



Map 1. Schoodic Point, early 1800s. Labels in capitals identify owners or occupants of the first properties bought for development, mostly from William Bingham. Geographical features are in italics. Map by Thomas Mayer, Winter Harbor based on Hancock County Deeds, 1:224.

SAVING SCHOODIC: A STORY OF DEVELOPMENT, LOST SETTLEMENT, AND PRESERVATION

BY ALLEN K. WORKMAN

Remote, isolated, and nearly barren Schoodic Point, now the easternmost part of Acadia National Park, was long bypassed by early explorers and settlers. It might have seemed destined to remain deserted, a candidate for coastal parkland preservation in the twentieth century. But like such distant outposts as Vinalhaven, Swan's, and Ironbound islands, Schoodic in the nineteenth century was overtaken by extensive land development, logging, and settlement by fishermen farmers. Eventually its proximity to Bar Harbor made it a target for vacation resort cottages. Yet Schoodic's peninsular ecology and elements of its social circumstances helped it escape such development in favor of land preservation and tourism. Allen Workman, a retired college textbook editor, has summered next to Schoodic Point since 1946. He is a member of the Historical Societies of Winter Harbor and Gouldsboro.

EAST of Bar Harbor, across the bay from the mountainous island that French explorer Samuel de Champlain in 1604 named Mount Desert, a high promontory reaches far out to sea, rising dramatically over 400 feet to dominate the horizon. Micmac mariners, on their many raids or trade voyages southwestwards, may have named this promontory “Eskwodek” — the end, or point of land — a name which subsequent English navigators transformed on charts to approximate our modern name for the point: Schoodic.

Though Champlain did not name this bold eastern promontory, he accurately mapped his discovery to show how this point and adjacent islands formed a fearsome obstacle of ocean currents and heavy surf threatening coastal navigators. Champlain provided a clear view of the archipelago and peninsulas just east of Mount Desert and suggested ways European settlers would see its potential. Comparing the region unfavorably with the oaks and hardwoods of more desirable terrain, the explorer described Schoodic as “mostly covered with pines, firs, spruces

and other woods of inferior quality.” He thought the area offered “very fine and worthy harbors,” but it was “poorly suited as a place to live.”¹

Given the marginal terrain that Champlain saw on Schoodic Point and other peninsulas to the east, it might seem uncertain whether such land would ever have prospects for economic development, or whether it would languish as a relatively undeveloped wasteland until its recreational or ecological value might be recognized. In either case, if and when such land could eventually to be considered for preservation and support for public use, the cycles of its economic development would somehow have to change, and this would likely depend on someone’s willingness to pay what it costs to shift the cycle and preserve the land. Such a cyclic process, which may be typical for much preserved open land in Maine, fits the story of the land at Schoodic Point, but in its own distinctive way.

Over the course of three centuries the land has been shaped by the heavy hand of three entrepreneurial tycoons: William Bingham in the late eighteenth century; John G. Moore in the late nineteenth century; and John D. Rockefeller, Jr. in the early twentieth century. Each imposed his own kind of order on Schoodic’s rough conditions. They, as well as two generations of settlers, set the stage for today’s preservation efforts. Humans can and often do affect the natural environment, but in this case, because of the land’s isolation and its scanty economic possibilities, Schoodic’s fate was determined in a unique way.

Today Schoodic Point is an isolated and almost uninhabited area that lies between the nearby settlements of Bunkers Harbor and Winter Harbor. The region is dominated by 430-foot Schoodic Head Mountain and by the hills surrounding Birch Harbor Mountain immediately to the north, forming a mostly undeveloped green band of forest and shore. Over 2,000 acres around the outer point have become Acadia National Park’s Schoodic Section, an area of unique beauty lying east of the more frequented Mount Desert Island sections of the Park. (See Map 1.) At Schoodic, visitors can treasure a secluded outpost with a serene mountain view, seemingly timeless forests, accessible stretches of bold shore, and dramatic seaward ledges that confront the full surge of Atlantic waves, providing painters and photographers one of America’s iconic images of dramatic surf crashing upon a granite shore. Its unique geography gives the region a sense of being almost an island. Thus Schoodic has long remained a world of its own, at first preserved by its remoteness, and later enjoying a splendid isolation from neighboring coastal towns and villages.

The Enduring Character of the Land

At Schoodic Point a forested land drops off, abruptly eastward and more gradually westward, from the summit of Schoodic Head Mountain, Birch Harbor Mountain, and the sea-facing Anvil bluffs. On both east and west sides of Schoodic Head, shallow salt ponds and mudflats (East Pond and West Pond) are sheltered by small islands (Little Moose and Pond islands). A brackish marsh, connecting these ponds, lies behind the outer headland (Big Moose "Island"), whose seaward ledges are white-rimmed from the spectacular crashing surf of the open Atlantic. About a mile northward on the point's west side, the shore is broken by a small harbor and creek, called Frazer's Creek after its first settler, and later "Lower Harbor."

The unique ecology of the outer point is shaped by its relation to the broader Schoodic Point region that surrounds it. A green band of uninhabited hilly forest two to four miles thick lies to the north of Schoodic Head mountain, insulating the outer point from the nearest villages of Bunkers Harbor and Winter Harbor. This forest surrounds the Birch Harbor Mountain watershed and effectively isolates the outer peninsula from the rest of the mainland. At the same time it conducts a steady flow of plant and animal life toward the outer point, sustaining the entire area in an ecologically balanced tension. The peninsular character of the point region creates environmental conditions that gradually become harsher along the shore and toward the tip, with mainland vegetation thinning until the outer reaches resemble the fragility and sparseness of remote islands. The spare outer tip is thus in delicate balance with the interior, allowing a limited passage for visiting moose, bear, deer, and smaller mammals, while enabling distinctive plant species such as jack pine to reach its southern limit at Schoodic.²

