# The Merrymeeting News



Summer 2004 VOLUME 14, No. 3

### The Newsletter of Friends of Merrymeeting Bay • Box 233 • Richmond Maine 04357



Volunteer Orman Hines peers from the crypt. Photo: Ed Friedman

#### Friends of Merrymeeting Bay

Friends of Merrymeeting Bay is a 501 (c) (3) non-profit organization. Our mission is to preserve, protect and improve the unique ecosystems of the Bay through:

#### Education

#### **Conservation & Stewardship**

#### **Membership Events**

#### **Research & Advocacy**

Support comes from members' tax-deductible donations and grants.

www.link75.org/mmb/

The Merrymeeting News is published seasonally by the of Friends of Merrymeeting Bay (FOMB) and is sent to FOMB members and other friends of the Bay.

For information call: Ed Friedman, Chair, at 666-3372.



## Hot, Humid and Life is The Pits

Context *n*. The circumstances in which a particular event occurs. Middle English from Latin *contextus* or past participle of *contexere*, to join together, weave.

This summer's FOMB archaeological dig near the Androscoggin has just wrapped up and context was the name of the game. For 5 generations, beautiful Native American artifacts have been found on this site as horse drawn plows covered nearly every bit of field. There has however, been nothing to put these artifacts into context, to tell us more about the people that made, and used, the stone tools found here.

The time period when these artifacts were made is known to archaeologist as the Middle Archaic Period and took place approximately 4-8,000 years ago. This was more recent than the paleo people who roamed the landscape, after the glaciers receded, some 9-11,000 years ago and older than the more agrarian natives of the Ceramic Period who lived here from 3,000 years ago until the first contact with Europeans.

Over 60 volunteers excavated this year's site in the course of about 10 days finding many flakes discarded in the tool making process, several important artifacts, and most importantly from the point of view of putting the artifacts into context, many pit features. A pit feature is seen as a differently colored section of soil in the pit profile, or on the bottom, that tells us a hole had been made and back-filled with soil or debris other than what we would normally find at that depth in that spot. Our features were typically seen as slightly darker orange or brown areas against a lighter sandy background. These features could be from trash pits, cache sites, graves, or more recently, post holes. Microscopic study of soil cross-sections and radio carbon dating of charcoal flecks will tell us more as time goes by.

All of the archaeologist working at the site, Leslie Shaw & John Cross of Bowdoin, Art Spiess of the Maine Historic Preservation Commission, and Dianne Doucette of Harvard, a specialist in this time period and in pit features, were very excited by the findings and we hope they will present their findings to us as analyses are completed. Art made some comments to me at different times: "this could be the Rosetta Stone", "you did it again!" [referring to our very successful Choice View Farm dig last year-the best organized he'd ever worked with volunteers on] and "another great dig by FOMB." John told me what a great crew he thought we had and in particular how the crowd who showed up the last day to primarily back fill the holes really went above and "beyond the call of duty in going that extra mile."

In what was surely a display of good karma come-a-knocking, our volunteer coordinator Liza Nelson who worked quite hard at scheduling diggers, came out to the site for an expected half day and unearthed a perfectly intact large bi-face or spear point, the only one found. Perhaps needless to say, she decided then to spend the rest of her day digging. Next time it's hot and humid and you think life is the pits, think again. It may not be a bad thing.

## Coming up in Merrymeeting...

Mark your calendars –there's still one more great opportunity to join an FOMB volunteer trip leader in exploring Merrymeeting Bay

#### Mushroom Identification

Trip Leader: Hal Bonner Pork Pt. Road, Bowdoinham. Contact Paul Dumdey (443-3479; phdumdey@gwi.net). **Tuesday, Sept. 21, at 4 PM** 

#### Fall Bay Day.

We're looking for volunteers to help with this hands-on educational day on the Bay for local 4th graders. Also, for the first time, we are opening Bay Day to homeschool children.

