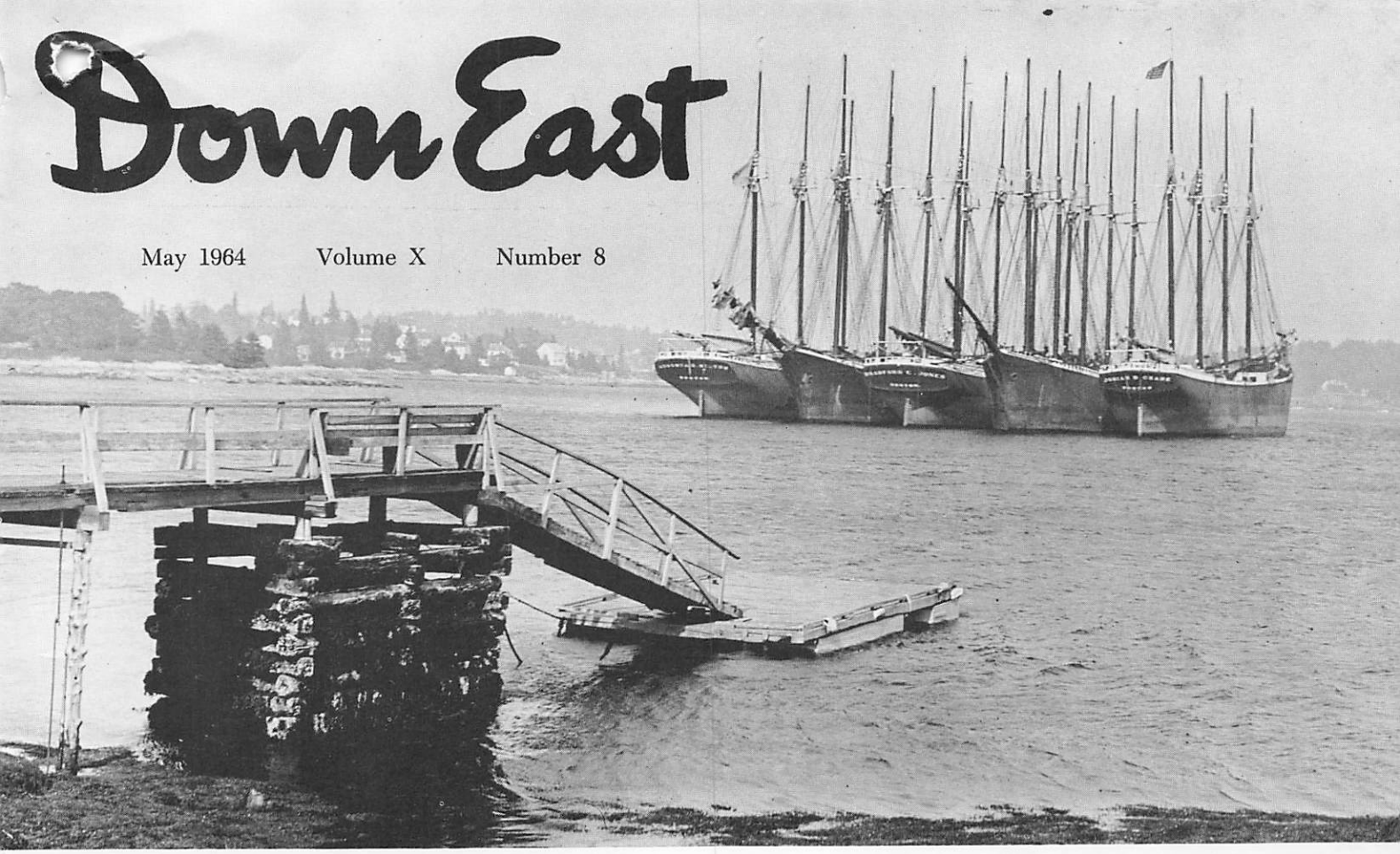
# Down East

May 1964 Volume X Number 8



*In Years Past — Schooners at Boothbay Harbor*

*Cover by Warren Spaulding*


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SUBSCRIPTION RATES: U.S. Territories and Possessions, one year—10 issues—$4.25; two years $7.50; three years $9.75; at newsstands, 50¢ a copy. Canadian and foreign addresses: $1.00 a year extra. The publisher, upon written request from any subscriber, will cancel a subscription and make full refund for copies not yet mailed. Entered as second-class matter at the Post Office at Camden, Maine under act of March 3, 1879.

