

# Historic Settlements at Clough Point, 1800 – 2020

## 1. The Lucas Bequest<sup>1</sup>

Surprising as it seems, the north end of Jeremysquam Island (Westport Island) once was considered part of Wiscasset. That is a result of a donation by one of the original “Wiscasset and Jeremysquam Proprietors” by the name of John Lucas of Boston. In 1792, Lucas gave a gift of 111 acres of his claimed land (Lot 34) on the island to the “East Parish of Pownalborough” (Now Wiscasset), “the use and income of which was to be applied to schools for the benefit of the poor children of Wiscasset Point”. The “East Parish of Pownalborough” (Wiscasset) was appointed Trustee. Details of the administration of this gift were lacking.

As a result of the transfer of the land to Wiscasset, property tax and census records for Westport Island lack inclusion of this land, including the very tip of the island that was owned by Joseph Decker. Decker had bought his 14-acre parcel from the Wiscasset Proprietors about 1750in.

Wiscasset did nothing with the land to raise funds for the education of children, as Lucas intended. In 1823, the Legislature agreed that the trustees in Wiscasset could sell the land to raise funds for the schools. In 1836, Gardner Gove of Edgecomb purchased the land but defaulted on his mortgage by 1844. However, Gove managed to float the Decker/Clough house to the Eddy in Edgecomb on “gondallows” in 1838, and hauled it to its present location above the Eddy.

It was during this time period that a fort was deemed necessary at Squam Heights at Clough Point on Jeremysquam to better protect Wiscasset from the British during the war of 1812. Wiscasset approved construction of the fort.

## 2. Fort McDonough

A little known, and short lived, military fort was situated on “Squam Heights” just south of Clough Point and east of Boat Yard Road (the Lobster Co-op). The 90’ elevation of the site gave commanding views of both the Sheepscot River and Back River; and the approaches to Wiscasset Harbor. The fort was a “star fort”, shaped as a five-pointed star, with six cannons arranged between the star points. It was an earthwork construction with logs and mounded

---

<sup>1</sup> Description of the Lucas Bequest can be found in “Wiscasset in Pownelborough” by Fanny Chase, 1941, published by Anthoensen Press, Portland Maine

## Historic Settlements at Clough Point, 1800 – 2020

soil providing defensive protection. Although little is known about the details of the design, it was similar to other earthen star forts constructed during the War of 1812. Three of the star points faced towards the Sheepscot and two, the Back River.

With the far larger and more powerful Fort Edgecomb just up the river and at the entrance to Wiscasset Harbor, built just six years before, why another fort? Perhaps it was recognized that Fort Edgecomb could only see attacking ships once they made the turn around the tip of Westport Island; which may have been too late to make a reliable defense. Fort McDonough, with its commanding hilltop position and long-range cannons, could defend the approaches to Wiscasset and provide warning to the stronger defenses at Fort Edgecomb. The six 18-pound cannons had a range of up to 1,500 yards. It was, however, vulnerable to land attack by British Marines.

### History of Fort McDonough<sup>2</sup>

In April, 1814, Great Britain, tiring of the North American sideshow in the Napoleonic War, began to enforce with “stern vigor” its blockade of the U.S. coast. Heretofore, because of the continuance of trade between Old and New England, the blockade of the northern ports had been desultory at best.

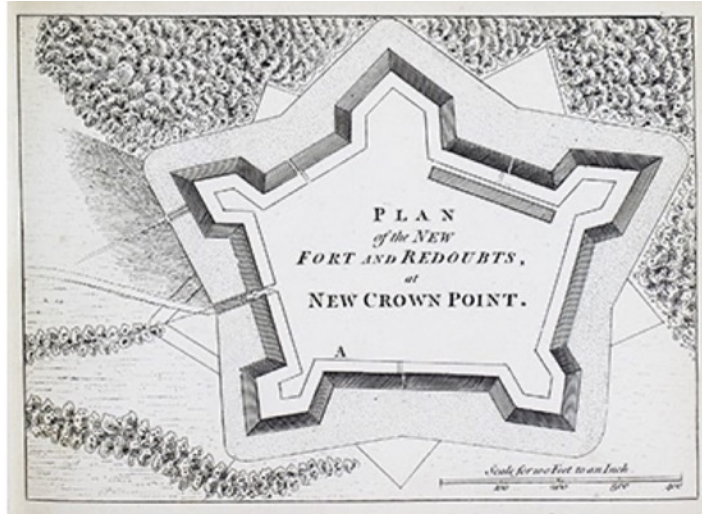


Figure 1 - Typical Five Point Star Fort (Fort at New Crown Point, New York shown as an Example)



Figure 2 - 18-Pound Naval Cannon

<sup>2</sup> Extracted from a Newspaper article by Dr. Nelson H. Lawey, 1982 or 1983

## Historic Settlements at Clough Point, 1800 – 2020

Now the Royal Navy’s barrier encompassed all American coastal towns of commercial importance.

