratical crafts, and British cruisers had many an exciting chase to catch them. On one occasion an American privateer entered Grand Harbour and seized a vessel in Bonny's Brook while quietly riding at anchor...the privateersmen, having caught one vessel, felt eager for another, and...pounced upon [the]



schooner Sally, owned by Wooster and Ingalls, who, anticipating a visit from Yankee privateers, had removed a plank from [the] bottom, which of course rendered the craft altogether unseaworthy. The privateers attempted to repair damages, but failed in the attempt, and Wooster and Ingalls were left in possession...." (Buchanan 60).

"The Sally Incident at Bonny Brook", watercolour on paper, 18"x18", by Janie Hepditch-Vannier, 2013.

Profits are Made from Privateering: Many private fortunes were made from privateering during the war. Some enterprising businessmen had ships built for privateering and hired crews to run them. The *Liverpool Packet*, a schooner from Nova Scotia was one of the most famous of the privateer vessels, capturing 50 American prizes during the war and making wealthy its owner, William Collins, and its Captain, Joseph Barss. One of the wealthiest men of his day, Collins founded the Halifax Banking Company, which later became the Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce (CIBC) (Adapted from Butts).

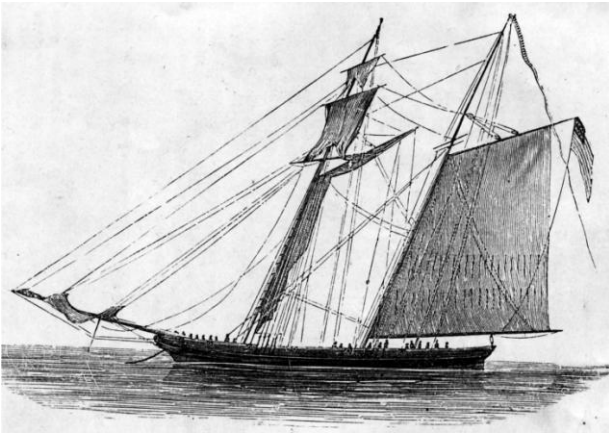
Sailing Ships Used during the War of 1812:

- **Brig:** two square-rigged masts, carried 10-20 guns, quick but required a large crew, served as couriers and training vessels.
- **Frigate:** square-rigged on all three masts, fast, 28 guns, used for patrolling and escort. Most famous was the HMS Shannon which captured the USS Chesapeake and towed it back to Halifax.
- **Schooner:** elegant, manageable, two masts, main and shorter foremast, gaff-rigged, popular as transports and as privateers.
- **Ship of the Line:** 60-100 guns, large fighting ships, the ships formed two opposing lines and battered away at one another.
- **Sloop:** smaller than a frigate, 20 guns, single-masted, fore-and-aft-rigged, formidable fighting ships. Built and used by the British to capture the menacing American privateers.

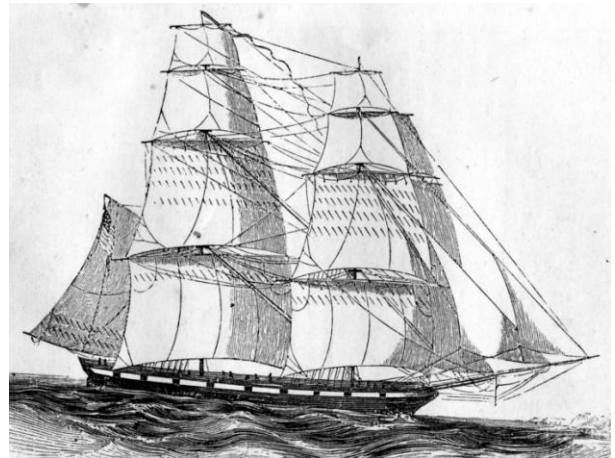
Notable American Privateers included the *Fame*, *Growler*, *Revenge*, and *Wasp*, of Salem, Massachusetts and the *Lily* of Portland, and the *Industry* of Lynn, Maine.