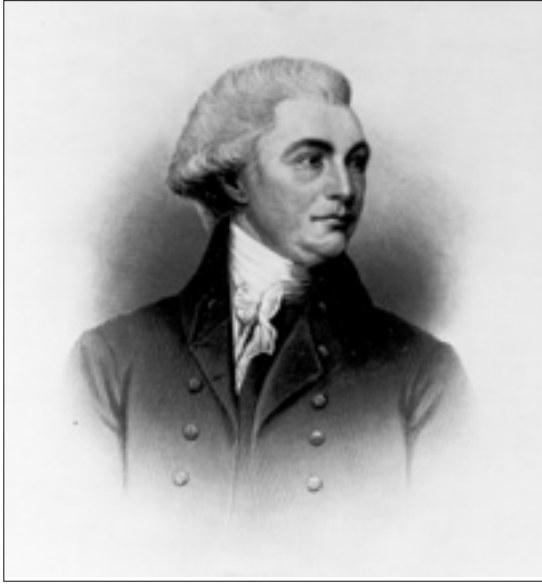
The First Wave of Development at Schoodic

Because of its sparse and unpromising resources, explorers, developers, and settlers were slow to reach Schoodic, thus granting it an unusually long reprieve as a natural area.³ English maps of the 1760s and 1770s make clear that settlers bypassed almost all the seaward harbors and remote peninsulas, leaving Schoodic undisturbed by humans. Four miles north of the point, timber resources attracted the proprietors of Gouldsboro with a sawmill at today's Winter Harbor. Following the American Revolution, lumbering and timber poaching created a rash of legal disputes; at the same time growing awareness of the potential for fishing brought old and new settlers seaward into the area's southern bays and harbors, closer to Schoodic.⁴

The first recorded non-Native inhabitant arrived at Schoodic shortly after the Revolution. Thomas Frazer, listed as a “mulatto with wife and seven children” in the 1790 U.S. Census, settled on Schoodic’s west side at the location still bearing his name: Frazer Point. With such a large family and a wife, whom one source identified as a Native woman, it seems certain that this black pioneer had already lived for some time in the downeast region. He settled at Schoodic on what had been a London proprietor’s land, not as an owner but possibly as agent for the proprietor. Thomas Frazer continued living at the creek now bearing his name for at least fifteen years, paying Gouldsboro and state taxes until 1804 and probably leaving shortly thereafter when colonial proprietary interests in the land were sold. He occupied what would become a productive spot for preserving cod, and it is possible that Frazer was the first in a series of “fish makers” using this space for processing dried fish with quantities of salt, almost all of it imported from abroad.⁵

In the post-Revolutionary era, the chaotic state of Gouldsboro’s land titles and squatters’ claims were brought into order by the intervention of a wealthy proprietor whose land acquisitions permanently influenced the town and the land at Schoodic. The Philadelphian William Bingham, one of the richest men in the United States, was among the most ambitious of the entrepreneurs to invest in land development in the new eastern Maine settlements. In 1793, following a complex series of negotiations, Bingham emerged to become the owner of a vast territory including 2 million acres of interior woodlands in Maine and as an outlet on the coast, most of today’s town of Gouldsboro with parts of Lamoine, Hancock, and Mount Desert Island.

Bingham’s comprehensive 1798 town survey, as mapped by Isaac Coolidge, assigned a role for future development in most of the land throughout town and established a thoroughgoing market appraisal of its real estate. Shore lots near the center of the township’s settlements soon went for four to five dollars per acre; shore lots at newer harbors went for half that, and undeveloped and remote shore went for one dollar or less per acre.⁶ For the Schoodic Point region the 1798 survey shows a mix of land ownership and management priorities. Bingham or his agents apparently chose the remote west shore of the point to locate one of the state-mandated “Public Lots,” making it a key reference point for the surveying of other Schoodic properties and for the bounds of the future Acadia Park. Meanwhile, previously settled properties, such as Thomas Frazer’s dwelling, were excluded from Bingham’s purchase. This earliest house lot, actually owned by the heirs of the colonial proprietors, was sold in 1805, not to Bingham, but to his land agent, General



William Bingham was a representative of Pennsylvania in the Continental Congress and in the United States Senate as a Federalist from 1795 to 1801. He was also a noted land surveyor who, in addition to his speculative exploits in coastal Maine, also surveyed and developed areas of northern Pennsylvania and southern New York, including the area of present day Binghamton, named in his honor. Courtesy of the U.S. Senate Historical Office.

Cobb. As for the Bingham-owned tracts at the point, none were less than 100 acres, substantially larger than most other nearby shore or harbor lots. The outermost part of the point was lumped into a thousand-plus acre lot, apparently not considered habitable land. Despite Bingham's ambitions, Schoodic did not attract investment, development, permanent residence, or purchase until the mid-1830s — late compared to the surrounding region.⁷