During the late summer of that year, British naval and military forces captured and garrisoned three Second System coastal forts at Eastport, Machiasport and Castine District of Maine; a fourth Second System work, then unmanned, on the St. Georges River was occupied briefly and its ordnance “spiked”.

In response to these offensive actions, Massachusetts militia further south in Maine began the construction of new earthen works to supplement existing First and Second System forts.

Three were built in Portland, another overlooking the Kennebec estuary and yet another was built in September-October 1814 on Westport Island (then Jeremy Squam) Island to command the Sheepscot River. Two acres of land were taken by the government for the fort (without deed).

At the time the fort was built, the war with England was at its height. English 74-gun ships were hovering on the coast, harrying and destroying American commerce and fishing. Local militia detailed to duty at the site were members of Lt. Col. Ezekiel Cutter’s regiment, part of the 11<sup>th</sup> Division. Major General William King, commanding. (General King went on to be our first governor upon Maine statehood in 1820.)

The fort was ordered by General King on the 23 of May, 1814. Construction started on the 28<sup>th</sup> of September and completed in October, 1814, by the drafted contingent of 128 men, exclusive of officers. Like the three new works in Portland, the fortification on Westport Island was the namesake of a naval hero. Fort McDonough honored Lieutenant Thomas McDonough (or sometimes spelled MacDonough), hero and victor of a recent battle on Lake Champlain.

The earthen fort was armed with six long 18-pound guns, likely on Naval carriages. Wooden gundeck flooring and a magazine were also constructed. Because the island extends well

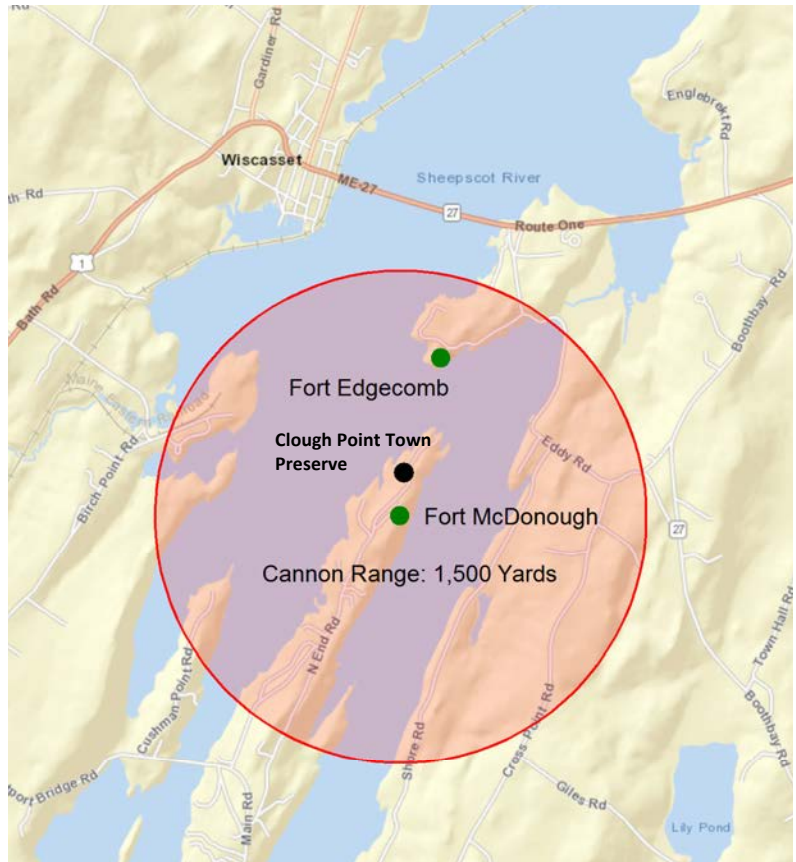


Figure 3 - Map Showing Forts McDonough and Edgecomb (Black dot is Clough Point Town Preserve). 18-Pound Cannon Range Thought to be up to 1,500 yards

## Historic Settlements at Clough Point, 1800 – 2020

downriver, beyond then effective gun range, a barrier of felled trees with sharpened branches was thrown up across the island just south of the fort, to counter a land assault. Such a barrier was referred to as a “chevaux de fries”. Volunteer militia were quartered in old buildings on Decker’s Point.