Notable British Privateers included the frigates *Spartan* and *Maidstone*, sloops of war *Fantome*, *Rattler*, *Indian*, *Emulous*, and *Martin*, brigs *Plumper* and *Boxer*. The schooner *Breame* was dreaded for her activity and success, although smaller than either the brigs or the sloops, and the *Spartan* and *Maidstone* were very successful in capturing American privateers cruising the Bay of Fundy in 1812 (Adapted from Kilby).

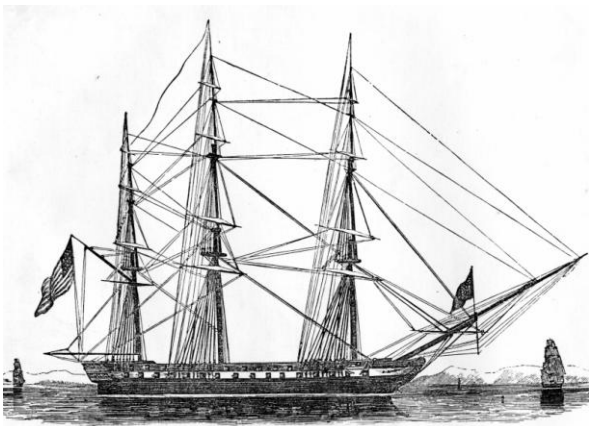
The following steel engraving illustrations of American naval sailing ships are from *The Kedge Anchor: or, Young Sailor's Assistant*, Wm. Brady, Sailing Master, U.S. Navy, 2nd edition, R.L. Shaw, 222 Water Street, New York, 1857. (A second edition of this book was owned by a Grand Manan sailor, Judson Foster, captain of the *Snow Maiden* which operated as a mail sailing ship until the late 1930s, bringing island mail to the Newton's Wharf behind the current day Home Hardware store.)



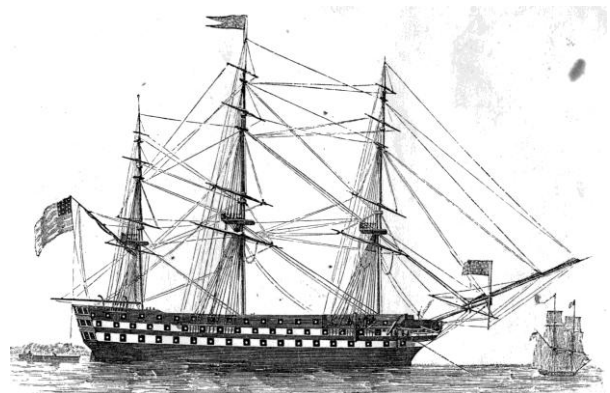
Brig-of-War (American)



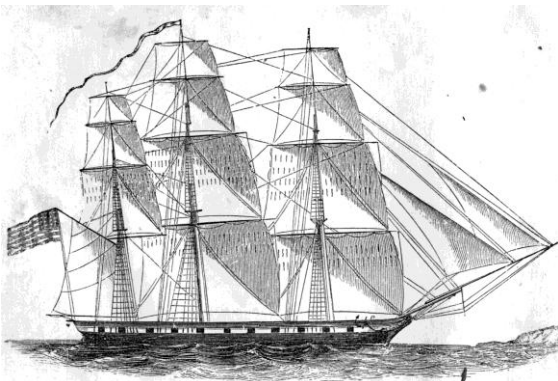
Frigate (American)



Schooner-of-War (American)



Ship-of-the-Line (American)



Sloop-of-War (American)

SEAL COVE PLAQUE

There is a commemorative plaque in Seal Cove located beside McLaughlin's Wharf Inn.

THE POTATO INCIDENT AT SEAL COVE: A TEST OF LOYALTY

The War of 1812 tested the loyalty of some Americans living on Grand Manan who had signed an oath of allegiance to King George III, a requirement for obtaining a land grant.

