

# Seal Cove Once Knew Life Of Economic Activities — Faint Memories Remain

By LaRue Spiker

Babylon fell. Rome declined, and Seal Cove isn't what it used to be. Today it is a quiet little cove, usually serene and frequently lonely, holding but faint memories of the buzzing activity that once lived the area.

At one time the Cove neighborhood was busy with economic enterprise diverse as corn grinding and, so it is said, hijacking on the high seas, which requires enterprise of a sort. Today only a few scattered stones from old dams and foundations remain as reminders of past economic initiative. A place that once echoed with steam engines, grinding mill wheels, and the pound of hammers is subdued and tranquil. True, now and then as the tide stirs softly in the sea weed on the richly colored rock of the shores, a sigh, as if for a more exciting past, rises from the clear water; but the hard-shouldered pioneer economy is gone, never to return, and sighs will not bring it back.

The deep green waters of the Cove, bounded on the one side by Gott's Head and on the other by the Algerine Coast, are broken by an occasional lobster boat. Or some one has a picnic on the rocky shore. Or a man, whistling softly, may once in a while be seen repairing a boat hauled up on the rocks. But on the whole the Cove is a quiet place and seems generally to turn back on its own memories of the past. It is a lazy place in a completed happy sort of way.

How the place came to be called Seal Cove, we do not know. Place names are like that quite often. They seem to spring up like hawkweed and take root in the same sturdy fashion, and know exactly

landers. The influence of Seal Cove extended eastward to Southwest Harbor along the Old Crossroad, southwest to West Tremont, and Goose Cove, and included The Cape to the north.

If you will take a look at a map of the Island, you will note that there is a bulge of land extending into Blue Hill Bay from the Cove to just south of the Pretty Marsh area. This was known as The Cape. The people who lived there had access to the Cove not only by an old road that ran past Seal Cove Pond near present Route 102 but also by a road arching parallel to the shore. It was called The Cape Road.

Many of the families living in the area were of Irish extraction. Probably many heart-warming stories about them are lost, for they seem to have lived true to the high spirits and sense of independence traditionally attributed to their country of origin.

Some of them earned the local title of the "Penians," a name describing their proneness to brawling and quick temper rather than any foreign political entanglements.

Then there were the "Murphy girls." In this day we would not consider them exactly guilty of reckless abandon; but they earned a reputation for daring in their own time, although it must be admitted they also went to some trouble to insure their eternal salvation.

In an unpublished paper written by Mrs. Adelmia F. Joy, who grew up in Somesville long before the turn of the century, there is a reference to the "Murphy girls" of Seal Cove.

"How I know that that meeting house on Beech Hill was a very

Only the stone foundation now remains.

"My Grandmother, who lived on Bartlett's Island, used to tell me about attending it. She had a large family and had to cook all day Saturday to pack a clothes basket full of lunch for Sunday. They left the Island early, rowing over, to attend the long morning service. They visited with other picnicking families at noon, then attended the afternoon service, returning home late in the afternoon. The Church was built in the early 1800's."

But life was not all "vanity" and Sunday picnics. Far from it. These same Murphy girls and their contemporaries could anticipate birthing their babies at home without benefit of what we consider minimum medical care.

In another paper Mrs. Joy mentions: "A Mrs. Milliken, a midwife, lived at Seal Cove. Edward Richardson, a boy of twelve years, was sent one winter night from the Sound from the place where Jones Tracy now lives (this was long ago) after this woman for someone who was sick. He started from about down by the Steve Sargent Shore and crossed the Sound on the ice, landed at Broad Cove and took the road to Beech Hill and over the Hill and crossed Long Pond and to Seal Cove. Went to the woman's house and told her who was sick and wanted her. She told him to go right back and she would overtake him. When he told the story he said he did not mean that she should overtake him if he could help it and she did not although she got there in time to bring some baby into the world."

Two families early gave the Cove economic importance — the Heaths and the Flyes.

The first William Heath had settled on the Island and built the grist mill before 1784. His son, William W. A. Heath became one of the leading citizens of that part of the Island. In addition to his business enterprises he was at one time or another Seal Cove Postmaster, first selectman, a surveyor, and a teacher.

He taught between 1855 and 1862, part of his experience being at the new Freeman School in Southwest Harbor. In the late 1880's he taught in the Free High School. The fall term of this school was held at Seal Cove, the second term at Tremont, the third at Southwest Harbor.