Please pass this information along if you know of any parents or kids who might be interested

(note all activities are geared toward 4th grade level). Contact Clancy Cummins at 737-4175 for more information. **Tuesday, Sept 28, 8:45 – 2:00** 

#### Annual Speaker Series begins!

The Role of Alewives in Maine's Rivers and the Gulf of Maine Ecosystem Naomi Schalit, Executive Director of Maine Rivers Bowdoin College Visual Arts Building, Beam Classroom **Thursday, October 21, 7 PM** 

## We need your help!

Do you appreciate all the work FOMB has done to protect the Bay? Chances are, it was done by a volunteer. In 2003, FOMB volunteers logged over 2000 hours. However, they left lots of great projects for you to help with. For much of what we do, chances are also good that if you don't do it, it might not get done. Whether you have a few hours or a few weeks to volunteer, we will try to find a project that fits your time and interests. See below for current needs you can help with or call Sarah Wolpow 721-0941, fomb@gwi.net.



Thank You Dig Volunteers [more than 60 of you]. We couldn't have done this without your enthusiastic participation!

Bill & Trey Milam, Will Beveridge, Heather, Alden, Owen, & Carter Blease, Jack Halpin, Leslie Shaw, John, Lauren & Audrey Cross, Liza Nelson, Kent Cooper, Bob & Diane Weggel, Linda & Frank Heller, Charlotte Agell & Anna Simmons, Jim & Heather Boyer, Henry & Cyndie Lamoreau, Ed Friedman, John Lichter, Kathy Claerr, Dawna Marden, Freeland Church, Art Spiess, Susan Wegner, Michael Hughes, Crystal Pietrowicz, Orman Hines, John Quigley, Erin Woodsome, Karen White, David & Rachel Matson, Bridget Sabo, Jason Blais, Tim Browne, Liz Dorsey, Fred Koerber, Stephanie Boucher, Kathryn Bridge, Caitlin Hayes, Sandy Petteruti, Beth & Johanna Thompson, Peter Gray, Betsy & Doug Arntzen & Jonathon Southworth, Bob Lamson, Dawn Jordan, Katrina Rickermann, Debbie Seybold, Kathy Sylvester, Mikhail & Dan Klimov, Bob Greeley, Karen Dyer, Dianna Doucette, and John Church.

#### Hot Humid, continued from pg. 1

Special thanks go out to Liza and also to our volunteer archaeologist John Cross and Leslie Shaw and to Henry and Cyndie Lamoreau who brought us the idea and worked so hard to help it bear fruit. Our deepest thanks as well to our site's landowner who wishes to remain anonymous-Thanks for the blueberry muffins!

Ed Friedman

## Three ways you can make Merrymeeting Bay a better place.

- 1. We know you're just pretending to love kayaking, but you secretly want to be AN ACCOUNTANT! Well, even if you really do prefer paddling, our Treasurer, Dorothy Chaisson, could use some help keeping FOMB's books in order. (1-2 hours/month)
- 2. Join our Membership and Fundraising team. Your creative ideas and input into any aspect of our work is most welcome. Our latest fundraising project is a 2006 photography calendar of the Bay.
- 3. Help FOMB by spending a pleasant afternoon poking around libraries, bookstores, outdoor centers, bakeries, and your favorite local hangouts. Doing what? Hanging posters, of course! We are finalizing the schedule for our fall/winter Speaker Series and could use some help getting the word out. Please let us know if you're willing to distribute a stack of posters.

#### Tidings

#### **Return of the Herring**

Today I had the privilege of witnessing (and documenting with photographs) the spawning of a large number of blueback herring (Alosa aestivalis) at the site of the former Union Gas Dam on Messalonskee Stream in Waterville, Maine. This blueback herring spawning site is one mile above the confluence of Messalonskee Stream and the Kennebec River; 19 miles above the former Edwards Dam site in Augusta; and 60 miles above the mouth of the Kennebec River at Popham Beach. To my knowledge this is the first time spawning blueback herring have ever been documented in Messalonskee Stream.

Although very similar in appearance and general life history to the alewife, blueback herring differ from alewife by spawning in shallow runs and riffles of coastal rivers, rather than in ponds. Because of this very different spawning behavior, and a difference in migration timing (several weeks after alewives), blueback herring are a major source of food for striped bass, osprey, great blue heron, cormorants, etc. during the period after the alewives are all done spawning.