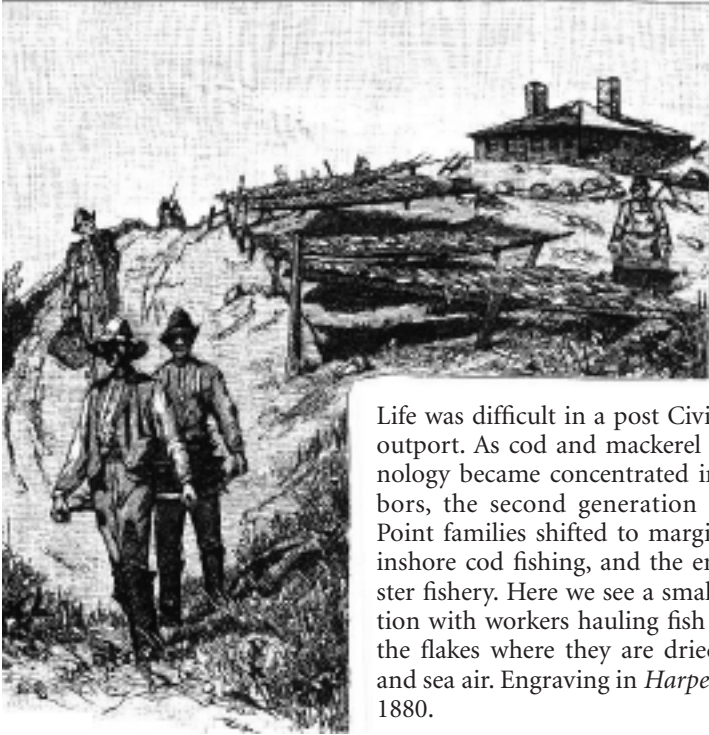
Yet the physical features and skimpy resources that Champlain had identified at Schoodic were becoming more attractive in the early 1800s as nearby harbors developed a critical mass of local sea fishery talent, an increasing demand for timber along the shore, and the capital necessary to exploit such opportunities. A federal fishing bounty implemented in 1819 encouraged captains and crewmen to build schooners that roamed to the faraway Canadian banks to supply salt-dried cod and mackerel to the urban Northeast and the plantation South. At the same time the rising price of lumber from the upper Penobscot Valley was driving demand for more marginal timber, and the voracious lime furnaces of Rockland generated a demand for kiln wood. Buyers in an era of land

speculation were thus motivated to seek formerly neglected coastal timberland. By the mid-1830s these conditions had ripened, even for isolated Schoodic.⁸

The west shore of Schoodic Point, the “Lower Harbor” near Frazer Creek, was possibly used by squatters for drying and salting fish during the three decades after Frazer left. But in 1836 physician-entrepreneur John Frisbee purchased the cove from Cobb and Bingham for fish processing.⁹ An 1838 town report denoted the waters as “Frisbee’s Harbor” and described a road leading from the village to the creek. By 1840 Frisbee owned and skippered his own fishing schooner, the *Industry*. He hired as crew and facility managers the heads of five families: three Rider brothers from Vinalhaven and two in-laws from Cranberry Isles, Leonard Holmes and Charles Norris. By the time Frisbee left in 1845, he had sold the entire operation, including buildings, for ten dollars an acre, more than triple his 1836 investment. A deed fifty years later describes a large shoreline “fish house”; its likely foundations are still visible today.¹⁰

Thanks to the demand for lumber and kiln wood, the modest timber resources noted by Champlain had become valuable. Logging development during the 1830s is partly measurable by price increases on land and improvements. After some dozen years of logging, cleared areas were often sold at three to four times their purchase cost.¹¹ The thousand-acre tract on the tip of Schoodic Point was the focus of exceptionally intensive development after 1840. Bingham sold it to two partners who paid with the proceeds from cutting the timber and selling some land piecemeal at cost. The waterfront area around the West Pond was virtually clearcut and then improved as a shoal-draft harbor and logging depot. To accomplish this, developers blasted a “canal” or entry, still usable today, through ledges and added a “breastwork,” wharves, buildings, and a roadway along a creek to reach a large nearby farmstead. After nine years the improvements were sold at a price four times the original, while the adjacent shore lot on Big Moose Island brought double its initial cost per acre.¹²

The demand at Rockland for lime kiln wood linked this first development of Schoodic to the lime supply for buildings in distant New York. This intense logging changed the ecology of Schoodic’s outer islands substantially, for both Little Moose and Schoodic islands have few if any trees today, and both were targets for timber cutting during this period. Large clearcuts on Big Moose Island, on the mainland around West Pond, and in the Frazer Creek area, are shown on a U.S. Geological



Life was difficult in a post Civil War Maine outport. As cod and mackerel fishing technology became concentrated in larger harbors, the second generation of Schoodic Point families shifted to marginal farming, inshore cod fishing, and the emerging lobster fishery. Here we see a small fishing station with workers hauling fish to and from the flakes where they are dried in the sun and sea air. Engraving in *Harper's Magazine*, 1880.

Survey map made about a generation after the major logging. Local residents recall these areas as remaining thinly forested into the 1920s, while today the varied character of tree growth there still gives testimony to the heavy impact of early timber cutting.¹³

Early deeds show active logging in the Schoodic region, especially for more kiln wood than lumber: “[Thomas] Arey [the buyer] to pay ... 600 cords of good kiln wood. . . . [S]uch wood as grows on the premises, and fifty cords of merchantable spruce wood for Boston merchants.”¹⁴ By 1850 lumbering was still a trade for some townsmen and for one Schoodic resident, as recorded in the U.S. Census. But by 1860 few, if any, still lumbered, suggesting a decline in large operations in the area. With few roads available, moving timber out of the coastal forest and onto stone or boulder beaches for boat transport was a challenge. Small pinky-style schooners were beached or drawn up in shallow water, as on West Pond, with logs winched or slid aboard. Rockland area harbors were crowded with these small schooners or “kiln wooders.” While such intensive logging exploitation made for an active market-oriented trade at Schoodic through the 1840s, it produced few permanent residents.¹⁵



Taken some decades later (1895), this is the *Heather Bell* docked at Rockland with a load of kiln wood for the lime furnaces around Rockland harbor. Woodlands, like those on Schoodic Point that had been largely overlooked by the mast traders, shipwrights, and builders of earlier decades, were heavily exploited by mid century to provide kiln wood for the lime industry of the mid coast. Courtesy of Walsh History Center, Camden Public Library.

