

THE FARMHOUSE OF PUMPKIN COVE

In the 1960s, when my friend Martha Phillips and I began vacationing at Pemaquid Point, we soon noticed that each summer season seemed to generate some special situation or event which excited and focused the group imagination and conversation in the Pemaquid Point Community. Let me give you a few illustrations. In about 1961 or 62, Julia Child introduced quiche to the American TV audiences. I remember 1964 as the “Quiche Summer.” While in Maine, we heard all about quiche, and to our good fortune, we tasted it many times, too. In 1973, John Dougherty built his beautiful little Salt Box house on the front side of the Loop Road, overlooking Lighthouse Cove. Much conversation that summer was fueled by this new addition to what was then called Spring Lane. In 1974, the talk of the Point had moved across Spring Lane to Thelma and Carl Niederfringer’s new home and extended green front yard, being described as a Long Island Lawn. In 1977, Paula and Ken Houghton purchased The Seagull Restaurant, and the family moved from Massachusetts to Pemaquid Point. Ken Houghton, who liked to participate in re-enactments, donned his Colonial uniform and shot his musket into the air each time the 2 p.m. boat arrived in front of the Pemaquid Point Lighthouse from Boothbay Harbor. Ken’s musket shot was – for the time of our stay, at least, the frequent focus of Pemaquid Point conversation. Now let’s move a few years ahead, to 1985 and 1986: the subject of the talk about town both summers was the Farmhouse of Pumpkin Cove! Ted Chase had moved this farmhouse from Pumpkin Cove, to a lot next to his own home on Route 130, about a half mile north of the Pemaquid Lighthouse. The Pumpkin Cove Farmhouse is the subject of my talk today. I tell you this story as I have been able to understand it, from very complete written and photographic records made

available to me by the Chases and Bob Kline – the owner of this property, from some research in the Lincoln County Courthouse in Wiscasset, and by conversations with Bob Kline, Cathy and Ted Chase, Edith Hary, Andy Seferlis, Reggie Reilly, and others who had stories to share about this most interesting and ancient home.

All of you have heard of the Curtis Family, I'm sure. Please raise your hand if you are a Curtis descendant. The Curtises were early settlers who owned much, if not all of the land of Pemaquid Point. The oldest homes on this peninsula were built by and for Curtises. Ted Chase's home, Noni Strauss's home, both on Route 130 at Pemaquid Point, were Curtis homesteads. And the Pumpkin Cove Farmhouse, also, was first occupied by a Curtis Family. Albert Curtis, Robert Curtis, and Aldana Curtis are three Curtises whose names I have found on land deeds of Pumpkin Cove, in my limited research on this property thus far. One of the Curtis family cemeteries is bordered by Meadow Lane and Route 130, very near the entrance to Massasoit Drive – just across from the street where I live.

The Pumpkin Cove Farmhouse was built between 1725 and 1750. Let's divide the difference between those years and settle on the date of 1738 as a likely year when the house was built. George Washington was then six years old, and six years would pass before Thomas Jefferson would be born. The best-known story about this house concerns a young woman who, in local folklore, came to be known as "Crazy Nancy." In the early 1800s a diphtheria epidemic struck this part of Maine in the dead of winter. One by one, the Curtis family members of the Pumpkin Cove Homestead died of this dreadful disease. Before the epidemic ended, the entire family had been wiped out, except for a daughter, Nancy. Because winter snow storms had completely isolated the home, the Pumpkin

Cove Farmhouse could not be reached by land. Fishermen in their boats finally caught glimpses of the distraught young woman, waving frantically at the window, pleading for help. By the time a boat could conquer the rocks, waves and ice, to remove the dead bodies, Nancy Curtis had lost her powers of reason – she had become insane. Hers was a restless and tortured spirit, whom fortune had treated sadly, and badly. Persons who study psychic phenomenon tell us that such crazed and distraught spirits find it difficult even at death to go to peace and rest. And they often hover about the physical place of their tragedy and grief. In preparation for moving the Pumpkin Cove Farmhouse, Cathy and Ted Chase spent long hours in the home at Pumpkin Cove. When they returned to their own home, a strong fragrance of wintergreen would permeate their living room. This was a new occurrence, and it always followed a visit to the Pumpkin Cove Farmhouse. Cathy had a music box that did not work. But one day, after her visit to the farmhouse, the music box began to play music. Ted was more hesitant in giving me details of his experiences, but he did say that Nancy Curtis kept him from working on the Pumpkin Cove Farmhouse project for an entire summer.

