June 7, 1997

Karen Poore
108 Holmes Rd.
Scarborough, ME 04074

Dear Karen,

I'm writing in response to your letter to the editor in the *Register* some weeks ago. The paper was unable to give me your address, but Martha Reed at the Boothbay town office supplied it for me. I've not responded through the paper, feeling it would be unsuitable; and I know the paper does not like people to use it as a stage for their disagreements. The paper and I have a good relationship and we want to keep it that way.

As I told your mother when she called, I certainly did not intend to hurt your family or hurt anyone's feelings. However, when your sister called May 4 (a few days before your mother did) and accused me of "slamming" the Marr family, as well as Edward R. Snow, I saw that I had stepped into an unpleasant situation. Since you took the time to lay things out in writing, I will take the time to explain my viewpoint in detail.

Your sister Winnifred tells a different story than you do. She claims her mother and grandmother told her that the story was true, but that it happened before Jeruel's time. Either you or your sister have it wrong, or the story was told in various ways, as tales often are. When your sister told me that no one at the Harbor, including the newspaper, knew what was happening on Southport because Southporters couldn't get to Boothbay Harbor in the 1870s, I realized it was pointless to pursue the conversation with her since she had entrenched naive notions about local history. She also told me Hattie's maiden name was Loring, so I thought (perhaps unfairly) she might be unreliable with facts. I asked your mother, who seems very nice, why your father and Arthur treated the story as a tall tale, and she said she didn't know. It does seem odd to me that you and your sister don't cite the Wolcott Marrs as sources for your information—that would seem most natural to me.

Your father cooperated with the 1955 *Register* Dash article about Jeruel's years at the lighthouse, giving Dave access to the 1872-1905 Hendricks Head log book of Jeruel (and Wolcott Sr.) to help him write the excellent, long article. Though Wolcott helped Dave, nowhere is the baby story mentioned, though many shipwrecks are, implying your father put no stock in the baby story. I hope the log book is still safe somewhere.

I want to explain why I think I am qualified to make judgements about the veracity of the tale. I've read all the Boothbay town warrants since 1764, all the surviving treasurers' books, and all the valuation records up to the late 1800s, thousands of deeds, all Boothbay court cases from the 1730s to 1800, and later selected ones, as well as notarial records of local shipwrecks and accidents in the late 1800s, county commissioners' books up to the mid-1800s, and all of Southport's warrants between 1842 and the 1870s. Basically, I've read nearly everything that exists on early region history, in book or manuscript form. Accordingly, I have a good idea about region conditions and what is and isn't plausible.

I have read every known existing *Boothbay Register* from 1876 to 1944 and have taken notes on their contents. The biggest gap is between 1890 and 1904 in terms of missing papers; all other decades are almost totally complete. From the paper's 1876 beginning, Southport had as regular a column, birth and death announcements, a couple ads, and shipping news as the other region sections. Any vessel disasters were covered, such as: Rand sinking off Cape Hatteras in Dec. 1876, a wreck the same winter at Maddockses at Dogfish Head, and a barque wrecked on the east side of Southport. There was no problem with communication between the towns, and like always, disasters were big news, like gory

car crashes today. Thirty years later, Jeruel's Bath obituary mentioned his imprisonment and how generous he was to religious organizations, but nothing about the baby story.

I have read many pre-1876 papers, maybe 75 or 100, like *Lincoln County News*, *Seaside Oracle*, and *Pemaquid Messenger*. The *Seaside Oracle* supplied shipping news, including Southport. The out-of-town papers occasionally covered Boothbay region news, but usually only if it was steamer news or scheduled outings, a spectacular launching, or a disaster. Fires, gun accidents, and shipwrecks were always covered. So the gale of 1869, when 20 local vessels went ashore in Boothbay, was covered in great detail. After two shipwrecks (with no loss of life except one captain who set out in a dory) at the Cuckolds, the *Witch of the Wave* in October 1873 and *Western Light* in January 1874, a tripod was put up on Cuckolds a few weeks later. All these events were separately covered by the out-of-town paper in three different issues. As I said before, shipwrecks were big news and were covered.

You're wrong about there having been no bridge in the 1800s; there was a bridge between Southport and Boothbay, from Oak Pt. to Landing Rd. The act to incorporate in order to build the bridge was passed by the state legislature in 1857. Before and after that and later bridges, there was a regular ferry between Southport and Boothbay. According to Greene, Rev. Fletcher started it about the 1830s. This is not something I've specifically researched, but it could be easily verified since the county commissioners licensed ferries, setting their placement and fees. There were many along the rivers; always one then between E. Boothbay and Bristol and other such obvious connecting points. People rowed themselves if they didn't want to pay the ferries or dories that were regularly for hire, such as Damon's or the Barters', to Bath. Steamers supplied regular service right after the Civil War, and at the height of the season in, for instance, 1877, six steamers a day stopped at Squirrel Island and the other landings, such as the Upper and Lower on Southport. Again, there was no lack of contact.

From 1987 until his death, Cecil Pierce and I were good friends and spent a lot of time together, thousands of hours, making videos, talking history, etc. At his urging, I made several videos on Southport, of Evelyn Luther Pratt, Katherine Thompson Buck, Ethelyn Pinkham Giles, Emolyn Smith Pratt, many with Cecil, and others, such as about the Ebenecook pound, making windows, making tables, moving the Southport museum, etc. Since 1992 I have worked weekly about half the year with Evelyn Pratt Sherman organizing the Southport documents; Ronnie Orchard joined us in the weekly sessions a couple of years ago. I've read and/or catalogued every piece of paper in the museum, including many of the town papers, such as pauper claims, treasurers' books, etc. I got to know Southporters very well, particularly Marr descendants, and they're the ones who first told me about the baby story and how it couldn't be true. You may have noticed that it was not included in the 1976 book *Gleanings*.

My point is that I don't make statements lightly about the region's past. I spend all my time on local history and, consequently, I have developed a good sense of what did and did not go on here in the past. I take what I am told, measure it against what I've learned in my reading of town records, and come up with what seems possible. The baby story just doesn't fit in the possible category. My Hendricks Head articles got longer than I wanted, so I cut parts, including my statments that despite all the reasons I put forward showing the story was improbable, some people out there would still believe it because the story was attractive; it made them feel special. I guess I should have left that part in!

Sincerely,

Barbara Rumsey