

Old Crossroad, Between SWH And Seal Cove, Is Re-Created

by LaRue Spiber

You are standing on an old road and are looking north. On either side of you the road stretches clearly discernible for some distance east and west. The contour of the land is flat here, and the rain has not washed away the old gravel allowing the boulders to show up out of the earth to destroy the road; nor yet will the earth hold enough moisture for alders to spring up hiding the road beneath a green tangle of leaves on a latticework of dark branches.

Behind you is an almost impenetrable spread of lilac bushes, growing thick and dark the way lilacs will after houses disappear and the people are gone. As you come up the hill from the west, a doe and her fawn raised their heads, eyed you curiously, then quietly disappeared into the forest. The earth is trampled under the lilac jungle as if they had used it for a house, and the grass in the field behind is matted down in several places as if the deer napped in the sun not long before.

In front of you a sweep of grass, tawny now under the bright blue sky, slopes gently into a wall of forest. A few apple trees raise their twisted branches here and there. They look as if they might once have been part of a thriving orchard, but they are fragile and scabrous with age and wanting care.

Far beyond the wall of woods at the edge of the meadow looms Western Mountain. Its great sloping hump is blue-green with

spruce and looks remote and a little lonely except at the road end where the bright warm rocks show through.

This is a point on the Old Crossroad somewhat west of center at a place last known as the Fred Walls farm.

For at least three-quarters of a century the Old Crossroad, leading almost due west from Norwood Cove to Seal Cove, was a busy and important road. It was the principal access between two of the island's busiest communities - Southwest Harbor and Manset on the east and Seal Cove and the Bass Harbor communities on the west, and along its course were a number of homes and farms. The buildings have long since disappeared, but most of the old cellar holes are still visible as are some of the fields. Most of the old home sites are marked by the inevitable lilac bushes, which seem to thrive in desolation, and the apple trees, which don't.

So far as we have been able to learn this was a county road. It must have been laid out well before 1850 and have fallen into disuse in the 1930's.

Just beyond its western terminus were several mills, two stores, and a shipyard. The Heath saw mill was located just north of the bridge spanning the outlet from Seal Cove Pond into Seal Cove. To the north on the Pond was the Heath grist mill. There was a store at each end of the bridge, the one on the east run by the Flyes and the one on the west by the Heaths. The Flye shipyard was located on the shore east of the bridge. Later, probably around 1900, the Cushman steam-powered saw mill was operating on a point about half-way down the Cove. There was a boarding house just behind the mill, and at the east end of the road at the present site of the Wayside Inn was another boarding house for workers at this mill.

There were a number of other industries, which we hope to discuss in a later article, located between Seal Cove and Bass Harbor.

Three wives of George M. Kelley are buried here. Each stone bears the legend, "Gone but not forgotten."

The Crossroad was important to the Bass Harbor community too as the present shore road between McKinley and Seawall was not really open until a good bit later.

Just west of Tremont a public road ran almost due north intersecting the Crossroad about midway and going on to connect with Beech Hill. If you lived near Bass Harbor in those days, you meant this road when you said "the Beech Hill Road," not the one which came down off the south brow of the hill and ran to Norwood Cove. This road from Bass Harbor to Beech Hill, we understand, was one of the first ways opened on the island. It had fallen into disuse by the middle of the century and by the 1870's or 80's had become little more than a woods road.

Knowing who traversed the Crossroad, perhaps daily on the way to work, perhaps but once or twice a week to get supplies or sell produce, perhaps only occasionally because it was a pretty and varied drive, is of course impossible today.

It must have been traveled by Heaths, Murphys, Flyes, Carters, Norwoods, Butlers, Kelleys, and others over around Seal Cove. From the Southwest Harbor end the men and women who used the road would have had names equally familiar to the island for almost two centuries. Although impossible to know the names of the travelers, we do know with what we hope is a fair degree of accuracy the names of some of the people who once lived along it.

We have studied a couple of old maps and talked with a number of people. Also we have walked along the road and stared wondering, into the cellar holes of the old houses which are no longer there.

Just west of the fork at the Southwest Harbor end where the road branches to Long Pond, the first house belonged to John Brawn. According to Mrs. Thornton: "John Brawn built his house on the Seal Cove road in 1888. It changed hands several times after the deaths of Mr. and Mrs. Brawn and was destroyed by fire in 1932." We can tell you nothing

more of the Brawns than this.

The next house west was built by Isaac Lurvey in 1827. This, we assume though we could be wrong, is the Isaac Lurvey who, as a young man, marched off with the musket belonging to his father, Enoch, to the Battle of Norwood Cove and later could point to 17 holes made by British muskets in the tree behind which he stood. He had a grist mill on the property located a short distance north of the shed now owned by the Billings and Hamblen contracting company.