In August of 1925, two young women who were teachers in Brooklyn, New York, purchased the Pumpkin Cove Farmhouse from Elmer and Cora Martin of Bristol, Maine. The Martins had purchased the property in October, 1921 from Julius and Ellen Tibbetts of Suffolk County, Massachusetts. I gave out of time and luck in going back any further with research on this farmhouse. But let's talk for a minute about the two women who purchased the property in 1925. They were Amy Gilbert and Ethel Grout, teachers who spent their summers at Pumpkin Cove. Amy outlived her friend, Ethel, and Edith Hary remembers Amy well. Miss Amy Gilbert had a beloved pet – a pedigreed dog who was

registered under the name Miss Pumpkin Gilbert of Pumpkin Cove. A young man who is a neighbor of mine on Massasoit Drive, Andy Seferlis, told me that when he was about five years old visiting his grandparents at Pemaquid Point, his grandfather arranged with Miss Gilbert for Andy to swim at Pumpkin Cove. Andy and his grandfather, Major General Clift Andrus, stopped to read a sign placed along the pathway to the Cove. This notice was signed by Amy Gilbert, and it read: “You are free to use the beach and to swim in Pumpkin Cove, but please do not pick the blueberries.” Then Andy said to me, “When we finished our swim in Pumpkin Cove, Miss Gilbert invited us into the little house and offered us a bowl of blueberries.” In 1966, after 41 years of vacationing here, Miss Gilbert sold the property to relatives – Martha Gilbert Sperry and William Sperry of South Byfield, Massachusetts. The Sperrys must have allowed Miss Gilbert to continue in her summer occupancy of the farmhouse, for it was in about 1974 when Andy and his grandfather enjoyed her blueberries. By the early 1980s, the farmhouse property had been sold to Dan Thompson and Reggie Reilly, who in turn sold the land and homestead to Mr. and Mrs. John Brandt. The Brandts hired Mr. Chris Glass, architect of Camden, to design a large elegant home which they wanted to place on the lot in approximately as the same location as the farmhouse. So the Pumpkin Cove Farmhouse needed to be razed or moved. Fortunately, the Brandts had a sense of the importance of history. Knowing that Ted Chase was interested in preserving the farmhouse, the Brandts offered the structure to Ted with the understanding that the farmhouse would as promptly as possible be moved to another location. Ted was delighted with this offer. This was in August, 1984.

The farmhouse is only 17 feet wide, but it had to be cut in half and moved in two sections in order to pass down the narrow road leading from Pumpkin Cove to Route 130.

Only the oldest part of the structure was moved. The summer kitchen and woodshed, an addition to the original home around 1900, was temporarily left standing at Pumpkin Cove. Ted hired Roland Bragg of Nobleboro to help him move the farmhouse. These two men found themselves handling timbers that were all hand-hewn. The boards, some measuring 28 inches in width, were nailed with hand-wrought nails. The woodwork was hand-planed. Moldings were of Queen Anne style, and built-in cupboards were of the Queen Anne period. All of these features were consistent with materials and methods used in construction from 1725 to 1750. So the Pumpkin Cove Farmhouse dates from that period, and is probably the first house built at Pemaquid Point.

In August 1984, Ted Chase made the decision to move the farmhouse to a field that he owned, next to his own home on Route 130 at Pemaquid Point. September, October and November of 1984 were months of preparations and measuring. Ted was assisted by his daughter, Emily, in repeated measuring, then checking again to be sure all data was accurate. In December 1984, Norman Kelsey and Bill Alley took down the two chimneys and fireplaces. Many of the brick survived intact. The exposed openings revealed a framing construction used around 1750, but even as early as 1730. Ted, Emily and Cathy Chase moved hundreds of bricks from the chimneys and fireplaces at Pumpkin Cove and stacked them at the new location for future use. Late one afternoon when they went to move more bricks, as they approached the Pumpkin Cove site, fog surrounded the entire scene and only the roof of the farmhouse was visible. It was as though the roof was floating on a magic cloud of mist.

In December Roland Bragg checked the house for moving, and determined that the ell which had been added to the original farmhouse around 1800, would have to be cut off

from the rest of the structure, but that the roof could remain intact. In January and February of 1985, all measurements were checked again. In March Ted and Emily Chase began clearing a space for the house at the front end of Ted's field. Ted made a trip to the Town Hall in Bristol and purchased a building permit. Immediately Russ Griffin began digging the holes for the foundation. He discovered a ledge about two feet down – just right, to get below the frost line!

March 18th, 1985 was a cold, raw and snowy day. Nevertheless, George Paulin and his crew laid out and poured the footings, and two days later they put in the foundation – 313 yards of concrete which, within a week, was dry and ready for the farmhouse to be moved. On March 30, the ell was separated from the rest of the house, and on April 3rd, the ell was placed on the new foundation. The main section of the house was moved the next day, after roads were plowed to remedy the effects of a snowstorm that came unexpectedly in the night.

