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Charlie York
Maine Coast Fisherman

by Harold B. Clifford

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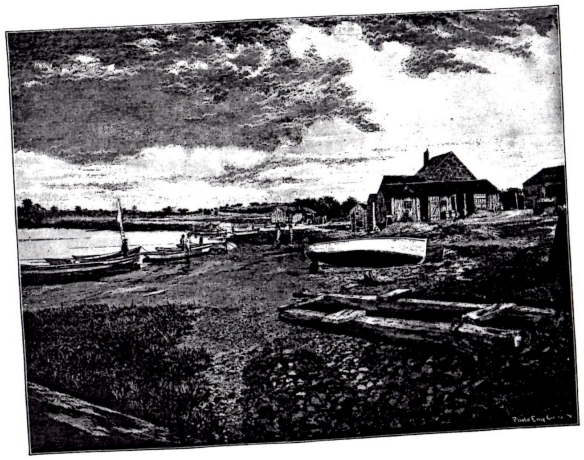


1

My Boyhood In Harpswell

I was born in a fisherman's home at Bailey Island in Harpswell on December 7, 1887. My mother was the daughter of Charles Burnham of Back Narrows, on the Damariscotta River in Boothbay. My Grandfather Burnham was a wonderful old man. He made his home with us and he's one of the first people I can remember; always wore a patch over one eye. He was born at Back Narrows and lived there till his children growed up and his wife died. He was an old salt fisherman, and for years and years he went on the bankers that loaded their tons of salt and sailed off to the Grand Banks of Newfoundland. If the weather was good, two men would take a dory, row away from the vessel, anchor, and handline all day. If it was blowy and rough, they fished over the side of the schooner. The catch from each dory was counted when pitched aboard and a total was kep' for the trip; it was a great honor to be high line. Every man's share in the voyage was in proportion to the number of fish he caught. For that reason, if dorymen was landin' mostly big cod, they'd sometimes shift their berth lookin' for smaller fish; they'd count just as much and come up easier. If the skipper found he was on grounds where worthless haddock or halibut was comin' in, he'd move off some distance and try again for cod. It might take six weeks, two months, or more before they'd wet all their salt and start for home.

One winter day in his middle years, Grandfather Burnham was goin' to the woodlot with his boys to cut the next year's fuel. One of his sons was just ahead of him, pushin' his way through a thick growth of spruce. A branch flew back, took grandfather in

the eye, and put it out. They drove him to East Boothbay where he had to wait a whole day before the steamer *Enterprise* left for Portland and the hospital.

I've heard him tell many times of what was perhaps the first wholesale shipment of Maine lobsters to the Boston market. A smackman sailed up the Damariscotta to Back Narrows one August, maybe in the 1870s, and made the fishermen an offer: three cents apiece for lobsters weighin' three pounds and over, anything under that size two for three cents. Two crews of two men each took up the offer; Grandfather Burnham was in charge of one pair. It was before the days of traps and they used a hoop-net. They took the iron tire from a wheel and fastened a net around the rim that was five feet deep, with a rope to the surface.

Each crew had five of these hoopnets. They'd bait 'em with dead fish, lower one to the bottom, move off, set another, and start haulin' after an hour's wait. It tells something of the lobster supply in them times when four men filled that smack in two days. The buyer refused one lobster because it was too big; grandfather said it weighed about forty pound. They put a wash boiler on the stove to cook it in, but they couldn't force the critter into it till they had broke off both claws.

One time Grandfather Burnham had a brush weir along the shore. He druv spruce poles into the mud and laced boughs between 'em to make a leader and a main trap. It worked almost as well as the later weirs with nets. He had a smokehouse where he smoked alewives and sold 'em. He put up a good many barrels of salted alewives and shocked clams, which went for bait.

At Bailey Island he was a very helpful member of our family; it meant a lot to mother to have him there, with father away fishin' so much. He always had a nice garden, got up the year's supply of firewood, and milked the cow. I remember how bad we felt when he died. The years on his tombstone is 1831 to 1923.

Several of my Burnham uncles was captains or mates on the pogie steamers for years, seinin' fish and bringin' 'em to the pogie factories here on Linekin Bay and to the many other places along the coast where they was cooked for their oil. It was a big business for years and then all of a sudden the pogies stopped comin'

to our waters; the factories closed and then fell down, or was took down, or burned.

My Grandfather Robert Merrill York lived much of his life on Long Island in Casco Bay. I once copied the dates on his tombstone, 1820 to 1901. As a young feller he went handlinin' and trawlin' in the small vessels of the day to the offshore fishin' grounds. All his cod, hake, and pollock was salted. It was before the time of purse seines and they jigged for mackerel with a line and a jig, and salted 'em by the barrel.

While my father Charles Nelson York and my uncle Lendall York was still young fishermen, they bought together thirty-two acres of land on the north end of Bailey Island and each built a house for his family. Soon after, Uncle Len quit fishin' and purchased a large tract of land in the center of the island, takin' in part of what was known as Lowell's Cove. He built a store on the ridge with a home upstairs, and big sheds for coal and wood at the cove where the Harpswell Steambo't Company had a wharf that come to be knowed as York's Landin'.