Dr. John Faxon, an early medical doctor on Grand Manan, arrived from the United States in 1808 and settled at Seal Cove. A noted walker, he would visit the sick in their homes and walk many miles for enjoyment and exercise. Dr. Faxon's lasting legacy, the result of his enterprising spirit and engineering skill, was the creation of Seal Cove Harbour. He organized men to cut a passage through the natural sea wall, opening up the picturesque cove to the open Bay of Fundy waters. In 1811 Dr. Faxon also launched the first full-rigged and largest ship ever built on Grand Manan, the full-rigged 500 ton *John*, c. 1811. When the War of 1812 broke out, however, Dr. Faxon hastily returned to the United States and his property reverted to local residents (adapted from Hill 24).

Joseph Blanchard, unlike Dr. Faxon, remained on Grand Manan when war broke out. Blanchard, like Faxon, had received several large land grants in Seal Cove, some of which he actively farmed. One day he was visited by a privateer who haughtily demanded a supply of potatoes. Blanchard refused to comply with the demand, telling the privateer that as he was now

a British subject he would not 'afford succor or feed the enemies of King George.' 'However,' said he, pointing to the potato field, 'there are the potatoes, and if you are rascals enough to steal them – you must dig them.' Such spirited response demonstrated his loyalty to the British and his new home and may have saved him from further aggressions (Buchanan 60).



"The Potato Incident at Seal Cove", watercolour and ink on paper, 18"x18", by Janie Hepditch-Vannier, 2013.

SOUTHWEST HEAD PLAQUE

There is a commemorative plaque at Southwest Head along the cliff to the left of the lighthouse parking. This plaque faces Machias Seal Island.

MACHIAS SEAL ISLAND OWNERSHIP DISPUTE: A WAR OF 1812 LEGACY

Introduction

Machias Seal Island is located between the Bay of Fundy and Gulf of Maine near Grand Manan Island, NB and Cutler, ME. Canada has maintained a lighthouse there since 1832 and has always manned the light with two keepers paid by the Canadian Coastguard. The island is also a noted puffin breeding colony and terns, until recently (they have all disappeared as their food source dwindled or relocated due to warming water temperatures), were also a great tourist draw. For a number of years now boats from both countries have taken turns landing a limited number of visitors (limit is 13 people) each day on the island during the summer months when puffins are breeding on the island. There are also biologists on the island during the breeding season.



Machias Seal Island with the three towers, two of which are lighthouses, c. 1920s. Photo from the Grand Manan Archives.

(The following information is adapted from Wikipedia: Machias Seal Island)

Machias Seal Island: A Few Facts

Machias Seal Island is a migratory bird sanctuary of approximately 20 acres, treeless, with a population of two, lying 16 km (9.9 mi) SE of Cutler, Me, and 19km (11.8 mi) SW of Southwest Head, Grand Manan, NB.

The first lighthouse was constructed in 1832 by the British government after Saint John shipping merchants exerted pressure upon the government, requesting a light to protect shipping in an area often shrouded in fog with many dangerous ledges and shoals.

The island was staffed by Canadian Coast Guard employees until the early 1990s when all of the lighthouses on the Atlantic coast became automated. Today, the two staff living on the island remain for sovereignty purposes and are paid by the Department of Foreign Affairs (through the Coast Guard). Machias Seal Light is the only manned lighthouse remaining in Canada.

In **1979** there was a “**Joint application to the International Court of Justice (ICJ) at The Hague**” in the Netherlands, but both countries avoided having the ICJ rule on the sovereignty of the Machias when determining the starting point for the offshore boundary for fishing and mineral exploration purposes on Georges Bank, which was set at 44°11’12”N 67°16’46”W.

In 1984 the ICJ ruling “**Delimitation of the Maritime Boundary in the Gulf of Maine Area (Canada/United States of America)**” highlighted a gap of several dozen kilometers between 1984 Gulf of Maine boundary and the present day International Boundary, and this placed both Machias Seal Island and North Rock in the middle of a “*grey zone*”, which is what fishermen on both sides now call the area.

This *grey zone* has led to an ongoing exploitation and overfishing of valuable lobster and other species by both sides in this area.

For decades now this remote migratory bird sanctuary has found itself in the news, and there is ongoing concern that this small island may someday lead us back into conflict if the sovereignty is not soon resolved.

Some Boundary History

The 1814 Treaty of Ghent re-established borders between the U.S. and present day Canada to their 1811 configuration. It also called for a joint British-U.S. Boundary Commission to resolve the disputed territory of several islands in Passamaquoddy Bay, including Grand Manan, which were claimed by both sides.