The Rise and Fall of the Schoodic Settler Communities

Bingham's plan for town development assumed that settlers would take up the land after the loggers had finished removing the wood. But Schoodic was unlikely to attract settlers with farming ambitions. Indeed the Schoodic settlers of the late 1840s were not from the same farming background as most of the town's colonial-era and post-Revolutionary settlers. Nine of the point's new settler families combined a seafaring life with lumbering, having come from island communities farther west. Two families were connected to the Cranberry Isles, and seven to Vinalhaven, with five of these apparently linked at first to the fish processing center at Lower Harbor, where they could position themselves in the burgeoning cod and mackerel fishery in competition with the fishing vessels at Vinalhaven. In addition, the remaining forest offered more timber than the largely denuded islands of Penobscot Bay. From Schoodic's marginal soils, declining timber, and small harbors, they extracted a meager prosperity.¹⁶

If some settlers hoped to develop an intensive market-oriented agriculture on the land, no such efforts succeeded. The bulk of the new population concentrated at Frazer Creek, where the tidal creek and harbor became the village of “Lower Harbor,” sustaining a thin population of three families in 1840. Five years later, with two of those families having moved on, a new wave of settlers arrived and the fish processing facility changed hands. Before 1850 more Vinalhaven families were drawn to the region, settling five saltwater farmsteads. Near West Pond Jabez Myrick, a fishing captain, had almost 100 cleared acres, while Thomas Arey cleared even more land, with extensive fields and pastures. Just to the east at nearby Bunkers and Wonsqueak harbors, Arey’s cousin, also from Vinalhaven, set up a small saltwater farmstead along with a logging and fishing operation. At Lower Harbor, the new fish plant owner developed perhaps ten acres of tillage and pasture south of his wharf, while two of his former employees farmed about five acres north of Frazer Creek. Today the cleared fieldstone walls, cellar holes, clamshell dumps, bridge heads, and road work are still visible.¹⁷

It took great effort to clear farms in this rugged and isolated region. Still, the prospect may have looked relatively good to immigrants from the offshore islands, who expected to get a good initial crop from newly cut timberland enriched by ash from burned brush — a typical slash-and-burn strategy practiced on cut-over ground on nearby islands. Yet the fertility of such thin soil, even with additions of seaweed and manure, could not last. Crops were typically limited to hay, potatoes, and some oats, barley, corn, buckwheat, peas, or beans. Apples were certainly important, for these trees can still be found in scattered locations. Fish and clams provided protein, as evidenced by several clamshell dumps around the farms.¹⁸

Livestock herds appear to have been small; records for the 1880s and 1890s show none of the farms in the Schoodic Point vicinity with more than one cow, two heifers, a horse, perhaps a pig and some chickens, and up to fifteen sheep. Judging from estimates elsewhere in New England, Schoodic farmers operated on the edge of subsistence, with perhaps enough to barter locally, but no prospects for surpluses to sell in the larger market.¹⁹ A hint at these local markets can be gleaned from the journals of physician Nathaniel Pendleton of Winter Harbor, who took goods in barter for his services during the 1850s and 1860s. Patients brought him milk, manure, building stone, potatoes, sheep, and the use of their oxen. Thomas Arey, owner of a relatively large farm, hoped to take advantage of a new road built by the town in 1855, which linked his “Schoodic Farm” to the village of Winter Harbor. Yet soon thereafter he

began abandoning the farm, seeking mortgages, buyers, and then tenants after he moved in 1860. The failure of this ambitious farmstead is indicative of the Schoodic region's poor agricultural prospects. Operating at the edge of sustainability, Schoodic's farming families had to seek prosperity elsewhere.²⁰

Most Schoodic residents looked to the ocean as their primary source of opportunity. Small schooners in this coastal region were typically owned by two to six partners and crewed by relatives or neighbors. A federal fishing bounty, based on fishing effort, along with the low-cost technology of hand lines fished from the deck, gave these fishermen a decent, if hazardous, living for a small investment. Neighborhood fishing ventures were common: in 1861 the *Laurel* out of Lower Harbor was owned, captained, and crewed by two local families, while the *Diamond* out of West Pond was owned and captained by landowner Jabez Myrick and crewed by his sons. As was also all too common, both Joy and Myrick were later lost at sea.²¹

The central element in this fishing economy was the "fish making" plant at Schoodic's Lower Harbor, the remote site of which may have been ideal for such an odoriferous process. This operation required sun-drying the split fish on racks while treating them with salt. Each marketed barrel of dried fish required about three bushels of salt preservation at sea — about a third of the total cost of outfitting a voyage — and another bushel ashore in the drying operation. Imported in bulk in rock form, the salt often needed refinement in salt pools. Schoodic's "fish maker" Leonard Holmes managed all this until 1857, when his partner Charles Norris took up the trade. The fish, packed or barreled on the decks of schooners, was freighted to urban northeastern, southern, and Caribbean markets. Thus it was the sea rather than the soil that gave Schoodic Point settlers a livelihood and tied them to worldwide markets.²²

Between 1850 and 1860 the first Schoodic settlers reached a delicate balance with the land. Their population stabilized at around seventy-five people living in what is now the Acadia Park area. Charles Norris sold a large portion of Lower Harbor's south bank to a prosperous old-settler couple, the Bickford-Wescotts. Thus Lower Harbor by the early 1860s was a community of seven to eight families, making over fifty people. The West Pond area, with its two farmsteads, had up to six families and twenty-five people before Thomas Arey left in 1860. This population was part of a closely connected network encompassing Lower Harbor, the West Pond section, and equally populous Bunker and Wonsqueak har-

bors, linked by logging roads and by sea.²³ For most, land was a capital resource, often leveraged for financing shares in fishing vessels or purchasing more timberland. Thus fish-maker Charles Norris, land investor William Wescott, and fishing captain Mark Joy pooled their resources to acquire almost all of the "Public Lot" as a timber resource.²⁴ A major disaster struck the area when a diphtheria epidemic swept through the area in the fall of 1862. Although children were especially vulnerable, young men were not spared, and some families lost nearly all their children. The epidemic was perhaps comparable with many tragedies sustained by Maine during the Civil War, but unlike many rural Maine communities, Schoodic was neither decimated by war enlistments nor abandoned during the demographic readjustments after the war. Rather, for Schoodic residents, it was the sheer exhaustion of their hopes in the land and the decline in their maritime livelihoods that took its toll.²⁵

