

Cranberry Isles Poetry

The Maine Camper's Slug Song

The sea slugs of Maine, the sea slugs of Maine,
Lengthened and strengthened by Northeastern rain,
What frightening sizes you all seem to be,
There in damp grasses, too close to me!

Like hot dogs or cucumbers – oh, how to describe?
The long, skinny, tube-like shapes that do hide
In grasses in yards of Tom, Dick, and Jane,
We are weak from your grossness, oh sea slugs of Maine.

Oh sea slugs of Maine, oh sea slugs of Maine!
How could I possibly sleep once again
Without nightmarish visions of slimy long necks
And trails of your travels and nocturnal treks.

For an encounter occurred tonight in the fog,
While islanders slept, sawing log by large log,
I met with a sea slug and had to then log,
My experience in this internet blog.

Nearby the front door, after some time away,
I found one of you, smack dead in my way–
Dead, yes indeed, I'd prefer you remain,
You foul gastropod, you mollusk of Maine.

But lo the courage I found I had not
Sufficient enough to kill on the spot–
What would I use? My shoe or my fist?
How might one murder a foe such as this?

For your body was tensile; gooey and brown,
And I had no stomach for stooping way down
To meet at the ground with the whites of my eyes
A creature's existence which logic belies.

And so with a shrug and a shiver of spine,
And a curse for a world that created its kind,
I sidestepped and wide-leapt its long, curvy line,
Dignity shattered but otherwise fine.

Oh sea slug of Maine, oh sea slug of Maine,
I am bested tonight – and this is quite plain,
But sleep with eyes open – all four of them,
For one night we'll duel and you'll not find luck then!

It's not that I hate them or wish them great pain,
But goddamn they're disgusting, the sea slugs of Maine.

Mary writes (22 Feb 2012): I happened across your site about Islesford. I work with Sonja Moser and Bill McGuinness in the summers sometimes, on the play. I was in "The Prufrock Variations" last summer and in "Game of Love and Chance" in '08. I write poetry and wrote an "ode" of sorts to the big slugs I kept seeing on the roads in Little Cran.

Islesford Chantey

The names of the folks of Little Cranberry
Sing themselves like a song to the sea.
From generation to generation
The chorus rises, staunch and free:

Stanley, Hadlock, Fernald, Gilley, -
Settlers here in who-knows-when;
Spurling, Bunker, Phippen, Bryant,
Names familiar now as then.

Strong and stern were the early settlers,
Steady, honest, and friendly too;
Seafaring men, resourceful women,
Youngsters that took to the sea as they grew.

Hadlock, Gilley, Fernald, Phippen -
Franklin Stanley, father of ten;
Ham and Bunker, Beal and Bryant, -
Agatha Spurling, and her four men.

Some have gone, and some have
come; Enough have stayed to keep
the Isle -In names that sing the
same old song, And faces with a
ready smile.

Stanley, Spurling, Sprague and Bryant, -
Age to age the staunch refrain.
Alley, Fernald, Beal and Bunker, -
May their valor never wane!

Contributed to the Islesford Historical Society by Rosamond Lord in 1990. Probably written some years ago by a member of her family. -- Hugh Dwelley

Cranberry Isles

The State of Maine is noted
For its firm and rock-bound coast,
For its scenes that have no equal,
Of its islands, I would boast.

There are many famed for beauty
Nestling near the rocky shore,
But a group of which I'm thinking
Calls for praises, evermore.

Shadowed by the rounded Cadillac,
Viewed in beauty o'er the miles,
On the waters of Atlantic
Rest superb, the Cranberry Isles.

Rest and peace, sweet joy, contentment,
Courage, strength, and health supreme,
All are fostered on these islands,
All the thoughts of poet's dream.

Come then, welcome to our islands,
Share with us the magic charm,
Leave behind the cities' noises,
Rest and share our peace and calm.

--- [James Belcher Ford](#)

This poem was included in a touristic brochure produced and distributed by the town until the 1950s. Rev. Ford was pastor at the Great Cranberry and Islesford churches for a number of years. -- Hugh Dwelley

Cranberry Road

I'd like to be walking the Cranberry Road,
Where the sea shines blue through the bristling firs,
and the rocky pastures are overgrown
With bayberry bushes and junipers;
Where orchards of bent old apple trees
Go trooping down to the pebbly shore,
And the clapboard houses are seaward turned,
With larkspur clumps at every door;
Where there's plenty of time to say good-day
When friendly eyes from a window peer--
Oh, I'd like to be back on the Cranberry Road;
I wish I were there instead of here!