His son, Isaac Freeman, was a member of the Maine Regiment during the Civil War. He died at Augusta in 1863 at the age of 38, leaving behind his widow, Rebecca. Before he marched off to be felled by disease in Augusta, Isaac and Rebecca had started to build a house on the Crossroad just west of the home of Isaac the elder. It was not yet complete when the younger man died, and the father bought it from his daughter-in-law. Later it was sold to Joshua Marshall, and although it changed hands a number of times, it became known as the old Marshall place. The house is gone but the old barn still stands looking as if time is about to exact the final toll with it too.

Some distance to the west and just beyond the town line into Tremont was the home of Samuel Norwood. You can still drive this far if you are careful. Set on a slight rise of ground on the north side of the road with a lilac bush by the doorstep and apple trees in the yard on the west (they still bear a tart flinty-hard fruit), the Norwood house looked over a bottom-land field which the alders are beginning to claim now.

We do not know the family relations of this Norwood, but he must have been a descendant of either Joshua or his brother William who settled at Norwood Cove in 1781. Later William moved to Duck Cove, and Joshua moved to Bass Harbor Marsh. The latter was chosen a constable in the town meeting held in April, 1789.

Some distance west of the Norwood place and well after the woods have closed in to the road is another old house site, dim but unmistakably a spot where someone once had a home. It is quite close to the road on the north side. We have been unable to learn who lived here. The place is not marked on any of the maps, and the people we asked just shook their heads and looked puzzled.

Shortly west a park road comes down from the fireroad to the north and terminates at the Crossroad. Beyond the corner you have to push through some alders; then the way is overgrown with thick

old grass because it is underfoot. On the right is a brown quiet pond where the bull frog held a gristful sing-fest in the spring, and the reveries in the woods beyond comment with displeasure over your unseemly invasion of their wilderness.

We turned back here and later drove around to the west end of the road to explore it from the other direction.

At the corner where the Crossroad comes into Route 102 near Seal Cove W. Carver had a house on the south side and L. R. Sprague on the north. A few hundred yards to the east is the site of the home of Tom Norwood. Then you go down hill and pass a small pond on the south side of the road. In the late 1920's Ben Worcester, Dr. Gilley, and Schuyler Clark experimented with rearing beavers in this pond. The beavers were live-trapped from a heath near Norway Drive, houses built in the pond, and a fence erected to keep the beavers in and predators out. Probably realizing that all this solicitude boded no good for their future, the beavers all died or escaped, and the experiment was not successful.

As a matter of fact, Ben Worcester tells us, the beavers had been a little reluctant to participate in the project to start with. When he first set out his traps he had had his eye on a mother beaver and a couple of cubs, but they were wary and the traps remained empty for some time. Finally one of the young beavers, apparently with the same disregard for maternal admonitions as Peter Rabbit, was caught. When Worcester came to pick up the trap, the old beaver was hanging about anxiously nearby. Instead of retreating into the safety of the marsh, she came bowling through the water at him with a terrific tail slapping and an expression on her face which, had she been the size of a grizzly bear, would have meant no good for Mr. Worcester.

The next house site is on the north side of the road some distance to the east just before you reach the park road which runs north to Oak Hill. Here again is the cellar hole, the lilac bushes and apple trees, also a magnificent old cedar, which in this day looks to the Grand Sir of all cedar trees.

Up hill and through the grassy field is the point where we started you out for a look at Western Mountain. This, as we said before, was the Fred Walls farm, and from the many traces of old foundations, it must have been quite an affair in its day. The first home on this farm was built by Jonathan Norwood, who was a later generation than Joshua but earlier than Tom.

Some distance north of the site of the Walls home is a very old cellar hole; it is the kind of thing which lends charm to writing history-in-a-hurry when you must sometimes leave loose ends. We are not sure we have identified the owners of the house which stood here, but it must have been built a long time ago. This also may have been a Norwood home-site, but we can't be sure for it is very difficult to be certain that you are describing the same spot which an informant, acquainted with the road years ago, has in mind.

Access to the old house was had by a lane slanting northeast from the Crossroad just a little east of the Oak Hill branch. There are two lanes here. One is still comparatively discernible and leads to a log cabin once used by a Park Ranger. The other is not visible really, but it must have once been lined with spruce trees for a line of sturdy old giants marches straight as an arrow, their shade

turning the needles carpeting the earth to a rich warm brown. After you have tramped a number of old lanes and wood roads, your feet develop a kind of feel as to whether they are following an ancient way or have wandered off, and we are pretty sure that wheels and hooves and other feet passed long ago beneath the line of spruce.

Along the road still farther east were the farms of Naham E. Kelley and George M. Kelley.