After the war the North Atlantic fishery shifted, bypassing the small-scale cod and mackerel fishing operations that sustained eastern Maine communities. Small outports like those on the Schoodic Peninsula faced obsolescence as expensive, large-scale fishing methods combined with America's changing food habits to create a preference for fresh fish, as opposed to dried and salted varieties. Lacking the necessary rail connections, fishermen of the downeast coast could not supply this market. In fact Charles Norris, the surviving owner of Lower Harbor's fish-making center, scaled down the operation in favor of saltwater farming, although his sons and most neighbors remained in fishing, probably shifting into the inshore lobster and herring fisheries. The diphtheria epidemic had taken a toll on local families, and many had scattered to different parts of the Schoodic region. The West Pond section was left with no full-time residents and saw very little use except for a few shepherd's huts and fish camps that were occupied in the summers.²⁶

Through the early 1880s Lower Harbor remained the center for the point's modest population of forty to fifty residents. Myrick's children and their families occupied a large house on the point in Lower Harbor. Wescott-Bickford in-laws and their families remained in another house nearby. These clans, with Charles Norris and his married children plus the remnant of three other families, made up a tightly-knit cluster of residents. To make ends meet with diminishing resources, one widow tried an unsuccessful mining lease while others turned to sheep herding on abandoned farm clearings in the outer sections of Schoodic Point. Norris retired to his marginal farm; another resident turned to ship carpentry, and two became full or part-time lighthouse keepers at Mark

Island off the western shore. Others eked out livelihoods as fishermen and mariners.²⁷

In fact most descendents of the first Schoodic settlers remained in the maritime trades — if not in deep-water fishing and transport then in the growing inshore lobster and herring fishery so well suited to small-craft ownership and inexpensive coastal weirs. One of Frazer Creek's many names, "weir creek," confirms oral accounts that describe fishermen working herring nets and seines along the creek into the early twentieth century. To hold the shellfish for favorable pricing, many lobstermen developed "pounds," or enclosures, like those in nearby Bunkers Harbor where dealers built two such pounds, securing the economic future of that village. But Lower Harbor's lobstermen sold mostly to visiting schooners from factory dealers, because their cove was not developed as a pound until about 1924, long after the permanent residents had deserted the area. Lacking a pound, local lobster fishermen had no economic focal point similar to the fish-making operation that sustained the community earlier, and the benefit of their nearness to fishing grounds was erased by faster fishing craft from the village of Winter Harbor.²⁸

Thus by the mid-1880s, the second generation of Schoodic settlers, having lost almost all the economic advantages that had drawn their



Inshore fishermen working their cod lines from a dory in a vigorous downeast swell. Engraving in *Harper's Magazine*, 1880, courtesy of the author.

parents to the land, were beginning to leave. The exhausted soils and the loss of the banks, lobster, and herring fisheries to centralized markets elsewhere convinced the remaining residents that they could make a better living by moving out of the area. From eight households and just under fifty people in 1880, Lower Harbor village declined to six families in 1890. The Public Lot timberlands to the south of the village, once cooperatively owned, were sold to absentee owners, mortgaged, or abandoned. By 1900 Obed Bickford's extended family, with one son on Lower Harbor's north bank and two more on the south bank, were the only recorded residents left at the village. They hung on until the World War I era when the patriarch died, but for most purposes Schoodic Point had come to be characterized locally as "unused" territory.²⁹

A Market for Resort Development and Recreation

The growth of outdoor recreation in the late nineteenth century was part of a nationwide desire for refuge from the ills of rapid industrialization and urban life. These trends renewed interest in the "undiscovered" Maine coast and its wide-open market for recreational land. At Bar Harbor the demand for resort and summer cottage property surged after the mid-1870s depression, and by 1884, with rail and ferry service from Boston and New York, Mount Desert Island became a developer's dream. By 1887, when speculators had exhausted suitable sites near Bar Harbor, their gaze turned eastward to Schoodic.³⁰

The market for vacation land in the Schoodic region seems to have been sparked in the mid-1880s when E.J. Hammond, a successful younger son of a former Lower Harbor settler, made a dramatic summertime return with his family to his home village of Winter Harbor. By 1887 Hammond had completed his purchase of prime harbor land from Dr. Pendleton's heirs, opening a resort hotel there the next year and initiating a cottage development scheme north of the village. This turn of events set off an explosion of vacation land purchases throughout Gouldsboro and into the Schoodic region. In that same year, local land speculators began an extensive series of purchases in the region, with two concentrating in the Schoodic Point area. Charles C. Hutchings purchased the Rider farm on Lower Harbor's north bank, and these holdings soon included the land that became a summer colony at Grindstone Neck. This was quickly combined with 3,000 acres along Wonsqueak Bay, and within another two years these were merged with other properties into a New York and Philadelphia consortium, the Gouldsboro Land Improvement Company. Its holdings, clustered around the new Grindstone Neck resort colony, constituted the principal territory for what be-

came a new Winter Harbor township. Down on outer Schoodic Point, Charles Norris' son Frank had begun a series of land title clearances, purchases, and consolidations, which he sold to two large land development holdings: the Schoodic Peninsula Land Company and the Harvard Land Company, both based in Bar Harbor. The Schoodic Peninsula Company laid out roads bearing names like "Park Avenue" and "Raven Street" (after the nearby Raven's Nest bluff). Only five years after Hammond moved to the area as a summer resident, Schoodic Point was ready for resort cottages, and several had been sold to vacation owners.³¹

Much as William Bingham had created a stabilizing plan for the point a century before, now a group of wealthy New York and Philadelphia "rusticators" had created an improvement company to impose order and predictability on a development environment that was becoming chaotic. From its holdings just across Frenchman's Bay, the Land Improvement Company founded the Grindstone Neck summer colony as a private fiefdom away from the increasingly commercialized tourist world of Bar Harbor. The company defined a new township, Winter Harbor, as a service support and tax refuge for the colony, and through its elaborate prospectus it highlighted its key resources, including a reliable water supply in Birch Harbor Pond, uncluttered views of the Grindstone colony, and control of future development along the west shore of Schoodic Point.