The Royal Navy, however, contented itself with a blockade of the mouth of the Kennebec River just to the west, and frequent forage raids by sailors and Marines along the lower Sheepscot River; often on Westport Island. On June 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1814, English troops landed but only approached within a few miles of Clough Point, with the intention of burning the wharfs and ships. However, after hearing Fort Edgecomb’s alarm guns, and the ringing of bells, they decided to retreat to their ships at the mouth of the river, after looting a few houses.

After the news of the signing of the Treaty of Ghent, coming on February 15<sup>th</sup>, 1815, Fort McDonough fell into disuse and was largely forgotten. The garrison at Decker Point remained for a period of time. Fort McDonough was subsequently mentioned in Maine Historical Society papers by William D. Patterson (~1925) and in Henry E. Dunnack’s “Maine Forts” (1924). It is also discussed in Fanny Chase’s “Wiscasset in Pownelborough” published in 1941.

### Rediscovery and Loss

The site, being cleared of trees at the time, was clearly visible from the river and was a landmark. An excursion to the site was reported in the Lilliputian Newspaper in July 1883 where the site was described: *“It is one of the most beautiful of the many beautiful spots in this vicinity. Situated high above the river, of which it commands a charming view from the Eddy to Fowles Point... and for side-scenes, the green fields of Westport”*. In August of 1884, the Sagadahoc Historical Society ventured to the site and described it: *“it is a considerable earthwork, triangular in shape, with a N.W. Bastion in the angle near the gateway. The ruins of the old cook house of stone were found.”* Nature then took over the ruins.

The land at the north end of Westport Island was acquired by Eastern Realty Sales in the late 1960’s and subdivision plans were started. In 1971, the town acquired the Clough Point Town Preserve from Eastern Realty Sales with local fundraising help and State support.

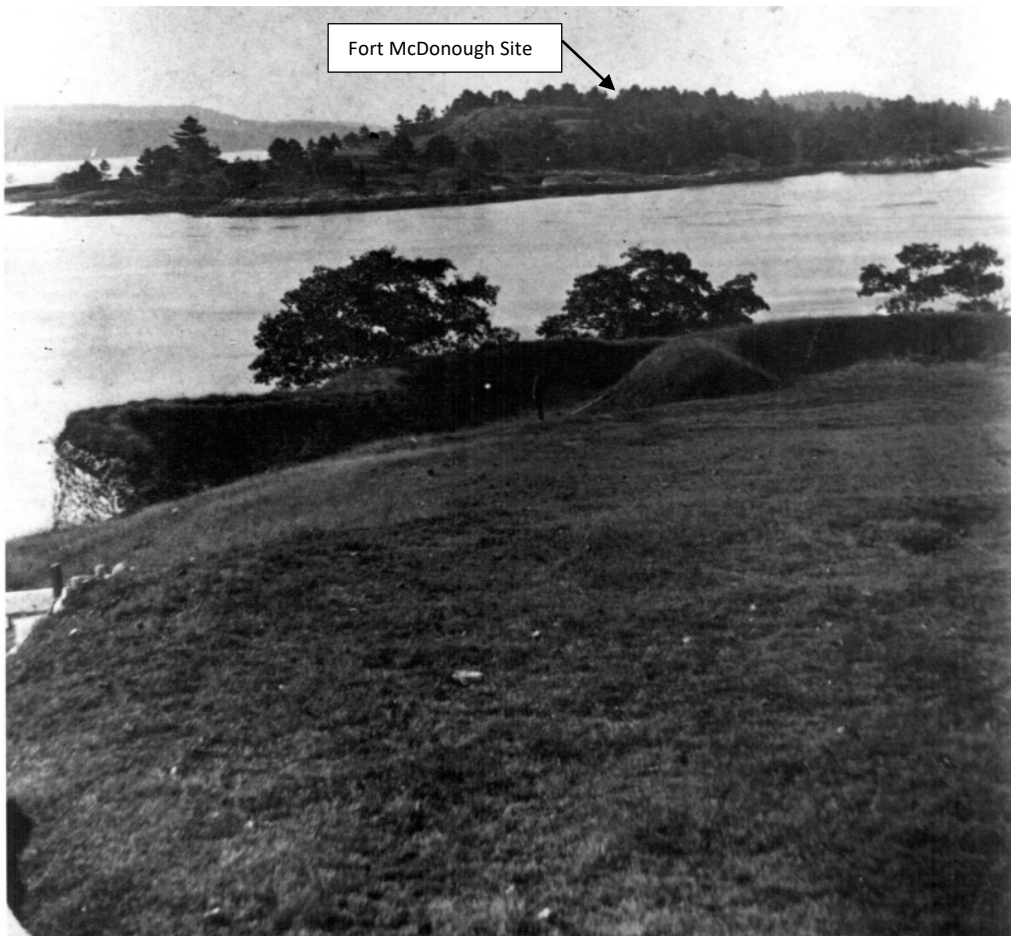
Recognizing the coming development, efforts were made to rediscover the fort in 1982 by Dr. Robert L. Bradley of the Maine Historic Preservation Commission. That mission was unsuccessful. However, in November of 1983, Dr. Nelson H. Lawry, with the able local help of Edwin and Alfred Cromwell, were successful. After some searching, Alfred ascended to a rocky eminence and found the remains of Fort McDonough. It was found quite abandoned, overgrown and forgotten. Its earthworks, in the shape of an irregular, five-pointed star and was heavily overgrown by a variety of conifers, largely white pine. Plans were made to do a more comprehensive survey of the old fort’s remains to document the dimensions and precise