Blueback herring will also spawn in rivers or streams that do not have accessible spawning ponds for alewives. A perfect example of this being ... Messalonskee Stream ... which has no natural alewife spawning ponds in its watershed. Prior to today, nobody ever "thought" of Messalonskee Stream as a spawning stream for blueback herring, or considered blueback herring a part of Messalonskee Stream's historic, native fish and wildlife community.

In fact, during the lengthy relicensing of the four hydro-electric dams on Messalonskee Stream during the 1990s, blueback herring were never even mentioned as a native fish species that might use Messalonskee Stream for spawning and thus benefit from fish passage at the dams on it. This was in part because the Edwards Dam was still in place during the Messalonskee dam relicensings and as such, the thousands of blueback herring stuck below the Edwards Dam were not given the opportunity to show us they would spawn in the Messalonskee Stream if given the chance.

Because of the above, today there are no requirements for fish passage for blueback herring at any of the hydro-electric dams on Messalonskee Stream. Oops...

And now today, 10 June 2004, lower Messalonskee Stream is full of blueback herring trying to migrate upstream past the remnants of the Union Gas Dam so that they might spawn and reclaim their historic home in Messalonskee Stream.

How come nobody foresaw this? Actually, one person did. During the Edwards Dam relicensing, the Kennebec Coalition's fisheries consultant, Dr. Michael Dadswell of Acadia University in Wolfville, Nova Scotia, predicted that blueback herring would be one of the most immediate and significant beneficiaries of removing the Edwards Dam. This is because, he said, blueback h erring are river spawners and restoration of the natural character of the Kennebec River from Waterville to Augusta would restore enormous amounts of ideal habitat for them. The thousands of blueback herring spawning in Messalonskee Stream today confirm Michael Dadswell's predictions in 1996.

Observations in 2003 and 2004 indicate there are now hundreds of thousands of blueback herring in the Kennebec River above Augusta and this population should continue to expand for many years as the bluebacks recolonize the vast amount of previously inaccessible and impounded habitat in the river. These observations also demonstrate that blueback herring should be found in large numbers in all of the coastal rivers of New England. If they are not, this means something is very wrong with that river and someone should figure out what so that it might be fixed (ie. Taunton River).

Many U.S. coastal states fisheries agencies have tended to lump alewives and blueback herring together for regulatory purposes, calling both species 'river herring' or just 'alewives.' This practice should stop, since these two species, while similar in physical appearance, are very different in terms of spawning and juvenile habitat ... and are two different and distinct species. While not exactly parallel, this would be similar to lumping shortnosed sturgeon and Atlantic sturgeon together and just calling them 'sturgeon,' lumping smallmouth and largemouth bass together and just calling them "bass," or lumping a Monarch butterfly and a Viceroy butterfly and calling them "those monarch sort of butterflies."

This "lumping together" has had the unfortunate consequence of relegating the native blueback herring of New England's coastal river systems to near invisibility in many fisheries restoration efforts and regulatory proceedings. The osprey and great blue heron now eating spawning blueback herring by the thousands in the riffles of the Kennebec River would sharply disagree with the 'conventional wisdom' that alewives and blueback herring can be considered the same animals for "management purposes."

Thankfully, the blunt act of removing the Edwards Dam from the Kennebec River forever has allowed ALL of the river's native fish species the opportunity to restore themselves in their own manner and schedule.

Interestingly, many of the spawning bluebacks I observed today in Messalonskee Stream were very small, maybe 7 inches long. This suggests some of them are maiden 3 year old spawners that were born in the river above the Edwards Dam site in June 2000 -- perhaps in Messalonskee Stream when nobody was looking.

#### WOOOO HOOOO!!!!!!!!!!! THE KENNEBEC RIVER IS FINALLY WINNING!!!!!!!!!!

Douglas H. Watts President, Friends of Kennebec Salmon

Photos are posted on the Friends of the Kennebec Salmon web site at: www.kennebecriver.org

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Ed. Note: This issue of Merrymeeting News is the first in years without the words of Frank Burroughs. As the demands of retirement catch up with him and his attention moves elsewhere we thank him for his years of literary infusion to the newsletter and wish him the best in his endeavors.