While the prospectus made only disdainful mention of E.J. Hammond's rival development, the company no doubt had serious concerns about the fate of outer Schoodic Point. While a small remnant of the descendants of early settlers was clinging to the rim of Lower Harbor, much acreage was under threat of development by the Schoodic Peninsula and Harvard companies, each of which had the appearance of a "wildcat" resort promotion. In 1895 two Belfast developers launched another mammoth resort project a dozen miles to the east on Petit Manan Point. The Grindstone founders were eager to suppress another resort on Schoodic Point.³²

A native of Steuben, tycoon John G. Moore was a leader in the Improvement Company, and in fact probably its main architect. He had become a major player in the harshly competitive world of New York finance in the post-Civil-War era. Moore's formidable achievements included sponsoring a Supreme Court repeal of federal income taxes (which waited until 1913 for a constitutional amendment), and developing a new railroad line for coastal eastern Maine. This powerful capitalist soon established his place at the colony in a palatial new cottage named "Far From the Wolf." Here Moore entertained the rich and powerful, in-

A Gilded Age financier who rose from local village origins, Thomas Moore largely engineered the Grindstone summer colony and the new town of Winter Harbor in 1895 before turning his attention to acquiring most of outer Schoodic Peninsula and constructing an early carriage road system to the top of Schoodic Head Mountain. Courtesy of Winter Harbor Historical Society.



cluding Republican kingmaker Mark Hanna and Speaker of the House Thomas B. Reed. Moore's view to the eastward from his Grindstone cottage presented an objective worthy of his acquisitive talent and energy. In 1897 he launched his Schoodic project, an odd mixture of grand development designs, private ambitions, and public-spirited benevolence. He possibly expected his improvements to become an amenity for the new Grindstone colony, but whatever his desires, he moved quickly and decisively.³³

Moore set forth in early 1897 to create a property at outer Schoodic that would determine the shape of the future Acadia Park property. Working mostly through a local agent, he bargained with the various owners, buying out the original land companies and their customers. As his Schoodic acquisitions came together, it became clear that he intended to build a road to the top of the mountain. (See Map 2.) By fall 1897 he had acquired over 2,000 acres, almost all of today's Acadia Park land, and had begun building a new carriage road along the Schoodic shore, up to the summit, and down to East Pond. In 1898 a *Bar Harbor Record* reporter predicted that the road would "without doubt become a favorite drive with the summer visitors." Enthralled by the beauties of Schoodic, the journalist gave out details about a "proposed camp," evidently on the site of today's Schoodic Head parking area. The camp never materialized, but in February Moore acquired the Moose Island cluster, and another excited *Record* reporter detailed his plans to use the islands as a hunting and fishing reserve featuring a massive stone hunting lodge with landscaped grounds and accommodations for thirty guests. The reporter speculated that Moore would "lay out over \$70,000 in improvements on Schoodic Peninsula and these islands" — nearly



Map 2. Shaded areas show various Moore properties assembled between 1897 and 1900. The carriage road shown to the south of Lower Harbor, up Schoodic Head, and toward East Pond, was built by J.G. Moore, 1897-1898. Moore's land south of the bold line was gifted to Acadia National Park in 1929. The Birch Harbor Mountain band north of the bold line, mostly privately owned and largely unoccupied in 2008, has been the target of proposals to build a large resort community. Map by Thomas Mayer, Winter Harbor, based on Hancock County Deeds for the properties shown.

two million in twenty-first century dollars. Whatever the credibility of these reports, they indicate a purpose more recreational than residential; Moore seems to have envisioned a private park preserve rather than a commercial lodge or new resort colony.³⁴

By the fall of 1898 Moore and his Schoodic parkland had acquired a near-mythic reputation. The author of an article titled "King of Schoodic" observed: "the natives look upon the transaction as the great freak of a rich man . . . [while] the summer boarders from the city suspect him of indulging in some great land speculation, and are talking of the great piles of money he is going to make by cutting his 20 thousand

acre pine forest into villa sites.” The article printed Moore’s statement for the press:

I bought these mountains and this land for a number of good reasons, just as other people buy pictures or pieces of china or diamonds or fancy horses. I bought them because I admired them as a boy, and it is a great pleasure to feel that they are mine. They didn’t cost as much as many pictures and some horses, and they can’t be stolen or burned up or die. This is the only place on the Atlantic Coast where the mountains come down to the sea, and therefore I own something that nobody else has or can have....

Then it is a good investment. I don’t expect to make any pecuniary gain out of it, but the land will grow more valuable every day. It is the finest summer climate in the world, and some time there will be a large community on that island [meaning Big Moose Island]. You know that the land on which Bar Harbor now stands was once sold for 50 cents, and now a villa site costs \$10,000.