## Historic Settlements at Clough Point, 1800 – 2020

geometry. In July of 1986 a transit survey was done by Dr. Bradley of the Maine Preservation Commission. However, there is no record of that project having been accomplished.

Squam Heights was subdivided in the 1980's. There are now homes located where the fort was. Most remains are sadly gone. There is not public access today.

Although Fort McDonough was on active duty for only four to five months, it will long be remembered by those who visit Clough Point Town Preserve.



*Figure 4 - View of Clough Point from Fort Edgecomb (Fort McDonough was on the Cleared Hill on the Top Far Right). Note: Photo taken between 1880 and 1890*

### References for Fort McDonough:

1. Bradley PhD, Robert L, *The Forts of Maine, 1607-1945: An Archaeological and Historical Survey* (1981) Maine Collection 6, [https://digitalcommons.usm.maine.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1005&context=me\\_collection](https://digitalcommons.usm.maine.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1005&context=me_collection)
2. Newspaper article by Dr. Nelson H. Lawey, 1982 or 1983

## Historic Settlements at Clough Point, 1800 – 2020

### 3. Molly Molasses and the Clough Point Clam Bake

*"I write these rhymes, poor  
Moll, for you to sell  
Go sell them quick to any saint  
or sinner  
Not to save one soul from  
heaven or hell  
But just to buy your weary form  
a dinner."*

#### Molly Molasses Visits Clough Point

Molly Molasses was the consort of John Neptune, by whom she had four children. She was believed to possess the powers of a shaman and her prophecies are said to have come true. She was a business-woman, selling animal skins, baskets, and other artwork, and was known as a healer.



Figure 5 - Native American Woman Tends to Clam Bake

Molly Molasses ranged the country at will and, one of her pilgrimages, is said to have visited the northern end of Jeremisquam when a party of merry makers were there having a clam bake. It was she who told them how the Wabanaki people did it, and the directions for a real Wabanaki clam bake are still preserved. In honor of this visit, the extreme tip of the island has since been known as Camp Molly.

Molly Molasses died in 1867 at the very advanced age of 92.

#### More about Molly Molasses

Mary Pelagie (1775-1867) an early 19th century [Native American](#) Penobscot woman, strove to live an autonomous life in an era in which there were numerous hindrances and hardships associated with womanhood. Existing in the late 18th to early 19th century was difficult for a woman in Maine and it was certainly a struggle surviving the winter months and living off the land in "Wabanaki Country" was surely an accomplishment. One such survivor was Mary Pelagie, a.k.a. Molly Molasses.

Born during 1775 in the Penobscot River Valley, Molly led an ideal childhood and learned the ways of her people. Shortly after the French and Indian war, and one year before the American Revolution, the Wabanaki land was claimed by King George for England. Soon English colonists dotted the landscape.

