

Remembrances of Phil Ham

E-mail from Phil Ham (8/29/99):

Subject: Been there. Loved it!

Dear Bruce,

Thought you might like to hear from a frequent visitor to your Island websites. I first visited **Islesford** in 1928 as a boy aged six. I have been to many places in the world since then, but none that I can recall so vividly. Quite possibly, the trip from Southwest Harbor in my Uncle Arthur's boat was my first ocean voyage. I remember it well. My Mother, Father and two sisters spent two wonderful weeks with my Dad's brother, Arthur Ham and his family on their little salt water farm at the South side of the island. My cousin Eleanor was about the same age as my sister Ruth and they got along famously. They also got stuck with babysitting my younger sister (4) and I, taking us to the rocky and stony beach in front of the property almost daily.

The farm had a barn and cows and chickens. My cousins Lee and Emerson were older and Lee had his own boat and like his father, fished and lobstered for a living. Emerson elected to be land bound and farmed the homestead and did handyman work around the island.

It was a wonderful time in my life. In that short two weeks I learned to clam, eat lobster, catch fish from a boat with a handline, eat homemade butter and sleep in a feather bed. Our trip to the island had been on a grey and overcast day, but our return to the mainland was on a beautiful clear day. I can still remember the grandeur of the mountains over on Mount Desert. I often think how great it must be to be able to look on that scene on a daily basis. But I suppose if one is privileged to do so, it becomes "ho-hum" after awhile.

I revisited the island about forty years later, on a spontaneous and nostalgic impulse. My wife and I and another couple were returning from a vacation trip to Nova Scotia, on the Bluenose. Staying that evening in Bar Harbor, I thumbed through the phone book and found a Ham's Lobster Dock on Islesford. I called and when a man answered, asked if by any chance he knew an Eleanor Ham. His immediate reply was, "Ought to, . . . I married her."

He was Junior (Andrew) Stanley. On learning who I was he insisted we come out the next day, that Eleanor would be delighted to see us. The following morning, we caught a boat from Southwest Harbor. On arriving and being warmly welcomed by cousin Eleanor who worked with Junior at Lee Ham's Dock, we walked once again that long pleasant walk to the same "Old Homestead" I had visited some forty years earlier. What a thrilling and memorable trip down Memory Lane for me.

For a few short years after this initial visit, on several occasions we visited Eleanor and Junior again. At times with other couples, with the three youngest of our six children or with "common" cousins from Bath. But after a while, vacations were taken closer to home and as is often the case, "the old order changeth". Junior and Eleanor left the Island, at first for a short time in Bass Harbor and then permanently in Bar Harbor. Junior died there some years later and eventually there came an end to communication with our Island relatives.

About five or six years ago, my wife and I found ourselves in Maine visiting Florida friends in Northport. On a whim, we decided to return to the island and see if we still had any kin there. Using the Post Office as a primary source, we learned that my cousins Emerson and Lee were indeed still there. We looked them up and had a short visit with Lee and a tour

around the island with Emerson. We learned that Eleanor had remarried after a while and was still living in Bar Harbor. We managed to get to see her before heading back.

The highpoint of that trip though was just getting back to Islesford one more time. Emerson had taken us to the beach in front of the "Old Homestead", which under new ownership had changed appreciably. The Island will always have an indelible place in my memory. It's a place where I think I might have loved to have been born and lived all of my life.

I hope I haven't bored you to death with this epistle. I will continue to visit your Island Websites, read familiar names and search for clues to more hidden memories. Perhaps too, I might even get back to see it all once again.

Thanks for your patience.

Phil Ham

St. Augustine, FL

P.S. Learned today on the Internet that Lee and Emrson still have phone listings on Islesford, and Eleanor (Finnimore), in Bar Harbor. Hardy Stock!

And, when I asked for permission to post this e-mail, Phil sent me the following reply (1/1/2001):

Happy New Year and thank you for your great note. I would be pleased to share the memories I have of Islesford over a span of so many years, in so few visits.

The relatives I visited on my first visit in 1928, were Arthur and Maude (Agnes M. Gilley) Ham and their sons, Emerson and Leeman and daughter Eleanor. My Family consisted of my parents, Rufus (Jack, . . . Don't think I knew his name was Rufus 'til that visit) and Anna Ham, my sisters Ruth (age 10 or so) and Arlene (age 4 or five). As I mentioned, we all had the time of our lives, enjoying an idyllic environment we had never imagined existed. Although I know my father had a wonderful time visiting with his older brother, I particularly remember that my mother fell in love with the island and enjoyed every moment spent there. We lived in Worcester, Mass at the time, where my siblings and I had been born. My father and his brothers and sisters were all born in Bath, another Maine location that holds fond memories for me.

There is hardly a day that passes that I don't visit the Islesford.com website. And once I posted a note on the bulletin board asking about relatives there. I received E-mails from Hugh Dwelly and Margaret Blank informing me of the passing of both Emerson and Eleanor. At that time, Lee was still alive. Having now rediscovered your site, I will make it a point to revisit it frequently.

Some of the memories of my earliest visit include a walk to the Life Saving Station and being shown the surfboats and a breeches buoy, fishing from my Uncle Arthur's boat, clamming and being introduced to the fabulous taste of lobster.

As I write this, memories of subsequent visits (sadly too few and too short) come to mind and I'm afraid I could get carried away here. So I'll just wish you once again, a Happy New Year and hope that perhaps we can communicate again sometime. However, if I can provide you with any more memories or family information, please let me know.

Phil Ham.