My Grandfather York give up goin' to sea and moved into Len's house. He finished his life as a small farmer. He kep' cows and killed a beef critter every fall, had pigs and cured his own pork and bacon, and he supplied the neighborhood with milk and eggs. Grandfather had a big barn but he didn't want his hens runnin' all over his property and his neighbors'. He built a henhouse near the shore, down over a steep bank, and he let 'em run free in summer time. Today's eggs don't taste like them I got as a boy. Nowadays the owner gives his hens synthetic feed. He turns on the lights and works 'em eighteen hours a day. When they don't lay their daily egg, he kills 'em. You won't see a rooster in a flock. They can't produce the same eggs I used to git when they was free to roam, pickin' up grasshoppers in the fields and sand fleas on the beach, with a helpin' of table orts after every meal, and a rooster proudly struttin' among the biddies.

His death at the age of eighty-one come from pneumonia that he caught by goin' out in a wet snowstorm to feed the hens and pick up the eggs. My Grandmother Margaret outlived him a few years, spendin' her winters with her sons on Bailey Island and the sum-

mers at Orr's with her married daughters. When she died, the funeral was at my aunt's and then we took the casket to the wharf and put it aboard the steamer for York's Landin' on Bailey's. She was buried in the cemetery there. Her sons and daughters gathered in Uncle Len's store, that was closed for the afternoon. Len was to pay all bills and he reported he had done so, and they was eighteen dollars left.

"What shall we do with it?" he asked.

"Give it to Mame," said my father, "she took care of mother durin' her last sickness." Which they done. Things was simple in them days; the York estate was settled as easy as that.

I've heard tell of Grandpa York's only toothache. My grandmother had the toothache often and grandpa always told her not to take on so, it would let up by and by if she would poultice it, and it did. Grandpa got up at his usual four-thirty one morning in his sixties and come down with a terrible toothache right after breakfast. He took on something awful, just couldn't bear it, in spite of all the comfort grandma offered, hot poultice and everything. He had a little square-ended punt and after half an hour of sufferin', he pushed her out and rowed across the sound to Harpswell Center where the doctor lived. He rousted out the sleepy physician, who seated him in a kitchen chair, took the pliers from his bag, sot out a bucket with some ashes to spit in, and asked which tooth. Grandpa told him and the doc took hold, twisted, pulled, and yanked, and hauled it out.

"I'm suspicious of this one," said Grandpa, and he pointed to a tooth on the other side of his jaw.

"Seems all right to me," said the doctor, takin' a look. "Does it ache?"

"No," said Grandpa, "but it might. Better haul it." Which the doc done. Grandpa give him fifty cents apiece. When he died, them was the only two teeth missin'.

To know what Bailey's and Orr's was like in them days you'd have to take away the bridge and the black road and remove the telephone and electric light poles. You'd see stone walls here and there, to mark the boundaries and hold in a few sheep and a cow. In July my Grandfather Burnham might be swingin' a scythe and

after the grass dried, two men would pile a haycock onto a couple of poles and carry it to the barn.

Across to Orr's, Prince's store sot where it does now, but with twice as much stuff in it: lines, ropes, hooks, leads, corks, anchors, oilskins, barrels of salt pork, flour, and sugar, with one of each open, so you could buy half a pound or a dozen pounds or a barrel; two grades of molasses with a faucet on tap in each and when they was empty, the sugar in the bottom was better than any candy you ever et. If it was Saturday forenoon, Prince's grocery wagon, with some young feller at the reins, would be startin' out to take orders in the neighborhood; he'd deliver later in time for dinner. Cordwood was piled on the bank where it had come off the scow. A big shed on the wharf held tons of coal and another was full of butts with salt fish soakin' in the brine. In season they was half an acre of fish flakes and slack-salted pollock dryin' in the sun.

I wish I could make you see Casco Bay, from Cape Elizabeth to Small Point, with its 365 islands and hundreds of half-tide ledges, like it was sixty years ago. They was three fishin' schooners from Cundy's Harbor on Great Island, two from Lowell's Cove on Orr's, three from Water Cove on the north end of Bailey's, and several from Mackerel Cove on the southern end, one from South Harpswell, and two from Chebeague. They all worked under sail with no auxiliary power, and the skippers depended on the imperfect charts of the day and their soundin' leads. After the island fleet had sold their catch in Portland, Gloucester, or Boston, one by one they made their way no'theast to their permanent moorin's in their home harbors. Time and again you could find as many as a score of fishin' vessels with a dozen nested dories on deck, anchored or layin' to their moorin's in cove or harbor. From the hill on Bailey's you might see the smoke of half a dozen steambo'ts at once, and some rich man's schooner yacht makin' for Bar Harbor, or even a steam yacht.