--- [Rachel Field](#)

If Once You Have Slept On An Island

If once you have slept on an island
You'll never be quite the same;
You may look as you looked the day before
And go by the same old name,

You may bustle about in street and shop
You may sit at home and sew,
But you'll see blue water and wheeling gulls
Wherever your feet may go.

You may chat with the neighbors of this and that
And close to your fire keep,
But you'll hear ship whistle and lighthouse bell
And tides beat through your sleep.

Oh! you won't know why and you can't say how
Such a change upon you came,
But once you have slept on an island,
You'll never be quite the same.

--- [Rachel Field](#)

Noted author Rachel Field summered on Sutton's Island in the 1920s & 1930s where she wrote extensively. This poem is thought to have been written for Islesford. -- Hugh Dwelley

Others think it refers to Sutton, and still others to Great Cranberry. -- BK

North of Time

We sat together in the small, square room,
Late sunshine fell across the kitchen floor
In yellow patches. I could hear the boom
Of turning tide along the island shore.

"Why, yes," the old man shifted in his chair,
"That's Grandfather's own chart hung by the door,
And that's his compass on the shelf up there.
He knew the world and foreign parts before
Most Island boys had learned their A.B.C.'s,
And how to cipher. He stood six feet two,--
It's queer to think a man like that should freeze
Sealing, up north in Greenland, but it's true,
And him not forty. Here I'm eighty odd
And not been south of Boston. Guess he'd say
Folks nowadays are like as peas in a pod,
And one port same's another all the way
Eastport to Hong Kong. He'd be right at that."

The kettle rocked with steam. The clock ticks told
The minutes off between us as we sat.
His eyes were age-filmed and his hands so old
They might have been dead roots. Dead roots? I thought
It can't be long before he's bound to go
After his Grandfather, to that same port
That's north of time, too far for charts to show
How currents run; what hidden reefs are near;
What headlands jut; what harbors to explore;
Or such a brass-bound compass serve to steer
The cruising souls along an unknown shore.

--- [Rachel Field](#)

'And the Place Thereof...'

This small house fitted him like some square shell
Weathered and worn, as if it somehow bore
His very likeness, but no smoke thread mounts;
He will not stand in greeting at the door
As he stood, gaunt and smiling, three days back.
He has no need now of the wood he piled;
The water pail and dipper, the small store
Of china on the shelf; the rocker there.
The bed-quilt will not warm him any more
On northeast nights. Birds that he fed still flock
Fearless and singing round about his door.
He will not see the sweet wild raspberries grow
Rosy as rubies, bright above the shore;
He will not dig his brown potato hills;
Or gather apples, spicy at the core.
The peas he planted hang in long green pods
Ripe for his picking now, and here a score
Of yellow squashes fatten in the sun.
Others will bear them all away before



Frost comes . . . O, ancient Psalmist, well you knew:
The place thereof shall know him now no more.

--- [Rachel Field](#)

In this poem and the preceding one, North of Time, the old man referred to is without doubt [Sammy Sanford](#), who loaned the Journals of his grandfather, [Capt. Sam Hadlock, Jr.](#) to Field, thus inspiring her to write her novel, [God's Pocket](#). -- BK

I'd Like to be a Lighthouse

I'd like to be a lighthouse
All scrubbed and painted white.
I'd like to be a lighthouse
And stay awake all night
To keep my eye on everything
That sails my patch of sea;
I'd like to be a lighthouse
With the ships all watching me.

--- [Rachel Field](#)

Cranberry Isles Benediction

On waters deep where porpoise play,
Thru storms that rock The Western Way,
I'll set my course content that He
My Compass True and Guide shall be.
God grant that Cranb'ry's lives be blest
With fervent joy and perfect rest.

(This benediction may be sung to the melody of the United States Navy hymn "Eternal Father, Strong to Save," and is dedicated to all who inhabit the Islands or who navigate the waters.)