Of his teaching the Rev. Edgar A. Cousins of Southwest Harbor wrote: "He was a progressive and inspiring teacher and in addition to leading his pupils in the perennial struggle with Greenleaf's Old and later New National Arithmetic and Parsing book he induced them to take up the study of Algebra, astronomy, navigation, geometry, and trigonometry."

The Heath enterprises included a grist mill, a saw mill, and a store, all located at the head of the Cove across the road from the Heath home, which still stands on a rise of ground at the junction of Route 102 and the road leading down to the shore of the Cove.

The grist mill was located at the outlet of Seal Cove Pond. Little evidence of it remains, the building having been long torn down and the old stones scattered to a number of different parts of the Island.

The saw mill was located just north of the bridge crossing the head of the Cove. There is a picture of the bridge crossing the head of the Cove. There is a picture of it in Street's history of the Island, showing the cable and wheel of the mill at the narrowest part of the neck between the Cove and the Pond. Some of the stones of the dam are still visible from

the bridge. This mill was probably built about 1780.

The Heath store was just west of the bridge and south of the road. The old cellar hole is still visible.

The Flye shipyard was located just south of the bridge on the east end of the Cove down by the water. The shipyard was one of the principal industries of the area. The Flye general store was just east of the bridge and north of the road.

Boat building remained for years one of the important economic activities of the area. At one time the assessed value of boats and marine equipment was greater than the value of all other assets put together.

Living so close to the sea a man must needs have some skills in relation to it no matter what he considered his principal occupation, and marine skills sometimes cropped up in surprising places.

The Rev. Lemuel Norton was such a one.

Mr. Norton was an itinerant Baptist minister who first came to the Island in the early nineteenth century, frequently walking as much as seventy or eighty miles "because of the difficulty of getting across the Narrows."

He stayed on the Island in the Seal Cove area a number of months during 1819, and we give you his own description of an incident which occurred:

"This summer there was a vessel built near where I used to hold the Lord's day meetings. Happening down on board of this craft one day after she was launched, and the masts put in, the riggers, for such they were trying to be, but they were only, in lieu of riggers, doing the best they could to put the rigging into its place, it having been fitted to their hands in Boston; a rigger on Mt. Desert was not to be found at that day, stepping forward where the master workman was trying hard to put the peril, so called, on to the fore-to-sail yard, I perceived at once that he was puzzled how to pass it round the yard so as to make it come right when the seizing should be passed."

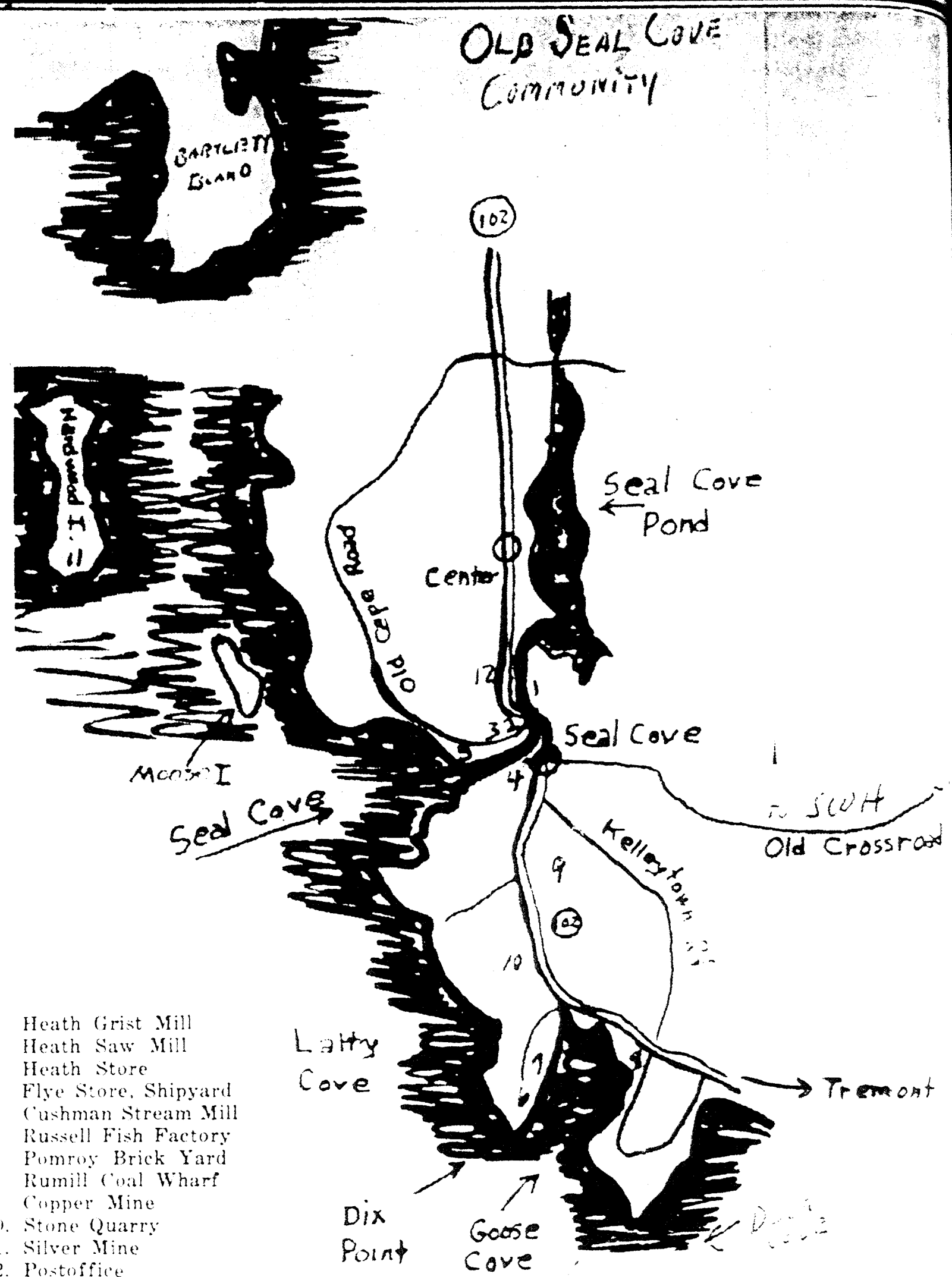
"Finding himself entirely at a loss, and no one present who could help him out of his dilemma, he says, 'Elder, I have heard you preach as though you had been at sea; how do I know how but that you can show me how to put this round the yard?'"

