

Diving Deep into Searsport Maritime History

By Cipperly Good, the Richard Saltonstall Jr. Curator of Maritime History



We love our interns at the Penobscot Marine Museum, and we had a winner this summer with Erica Buswell (seen on right with “Little Jim” intern Matt Pickarski). Erica is a long-time Searsport resident embarking on a second career and is currently enrolled at Simmons University in the Library and Information Science program. We were more than happy to give her some hands-on experience with the collections.

As those of you who have visited our *At Home, At Sea* guided historic house tours know, we have a wealth of objects on display, which our team of interpreters use as the basis for the stories they tell. To increase the information at the interpreters’ fingertips, Erica enhanced the descriptions and interpretive texts linked to each object in our online database, as well as a curated slideshow available on the interpreters’

tablets. She conducted one-on-one interviews with the interpreters to understand their needs and shadowed a curator-led tour where interpreters posed the questions that stumped them. Based on the feedback, Erica revised and provided robust catalog descriptions for 287 artifacts! All in just 165 hours of her time.

At her disposal, Erica had file cabinets of accession files containing correspondence written by the donors—with stories about the objects and other tidbits of information that gave insight into the people who used the artifacts. Other context for the objects came from the interpreter handbook for *At Home, At Sea*. Erica also delved into our library collections with self-imposed time limits so she would not get too lost down the research rabbit hole.

A huge thank you to Erica for spending her internship with us! We look forward to seeing her out in the world as one of our newly minted colleagues.

Here are some examples of the work Erica completed:



Original description: Barometer: in brass case, a brass & a blue pointers made by Charles Pace of San Francisco, California, belonged to Capt. B.F. Colcord. Benjamin F. Colcord Collection, 1970.21.

New and improved description: Brass barometer with blue pointers made by Charles Pace of San Francisco, California.

This barometer belonged to Capt. Benjamin Franklin Colcord (1854-1935), who found business success both on shore and at sea. He captained Searsport barks, ships, and schooners between 1882-1901. His son Rupert was born during a typhoon that dismasted the ship in 1887: the barometer must have been low that day. Captain Colcord retired from sea in 1903 and held Searsport town offices, served as a member of Maine House of Representatives in 1906 and 1920, the State Senate in 1908, and as a member of the Governor's Executive Council from 1913-1914. In local business, he was president of Searsport National and Savings Bank between 1916-1919 and ran the B.F. Colcord Insurance Agency from 1918-1935.

Want to know more? Click this [link](#).



Original description: Model of the 3-masted schooner GEORGIA GILKEY. It has truncated masts and no rigging. In glass case with wood base. The GEORGIA GILKEY was built at Searsport, Maine in 1890. She was commanded by Capt. W. R. Gilkey, father of the donor (Mrs. P. Banning Blanchard). Phineas B. Blanchard Collection, 1970.18.1.

New and improved description: 8 1/4" x 29 3/4" model of the 158' three-masted schooner GEORGIA GILKEY modeled after a ship built by Josiah Dutch in 1890 at Searsport, Maine. It has truncated masts and no rigging and rests on a wooden base.

The GEORGIA GILKEY was commanded and owned by Capt. William R. Gilkey (1856-1935), who named it for either his wife or daughter. Captain Gilkey captained 7 brigs and schooners from 1884-1906, bringing his family along on voyages. The GILKEY was the last schooner to be built in Searsport.

The GEORGIA GILKEY's shipwright, Josiah C. Dutch (1837-1910), like many shipwrights of the time, traveled from yard to yard, including yards in Searsport, Rockland, Waldoboro, and Camden, to supervise the construction of vessels. The son of Marshall Dutch, another master shipbuilder, the father and son built over 24 ships in Searsport. Josiah oversaw crews of 75 workmen in his career that spanned from 1874-1901. The men held him in high esteem for his gentlemanly bearing towards them.

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Original description: Oil painting of SS PENOBSCOT made c. 1895. Image of the SS PENOBSCOT, built in Searsport, ME in 1882. Visible in image: a dirt road in a grass field with a body of water in the background. Vessels, including the SS PENOBSCOT, are visible in the water. This painting looks nothing like the mature work of Dolly Smith. Doubtful that this is Smith. Fine Art Collection, 1953.40.1.

New and improved description: 20 1/16" x 26 1/16" oil on board painting of SS PENOBSCOT by an unknown artist, circa 1895. This image depicts the 255' steamship PENOBSCOT off of Searsport's Steamboat Landing. The other landmasses ringing Penobscot Bay visible in the painting include Sears Island to the far left, and Blue Hill rising above the shorelines of Orland, Penobscot, and Castine.

The SS PENOBSCOT was built by Smith & Townsend in 1882 in East Boston, Massachusetts and was sold to New York in 1911. This view of Searsport and Penobscot Bay probably predates 1900, given the lack of motor vehicles and the small number of buildings depicted. Established in 1882, the Boston and Bangor Steamship Company, for which the SS PENOBSCOT served, became part of the Eastern Steamship Company in 1901; it ran until 1935.

This painting may be the work of Searsport artist Dolly Smith.

Want to know more? Click this [link](#).