On April 6, 1985, the summer-kitchen and woodshed of the farmhouse which had been left at Pumpkin Cove, was burned in a control practice drill by the Samoset Fire Company. The agreement that Ted Chase had made with the new owner, John Brandt, had now been satisfied: The farmhouse was no longer on the property of Pumpkin Cove. Also seemingly satisfied and finally given peace was the spirit of Nancy Curtis. Cathy Chase experienced no further sign of Nancy's presence after the Pumpkin Cove Farmhouse summer-kitchen was destroyed by fire.

By the end of April, back fill around the new foundation had been completed, and the septic tank was in place. By fall the leach field had been completed, and some of the sills and floor timbers had been replaced. In January 1986, corner posts were finished, a half

bath had been added to the hall area, and a new kitchen was taking shape. By February the farmhouse was enclosed and tight, awaiting the coming snows. Ted was happy to find that measurements regarding leveling and straightness were both very satisfying. In March 1986, roof shingles of asphalt were put into place, and a heat engineer came to decide the location for the hot air furnace. In April, Norman Kelsey, who had taken down the two chimneys and fireplaces, came to build them back again. And on a day described in Ted's notes as being "warm and wonderful," Doug Baldwin began digging the well – a job completed in early May. The well goes down 115 feet and provides more than three gallons of water a minute. By the summer of 1986, all the windows had been painted, and all work on the front of the house had been completed. In late fall, Carmen Knipe installed the furnace and plumbing.

The winter of 1986-1987 brought much snow. But Ted and Cathy were fully occupied with detailed work inside, on the kitchen and baths. By the summer of 1987, Cathy was scraping and painting the downstairs and upstairs bedrooms. By July, the property was ready for an open-house tour. In the fall a brick walk was laid and a picket fence was added for privacy and decoration in the front. During the winter of 1988-89, three final jobs were completed: storm windows and doors were added, the corner cupboard in the parlor was stripped to the natural wood and was rubbed down with Danish oil, and the floors were sanded. And guess what! They turned out to be of straight-grained Southern pine which is the reason for their good condition and minor wear, despite more than 250 years of constant use. How Southern pine got to Maine in the 1730s – to quote the King of Siam - "is a puzzlement." In his wonderfully detailed notes, Ted Chase's comment on

the finished farmhouse was this: “Looks darn good, if I may say so!” You can surely say so, Ted. How right you are!

Barbara and Dick Delong moved into the relocated farmhouse in March 1989. Soon a gate was added to the front fence, stairs were built to the rear deck, and the front brick pathway was redesigned.

In November 1993, Bob and Shirley Kline purchased the farmhouse just in time for the seventeen snowstorms that came to Pemaquid Point that winter. In 1995, the Klines had the red barn on the property built, of boards purchased from Harold Dawson of Bremen. The boards were from an old wing house dating from 1836. Gravel topped by stone and concrete pads form the floating foundation for this barn. In 1997 the Klines added a small guest house to the property. Shirley and Bob have been most generous in enabling others to enjoy this historic homestead. Even after Shirley’s death in 2007, Bob has continued to host the Pemaquid Point Association’s August picnic in his Red Barn. If you would like a tour of the Pumpkin Cove Farmhouse, please speak to Bob Kline. He has asked that I give you this invitation.

As for Cathy, Emily and Ted Chase, let me say that we have here a family who worked long and hard to preserve history in our midst. Ted is a skilled artisan in his trade – an artist if you will – who works with talent, insight and imagination. Without Ted Chase this beautiful old homestead would long ago have been ashes on the ground at Pumpkin Cove. The Chases saved the house and a piece of history – a piece of Pemaquid Point’s past. And in so doing, they gifted us with a delightful piece of our present, also.

This summer I have been reading the biography and some of the writings of the Mississippi author, Eudora Welty. She says that as human beings our most prized

possession is our memory. When he was a boy and young man, Ted Chase heard stories about the Pumpkin Cove Farmhouse from Carol Osier, an old fisherman from Back Cove, New Harbor, who lived to be 90 years old. Ted's memory held onto a life-long fascination with the Pumpkin Cove Farmhouse. Eudora Welty describes memory "as that most wonderful interior vision." In our memory, all our life experiences converge, bringing together in meaning for us our youth and our old age, the distant and the near, the living and the dead, the past and the present, the beginning and the end, the old and the new.

Hearing about people like Cathy, Emily and Ted Chase, the Brandts and Shirley and Bob Kline, who cared so deeply about preserving the past, and knowing a little about a few of the persons who lived in this old homestead, we can add a new page to our life experience and to our memory. Whatever its message to us – whether it is a new chapter, a new page, a paragraph or just a footnote – we surely are enriched to some degree by what we have come to know about the Farmhouse of Pumpkin Cove.

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Anne D. Lewis
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