-- Arthur W. Forrester
(circa 1982)

Distributed on Great Cranberry Island in late July 1995, on the occasion of Arthur Forrester's retirement as summer guest minister of the Congregational Church. -- BK

Same Time, Next Year

Heathered meadows, shady bogs,
Mornings wrapped in misty fogs,
Starfish, urchins, tidal treasures,
Sea surf pounding; primal pleasures.

Buoys bobbing in the bay,
Eagles soaring meet the day,
Apple-hunting deer surround,
Distant waves, a constant sound.

Be it Great or be it Little,
It's the answer to the riddle,
Where when isolated then,
Are the freest of all men?

Atlantic waters 'round all shores,
Separate our urban chores,
Removed from stressed society,
On Cranberry I long to be.

And though I'm here for only one,
Of fifty-two, and then I'm gone,
These island memories I hold dear,
Until I come, same time, next year.

-- Harlan Spence (1998)



Your Misty Dawning

A morning march in damp dense fog,
Back from east shore, out past the bog,
Down rutted trails carved through the earth,
Returning from a day's new birth.

The dirt path led me from this wood,
Into a meadow, there I stood,
Wane sunshine filtered through the dew,
And painted all a rosy hue.

To Towns' old barn I set my gaze,
A comfort through this misty haze,
Now beautiful in dawn's fresh light,
Such warmth provided at that sight.

Foundation firm and roof beam straight,
Constructed in this perfect state,
It caught the sun, it caught my eye,
Grey weathered shingles kissed the sky.

That distant barn's now never gone,
Its memories warm, a pure love song,
And through each silent reverie,
Your misty dawning calls to me.

-- Harlan Spence (1998)

Harlan Spence, professor of astronomy at Boston University, is the nephew of Charlotte Harlan, and has regularly

Song for the Island

Out on the island on warm afternoons
Old men go fishing and hum island tunes
And if they catch nothin' they never complain
I wish I were with them again - - -

As boys in their boats call to girls on the shore
Teasin' the ones that they dearly adore
And into the evening the courting begins
I wish I were with them again.

CHORUS:

Can you imagine a piece of the universe
More fit for queens or for kings?
I'll give you ten of your cities
For Cranberry Road and the pleasure it brings.

Out on the island on soft summer nights
Bonfires blaze to the children's delight
They dance round the flames singin' songs with their friends
I wish I were with them again - - -
And over the ashes the stories are told
Of witches and werewolves and old island gold
Stars on the Western Way sparkle and spin
I wish I were with them again.

CHORUS

Out on the island the people are kind
They treat you like fam'ly and help you unwind
And if you come broken they'll see that you mend
I wish I were with them again - - -

Now I'll conclude with a wish you go well
Sweet be your dreams and your happiness swell
I'll leave you here for my journey begins
I'm going to be with them again.
I'm going to be with them again.

Adapted by Jim Gertmenian and Susan King from "Song for the Mira," words and music by Allister MacGillivray

My Island Home

I often think of my place of birth,
On an island off the coast of Maine.
The childhood memories are so clear today
As in my mind I walk the woodland paths.
The entrancing fragrance of fir and juniper;
Cascading ferns brush against me --
Growing from a velvet carpet of mosses.
From overhead a sparrow repeats his three-note song.
I see a pitcher plant and chanterelle ready for harvest.
Then comes a turn in the trail with the open sea with its salty fragrances.
Sailboats gracefully gliding in the Western Way.
The colorful spinnakers magically piloting them homeward.
My gaze turns to the Western sky -- and behold
The sun just vanishing below the horizon.
The world is being tinted a blushing pink --
Then the lavender tones of the evening sky.
Hark! I hear the strains of a far-off vesper hymn.
I need no compass to assure me
That I have reached the Sunset gate.

Farewell!

-- Barbara Brooks

Written at Preble Cove, Great Cranberry Island.

Ladies' Aid Society

The old church bell has long been cracked
Its call is but a groan.
It seems to sound a funeral knell
With every broken tone.
"We need a bell," the brethren said,
"But taxes must be paid.
We have no money we can spare
Just ask the Ladies' Aid."

The shingles on the roof were old.
The rain came through the rills.
The brethren slowly shook their heads,
And spoke of monthly bills.
The chairman of the board arose
And said, "I am afraid
That we shall have to lay the case
Before the Ladies' Aid."