I built a road to the top of that mountain (Schoodic Head) first for my own pleasure and convenience, so that I could enjoy my kingdom, and second, to stimulate local enterprise. . . . Besides it gave employment to a large number of people who need the money.³⁵

Moore was clearly aware of Schoodic’s potential for resort development, yet he appeared determined to forgo that, preserving his mountain for its recreational value. His main emphasis was pride in creating a widely praised model road that “opened and beautified the unused Schoodic Peninsula” — the same roadbed used by Acadia Park’s engineers forty years later.³⁶

Moore soon afterward made another important Schoodic land transfer. In 1899 he helped liquidate the Gouldsboro Land Improvement Company and thus acquired the vast Birch Harbor Mountain watershed territory — 3,400 acres including the hilly band just north of today’s park that defines the peninsular character of Schoodic. This land constitutes most of the foreground view that he and today’s visitors would see northward from his mountaintop. It will never be known whether Moore saw this acreage as part of his complete Schoodic Point complex, because he died abruptly in June 1899, just short of age fifty-two, seemingly of a heart attack. His most obvious legacy is the preservation of the outer point, with over 2,000 acres that became the core of the Schoodic section of Acadia National Park (see Map 2). Moore rescued the land from further development — and preserved it for the ambitious visionary known today as the park’s savior.³⁷

Schoodic Becomes a National Park

For a generation after Moore's death, from 1899 to the 1930s, the Schoodic lands remained largely untouched. This was a critical step in preparing the land for park status. This hiatus occurred because for twenty-eight years Moore's widow and daughters, despite their diminishing interest in the community, continued honoring his wishes by holding the land that now makes up the park. Amazingly, neither a move to England nor a two-fold increase in land taxes stopped Moore's widow Louise or his daughter Ruth from retaining, and even rounding out its original holdings in Lower Harbor a few months after Moore's death. The Grindstone colony's Improvement Company gained control of the Birch Harbor Mountain territory, alienating land that is still privatized east and north of today's park. Yet fortunately, Moore's unmarried daughter Faith retained substantial property in the Grindstone neighborhood. Although she lived much of the time in England, she apparently sustained an heir's interest in preserving her father's first Schoodic purchases for use by the Grindstone colonists and the local community.

During this long hiatus, Schoodic Point went through a substantial change, becoming for the first time relatively open to the public. As an abandoned development venture, it assumed the character of a large vacant lot, and like any vacant lot, it was subject to public abuse. John Moore's carriage roads gradually deteriorated, but the colonists and the local public frequented the land. A variety of people regularly passed through this almost deserted region. Trails appeared over the marsh to Big Moose, and old logging roads continued in use over Schoodic Head and Birch Harbor Mountain as villagers visited friends and relatives, and as rusticators toured "the ponds" from a local hostelry at Wonsqueak. Hunters and boaters used the roadbeds to carry skiffs to the water on the outer point, and a few lobstermen maintained summer fish camps. The old sheep pastures remained open, perhaps even grazed, as on the adjoining peninsulas, until the World War I era. During the same period, the Crane and Norris plots remained at Lower Harbor, and Obed Bickford's clan continued in residence there. In 1924, too late to benefit the ghost community, two men from nearby harbors finally built a lobster pound and seined herring on Lower Harbor's Little Point. Schoodic Point's last gasp of commercial development came in the 1930s when an investor bought the pound, built a residence, and staffed it with a man-aging family until World War II.³⁸

After World War I land taxes began to play a major part in decisions about Schoodic. Moore's widow and his daughter Ruth had both mar-

ried and moved on, settling with daughter Faith in the English countryside and pursuing interests far removed from Schoodic. Taxes doubled over the next two decades, and in time this became a concern for Moore's heirs. This was more than likely an issue when Moore's widow Louise Leeds sat with park benefactor George Dorr at a Jordan Pond House dinner in September 1922 and discussed the status of Schoodic Point.³⁹

The model for Acadia Park's land preserve was the Trustees of Reservations started in Massachusetts in 1891 by Harvard President Charles Eliot's son, a frequent rusticator at Mount Desert. In 1901 George Dorr and Eliot, Sr. applied this concept to watershed conservation and mountaintop preservation on Mount Desert Island by creating the Hancock County Trustees of Reservations. As the trusteeship gained momentum, Dorr and Eliot sought tax-free status for the Trustees' land on Mount Desert, and in 1913 they proposed National Monument status as the only way to protect Mount Desert's mountaintops from state tax liability. Dorr brilliantly sold the preservation concept, first to President Woodrow Wilson as a National Monument, and then to Congress in 1918-1919 as Lafayette National Park, in recognition of the Marquis de Lafayette, a French nobleman who served as a general during the American Revolution.

Dorr was still using the Trustees of Public Reservations as a private vehicle for acquiring and transferring new land for the park area on Mount Desert when in 1922 he had a seemingly chance dinner meeting with Moore's widow Louise Leeds. He registered agreeable surprise as she "asked if I would not like to have her interest, a third, in Schoodic Peninsula." The next day the two led a party up the still navigable road to the summit of Schoodic Head Mountain, and from there resolved to persuade Moore's other heirs in England to join in the gift. After long and complex negotiations, Dorr secured the gift to the Trustees in 1927. The heirs' main requirement was for "its use in perpetuo by the public and in memory of the late John G. Moore its former owner." The bankers' deed for widow Louise's estate exceeded Moore's daughters' terms, emphasizing that "the premises shall be held forever as a free public park or for other public purposes," little suspecting that these purposes might include a large Navy base. Dorr found there was still one important unexpressed condition from the donor families in England: as avid Anglophiles, they were reluctant to donate land to a park named for a Frenchman, but were willing if the name were changed. Dorr decided upon "Acadia Park" — still French in origin, but apparently more

Working with Charles Eliot, John D. Rockefeller, Jr., and other landowners on Schoodic Point and Mount Desert Island, George Dorr pieced together tracts of land for preservation and created Lafayette National Park in 1919, later to be renamed Acadia. It was the first park of its kind east of the Mississippi River. National Park Service photo, courtesy of the author.



acceptable to the Moores. His “tactful handling” likely included reminders of the tax costs of Schoodic land, which in 1926 abruptly increased by nearly another 50 percent. In any case, by 1929 his trusteeship had deftly arranged for over 2,000 acres of outer Schoodic Point and some other areas to become part of a newly expanded and renamed Acadia National Park. Much of the point had become a preserved park, open to the public.⁴⁰ Perhaps George Dorr, as the first Acadia Park director, would have been content to see outer Schoodic Point continue forever in its original primitive condition. His view on park land, as later reported by the Rockefellers, favored “leaving it wild” for the quiet pursuit of nature in an undeveloped state, accessible to the “woods wise” hiker and appreciative naturalist. But Dorr was above all a political realist and quite ready to adapt to changing conditions.⁴¹

