

Historic Settlements at Clough Point, 1650-1850

1. Fur Trading Post and Stone Garrison House

By 1676, a fur trading post was sited at the northern tip of Westport Island, directly opposite Wiscasset Point. Native trails led down Birch Point in Wiscasset to the shore, where natives traveled by canoe to the Westport Island trading post to trade furs for goods like knives, cloth, wampum and, sometimes, even rum or guns. The trading post site was well situated to trade with the natives in the Sheepscot Valley and lower Kennebec area. It was central, accessible and defensible.

The fur trade was a vital source of income for the Plymouth settlers as they struggled to repay debts incurred by investors in their journey to the new world. Furs, especially beaver, were in high demand in England, and were plentiful here, and profitable. A group called the Plymouth Proprietors were granted exclusive rights, by England's king, in 1629, to the Kennebec area (15 miles on either side of the river) for fur trading purposes to help them pay those debts. In late 1669, the Plymouth Proprietors leased their Kennebec tract, and their trading rights, to the partnership of Obediah Walker and Edward Naylor. Walker and Naylor already ran a trading post on the south side of Merrymeeting Bay. Walker, a wealthy Boston merchant, provided the cash while Naylor contributed his many years of trading experience as a "truckmaster" (one who does the actual trading and knows the Indians personally).

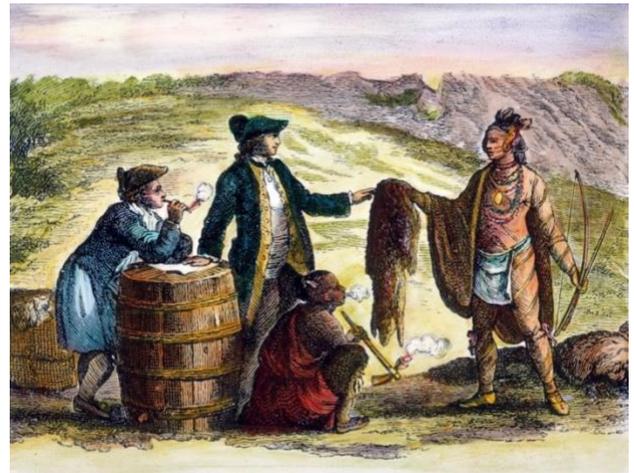


Figure 1 Fur Trade with the Natives on Jeremisquam's Squam Point (now Clough Point)

The fur trading post they established on Westport Island (Jeremisquam, as it was called then) was established just at the beginning of the hostilities with the natives. King Phillips War with the native americans started in 1675 and raids in our area caused settlers to abandon their homes and flee to Newagen for safety. Obediah Walker, after starting our trading post, died in 1676, at the start of hostilities, at the age of 33. Edward Naylor continued as "truckmaster". However, Naylor had legal, financial and domestic problems. Naylor was so deeply in debt that in 1672, he surrendered his interests and profits in his partnership with Obediah Walker in order to pay off a £330 debt to Walker's heirs.

The Westport Island fur trading business appears, then, to have gone to a Mr. Delano who continued to operate the trading post and improve and fortify the site. The Delano family arrived in Plymouth in 1621 and were well known loyal Puritans and merchants in the Plymouth Colony.

A stone “garrison house” was constructed near the original trading post site. Little is known about the building. However, garrison houses were common as defensible buildings for settlers to seek shelter during times of hostilities. The garrison house remained thru the “French and Indian” wars. Mr. Delano, eventually acquired a legal title to the building in 1754.



Figure 2 Typical Garrison House – Westport’s Garrison House was constructed of stone, at least at the lower level, as shown in the display at Clough Point Town Preserve..

A permanent settler, Joseph Decker, came to the north end by 1751 as hostilities were easing. Decker was one of Westport Island earliest permanent settlers. In 1772, his son, Captain Joseph Decker acquired title to the stone garrison house. He had started a successful shipping business, delivering lumber and spars. Unfortunately, the garrison house burned down and was lost. However, with his growing wealth, Captain Decker commissioned construction of a stately mansion, in the southern tradition, by Moses Davis of “Folly Island” (Davis Island in Edgecomb now). It is alleged to be of “oak framework”. That house is the “Decker/Clough House”, which was moved by barge to Edgecomb’s “The Eddy” in 1838.

Little is known of these buildings. Development of the north end of Westport Island has now eliminated their footprints. However, in 1884, before development, a group from the Sagadahoc Historical Society visited the site. They reported:

“But the most interesting work if some of the members was done on Squam Point, head of Westport. The mines of the old Walker trading house of 1676, and of the stone garrison of Delano, 1754, the outlines of a considerable establishment are apparent, north of the cellars of the old Clough homestead.”