MANUSCRIPTS: Manuscripts, artwork, photographs and photosequences are invited. However, material submitted and inquiries must be accompanied by a self-addressed stamped envelope. No responsibility assumed for unsolicited contributions. Down East Magazine is published by Down East Enterprise, Inc., Camden, Maine. Zip Code 04843. Phone: Area Code 207, 236-3771. Duane Doolittle, President; Katherin E. Perot, Secretary-Treasurer; August I. Wieners, Advertising, Business and Circulation Manager; Isabel Currier, Associate Editor; J. Malcolm Barter, Assistant to the Publisher; David H. Jinno, Art and Photo Manager; Roland L. Moon, advertising sales representative, Surry, Maine; Alysan Hooper, sales representative, 45 Exchange St., Portland, Maine. Printed in the U.S.A.
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**Credits: Photos:** pp. 20, 21 bottom, 24, 25 top, second from bottom, bottom, Gardner Roberts; pp. 21 top, 23, 25 second from top, U.S. Coast Guard; pp. 26 top, 28 center bottom, 29, Lyman B. Owen; pp. 26 bottom, 27, 28, Paul J. Fournier; pp. 40 top, 41 top three photos, Youngs Photo Service; pp. 40 bottom, 41 bottom, University of Maine; p. 44, Charles Merrill Jr.






EARLY in February, obeying orders from Boston, a U. S. Coast Guard patrol boat put out of Rockland for Eagle Island, carrying a work crew of twelve men armed with crowbars and sledge hammers, on a mission of destruction. Windows and doors were ripped from the former lightkeeper's home and from a nearby barn on the northerly end of the island; glass panels and frames were splintered with mauls, and the debris was tossed on a pile. In a new bathroom, installed in 1958, the sledge hammers served to demolish the bathtub. Radiators and copper tubing, connecting the furnace, were torn out and pitched from the windows. The "service room," built up with brick to connect with the stone light tower, was ripped apart, leaving an unsightly rubble at the base of the tower.

In reporting the final demolition of the Eagle Island "surplus government property" on March 1, 1964, the *Bangor Daily News* quoted CWO Joseph Deltorto, commander of the Rockland moorings. "The Coast Guard felt it was better to salvage what material we could from this property (doors, windows, plumbing fixtures, etc.) and then raze it," CWO Deltorto explained. He told DOWN EAST that the property had been put out to bid "several years ago," but had attracted no bidders. "Nobody wanted to remove the buildings from the land," he said, "and these old buildings go to pieces fast when they are not used. The ceilings fall down, and the plaster falls off the walls."

The government bonfire which completed the razing included almost *all* "salvageable material." Even 12-pane outside windows and combination doors stored in the barn were reduced to splinters with sledge hammers, as was the transom over the door of a small brick oil-house, still standing.

The "small home" which was destroyed was the birthplace of Mrs. Erland Quinn (nee Ball) of Camden, one of nine children, whose father and grandfather tended the Eagle Island light for a total of over thirty-five years. The 6.15 acres of land comprised in the government station originally had been part of the adjoining farm, still owned by her husband, Erland Quinn. He has been trying to get any part of the government's "surplus" holdings back into his family property ever since the Eagle Island light was automated in June, 1959, but has been told repeatedly by the 1st U. S. Coast Guard Command that it was *not for sale.*

Persistently and patiently, through the years, Mr. Quinn sustained his frustrating correspondence with the U. S. Coast Guard Command. On June 4, 1963 he was informed that "the entire property must be retained so that no future buildings or obstructions will interfere with its functions as an aid to navigation."

Guided by precedent, Mr. Quinn had proposed that the Eagle Island light tower be separated from the dwelling and encircled by a fence, as has been done at Monhegan, leaving the surplus buildings intact for private use, under a lease of the land from the government. "Whoever got the surplus buildings on Monhegan under this plan had more pull with the government than I had," Quinn remarked drily. "I continued to get nowhere fast."