Schoodic’s Third Phase of Development

By 1930, Schoodic had become part of America’s greatest national treasure — its national parks. And among those looking for new ways to improve and develop these lands was John D. Rockefeller, Jr., the third tycoon to oversee development at Schoodic. After World War I, he had focused much of his public philanthropy on Mount Desert Island, where he had settled in a Tudor-beamed “cottage” in 1910. Energized by his vision that preserved land should be seen by an appreciative public and made accessible to visitors, and with a disposition toward carefully-planned engineering, Rockefeller quietly and steadily bought land adja-



John D. Rockefeller, Jr. is a central figure in any history of Acadia National Park. While he sought to impose his own vision on the landscape, it was a vision that prevented widespread development in cherished scenic spaces. National Park Service photo, courtesy of the author.

cent to the emerging Acadia Park. In 1930 he began building his famous carriage roads and bridges, mostly on his land but partly also on areas owned by the park or the trustees. Most of these cooperative arrangements he accomplished by carrot-and-stick negotiations with Dorr and the park administrators, with his future land donations always on the horizon. The next step in Rockefeller's vision for the park in the 1930s was to extend his program for access by motor roads, already completed and donated for Jordan and Bubble ponds. He was now ready to fund and oversee construction of a summit motor route over park land to Cadillac Mountain, but was especially keen to build the Ocean Drive, today's Park Loop road around Otter Cliffs, principally on land he owned and would soon donate. Before long, his vision had a direct impact on the landscape at Schoodic.⁴²

Rockefeller enlisted George Dorr to help him deal with an inconvenient obstruction to his Ocean Drive plan: a World War I-era international radio signal station owned by the U.S. Navy on the heights of Otter Cliffs that stood immediately in his path. Rockefeller was eager to persuade the Navy to move the station elsewhere, but must have been pleased that Dorr claimed credit, during the spring and summer of 1930, for identifying Schoodic Point as the only available mainland alternative to Otter Cliffs.⁴³

And so both Dorr and Rockefeller were willing to compromise the newly preserved status of Schoodic in favor of their vision of public

progress. In Dorr's words, "no site less favorable [than Otter Cliffs] would be acceptable, in exchange, to the Navy Department, I knew, and there was but one location which I thought might equal it — the far seaward projection of Schoodic Peninsula, the Park's recent acquisition." In fact Rockefeller was also directly involved in promoting the Schoodic alternative and personally surveyed the site at Big Moose in mid-May 1930. Thus was Rockefeller's golden finger directed at Schoodic Point, and Dorr promptly sought Navy brass to look favorably on this mainland location, soon securing the consent of the Secretary of the Navy — an "old friend" of his in Boston.

With Rockefeller pushing for a deadline, Dorr strove to overcome Navy technical objections and find federal funding. With the help of David Rodick, attorney for the Trustees of Public Reservations, he consulted Navy radio experts and secured an encouraging report: "there could be no question, they said, as to the exceptional radio receptive fitness of the Schoodic site. Objection could center only on the relative isolation for its personnel." Dorr helped engineering experts establish water and power on the site and pulled strings in Washington to fund the necessary road and buildings. The deal was confirmed in 1932. Rockefeller was, of course, pleased to open the way for his Ocean Drive, and he oversaw its construction concurrently with work being done in 1933 and 1934 on the new road at Schoodic, where he took an active interest in constructing roads and drilling artesian wells. It seems likely that he and Dorr, through trusteeship associates, were behind the 1933 purchase of the core twenty-six-acre plot for the radio station and most of the remaining abandoned lots at Lower Harbor. In a final grand philanthropic gesture, Rockefeller signaled his pleasure in this newly accessible Schoodic District of the Park by funding and overseeing an elegant new brick-and-beam "Acadian lodge," hoping to set a park-like tone for the new Navy radio signal base that opened in February 1935.⁴⁴

During the Depression the presence of the Navy base at Schoodic drew major federal funding and improvements for the park, developing it into the tourist-friendly configuration seen today, with trails, roadways, picnic facilities, and an extended base road around the east side of the point to Wonsqueak Harbor. While the base itself grew larger during the Cold War era, it remained self-contained as a partly covert signal operation with little impact on the nearby tourist experience. When satellite technology made the base obsolete, its facilities were turned over to Acadia Park in 2002 and converted into an educational and research center, adding a different mix of visitor traffic to the point region.⁴⁵



Taken in 1933, this photograph depicts the new roadway built by federal contractors to access the new Navy station, relocated at the behest of John D. Rockefeller, Jr., from Mount Desert Island to Schoodic Point. Note the extensive blasting required to cut a roadway through the ledges of Schoodic granite. Courtesy of the author.

In 2007 a foreign holding company, owning the still private Birch Harbor Mountain property that surrounds the Park, began publicizing plans to develop a massive recreational “eco-resort,” projected to occupy most of its forested green-band area. The layout as presented in 2008 seemed designed to engulf this isolated landscape with the trappings of a luxury resort quite at odds with the semi-wilderness conservation culture that had grown here over the course of a century.⁴⁶

And so for Schoodic, the cycle of development and preservation remains active. Starting with the nineteenth-century settlers forced by the marginal environment gradually to abandon their homesteads, and passing through resort developers to Moore’s private preservation, Dorr’s public park success, and Rockefeller’s promotion of a Navy base development, much of Schoodic Point has been preserved as an open landscape of great beauty. Whether its preserved land will be “loved to death,” choked by surrounding development, or further preserved for its natural integrity, remains an open question.

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