"Yes," I remarked, "I can show you how to put that peril round the yard, with perfect ease, or any other piece of rigging you have."

"The fact was, I could rig a ship, and put every block and strap in its exact place with as much certainty as I could count ten. Eleven years on shipboard had taught me that business more thoroughly, and nothing to boast of, either. Could I have preached the gospel then as perfectly as I could rig a ship, I might have preached it to much greater advantage, and been instrumental in the salvation of many more souls than I could possibly be with all my ignorance and want of education for so great and glorious a work."

"But to return to the peril. I off coat, rolled up my shirtsleeves, took the marine-spike out of his hands, and I won't say in less than no time, but in a time that astonished him for its brevity, had the peril on, and secured in first rate order. The owner standing by wished to know if I worked at the rigging business now. I told him I worked at anything by which I could honorably support my family."

"Soon after I saw the owner, Mr. James Flye, and Mr. Richardson, the rigger, in close conversation together. After taking a look at this fine craft, I was about stepping on shore, when the owner wished to know if I would finish rigging his vessel. I told him if he desired it I would,



if it would be no put out to him who had undertaken the job. He said it would not, for he desired to be relieved from business he knew so poorly how to perform. Accordingly I borrowed some tarpaulin clothes, and soon had the America, for that was her name, ready for sea.

"After this I was frequently sent for to rig new vessels, and did so, always receiving large pay for my services. Sometimes I would go from my rigging business to the pulpit, and from the pulpit to my rigging business."

And that was no mean trick either, for the meetings Norton led sometimes lasted until eleven o'clock at night. He seems later to have saved more than his lack of confidence in his prowess might warrant. Whether his success arose from increased power of persuasion or from sinners capitulating out of sheer weariness, we do not know.

Some years later there was a steam saw mill on the north of the Cove. Tom Kelley of Bernard remembers this as quite a flourishing enterprise when he was a small boy. In addition to the mill itself there was a good sized wharf and a boarding house for the housing of workers. Additional workers were housed in a building near Southwest Harbor where the Wayside Inn now stands on Route 102. These workers reached the mill via the Old Crossroad which was then one of the important by-ways of the Island.

A firm in Ellsworth operated this mill until all the Heath timber was gone. The first superintendent was named Cushman and the last one named Durham.

No evidence of the old structures remain, but across the road close against the foot of the hill rising up from the shore you can still find the old reservoir used as a water supply for the mill. Water was also piped in from Seal Cove Pond, and some of the old pipes still remain.

There were a good many other businesses in the area from time to time, some of them flourishing, some little more than experiments.

