

BEALS HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER



A BRIEF HISTORY OF BEALS ISLAND SCHOOLS

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*BHS Heritage
Center Hours:
Monday – Friday
9:30AM to 1:30PM*



FOREWORD: The following is another article in the series, “Time and Tide,” researched and compiled by Daniel F. Davis (Historian), Beals Historical Society, with the purpose of preserving local history for current readers and for future generations. Sources for this installment are: *Town of Beals Comprehensive Plan, August 2003*; *150 Years of Education in Maine* by Kermit Nickerson, Deputy Commissioner of Education, State of Maine; a 2001 interview by Velton Peabody with the late Vernal Woodward of Beals; memories of Beals as shared by Erroll G. Woodward (published in the BHS Newsletter); and this author’s personal knowledge of the evolution of local education. (For the BHS Newsletter format, it may be printed in several parts throughout the current year.)

PART 1

Pre-1900 Influences on Local Education

Although the Town of Beals has existed as a separate entity since its incorporation on July 11, 1925, it was once an island district of Jonesport, that town having been designated under the Jones grant as Township 22 as of March 4, 1809. That governance remained in place when the Town of Jonesport was incorporated February 3, 1832 and included “Long Island, Evans Island, and Vass Island,” according to an early map dating back to 1770, as cited by McLane in his book entitled, *Islands of the Mid-Maine Coast* (copyright 1989). The two main islands that later comprised the main portion of the Town of Beals were also known by the names “Little Wass” and “Great Wass.” The settlement of Beal’s Island (Little Wass) goes back 250 years to June 25, 1775 (or slightly before), when Manwarren Beal, Jr. (born in York,

Maine August 12, 1736) first took up residence at Barney Cove on the island’s western side.

From the time of his arrival (and from what we know of the character and conscience of Manwarren Beal), we can safely assume that he valued a good education, knowing that such was necessary for the advancement and betterment of a developing community. We also know that Beal took upon himself the task of furthering his own education and would certainly have provided, to the best of his ability, for the educational needs of his family, although limited to a home-school setting. This supposition is further supported by Manwarren’s thirst for knowledge, as evidenced in his writings—a desire that may have grown out of his having been born and raised in York, Maine, adjacent to the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, where comprehensive education laws were in place in his early years to

enhance the literacy of its citizens. “Main,” then a part of Massachusetts, felt the effects of those efforts, as those in authority sought to improve the quality and scope of learning into the newly settled wilderness areas that became the State of Maine—efforts usually met with obstacles not easily overcome.

Kermit S. Nickerson, in his *150 Years of Education in Maine*, looking back prior to 1900, and recognizing those obstacles to the advancement of learning, makes the point that “during years of exploration and settlement it was natural that there was a minimum of interest in the establishment of schools in the ‘Province of Main’ because the area was settled slowly and the threat of Indian attacks left little time for social or cultural development.” He goes on to state that during those early years children could not go out of sight of home with any degree of safety, and consequently it was around 1700 before schools were maintained regularly. Fortunately, Indian relations with the early white settlers of Beal’s Island are said to have been peaceful, for the most part, with few exceptions, thus avoiding many of the obstacles that faced the early

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settlers of southern Maine.

Given the peaceful relations with the natives, other hindering factors may have come into play, hindered the growth of education in the Moosabec area such as its harsh and unwelcoming environment, which forced Manwarren Beal and other early settlers to concentrate on survival for self and family, rather than the task of cultural refinement and the pursuit of knowledge in a more formal, public setting. Of lesser concern, but none the less still an obstacle to educational development, was the fact that Manwarren Beal and his family came to the area alone, and like other settlements in Maine, found it already frequented by Native Americans (Passamaquoddy Tribe) who fished and clammed during their summer stays, having left the heat of the mainland to enjoy the cool ocean breezes this area afforded, in addition to its abundant natural resources, which included wild berries and salt marsh reeds for basket weaving. Therefore, survival was Beal's main concern during those early years, along with a concerted effort to establish and maintain peaceful relations with the natives of the region.

Nickerson goes on to point out that the Province of Main was purchased by Massachusetts in 1677, and under its laws going back to 1642 and 1847, required that the selectmen of every town teach "their children and apprentices, so much learning as may enable them, perfectly, to read the English tongue and knowledge of the capital laws..." A penalty of twenty shillings was assessed for those who failed to do so.