Schooners, and even Friendship sloops, when in need of work, was sailed to a marine railway at Portland or Boothbay, to be hauled out. But the local fisherman, with some help from his neighbors, tended to his own smaller Hampton bo't. If all he plan-

ned to do was scrape and paint, he might pull her ashore at high tide beside a wharf, where a rope would hold her upright. He could fix up the bow half between tides over a period of two, three days. Then he'd bring her in stern first and go to work on that end. Copper paint can go on a moist surface all right, and it don't do no harm if it's wet soon after, but the owner would plan to do his paintin' on a dry day.

Sometimes a group of neighbors would pull the bo't out on the bank; I've helped and been helped many times. We'd lay a pair of plank down into the water, three feet apart, to make a smooth path for five-foot rollers. We'd plant a crowbar on the bank and rig a block and tayckle to it. We'd bring the bo't in on a high tide and git her onto rollers when she grounded out. We'd make the tayckle fast to her and with men to hold her upright, a bunch of us would man the rope and roust her up the slope while others fed the rollers under her keel and moved a pair of planks ahead. Any good carpenter on Bailey's in them days could replace a broken or rotten piece of plankin' and we was all painters.

When I was a kid, everything and everybody come to Bailey's by water. Before the bridge was built, my Grandfather Burnham used to set people across the narrow channel to Orr's in his dory, ten cents a person, three or four for a quarter, or bring 'em on when he heard 'em shoutin' for the ferry.

The Harpswell Steambo't Company run year-round service to Portland. The steamer would leave Orr's Island at 7:00, put into York's Landin' on Bailey's, then across to South Harpswell and on to Cliff Island, Chebeague, Long, Peaks, and dock at Custom House Wharf about 10:30. She left on the return trip with passengers, mail, express, and freight at 2:00. We young ones knowed the names of every bo't and we could tell which was which as fur as we could see 'em, or hear the whistle: *Merriconeag, Sebascodegan, Aucocisco, Machigonne*. Indian names, probly.

The most excitin' time of day was when we'd hear the steambo't blow about 4:00 P.M. All the local people that could spare the time went to the wharf and, as it was summertime, the rusticators flocked down. The steamer's side would be lined with men, women, and children as she come near, and the cap'n would bring

her in at a smart clip. Then he'd give the engineer two bells and the jingler and fetch her right on a dime. I can see the mate now, standin' with the forrard spring line, and how easy he'd flip that hawser over the pilin' just right as the bow come by the dock. He'd hold a strain and she'd come against the wharf with hardly a jar; then he'd snub her tight.

The gangplank would drop for the passengers to go ashore. Everett Sinnett, he was postmaster for fifty years, would be there for his bags of mail. Deckhands would roll out barrels of sugar and flour, crates of groceries, maybe a bunch of bananas, and other fresh fruits. Then the skipper would give the whistle a toot, they'd haul in the gangplank, and she'd git under way for Orr's Island.

Cap'n Henry Sinnett had wagons for the passengers. Lish Leeman had a pair of horses and a cart to take the freight, trunks, and heavy baggage. Come the end of August, he dreaded to handle them trunks again; they was usually half full of smooth, round rocks from Pebbly Beach. A lot of us follered the mail to the store and waited for it to be sorted. In them days all first class mail had to be backstamped. We could hear Mr. Sinnett go kerthump, kerthump; sometimes he'd stop and we figgered he was readin' a postcard. Friends would be talkin' with friends. Kids would be skylarkin' around. If they was a girl you wanted to see, she was sure to be there. When the mail was out, everyone went home.

Whenever they was something special goin' on in Portland, the steambo't company would run an excursion, with reduced rates. The one I remember best was in the late spring of 1899, when the first automobile come to Portland. They put the fare for grown-ups from fifty cents down to forty cents and kids up to twelve could go for twenty cents. A lot of people went from Bailey's and more from South Harpswell and the islands. We landed at Custom House Wharf and I had to foller mother around while she shopped, and then we had dinner in a restaurant.

The big show was to begin at 1:00 P.M. All the side streets was roped off from Monument Square to the Lafayette Hotel, the trolleys stopped runnin', and no wagons nor carriages was allowed. The sidewalks was lined with people and they was policemen everywhere. I dragged mother down to the Square where it was

goin' to start and got a good place. The automobile looked like any buggy, except it didn't have no sharves. They was a dashboard, but no top, and a kerosene lantern each side. The tires was hard rubber. They told us the motor was under the seat.

A man was sittin' in the automobile, stiff and important, with a dust co't on, leather gloves, and goggles. It seemed like the time would never come but at last he climbed out, stepped to the rear, and cranked her round and round. In a minute we heard a slow putt-putt-putt. He got back in his seat, put her in gear, sot his hand on the tiller, and begun to move slowly up Congress Street. She went faster and the motor sounded bang-bang-bang; must of had just one cylinder. I got away from my mother's hand and follered the auto up the street with a crowd of other boys. We was keepin' up with her all right till policemen druv us back onto the sidewalk, where the crowd bothered us. Back home, it was the main topic of conversation for weeks; not many thought she would ever be practical.