Until about forty years ago the Russell Fish Factory, operated by a Boston firm, packed sardines in a plant on Dix Point.

Across Goose Cove from the fish factory was the Rumill coal wharf where the Russell ships came in.

From around 1905 until about 1915 several steamboats put into Goose Cove, one and sometimes more of them arriving each day. The boats were the Tremont, the Percy V., and occasionally the Westport, all carrying both passengers and freight, and the Mo-hawk which was a freighter.

About 1895 Abner Pomroy owned a brickyard north of the fish factory on the west shore of Goose Cove. Until a few years ago there were still some broken bricks scattered around but now the site is only a grassy field.

In the 1890's John Murphy operated a stone quarry, financed by Joshua Marshall, on property now owned by Grace Merchant. It was never a large scale oper-

ation, but some paving stone quarried there was shipped from Seal Cove. Some marks of the old pits are still visible in the woods about half way between the present home of Milton Pomroy west of the Laity Cove corner and the Kelletown Road.

Although still important as a residential area, the environs of Seal Cove are less populous than in the past. No one lives along the Old Crossroad now, although there were once farms scattered along its entire length. The Kelletown Road was once lined with houses. An 1881 map showed sixty-seven houses on the road running along the west side of Seal Cove Pond between the island

and north and south turn-off. Some of the old houses were either located on the Cape Road. Some of the old houses are gone, but probably the oldest yet standing is the old Manly Turner place, a small house on the highway north end of The Cape. The whole area around Seal Cove is an especially scenic part of the Island. It is a scenic part of the Island, a scenic part of the Island, a scenic part of the Island.



W. W. A. Heath homestead.

## CLAYTON J. WALLACE

### Rug and Upholstery Cleaning

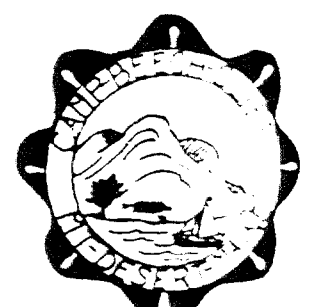
NORTHEAST HARBOR

BRowning 6-3252

BRowning 6-3306

**CAMP BEECH CLIFF**  
RESIDENT CAMP  
Echo Lake - Mt. Desert, Maine

Boys ages 8-16  
8th Season



A well-rounded program. Fresh water swimming - Red Cross instruction - Fresh and Saltwater sailing - Waterskiing - Fishing - Allegash River canoe trips - Katahdin Mt. trip - Jr. Maine Guide Training.

Also, Hiking, riflery, archery, tennis, sports. Mature staff. Tutoring offered.

(See Day Camp Ad in this paper)  
REGISTERED NURSE IN CAMP — DOCTOR ON CALL

**CLIFFORD A. PULIS, Director**  
Old Marlboro Road, Concord, Massachusetts  
Write for Booklet at camp after June 4th



Site of the old Heath sawmill north of the bridge.

how they came there. Presumably seals once lived in the waters of the Cove, but they also lived in a good many other areas around here; so there is nothing remarkable about that.

Some of the other names about the Cove are more easily accounted for. Gott's Head on the south shore was so named because it was once owned by John Gott. The north shore was once known as the Algerine Coast, "Algerine" is a corruption of the Algerian Coast, which everyone knows was the home base for desperate and bloody-minded pirates.

It is a little hard to picture the Cove as the home of violent, ruthless men, although it is secluded. We have a report, however, that some of the residents who once lived along or near the north shore were something less than peaceable in their conduct on the high seas. We hasten to add that the report is unverified and that we do not know which former residents were so suspected by their fellow Islanders.