### The Carrot King

Long ago and far away on the arable but clay and rocky soils of Cape Elizabeth a future king was born. Known at that time only as Harry Prout, few knew they were looking at a gentleman with a future in Vegetable Royalty. On an early outing into the surrounding countryside he ventured into a Portland establishment of spells, elixirs and patent medicines where he had the good fortune to have a strawberry soda jerked by the fair damsel Dot. Harry was so smitten he came back for another soda, and then back again, and again, and again until finally he was able to carry her off to the East Bowdoinham wilds along the Abbagadasssett and Kennebec Rivers

It was a wild country in the spring of 1946 but the soil [not dirt] looked ideal for growing root crops and raising a family. The countryside's silt loam was rock free and river water was handy by for irrigation if and when needed. Of course one doesn't generally become King without first paying dues as a Prince and over the years the young Prout became known as the Prince of Parsnips. His now wife, the maiden Dot, he generally referred to as the Princess. Over the years, growing parsnips, carrots, peas, lettuce, cabbage, cauliflower, broccoli, turnips, and sugar beets they gradually focused on carrots, parsnips, peas and beets. Literally putting East



Prince of Parsnips, circa 1950's.

Bowdoinham farming on the map [printed on their one pound carrot bags], in 1952 they became the first in New England to process and sell bagged carrots. The end of Abbagadassett Point also housed the first place in Maine to can beans, grown by Ransom Kelley, yet another local character.

Farming 200 acres in his heyday, Prince Harry made active use of green manure cover crops both after he harvested his crops and when in the course of rotation he left fields fallow. Winter rye and Sudan grass were his two primary cover crops for these rotations. By now the newly crowned Carrot King [and his fair Queen-the Pea Queen in fact] supplied all of the Hannaford stores with carrots as well as selling to the Boston market and farm stands. Carrots were so popular they outsold parsnips 20:1. Over time more growers in Canada and other states picked up carrots and the market for them became too competitive.

As Harry gradually headed towards semi retirement

#### Saving Everything by Gary Lawless

This morning the field Is full of trucks. Tractor trailers with Pieces of a house soon To stand where last year There was forest. This morning the turtle who Spent the week laying eggs In the sand beside the road Lies crushed on the pavement, Eyes open, still breathing while Just yards down the road, The squirrel has already died. These are the first signs. We leave the earth a cleared place, Spaces where the woods were, Spaces where the turtles were, What becomes of the world. With us in it. I will move the beautiful bodies Into a woods of their own.

One day everything changes. The woods where you walked has new roads, houselots, the beach where you came ashore, the fields you admired in the summer sun. By that time it is too late. The animals who came there to build nests, to forage, to find refuge. The trees, the plants, the clean water. They don't understand ownership, or lifetime. They can't negotiate conservation easements, or form land trusts. We wish we had done something, or deny that we could have. It is too bad, but it is too late. Our sense of the world changes, diminishes, we are diminished. What becomes of the world, with us in it.

#### SEND US YOUR EMAIL!

We now have two new email lists to keep you more informed about ways to help protect and enjoy our beautiful Bay. One will be used for notices of events and volunteer opportunities (maximum 2-4 emails/month). The other will be used to alert you when action is needed to support our advocacy work. We may suggest that you call your legislators, or write a letter to the editor. There is no obligation on your part — you can follow through as time and interest permit. (maximum I email/month, depending on season). Please send a note with your email address to fomb@gwi.net if you would like to be added to either of these lists. FOMB will not exchange your email with any other organizations.

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with the Merrymeeting Gardens operation, his land use shrank to 15-20 acres concentrating on parsnips, peas and beets with only a few carrots. Now once again the Prince of Parsnips (being no longer in the carrot business and having one son, David, become the Strawberry King), Harry asked four Bowdoin College students who were interviewing him if they knew what being semi-retired made him. The answer not being obvious, he had to tell them; he was "now an old Fuddy Duddy."

As I noted in the last issue of Merrymeeting News, the King [or Prince] passed away earlier this year at 90 survived by Dot, their two sons David and Buster and their families. Knowing Harry and the royal family has truly been a privilege for me and has been a high point of living here in the kingdom. I will miss him deeply.