References:

1. “Wiscasset in Pownelborough” by Fanny Chase, 1941
2. “Trouble to the Eastward; the Failure of Anglo-Indian Relations in Early Maine” by Emerson W. Baker, William & Mary ScholarWorks, 1986.
<https://scholarworks.wm.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=3649&context=etd>
3. For details on the Plymouth Proprietors' operations, including their connections with Walker & Naylor and the Hammonds, see Kennebec Proprietors' Papers, Maine Historical Society. For Walker & Naylor, see also Suffolk County Court File 139152.
4. “Field Day of the Sagadahoc Historical Society”. Lilliputian Newspaper, August 16, 1884.

2. Captain Joseph Decker & Captain Stephen Clough House

Joseph Decker and his brother John came to Wiscasset in about 1741. Joseph was said to be a descendent of Mr. Delano, who ran the fur trading post and built the stone garrison house on Squam Point (now Clough Point). Joseph and his wife Rachel came to Jeremisquam Island (now Westport Island) by 1751, and settled at Squam Point and raised six children.

One of his children was Captain Joseph Decker who became a successful, and well-to-do ship owner, sea captain and trader in the timber and spar trade. In 1772, he acquired the stone garrison house and 13 acres of land at the norther tip of island, including the land that is now Clough Point Town Preserve. This land became an integral part of the “commercial bee-hive” that was Wiscasset Harbor. After a fire took the old stone garrison house, Captain Decker

commissioned the construction of a stately mansion of Virginia plantation style. It was built next to the ruins of the old stone garrison house and was said to be “hewed and built of oak frame-work” and by Moses Davis of “Folly Island” (now Davis Island in Edgecomb). Decker also added wharves, warehouses and docks to the eastern shore front. There, he kept his ship “Sally” that supported his spar and timber trade in partnership with Captain Swan of Boston. Captain Decker married Sarah Davis in 1772 and had a daughter, Sarah. Sarah later married Captain Stephen Clough in 1789.

(See the story of Marie Antoinette’s ties to the house).

Captain Decker died in 1792 and left all his property and business interests to his son-in-law, Captain Stephen Clough and his daughter Sarah. The Sallie, now owned by Captain Clough, carried lumber and spars to customers in France, where Captain Swan and Captain Clough spent a considerable amount of time as the “Reign of Terror”, during the French Revolution, unfolded.

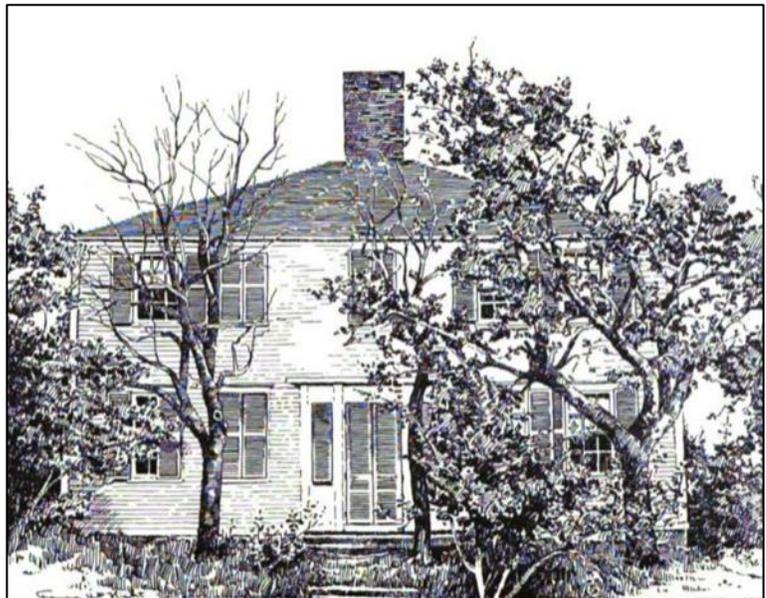


Figure 3- Captain Joseph Decker House at Clough Point

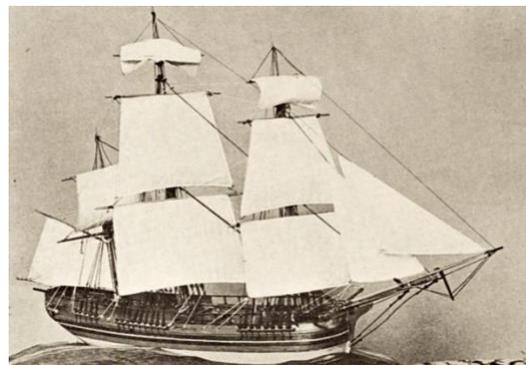


Figure 4- Captain Decker's Ship "Sally" Engaged in the Lumber and Spar Trade (Photo of Sallie Model)

Stephen Clough and Sarah had three children at the time of the French Revolution in 1793 when Queen Marie Antoinette was executed. By the 1800 census, they had seven children. (Due to disputes over land ownership between Wiscasset and Edgecomb, the northern end of Westport Island appears to have been treated as Wiscasset town holdings for census and taxation purposes until after 1842.)