They was lots of tourists by 1900, only we called 'em rusticators. They'd been comin' to Harpswell long before my time. In them days they brought their trunks and stayed a month or all summer. Just on Bailey's they was Robinhood Inn, The Homestead, The Johnson House, Ocean View, and The Woodbine. They'd take care of twenty to sixty people each. Cottages was goin' up here and there; a thousand or fifteen hundred dollars would build a nice little summer place. Some years later the summer business got so heavy that a steamer run daily excursions to the Harpswell area, with a shore dinner at one of the hotels.

Heavy stuff like lumber, brick and cement, coal and cordwood, come on scows towed by small tugbo'ts. For fuel at our house we burned the spruce that growed on the island for our summer cookin'; but it's soft wood and don't hold the heat. As a boy, one of my jobs was to pick up driftwood and take it home in a wheelbarrer. But our good, dry hardwood, the maple, beech, and yaller birch, come by scow. Them that has never burned anything but oil don't know what they've missed!

It was cheaper in them days to send heavy seacoast freight by water. Outside Half-Way Rock you might see coasters with barrels

of lime from Thomaston, granite or pavin' stone from Vinalhaven, ice from the Kennebec, lumber and laths or Aroostook potatoes from Bangor, Stark and Baldwin apples from saltwater farms, cordwood from little villages along the shore. It was a pretty sight after a storm, when the schooners had been layin' up in some safe harbor. After the weather cleared, they'd git up sail and take off together. I've seen thirty or forty of them vessels within an area of a square mile, white sails spread to the wind, standin' out across Casco Bay.

Our ro'd wa'n't much, just a three-way track along the middle of the island, two for the wheels and one between, where the horse walked. Some places it went over bare ledges, and then through mudholes after a rain. I can faintly remember a big snowstorm and everyone turnin' out with shovels to clear the ro'd. They didn't need no orders from a town manager. One neighbor had a pair of oxen and he yoked 'em to a wedge of oak planks, with a crossbar to support 'em. The men stood on the cross-plank to hold the plow into the snow; when they come to a big drift, the men went ahead and shoveled till the oxen could get through.

When I was a kid, they wa'n't no fellers my age at the upper end of the island and my special pal was Lula Doughty. She seemed almost as good as a boy to me. When the daisies and buttercups was in bloom we used to pick wild strawberries by the pailful on the west side of Bailey's. Our mothers would help us hull 'em and the rusticators bought 'em for twenty-five cents a quart. In August blueberries was ripe, and me and Lu found 'em in the fields where the juniper grew; we got ten cents a quart for 'em. They was raspberries and blackberries for home preserves.

Me and Lu had a regular partnership in the clam business from early spring till it got too cold in December. We went clammin' in vacation time, holidays, weekends, and sometimes after school if the tide served right. We dug the flats near home; if the weather was good, we rowed across the Sound to Stover's Cove. The diggin' was wonderful. Many a time us two youngsters dug three bushels on a low dreen tide. I remember how heavy they was to sack; we took 'em home in a wheelbarrer, or dragged 'em on a sled if they was snow on the ground. Our mothers and anybody

else that had the time would help us shock 'em. In summer, the rusticators paid us twenty-five cents a quart, blacks removed. At other times, dealers give us fifty cents a bucket for clams or mussels for bait; the mussels was used fresh but the clams was salted by the barrel. Canners paid twenty-five cents a bushel in the shell. We split our money half and half. Years later, Lu married Elbro Cushing, a Cliff Islander, raised a nice family, and had a good life. She died a few years ago.

Clams is a different matter today. Last lot I see in the fish market was three dollars and fifty cents a peck, and try and dig some yourself! You can't find none, and most towns has a law that only residents can dig. Eel grass used to grow all along the mudflats and the sandy shores. The clams would spawn in the summer months and the eel grass would hold and protect them. Then something hit the eel grass and killed it off. Clams got scarcer and scarcer. Some of the brain men claims that the green crabs has moved east along our coast with these warmer winters, and they eat a lot of small clams. Maybe so. Flounders eat little clams and seagulls prey upon 'em. In the old days we had to wait till the tide was half out before we could find any to dig. Right on my waterfront today you can see little clams by the time the tide is an hour and a half out, provin' the spawn was carried too far up the beach; they never reach no size. But the eel grass is comin' back now all along the shores, and in my opinion you're goin' to see clams increase again.

They's nothing I remember better than clambakes on Cedar Island. At half tide you can walk across to it, and they's a pool there that stays about two feet deep after the tide has dropped. It was a favorite place for lobsters to stay durin' July and August, waitin' for their new shell to git hard.

We young ones always went barefoot, but for the job of huntin' lobsters we put boots on. If you see a furrow under the side of a rock, it meant a lobster had dug in, to be safe while his shell was soft. We would flip the rock over and then grab for the lobster; we didn't take no chances with the claws of the big ones, but they would be plenty that was small. What yellin' and splashin' as the lobsters backed away, tryin' to escape, and us kids after 'em. With

a driftwood stick we could easy dig enough clams to go with 'em.