It was only after appealing to Senator Margaret Chase Smith that Quinn learned, through a letter to

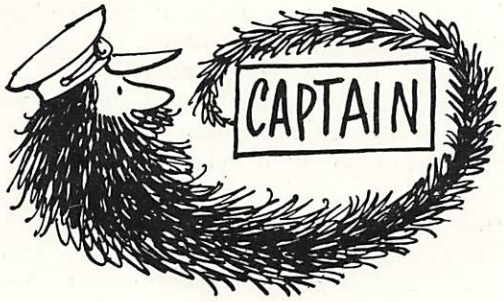


◁ *Operation Salvage: Eagle Island Light —Photo, courtesy of Lynwood Littlefield*

her on August 26, 1963 from the Commandant of U. S. Coast Guard Headquarters in Washington, that the Commander of the First District in Boston was being instructed to sell the buildings for removal from the site, but to retain the land. Quinn, however, was never advised that the buildings were actually up for bidding, nor where a bid might be placed. Furthermore, we know of no notice of their availability having appeared in any Maine publication.

Not having a boat this winter, Quinn has kept in constant touch by citizen's band radio with two elderly relatives in separate homes, who are the only remaining year-round residents of Eagle Island. His cousin, Marion Howard, informed Quinn when the destruction began, and he begged a ride to the island with the Coast Guard demolition crew on February 17th.

There he saw for himself how the fine old doors and windows were being "salvaged" with pulverizing sledge hammers, their remains piled high in readiness for the government bonfire. Erland Quinn has spent forty of his sixty-three years on Eagle Island. And as he left it for the mainland, that was the first time that he felt too heartsick to look back, where the familiar landmarks had been wantonly reduced to nothingness.




## For Captains Only

WE were beginning to ho-hum about the vogue in recent years for Maine men to start sprouting facial foliage, in advance of their home town's centennials and similar celebrations, thereby grooming themselves to appear in great-grandpaw's frock coat and tall hat as if they were reincarnations of the history-makers. But a visitor to our office recently whetted our interest in whiskers by revealing that they were once a status symbol for Maine men of the sea.

An ordinary deckhand might – and did – sport a handlebar mustache. A bosun or a junior officer might reasonably fancy himself as the mutton-chop type. And a mate's sideburns customarily grew so close together that only a furrow separated the two sides, like a cleft in the chin. This separation of chin whiskers into the port and starboard side was, in itself, vulgarly known as "the peasoup drain." But its significance was unmistakable: it meant that the wearer didn't have his ship's master's papers because *only* a licensed captain could, by custom, flaunt the dignity of a full beard.

Our friend did not say what the penalty was, if any, for an unqualified mariner who allowed his whiskers to wander over the area held sacred to captains. But we'll bet there was one, and that a man's shipmates took punishment for such pretense into their own hands. Anyway, we're going to scan the bicentennial parades and similar functions this summer for full captain's beards, and any contemporaries who fail to qualify had better let a patch of their chins show – or else.

## In the Kitty

MAINE'S bounty of $15 each on bobcats has enriched hunters by $7500 thus far this year, and the State Department of Inland Fisheries and Game expects that $6000 more will be paid in bobcat bounties before the end of the year. Meanwhile, the Boston Museum of Science will pay $100 for a panther shot in Maine – or anywhere else in New England – but nary a penny for a panther has been spent, despite reports of their being seen throughout Maine, "as big as a lion and snarling something fierce."

Game Warden Charles Libby of Wells says that the Boston Museum's $100 offer "is pretty safe." He won't say for certain that there couldn't be a panther in Maine. "Maybe there is." Nevertheless, none of the people who say they have seen a panther have been able to substantiate their claims.

People in Maine who see things that they believe to be a panther, mountain lion, puma, cougar or catamount probably are seeing a large dog, a bobcat, or a lynx. One of the last panthers taken in New England, according to the Boston Science Museum, was trapped and shot in Wardsboro, Vermont in 1875, which was a long time ago and a long way from Maine. We venture that Down East bounty hunters will fare better by training a good hound and going after bobcats. By simple arithmetic, seven bobcat bounties in the bank at $15 each are worth more than one possible pelt of a panther.

## Laconic Language

MOST controversial subjects are said to be as broad as they are long – but that is not true of a Mainer's distinctive pronunciation. Although the classical downeast agreement of "ay-ah" may seem to be long at the bow and broad at the stern, careful listeners will note that the final syllable is cut off with a kind of gasp, designed to save the breath.

Just as the British cockney drops his "h's," the true Mainer trims off any unnecessary "A's," regardless of length, at the prow of his few well-chosen words. The town of Arrowsic, for example, is never spoken on the banks of the Kennebec as it is spelled: it's always