Captain Stephen Clough died in 1818 while working on the Mississippi River. Sarah, age 45 at that time, remained in the house until her children were on their own. When Maine was granted statehood in 1820, she was 47 years old. In 1839, the property was sold to Gardiner Gove of Wiscasset, who decided to move the house across the Sheepscot to "The Eddy" in Edgecomb. The house was loaded onto barges and floated across to the site where Eddy Marina was located and dragged up the hill to its current location "by 40 oxen" where it was occupied by descendants of Stephen Clough until about 1950. Mystery author Lea Waite's family purchased the house in 1950. Lea, her mother and grandmother, tore down a wall in the kitchen uncovering a fireplace, including a functioning pot crane, that was built in 1774. Lea owned the house until her death in 2019.



Figure 5- Lea Waite Standing in Front of 1774 Fireplace in the Old Decker/ Clough House. (Photo by John Maguire/ Wiscasset Newspaper0

The house still remains at the site it was relocated to in Edgecomb, overseeing the now quiet Clough Point on Westport Island.



Figure 6 - Decker/Clough House Now Located at "The Eddy" in Edgecomb

References:

1. "Wiscasset in Pownelborough" by Fanny Chase, 1941
2. Collections and Proceedings of the Maine Historical Society, Second Series, Vol V, 1894
3. Marie Antoinette and Me, Maine Crime Writers, Lea Waite, 2011

3. "Marie Antoinette House" – Was Queen Marie Antionette to Live in Exile on Westport Island?

The "Marie Antionette House" stood at the tip of Clough Point just to the North of the Clough Point Town Preserve. It was built in 1744 by Captain Joseph Decker on land which was claimed and occupied by his father since before 1751.

Captain Joseph Decker was a successful ship owner and merchant, trading in lumber, salt and spars. His son-in-law, Captain Stephen Clough took over the business and property in 1792 upon the death of Captain Decker, and, with a business partner in Boston (Captain James Swan), established a trading relationship and business with France.



Figure 7 - The "Marie Antoinette" (Decker/Clough) House

During the French Revolution, Captain Clough, for whom this point of land was named, was in France, with his ship "Sally". Captain Clough and Captain Swan were loyalists to the French royal family due to France's support of the American Revolution. When French revolutionaries "Reign of Terror" started, Captain Clough and Captain Swan were on "Sally" docked in France.

The Queen was taken into custody and jailed. The possibility of offering her refuge and negotiating her release and returning to Maine with Queen Marie Antoinette was a topic of discussion.

Although legend has it that this house was being prepared as a home in exile for Queen Marie Antoinette, there is no real evidence to that fact, and at least four other places in America were made ready for her and her court should a rescue have succeeded.

Her execution by guillotine, which Captain Swan was said to witness, ended any dreams of a quiet life at Clough Point for Marie Antoinette. However, the “Sallie” had been loaded with royal furniture, clothing and silverware and set sail in the dead of night after the execution.



Figure 8 - Queen Marie Antoinette of France

Some of that cargo ended up decorating the Clough and Swan homes and other notable homes in Wiscasset, Boston and elsewhere.

In 1838, the house was moved across the Sheepscot River on gundalows to Edgecomb where it still stands today on the hill behind “The Eddy”. After the house was moved, the remaining barn served as a convenient target for the gunners at Fort Edgecomb and their cannon firing practice.

For more in-depth information of the legend of the Marie Antionette House, the following articles from the Maine Historical Society and from others make for fun reading:

1. “A Refuge for Marie Antoinette in Maine”, by Rufus H. Sewell in the Proceedings of the Maine Historical Society, Second Series, Volume V, Published in 1894
2. “Marie Antoinette House, Bill’s Mythbusters”, by William David Barry, Maine Historical Society, October, 2010.
3. “Clough House Tale – The Clough Family Waits for a Queen” from “The Garden of the East: Wiscasset on Sheepscot Bay”, by Maude Clark Gay
4. “Let Them Eat Lobster – Marie Antoinette Plans to Move to Maine”, from New England Historical Society, updated in 2019 (<https://www.newenglandhistoricalsociety.com/let-eat-lobster-marie-antoinette-plans-move-maine/>)
5. “Marie Antoinette, Maine & Me”, in Maine Crime Writers, by Lea Waite
6. “Lea Waite and Marie Antoinette House”, material compiled by Laurayne Presby, 2020.