We are sorry we cannot tell you much about Naham E. except that his wife, Phebe M., who died at the age of 98 in 1892, is buried in the Kelley family cemetery beside the road between the Walls and the Kelley farms.

The Kelley women seemed to have rated better as to headstones in this burying ground than did the men.

In the center snuggled under a protective growth of shrubs and trees are three stones placed in a row which bear the following legends:

"Mehitable N., wife of George M. Kelley, died May 13, 1850, age 30 years, 2 months, 26 days. Gone but not forgotten."

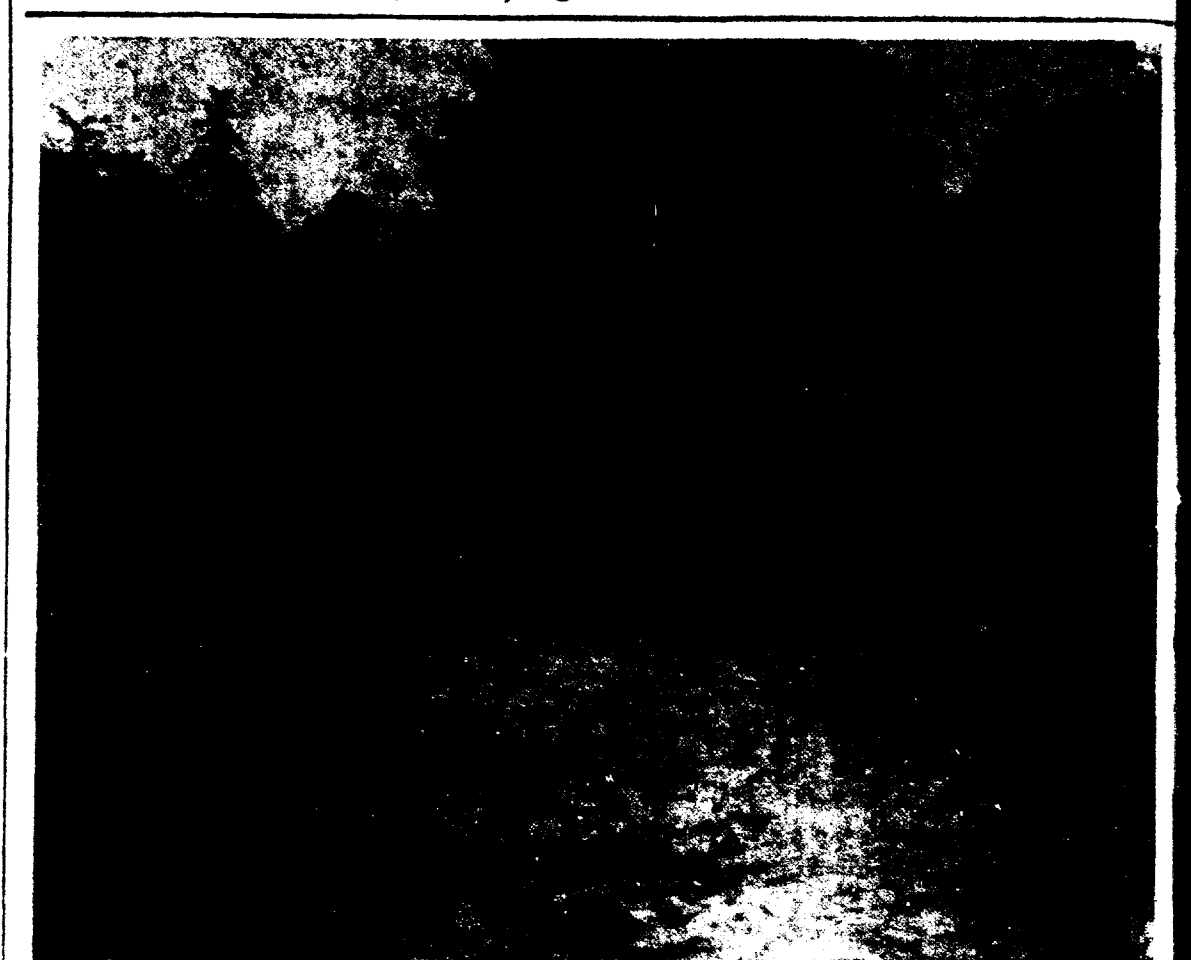
Sarah A., wife of George M. Kelley, died April 18, 1879, age 44 years, 8 months, 1 day. Gone but not forgotten."

"Ann E., wife of George M. Kelley, died June 8, 1891, age 4 years, 5 months, 8 days. Gone but not forgotten."