This, perhaps, was the first step toward compulsory education and attendance in a formal setting. Thus came into existence a requirement that once a settlement increased to fifty householders, one person was to be appointed by its leadership to "teach all such children as shall resort to him to write and read." Wages were to be paid by the parents or masters of the children or by the inhabitants in general and provided guidelines as to that cost, as compared to other towns. When a community increased to one hundred families, the authorities of the town were to "set up" a grammar school to prepare the youth for high-level studies, such as a university. Of course, grammar schools of those days were more like high schools and academies of today, with high expectations and standards of achievement in reading, writing, mathematics, and basic life skills.

Having lived for some time in York, and knowing the requirements for appropriate educational opportunities as established in Law, it is no surprise that Manwarren Beal should highly value education for his own children, some of whom he brought with him from York and others who were born on what was to become "Beal's Island." Nickerson cites the towns of York County, closest to adjacent Massachusetts, as the earliest settled in what would become the State of Maine. He also makes the point that it is difficult to research the history of the schools established in that part of the state prior to the 1700's, since the Indian wars caused the destruction of many of our state's early records.

Nickerson also makes clear to his readers that in those early years of settlement and development, there were no schoolhouses in any established towns in Maine. For that reason, whatever provision was made for the instruction of children must have been in the home. The Town of York in March of 1724 voted that a schoolhouse was to be built, and provided the finances for this purpose. In 1731, a school was built in Wells, and one soon followed in 1734 in Kennebunk. These were certainly not like the schools we think of today, as Nickerson points out, quoting from his sources that the school in Kennebunk was "built of large round logs notched at the ends so as to let into each other, as logging camps are built at the present day. The walls were about six feet high, with a roof over the top, though the gable ends were entirely open. There was [were] no windows, the light coming in freely from the ends. The only way of entering, both for masters and scholars was by climbing up on a stile at the end and jumping down into the house." Some schools were built of stone, rather than wooden logs, as was the case at Round Pond in 1827.

The teachers were to be of high moral character, in keeping with the Puritan heritage of New England. The atmosphere and curriculum was greatly influenced by religious principles. The focus for acquiring good teachers was not so much on educational qualifications as it was on morality and religious conviction. Children were to attain not only a secular education and be exposed to good literature, but also were to be instructed in sound church doctrine, which made the hiring of a teacher of high moral character even more essential.

Having established, in part, the background for educational

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Quakers do not hold to the Puritan approach seeking to instill in children a particular set of beliefs or doctrines. Rather, it seeks to nurture the individual to become his/her own self. It goes beyond the five main senses (sight, taste, touch, smell, and hearing), seeking the importance of the Spirit in life. It looks to the unseen, as well as that which is obvious. For that

These characteristics and beliefs, as stated, were in evidence in the life of Manwarren Beal. His personal writings (both letters and prose) are indicators of a deep personal faith, reverence for God, and a profound respect for his fellow man. It is further evident that Manwarren Beal, Jr. was a learned man for his day, by anyone's standards. Having said that, it is fitting that we should look more closely at the educational heritage that took root in his early settlement and the influence succeeding municipal leaders had in providing the facilities necessary for proper learning to take place.

In the next edition of the BHS Newsletter, we will present Part II: “Providing for Local Educational Opportunities.”

The Beals Historical Society offers the chance to be creative in personalizing a brick for your favorite person, pet, place, event, occasion, or simply something that is near and dear to your heart. Purchasing a personalized brick will enable the continuation of the brick patio, and/or adding your favorite Veteran to the Veterans Monument Park Area. The Veteran's 4 x 8 brick consists of the Veteran's rank, name, branch of service, war served in and years served. Your purchase of a personalized 4x8 cinnamon colored brick with black filled lettering for \$85 is a tax-deductible donation or you may wish to purchase an 8x8 brick for \$125. Purchasing the 8 x 8 brick gives you an additional line or instead of the line you may purchase a logo for an additional \$10. Price includes shipping.

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Beals Heritage Center



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Annual memberships are for the calendar year and expire Dec. 31.