They was an old iron kettle on the bank and somebody had rocked up a small fireplace. Storms had piled plenty of wood above high-tide mark for our fire. We'd put a quart or two of sea water in the kettle and heat it, then in would go the lobsters, follered by the clams, and seaweed on top. We didn't need no melted butter nor other fixin's to make 'em perfect. They was seagulls all around, waitin' for whatever we might leave, herons stalkin' the flats on their long legs, fish hawks treadin' the air over a likely spot, and sandpeeps skitterin' here and there along the shore. Before the tide covered the walkway, we was back safe on the main island.

In my youth eels was considered a very choice dish and my Grandfather Burnham was fond of 'em. I went eelin' with him more than sixty years ago. He always had time and patience to teach me things. He showed me where eels was most likely to be found, how to stick 'em, and how to git 'em into the bo't before they squirmed off the spear. Come November, eels go into the mud and lay there till spring. Saturdays and Sundays, with the tide more than half out, grandfather would take me out in the dory and row away to some muddy bottom four to six feet deep at low tide, where the eelgrass growed. I was just a little shaver, but I could pick up the oars, about as big as I could handle, and move the bo't forrard or back as he told me, while he punched for eels. When he begun to find some, we'd put our rock anchor overboard and let the dory swing in an arc while he'd spear the eels and bring 'em up.

I liked it. Many a time I teased my grandfather into goin' when he didn't have no idea of it. I asked my father time after time to let me take his big eel spear, but he said not till I come ten years old, and then he would only let me have it when I was with grandfather.

I'll never fergit a November day the fall I was comin' on eleven, must of been 1898. It was a Saturday, one of them days you git in the late fall, sky covered with soft gray clouds, not a breath of wind, a wet chill in the air. Gulls was turnin' over little rocks, grabbin' clams by the neck, flyin' up, and droppin' 'em to break

the shells so they could git at the meat. Now and then a crow, too lazy to fly south, was huntin' seaworms along the flats. I had the little square-sterned punt that had belonged to my Grandfather York. I asked Granpa Burnham to go eelin' with me, and he said he couldn't, so I told him I thought I'd go alone. He made me ask my mother and she put up quite a fuss because I'd have to stand up in the punt, but I told her how shallow it would be and at last she give in.

The punt was high up on the bank, out of reach of the tide. Garrison Cove, where we lived, is shallow, and I had a hard drag of most a hundred feet across sand and gravel. When I got her afloat and stood up, pushin' her along, with my father's spear at hand, I was a proud kid and I hoped people was watchin' from the shore. The tide was maybe two thirds out. Near the mouth of the cove some eelgrass was growin' in the mud. I'd never seen anybody spearin' eels there but I thought I'd try. The punt drifted along very slow and after three or four spears I hauled up a nice eel. On the next punch I got two at once, and I put over the rock that was tied to my painter.

I poked and poked with my spear and when I felt an eel on it, I would roust him in as quick as I could; I lost some, of course, I got so excited and worked so hard and fast that once in awhile I'd have to sit down and rest. I'd started about two hours before low water and I never quit till two hours after the turn. Dinnertime had gone by but I didn't care. When I did head for shore, they was eels all over the bottom of the punt, ankle deep, squirmin' around my boots and up my legs. I'd brought a crocus bag to take my eels home in, but they was too many. I carried my rock and the painter high up onto the bank, picked up father's spear, and set out for the house.

Grandfather was settin' in the kitchen mendin' a net and mother was puttin' yeast bread to rise.

"How'd you do, Charlie?" asked Grandpa. I went to the stove and got some hot water to wash in.

"I got a puntful," I answered.

Mother spoke up quick and sharp. "Don't you lie to your grandfather, Charlie!" He looked up at me and grinned.

"Where be they?" he asked.

"In the punt," I said, "they was too many to lug."

I et some dinner and then me and grandfather put one of mother's wooden washtubs on the wheelbarrer and went to the shore. We come back with the tub full; he figgered about 100 pounds, maybe 200 eels. We dressed eels till suppertime at 4:30, takin' out their insides, skinnin' 'em, and cuttin' off their heads. After supper grandpa took his pail and went to milk the cow. I lugged in my usual four pails of water from the well, a hod of coal for the livin' room, and another for the kitchen stove. I carried out the orts from the table and some corn to the hens, and picked up the eggs. Then we went at them eels agin and finished late in the evenin'.

"Here's more eels than we know what to do with," said my grandfather. "Why'n't you go to Clary's store in the morning, ask to use his scales, make up five-pound packages and see if you can sell 'em?" Which I done. Sunday mornin' I carried a nice mess to Mr. Clary and he helped me tie the eels into five-pound lots. I peddled 'em from house to house at twenty-five cents each and took in between two and three dollars; it seemed like a wonderful lot of money to me.

When I moved to Boothbay Harbor a long time afterwards, I brought the spear. For years I got all the eels I wanted in West Harbor. Then come that time when the eel grass all died and the cunners, flounders, salmon, and eels almost disappeared; they've now begun to come back. Eelin' was once quite a business. In my boyhood eight out of ten families in Casco Bay loved eels, baked or fried. This generation don't hardly know what eels taste like. If you ever see any in the Boston market, you can be pretty sure they've come from Canada.