The carpet had been patched and patched
'Till quite beyond repair,
And through the aisle and on the steps
The boards showed hard and bare.
"It is too bad," the brethren said,
"An effort must be made
To raise an interest on the part
Of the members of the Ladies' Aid."

The preacher's stipend was behind.
The poor man blushed to meet
The grocer and the butcher as
They passed him on the street,
But nobly spoke the brethren then,
"Pastor, you shall be paid.
We'll call upon the treasurer
Of our good Ladies' Aid."

"Ah," said the men, "the way to heaven
Is long and hard and steep,
With slopes of ease on either side,
The path 'tis hard to keep.
We cannot climb the heights alone.
Our hearts are sore dismayed.
We never shall get to heaven at all
Without the Ladies' Aid."

From *Favorite Island Recipes*, collected by The Ladies Aid Society of Cranberry Isles, Maine 1988.

Fisherman's Funeral

Harry's Funeral

The day was gray and sad.

As the appointed time drew near the lobster boats began to assemble in Northeast Harbor.

Fishermen of the Cranberry Isles were coming to pay tribute to their fallen comrade.

Pleasure boats lay at anchor on this gray and blustery day.

Harry Alley's family were packed aboard his boat Shannon Two with his ashes, preparing to give the Captain his last voyage.

As she left the harbor a long line of boats fell in behind her; the air was filled with thundering diesels.

A flotilla of fishing boats, sides scuffed from hauling traps, fanned out in the foggy mist as the island fishermen brought Harry in from the last haul.

As a phalanx of boats emerged from the fog into Spurling's cove, as his blue pickup waits at the end of the dock to carry him to his final harbor.

The island's population walks through the island wood to Harry's final resting place amid the spruces in a tiny cemetery surrounded by a white picket fence and carpeted with low bush blueberries.

His spirit will never be far from the sea he loved, the gong of the nun buoy in the fog tolls for a waterman on his last voyage to safe harbor.

His memory lives on with all who loved, remember, and respected him.

Goodbye Harry, goodbye.

--G.E. (Ted) Harlan

© Copyright 2001 G.E. (Ted) Harlan

ISLAND CAR

My island car is a symphony of squeaks.

Rattles groans and creaks.

Juddering banging and crashing over every pot hole it meets.

What is painted metal? What is painted rust? With every passing year and mile it's slowly returning to dust.

It starts, it stalls, it starts, it stalls, and reluctantly it goes, ancient engine slowly becoming unfroze.

Going down the road we shake rattle and roll all the while dodging infriendly holes.

The brakes go almost to the floor which certainly keeps driving from becoming a bore.

My island car is a symphony of squeaks, rattles, groans and creaks.

--G.E. (Ted) Harlan

© Copyright 2001 G.E. Harlan

THE WRECK OF THE DONBHE

This is for the men who go to sea,
An unforgiving mistress is she.

The Donbhe, rigged for scalloping was she,
Chugged out of Northeast Harbor looking for bounty beneath the sea.

She headed out the Western Way, searching for shellfish to fill her hold,
Which would be brought back to port to be sold.

The Donbhe had a hull of stoat oak,
Which up until now had withstood a good long soak.

The scallop drags were lowered beneath the briny blue.
Donbhe steamed slowly, looking for the fan-shaped shells,
That would bring in a payday to fatten the Captain's purse, oh, so well.

As the hold began to fill and the darkness began to fall,
The Captain of the Donbhe told his crewman that it was time for the last haul.

She was on course through the Western Way on this fateful night.
Soon she would feel the jagged ledge's bite.

Surf breaking on the Cranberry shore,
Captain Strout made a mental note,
Not realizing that tonight it would claim his tough old boat.

Down in the engine room a valve began to leak,
The Captain set the autopilot on a course for home that Donbhe would never reach.

Soon she would founder on a rocky ledge,
Curving out from shore like a scimitar of stone,
One that could flay Donbhe's bottom to the bone.

Both men were below when, with a shudder and crash,
She drove hard up on the unyielding stone,
With her still-turning prop beating the sea into a frothy foam.

The Captain ran up the ladder to the deck,
Knowing in his heart that his vessel had been wrecked.