As Harry said to the Bowdoin students: "Farming in some ways is a great life, though it has its frustrating moments. There is a certain satisfaction in growing something productive and helpful to the environment and community, and friendly to Friends of Merrymeeting Bay."

Ed Friedman

#### 5th Annual Spring Bay Day

Almost 200 local 4th graders turned out under threatening skies for another successful Spring Bay Day. In this twice a year day of hands on activities, FOMB volunteers share their knowledge of mud, fish, and fowl!

We'd especially like to thank our volunteers – without you, we could not run this event. Special thanks to go Clancy Cummins and Ed Friedman for coordinating, Steve Musica for sign construction, Chops Point School for use of their spectacular property, to our presenters: Jason Bartlett, Will Broussard, Libby Crosby, Steve Eagles, Anne Hammond, Bill Milam, Jay Robbins, Jeff Varrichione, Steve Walker, Tom Weddle, & Jack Witham, and finally to our chaperones who managed not to lose a single child: Ed Benedikt, Macky Bennett, Bill Briggs, Kathie Canonica, Dana Cary, Kent Cooper, Joe Kochefko, Liza Nelson, & Kermit Smyth. "No child left behind." Another unfunded mandate from FOMB.

Fall Bay Day is September 28th. Please contact Clancy Cummins (737-4175) if you are available to help!



As we have since 1996, FOMB continues our posting of fish consumption advisories around the Bay as part of a statewide effort by the Maine Toxics Action Coalition [MTAC] of which we are a member organization. The brightly colored signs have been posted at various fishing and boating access points surrounding the Bay.

While we were recently successful in achieving a classification upgrade on the Kennebec from a "C" to a "B", the classification system is only based on dissolved oxygen and coliform bacteria levels. This system has really no relevance as to whether or not one can safely eat the fish that may contain a host of contaminants regardless of classification level.

Mercury, dioxin and PCB contamination of fish continues to be a problem as are the sources of these contaminants ["Clean Skies Initiative" notwithstanding]. FOMB continues to proactively work towards the elimination of these extremely dangerous toxins.

These three chemicals are exceptionally dangerous substances. Mercury is found throughout fish tissue and cannot be avoided. Exposure to dioxin, PCBs and other fat-loving organochlorines can be somewhat minimized by avoiding the oils and fatty portions of fish. For health as well as sporting reasons FOMB suggests catch and release.

Interestingly, the National Academy of Sciences backed up our position years ago, the other national agencies are slowly catching up, and the Maine state agencies-Inland Fisheries & Wildlife, DEP, Bureau of Health, and Department of Marine Resources all still do not post advisory signs.

## Palesky Tax Cap Bad News for Health Care, Education, & Environmental Protection

Merrymeeting Bay and the towns that surround it comprise a wealth of essential habitat for an astounding amount of wildlife; an eco-system of global importance around which our communities revolve. This wonderful place could be seriously hurt if the Palesky Tax Cap passes in November.

The Palesky Tax Cap will, on average, cut municipal budgets in half by capping every town's mill rate at 10 [\$10 per \$1,000 of valuation]. The budgets of larger cities [service centers] will be cut by closer to 2/3 or 66%. Whether one agrees with the tax cap or not, revenue reduction will be huge.

Practically speaking this means not only will essential services get cut in municipalities, but huge pieces of the state budget will be cut as well. There will have to be extraordinarily large cuts in health care, education, and environmental protection. Eagle monitoring, Department of Marine Resource's anadromous fish monitoring, dam removals, trap and truck programs moving anadromous fish around dams, state share of municipal waste water treatment plant improvements in Gardiner, Bath, & Augusta, archaeology, game management area maintenance, and warden service [IF&W & DMR], to name a few, would likely be cut.

And there will be no monies for Land for Maine's Future [LMF] and, as happened in the budget crunch of the early 1990's, we may well see the state sell off protected land. The LMF program has helped us protect thousands of acres around Merrymeeting Bay and the lower Kennebec and enjoys huge support from Maine citizens [80%] but will have little support in the way of funding by the state.