In them days every boy wanted his own bo't, just like today every high school boy wants a car. I kep' after my father all the time and the spring I was comin' on twelve years old, he give in. He agreed to pay for half of the bo't if I would pay for the other half; father had ideas about bringin' up kids and one was that they needed to learn the value of money.

In March we took our dory and rowed over to Orr's Island to see

Herbert Wilson who was a bo't builder. My father explained that we wanted a fifteen-foot sailin' peapod, double-ender some folks call 'em, with centerboard, outboard rudder, small mast, regular rowlocks, and them raised oarlocks so a man can stand up and push. I got a lesson in dickerin'. Mr. Wilson admitted he wa'n't pressed for work just then, and thought he could do the job for twenty-five dollars. Such a bo't would cost two hundred and fifty dollars today. But father wouldn't agree. Mr. Wilson hung on and the price was finally set at twenty-two dollars and fifty cents.

Grandfather Burnham helped me make some lobster traps and mother knit the potheads; I had twenty-five all ready when school closed. The day the bo't was delivered I thought I was made. I don't believe a boy today can love a car the way I loved that peapod. She was painted green, with red copper bottom. She rowed easy. Father let me have a small spritsail, and when I dropped the centerboard, she would beat to wind'ard like a regular vessel. All them peapods is good in a seaway.

My grandfather made me a flounder spear and at low tide I'd drift over shallow bottom and spear flounders and sculpins to use for lobster bait. When the tide didn't serve, I put a line over the side and caught cunners and harbor pollock. I run my gang of traps just like a man would, hauled 'em every day, throwed out the shorts unless we needed a mess at home, kept the counters, re-baited the trap, and sot it out agin. In them days legal-size lobsters had to measure ten and a half inches or more from nose to tip of tail. They wa'n't sold by the pound; every hard-shelled lobster brought ten cents no matter what he weighed and a shedder was worth only seven cents.

Father was away fishin' and at the end of the summer we settled up. I paid him for my half of the peapod and handed over the rest of my money for him to put in the bank, but he placed the whole twenty-two dollars and fifty cents in my name and started a savin's account. I kep' addin' to it and when I was twenty-two, got married, and built my own house, I had in the bank every cent I needed to pay for it with. People was savin' in them days.

When I grew older I played on the ball team. Summer boys joined with us and our Bailey Island team played Orr's Island and

others; if we had time and good weather they might be two games a week. Us young fellers used to box a lot; I owned a pair of gloves from the time I was sixteen. Charles Morrill at Orr's Island give boxin' lessons, twenty-five cents, every Tuesday night all winter; I took it serious and lost some teeth. We would rassle, and someone was always takin' hold of somebody else for a scuffle, to see which could put the other on his back. I never learned how to swim. Funny thing, hardly a fisherman knowed how.

Every fall a bunch of us young folks would go to Topsham Fair. We'd row across to Orr's Island where a farmer would be waitin' for us. He had a hayrack with plenty of straw to sit on and a pair of fast walkin' horses. They was a bridge from Orr's to Great Island and another to the mainland. It took three hours to fetch the fairgrounds up beyond Brunswick with the side shows, pullin' contests, horse racin', and things to eat. It was long after dark when fellers and girls got into dories and rowed back to Bailey's. Come Thanksgivin', the small ponds was always froze and we went skatin' and played hockey. We'd go coastin' down the hills on moonlight nights in winter.

Father didn't want me to be a fisherman; it's a hard life and a dangerous one. He hoped me and my brother Leo that was seven years younger would have it easier, as if an easy life ever made a man of anybody. He wanted me to git an education, but I never liked school. My birthday come so that I couldn't start school till I was 'most seven. When I begun we had thirty-five or forty scholars in our little schoolhouse, all ages up to sixteen. The boys sot on the right and the girls on the left. The room was het by a big pot-bellied stove that burned coal. In them days the sixth grade was the highest on the island. In the summer of 1902 they riz up the roof and put a second story on top of the first. After that we had two teachers and kids could go through the eighth grade. I did good in arithmetic. I worked hard at it and I led my class, but I never tried in the other subjecks and I can't spell today.

It happened the winter after I was fifteen. We had a young teacher named Ephraim Harrington, mighty nice kind of feller. When he couldn't find no boardin' place on the island anywhere,

he came to our house. Mother took him for two, three days and when we liked him and he liked us, and still no place opened up, she said at last that she'd board him if him and me slept together. That was all right with us, for we was friends already. Eph was heavier than me but not quite so tall and not so muscled up. We would rassle and he would throw me maybe three times out of five.

There come a snowstorm one day in March and at the afternoon recess none of us went outdoors. We drew pitchers on the painted wooden blackboards. When Eph rung the bell, the scholars took their seats. I was the biggest boy and I picked up an eraser in each hand and started cleanin' the blackboards.

"Charles!" said the teacher in a rough voice, "take your seat!" It ruffled me.

"In a minute," I said.

He grabbed me by the collar and give me a yank. I don't know why I done it but I got him just right by his wrist and flipped him over my shoulder flat onto his back in front of me. At that instant, of all times, the door opened and in walked the super'tendent. He caught on quick to what had happened.