In 1817, this Boundary Commission declared that Moose, Dudley, and Frederick Islands belonged to the United States, while Grand Manan and the other islands of the Bay belonged to Canada.

Unfortunately, this treaty, and subsequent commissions, failed to mention or deal with Machias Seal Island because it is not an island of the Passamaquoddy Bay. It is, consequently, the only remaining unresolved boundary dispute between the United States and Canada, with both countries claiming sovereignty. This was never much of an issue until the 1970s when the Americans decided they wanted access to the rich fishing grounds in the area (Adapted from *Wikipedia: Machias Seal Island*).

In The News Recently

National Post headline, Nov 27, 2012: “Puffin Wars: The Island paradise at centre of last Canada-U.S. Land dispute.”

The Canadian Press headline, Dec 23, 2012: “ Tiny island subject of dispute between Canada and U.S.”

Maclean's Magazine, Jan 7, 2013: “Does Canada or the U.S. own Machias Seal Island?”

The Last Canada-U.S. Boundary Dispute

International Boundary Dispute: Historical Timeline (Bay of Fundy): The following excerpts are adapted from the *International Boundary Commission: The History – The Historic Treaties of the Boundary Commission*, web, unless otherwise noted.

1783 The Definitive Treaty of Peace: Defined the boundary between the newly-formed United States and British North American colonies from the “mouth of the St. Croix River in the Bay of Fundy...”

1794 Jay's Treaty: Provided two Commissioners to decide what river was the St. Croix.

1814 Treaty of Ghent: Appointed two Commissioners to decide the sovereignty of several of the islands in Passamaquoddy Bay, including the island of Grand Manan with its rich fishery. The Fourth Article of this Treaty explains how the United States claimed Grand Manan and several other islands in the Bay as being within their boundaries (being within 20 leagues of their shores), and that Great Britain claimed the islands as being within the limits of the Province of Nova Scotia, as predating the Treaty of 1783.

1817 Commissioners' Report (November 25): "The commissioners appointed pursuant to the Treaty of Ghent determine that Moose, Dudley, and Frederick Islands belong to the United States, but that all other islands in Passamaquoddy Bay, and Grand Manan Island in the Bay of Fundy, are part of New Brunswick" (Canada's Historic Places. *War of 1812 Timeline: January 1815-1871*).

Following the appointment of Thomas Barclay and John Holmes as the British and American Commissioners respectively who were appointed to resolve the 1817 Eastern Boundary of ownership of the islands in Passamaquoddy Bay, the Hon. Ward Chipman, contacted Moses Gerrish, a Harvard graduate and the Loyalist leader of the settlement of Grand Manan, which took place on May 6, 1784, and questioned him extensively on the settlement of the island in order to help establish Britain's claim to the island. Here is some of what he had to say:

"I am arrived so near the close of life it would be a serious mortification to lose Grand Manan and be compelled by my Countrymen to move again, or live under their Government, merely because we are not able to prove some act of Jurisdiction from the Government of Nova Scotia has not been exercised over the Island before the peace of 1783.

The American claims being admitted, they will not only hold Grand Manan but several other Islands in this Bay; but relinquish our claims to this Island only, and they will be satisfied, on account of the fishery about it; for it is that they covet more than the Island" (Buchanan 29-30).

1842 Webster-Ashburton Treaty: Agreement is reached on the boundary from the source of the St. Croix River to the St. Lawrence River.

1892 Convention: The boundary line is laid down through the islands in Passamaquoddy Bay...

1908 Treaty: Since land boundaries were marked previously with monuments, mounds or rock cairns, but water boundaries had not been shown except by a curved line through various rivers and lakes on its course, and was not shown at all on the chart of the St. Croix River, this treaty provided for such water boundaries to be marked by buoys, and other ways deemed desirable.

1910 Treaty: The boundary was defined through Passamaquoddy Bay to a point in the middle of the Grand Manan Channel.

1925 Treaty: Minor adjustments are made in the boundary line at Grand Manan Channel.

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