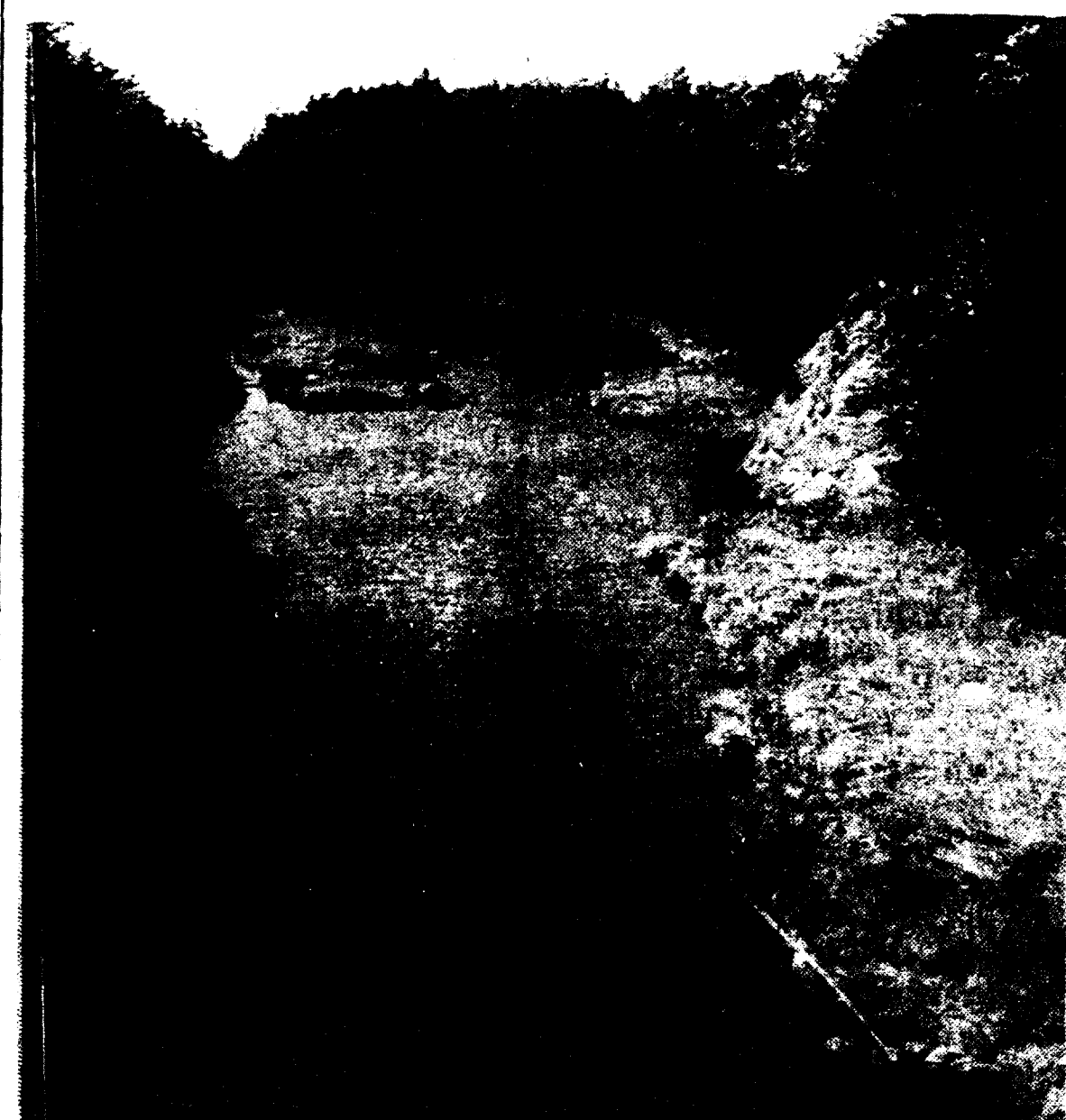
Actually, it isn't very important whether the suspicions were true or not. The real romance of the Cove lies in the fact that it was once at the heart of a whole area which was important to the happiness and lives of the early Is-

old one," Mrs. Joy wrote, "was that my grandfather Seavey moved there when my mother was about 12 years old and she told me of going to church and people coming from Seal Cove. Some Murphy girls used to come all the way barefoot, bringing their shoes and stockings and putting them on just before they got in sight. She said they were very dressy, and stained their cheeks with cranberry juice; so I suppose as long ago as that there were vain ones on Mount Desert."

Sometimes as a girl Mrs. Joy visited the meeting house at Centre.

"They had a row of Obers in the gallery singing," she noted. The Union Meeting house just north of Seal Cove played an important role in the life of the community for many years.

Mrs. Lyda B. Carter, now of Seal Harbor, recalls that "my childhood home was at Centre, now consisting of about a dozen houses between the villages of Pretty Marsh and Seal Cove. Formerly it was an important part of the Island because of the old Meeting house..... This was a Methodist Church. Although it had not been used for services since about 1915, it was still standing in 1958, as I took pictures of it.



Site of the Cushman stream mill on the shore of the cove.

## INVESTMENT SHARES

3 1-2% per annum now being paid on deposits of \$1.00 to \$50.00 per month. Further information on request.

Also Prepaid Shares . . . \$200.00 - 3 1/2%

**Bar Harbor Loan & Building Ass'n**

Telephone ATlantic 8-3685