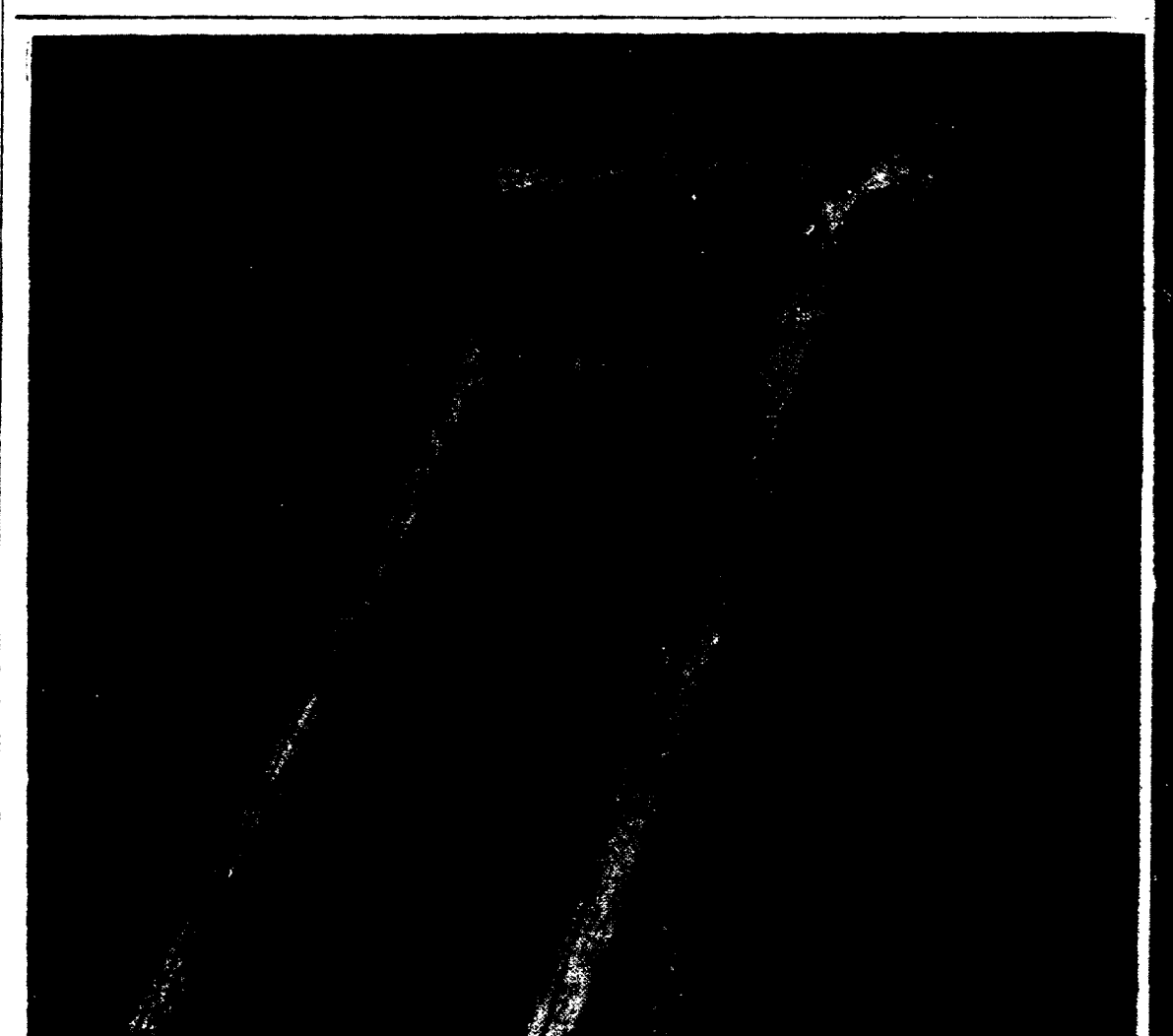
George M. Kelley (or Kelley, there seems to have been a difference spelling within the family, was a farmer and a blacksmith. He had two sons and three daughters. One son, Captain John, was lost at sea in 1874, at the age of 34. His other son, George, still lives near West Tremont.

John Carroll of Southwest Harbor can still remember the shoeing of oxen at the Kelley blacksmith shop. The animal was led into a heavy crate-like structure and a canvas sling fastened under its belly. The sling was raised by means of a pulley suspended from the top of the frame work so that the smith could work on the animal's feet.

The crossroad is not passable to vehicles now. Even a jeep would have trouble over parts of it, but the trace of it will remain for many years even yet. Several sections are a pleasant and varied walk, easily accessible when the fire roads are open from the two Park roads which branch down



A section of the old Crossroad.



An old sign marking the way from the Crossroad to Oak Hill is made of a solid piece of wood formed by a tree trunk and two branches.

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