The sea broke all around as the Donbhe was smashed by wind and surf.
Captain Strout put his boat in reverse, and hoped that a wave would lift her free,
But on this night it was not to be.

The waves pounded the boat against Rice Point's reefs.
She grounded and lurched, and was driven ever further upon the ledge's grinding teeth.

The crew made it ashore that night,
Abandoning the vessel that had served them so well,
Now being pounded to a watery hell.

All that remains upon the rocky beach
Is an upturned keel memorializing where she died upon Great Cranberry's rocky reach.

G.E. (Ted) Harlan

Ted Harlan writes:

I am a lifelong visitor to the island and my creative muse is always very active. I am International package auditor for United Parcel Service in Portland, ME and a poet since the age of eight. My love for the island and its people are an integral part of my life. I hope you'll consider these pieces for your website. I have read my poetry at various venues around Cambridge, MA as well as annual performances at The Libby Library in Old Orchard Beach, ME. I live in Old Orchard Beach and can be reached at maineharlans@msn.com

My Island Home

(version 1)

Beautiful isle by the old open sea,
Land of my childhood my heart turns to thee;
Years for the home by the old rock-bound shore,
Longs for a glimpse of those glad days of yore.

Years for the sea-shore and mountains so blue,
Beautiful landscapes of nature so true;
Ocean and beaches, rocks, valleys, and hills,
Forests and meadows, fields, brooklets, and rills.

Fondly I dream of that home by the sea,
Where I in childhood was happy and free,
Happy with loved ones and kind playmates there,
Years glided swiftly. I knew not a care.

Oft with those playmates I've roamed hand in hand,
Often we've lingered and played on the strand;
Gathered bright shells from the surf-beaten shore;
Camped in the forest that grew near our door.

Through those old pastures we've wandered for hours,
Searching for berries and wild, fragrant flowers;
Happy in youth with our hearts light and free,
As the birds soaring over the deep restless sea.

Other loved playmates will roam hand in hand,
When we have crossed to that far distant land.
Others will gaze on those mountains so blue,
When our frail bodies are hidden from view.

Our kindred and loved ones will all pass away.
That home by the sea-shore will fall to decay.
But the mountains and islands and ocean around,
Will still be the same till the last trump shall sound.

Then may we meet on that Heavenly Strand,
Then may we join in an unbroken band;
May we all sing in a chorus with glee
Sweet Heavenly Home by the clear crystal sea.

In that blest home may we enter at last
When all our sorrows and troubles are past.
Safely be gathered Our Father with thee

To dwell in that home by the clear crystal sea.

E.T. Preble
1876

This poem was accompanied by the following handwritten note:

"Dear Mr. Sawtelle,

The enclosed poem, (My Island Home) is the first poem I ever tried to write. My daughter, (Lizzie A. Preble) copied it off for me. Will you please put it in your little house, among your other old relics? Not only for the verses themselves, but in remembrance of the dear girl who was taken from me a few years ago.

*Sincerely,
E.T. Lurvey"*

The author of the poem is most likely Elmenia Thompson Spurling, b. 19 Aug 1840, who married first Ezra Carroll, then William Henry Preble. Elmenia had four children by Preble, one being Abby Lizzie Preble, b. 25 Sep 1865, d. 24 Dec 1901 in Chicago. She was apparently the Lizzie, mentioned in the letter, that copied out the poem. Another daughter, Eva Florence Preble, b. 25 July 1863, d. 30 July 1879, was apparently the one mentioned in the letter as having died "a few years ago." Thus the letter was probably sent to Professor William Otis Sawtelle in the 1880s.

I do not understand why she signed the note as "E.T. Lurvey."

Both poem and note courtesy of Hugh L. Dwelley.

My Island Home

(version 2)

Beautiful Isle, by the old, open sea,
Land of my childhood, my heart turns to thee,
Yearns for the home by the old rock-bound shore.
Longs for a glimpse of the glad days of yore.
Yearns for the seashore and mountains so blue
Beautiful emblems of nature so true,
Ocean and beaches, rocks, valleys, and hills,
Forests and meadows, fields, brooklets, and rills.