## Quoteworthy

"DEP tends to avoid enforcement action UNLESS it is politically expedient," the anonymous staffer writes. "For example, we recently hammered a construction/paving company (Ferraiolo) for oil discharge violations that were real but not overly traumatic . However, the violations were reported to us by an environmental group that was actively critical of DEP stewardship of the Kennebec river. DEP pursued Ferraiolo primarily to appease this environmental group."

From the Portland Phoenix 7/14/04

[FOMB was the environmental group, the discharges were clearly into the river despite yearly DEP inspections and the DEP still has done nothing regarding the possible PCB hotspots we identified, one of which was just below this facility] In Maine we are over-reliant on property taxes. There are several reasons for this. First, are the trickle down deficits from the federal budget, to state, then municipalities. States not only get less aid now from the federal government, but also are being required to fulfill unfunded mandates. Since 2002 the federal government has not made good on its promises to Maine for:

• Special Education:	\$223 million
• No Child Left Behind	\$149 million
• Election Reform	\$3 million
• Prescription Drug aid	\$172 million
	\$547 million

The federal government has only provided \$115 million in state aid to Maine in that time leaving the state budget with nearly a half-billion dollar deficit above and beyond our normal responsibilities.

That requires the state to drastically cut its budget, which then trickles down to municipalities, and individuals where we can afford it least.

We already cut \$1.2 billion from our state budget last year [20%!]. Next year we face nearly a billion dollar shortfall in our state budget. We will lose another \$650 -750 million in revenues if the Palesky Tax Cap passes. The state will have to pick up many of the responsibilities of municipalities just to assure basic services like road maintenance, and education [as was the case when this passed in California]. Municipalities will not be able to provide most essential

continued on next page

## Attention photographers and people who love the Bay!



Call for Photos for our 2006 Merrymeeting Bay Calendar

For more information see: www.link75.org/mmb/FOMB/calendar06 photocall.html.htm or contact Sarah Wolpow (721-0941, fomb@gwi.net)

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public services; fire and police protection, paramedics, ambulance, and education would be cut dramatically. Furthermore, municipalities would lose local control when turning over these responsibilities. Towns would have little say in the running of their own communities.

Secondly, we should be paying about a third each from income, property and sales tax. Our property tax percentage is closer to 40% and our sales tax is about 20%. Our tax system needs to be rebalanced. There are Maine residents who really are being taxed out of their homes, and they need help. There are ways to provide that assistance in a fair, responsible equitable manner, without losing essential public services and putting our communities and our environment at risk.

Our taxes pay for the things we cannot afford to do as individuals. If we each had to contract out for educating our children, garbage disposal, recycling efforts, plowing, paving and other road maintenance, trying to protect the precious wild land where we can feed our souls, saving eagles and sturgeon from oblivion, and emergency services, 99% of us could not do it.

We cannot disconnect tax issues from all the other seemingly more passionate issues we care about. They are inextricably connected. We have no civil society without taxes. And we certainly cannot protect an environment that needs protecting by and from ALL of us.

Kathleen McGee

Steering Committee Dorothy Chaisson (Brunswick)Treasurer Clancy Cummins (Richmond)Secretary Ed Friedman (Bowdoinham)Chair Dee Cummins (Richmond) Kathleen McGee (Bowdoinham) Steve Musica (Richmond)	
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Friends of Merrymeeting Bay, P.O.Box 233, Richmond, Maine 04357

#### MEMBERSHIP LEVELS

□ \$	Other.
□ \$250	Striped Bass

□ \$500 Wild Salmon

□ \$20 Smelt

\$50 Alewife\$1,000+Sturgeon

□ \$100 Shad

□ \$ \_\_\_\_\_enclosed as an additional tax-deductible donation.

	\$6.00 enclosed for a copy of
Name	Conservation Options:
RR# or Street Address	A Guide for Maine Landowners.
Town /State/Zip	(\$5 for the book, \$1 for postage)
Phone	



- Life in the Pits
- 3 easy things you can do to make Merrymeeting Bay a better place



Inside this issue...

## The **Merrymeeting News**

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