"Git your things and go!" he shouted. "And don't come back!" I went.

My Uncle Lendall York's store was nearby. They was no one else there when I stepped in.

"I'm goin' fishin'," I said. "Will you trust me for my gear?"

"I thought you was goin' to school," he said.

"Not any more," I answered. "Can I git my things from you? I'll pay you just as fast as I make the money. I've got my peapod."

"Sure I'll fit you out, Charlie," he said, "and I sha'n't worry about the money. What do you need?"

"You know better'n I do," I answered. He made a list: the makin's for four tubs of trawl, warps, buoy kegs, leather boots, oilskins.

I hung round till school was out and then I went back in. Eph stuck out his hand. "No hard feelin's," he said. "You come tomorrer just the same." I shook my head.

"I'm all done," I said. We went home together.

On our porch was my fishin' gear; Uncle Len had sent the stuff right off. And inside was my father; his vessel had come in durin' the storm that afternoon. Father never said nothing till after supper was done. Then he looked at me very stern and asked, "What's the meanin' of that stuff on the porch?"

"I'm goin' fishin'," I answered.

"Your school?" he asked.

"I'm all done," I said. His mouth set hard.

"I'll give you all the fishin' you want," he said. "I'll bring you a dory from Portland when I come back on my next trip. You be ready!"

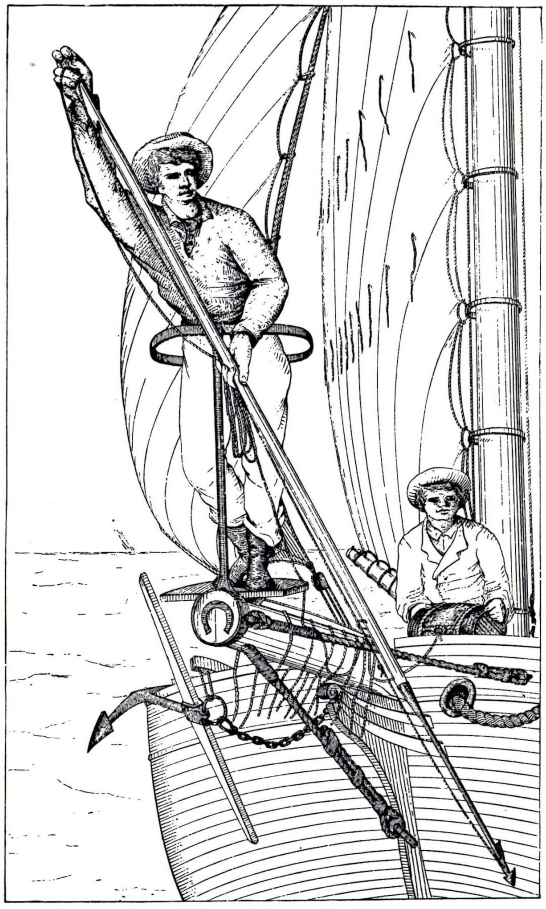
The next week was a busy one. Grandfather Burnham helped me make up my trawls and mother got my clothes fixed up. We left Water Cove for the Sou'Sou'West Grounds off Monhegan in the *Eva and Mildred* with a crew of ten fishermen and a cook; father was the skipper. Lucky for me we had as good March fishin' weather as ever I see, good glass, steady sou'west air, no freezin' spray; but that first trip was as hard a one as I ever put in.

Father made it just as tough for me as he could and I was called on to do everything the older men did. We had breakfast before daylight, was put off in our dories at sunrise to set trawl, was picked up for dinner, and then dropped off to haul. Two or three mile of trawl with a good catch of fish on it comes in hard for a fifteen-year-old boy. Each man was back on board with his catch by the middle of the afternoon, had supper, and then dressed out the fish. When that was done, we baited trawl for the next day. A fast man can bait a tub in an hour; I wa'n't that good and it took me an hour and a half. The first night it was two o'clock when I tumbled into my bunk and I was up again before daylight. I was more than half seasick the first two days.

The second night I had to take my turn standin' watch. When my turn come on the fourth night I was all in. The crew was my friends and they double-crossed father. One of 'em whispered to me, "You stay in bed and we'll divide your watch." Which they done and I slep' right through.

With a full fare we made a twenty-four-hour run to T Wharf in Boston, sold our catch, and shared twenty-seven dollars and ten

cents apiece. That was big money in them times for four days of fishin'. When everything was shipshape on board, the men invited me to go uptown with 'em to a beer parlor. With money in my pocket and a bunch of friends, I never felt bigger in my life, and I was all set for the next trip.



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Swordfishing

At the time I started man-size fishin', father was goin' after swordfish every summer — June, July, and August. I went with him the next seven seasons till I got married.

The *Eva and Mildred* was one of a fleet of seventeen swordfishermen from Casco Bay. She was a two-masted schooner, sixty-eight feet long, twenty-two feet beam. S. J. Prince, the storekeeper on Orr's Island, owned half of her; the rest of her was split up, an eighth here, a sixteenth there, among a number of island people. Father was skipper.