Fondly I dream of that home by the sea,
Where I in childhood was happy and free,
Happy with loved ones and kind playmates there,
The years glided swiftly, I knew not a care,
Oft with those playmates I've roamed hand in hand,
Often we've lingered and played on the strand,
Gathered bright shells from the surf-beaten shore;
Camped in the forests that grew near our door.

Through those old pastures we've wandered for hours
Searching for berries and wild fragrant flowers
Happy in childhood, with hearts light and free;
As the birds sailing over our deep rolling sea,
Often we've sailed o'er that ocean so wide,
Bounding along with the wind and the tide,
Gazed on those mountains that towered so high,
Toward the white clouds in the clear azure sky.

In that old school-house that stands on the hill,
Oft we have mingled our voices at will,
Studied our lessons together with care,
Sung many anthems and choruses there.
Though I am older, those days, "Auld Lang Syne"
Waft to me thoughts of my own native clime,
Still doth my heart as in fond days or yore,
Cling to that Isle and that home by the shore.

Where are those playmates and friends that I loved,
Where have they wandered, oh! where have they roved,
Many have passed to the heavenly shore,
Others are roaming the wide, wide world o'er.
Years will roll on and with steps light and free,
Strangers will roam by that wave crested sea,
Others will sail o'er that ocean so clear
When we have finished our life journey here.

Other loved playmates will roam hand in hand,
When we have crossed to that far distant land.
Others will gaze on those mountains so blue,
When our frail bodies are hidden from view,
Our loved ones and kindred will all pass away
That home by the seashore will fall to decay,
But the island and ocean, and mountains around,
Will still be the same till the last trumpet sound.

"Composed by ELP for Mrs. CMR to recite at a concert in Oct 1895 in the old Union Meeting House."

Grandfather's House

(inscribed to Uncle Enoch)

Still stands the old house on the hill,
Beside the open sea.
Where it has stood for years and years,
Almost a century.
It's spacious rooms are silent now.
No tones of youthful glee
Make them resound with joyous mirth
And glad festivity.

The old hillside remains the same
As in the long ago;
When youngsters coasted on their sleds,
Through winter's ice and snow.
And 'neath the hill the glassy pond
Lies sheltered in the glen,
Where now the merry skaters glide,
The same as they did then.

The primitive, old-fashioned well
Below the kitchen door,
Is filled with water, clear and cool,

As in the days of yore.
And there within the mossy curb
Hangs rope and bucket too;
The windlass draws them to the brink,
Just as it used to do.

Beyond the house, old ocean breaks
And dashes on the shore,
In foamy, tossing, spashing waves,
With angry, sullen roar.
Yet, often-times those boisterous waves
Serene and calmly lie,
Reflecting hills and forest trees,
And cloudless, azure sky.

Sunlight and shadow play around
The grave yard by the sea;
Where calmly sleep the honored dead
In silent mystery.
They sleep the long and dreamless sleep
In solitude sublime.
But the old house stands on the hill
A monument of time.

Chicago, January 1st. 1900, E.T. Preble

I Like a Window Looking Out Upon the Sea

I like a window looking out upon the sea
Where ships pass up and down the world,
And bellying sails and steamer smoke signal me
To leave my narrow room
And search the maze of ever changing patterns made
By sun and cloud and wind and wave
And far off skies call me to go adventuring
In lands I do not know.

I like a window looking out upon the sea
Where I can stand and watch the storms
And feel the jarring thunder of the surf.
And on a quiet night,
Sense the lifting tide beneath the stars, and in
The whispering of the waters to
The sands, hear the still, small voice of Him who holds
The oceans in His hands.

I wish that there might be for me a window where
My soul could look upon the sea
And know the meaning of these things that reach so far
Beyond the range of mortal sight--
That wonders of the infinite might tempt me from
My narrow earthly room to search
God's maze of mysteries and go adventuring
In worlds that no man knows--

I like a window looking out upon the sea.

To An Isle in the Water

Shy one, shy one,
Shy one of my heart,
She moves in the firelight
Pensively apart.

She carries in the dishes,
And lays them in a row,
To an isle in the water
With her would I go.

She carries in the candles,
And lights the curtained room,
Shy in the doorway
And shy in the gloom;

And shy as a rabbit,
Helpful and shy.
To an isle in the water
With her would I fly.

-- William Butler Yeats, 1889