Come the first of May, we stowed away our trawls and fishin' gear and put all our dories but four ashore. For winter fishin' we had taken down both topmasts; a vessel rides easier without 'em in heavy weather. Now we put 'em back with the necessary stays and we rove in the forestays'l, the main stays'l, the gaff tops'l, and the balloon jib from the tip of the bowsprit to the fore topmast.

For swordfishin' we put three seats on the foremast. One was right at the top of the mast; two to four men could occupy it. Another was fixed halfway up the topmast; you could seat one man on each side of it. The third was at the very tip of the topmast; it's the only place you can see good when all the sails is drawin'. Next we put the pulpit on the end of the bowsprit and stayed it off. It has to be steady, so the harpooner can git good footin' for his heave. We hauled the vessel out on a marine railway in Portland, cleaned her bottom and put fresh paint on. We was all set to start the first of June.

Fishermen eat real good. Our cook was Steve Latham. He

would ask father how long a trip to count on; if father said 21 days, Steve made his plans for 21 days. He placed his order with Prince's store: a side of beef, pork ribs, ham, bacon, sausages, potatoes, onions and other vegetables, canned milk, a barrel of flour, a hundredweight of sugar, coal for the stove. Steve laid out a seven-day rotation; whatever we had the first Monday, we had every Monday. On Friday it was fresh fish. Steve made raised bread, hot biscuits, fresh doughnuts, molasses, and sugar cookies regular. You could have cold meat. On the fishin' grounds we had breakfast at 5:00, dinner at 10:30, supper at 3:30. Tea and coffee was always hot, day or night; when a man come in from his watch he could help himself to anything. But the cook was a snug planner; if we was out a twenty-second day, we fared slim.

They was a big tank under the foc'sle floor that extended into the forehold; we filled it with Sebago Lake water. Whenever we was in Portland, we signalled for the waterbo't. She'd draw alongside and pump us what we needed for her tank; might be two dollars worth. If we ever showed signs of runnin' short at sea, we'd chop some ice and put it in the tank to melt.

When everything was ready, our meat and groceries come in fresh to Prince's Wharf on the four o'clock steamer the night before we left, and we loaded 'em right aboard. We was off at daybreak and up the New Meadows River to Dingleys Island where we took on our ice, maybe twenty-five tons. It cost us $1.25 per ton as against $2.25 in Boston; father was careful of them things.

Swordfish can be expected to show up at Block Island the last of May and they'll work to the east. On Georges Bank we'd git our first ones genrally between June first and tenth. Later they'll be off the Nova Scotia coast and on the outer bank. They all disappear as soon as the water starts to git cold in the fall.

We sot our course sou'sowtheast for Georges Bank. The northern end of Georges is about 200 miles from Seguin Light at the mouth of the Kennebec. Six knots was good sailin', eight knots was excellent; under perfect conditions we could make ten. Dependin' on the weather, it might take us two, three days. With a fair wind it was a simple matter to hit the bank. If we met a head wind and had to tack, father would use dead reckonin' and estimate where we was after we had run out our time. We'd heave the lead and if they was no bottom, he knowed we wa'n't on the bank. If it showed 85 fathom or less, we was on the bank and he had a genral idea of what section might be that deep. We sailed across Georges to fish on what they call the southeast curve of the bank, from 70 to 110 fathom deep, wherever we found the swordfish.

Every crew member had to furnish his own clothin', boots and oilskins, two watertight half-barrels, two hundred-fathom lines, and two darts. If he supplied his own dory, he got one dollar a trip for her because of the danger of a fish stavin' it up. The captain furnished the harpoon poles and irons and a number of darts. The pole is maybe twenty feet long, of light, strong, hardwood, and it's shod with a three-foot iron pike. A bronze dart, four or five inches long, with a stout cord to it, fits into the end of the pike. The harpoon is driven into the fish and sometimes it goes clear through him. The pole is made fast to the pulpit by a rope and as the fish jumps away, it comes free from him, but the dart stays in. The pull of the cord on the dart turns it sidewise, so it can't haul out. This cord is fastened to a hundred fathom of strong line, with the watertight half-barrel on the end.

We had a crew of eight my first summer of 1902. My father was skipper and harpooner. Bill Johnson handled the wheel; that was an important job because he must put the vessel right up to the fish. Jim Perry, Isril Nickerson, and Frank Mumford was the reglar spotters at the masthead and first thing in the morning, till we spotted a fish, me and Nan Dexter joined 'em. If the fish was real plentiful, they'd be four men out in the dories and only one left on the mast.

Here's the way we done. Say it's about 8:00 in the morning; swordfish don't genrally surface much before that. Say they's a five-knot breeze blowin' from the sou'west, with a long smooth roll to the sea and a little chop; no fog. We're on the starboard tack under mains'l, fores'l, and two jibs. Bill has the wheel. Father is in the pulpit, harpoon in hand. Five of us is on the mast scannin' the water in all directions.

Some days every swordfish you see will be on top. You look