## Historic Settlements at Clough Point, 1800 – 2020

Although the first white settlers came to the region six years before her birth, the Penobscot outnumbered the strangers and Mary was happy in the work expected of her as a Penobscot girl. Her family taught her to be self-sufficient. She learned how to plant essential crops like corn and beans and how to gather wild berries, herbs and eggs. Her mother handed down traditional arts like moccasin making, basket weaving and building birch-bark wigwams for shelter. She learned how to decorate with porcupine quills and dye, adding personal touches to her wares. Most importantly, she learned how to survive. This meant learning how to cope with each season of the year by maintaining a certain ebb and flow that enabled her to survive both through a year's passing and her life's passing.

Using these life skills, Molly was able to establish herself as a Penobscot woman. She became shrewd in her business, trading with the ever-increasing white settlers. Molly had a gift: the art of m'teoulin or magic. Of all the skills she had learned, it was m'teoulin that most helped her survive in her later years.

In her youth, Molly Molasses was an attractive girl and she caught the eye of John Neptune, who like her, had the gift of m'teoulin. He would become a second chief in the Penobscot nation, subordinate to Chief Attean, but unofficially Neptune had more influence among the tribe's people who referred to him as Governor. He had many wives and consorts; Molly herself had four children by him. Two of her children died and a prominent Bangor businessman raped her only living daughter Sarah. Molly would harass the man for compensation for the rape every time she crossed paths with him.

It was not easy dealing with her new life. The settlers ravaged more than Molly's only daughter; they raped the Penobscot land. In 1784, surveyors planned the city of Bangor and by the turn of the century, there were 300 settlers, with 1,000 more in outlying areas.. Bunny McBride describes the change in *Women of the Dawn*. "Within a few decades," McBride wrote, "Bangor would become the center of Maine's booming timber industry. In turn, the landscape and the lives of Molly's people would be transformed more swiftly and thoroughly than anyone could have imagined" (McBride, p. 80).

The settlers made and broke treaties with the Wabanaki, and the Indians were losing their rights to hunt, trap and gather ash wood for baskets. Trees fell at alarming rates in Wabanaki country but the Penobscot were harassed for trespassing onto homesteads to gather wood for basket making.

In the year 1820 Maine split from Massachusetts and the new state of Maine established jurisdiction over its Indian reservations. By this time, there were 300,000 settlers in the state, and 1,000 in the Bangor area, but the Penobscot numbered less than 400.

With their hunting grounds decimated by logging and lumber mills, Molly's people turned to farming to make a living. They hunted, trapped and traded but many Penobscot took factory or logging jobs, or became entertainers. Molly resisted these trades. She continued to move through Wabanaki country, trading baskets but she also begged on the streets for money and frightened passers-by. Unmarried females left on [Indian Island](#) were vulnerable and needy but Molly

## Historic Settlements at Clough Point, 1800 – 2020

Molasses gained a reputation of fierceness. She frightened merchants and businessmen who prided themselves in being able to walk by her, unscathed, as if she were from the spirit world. Ultimately, Molly became a source of entertainment for the town folk.

When she was an older woman, she caught her gaze in a mirror. The cracks in her face and her hard exterior exposed the reality of her lost hope. She felt weakened after Neptune's death and was often seen wandering aimlessly like a ghost.

McBride tells us that Molly once thought that “the enemy seemed to have two faces: one cold and selfish, the other kind and helpful” (McBride, 89). Like the faces of her enemy, she too became embittered with sarcasm and detachment, but this was not her true nature. The young girl whom she had caught a glimpse of in the mirror, distorted by her own shields, created an impenetrable wall around her heart, and she knew it was something she needed, to survive.

Molly Molasses defied her gender role. She survived during a period in American life when women were subject to their fathers and their husbands. Although it was never easy to make her way in a patriarchal society without a husband, she rose to the challenge and survived Maine's harsh physical and social climate.

**Contributed by Elizabeth May-McGrath, Bowdoin, Maine, 2008.**

### References for Molly Molasses:

1. Brown, Jason K. *Molly Molasses: Mixed Media Drawing and Story*. <http://www.acaciart.com/stories/archive13.html> (accessed June 5, 2008)
2. McBride, Bunny. *Women of the Dawn*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1999. pp. 73-150.
3. *Molly Molasses & Me: A Collection of Living Adventures*. Brooks, Me. Little Letterpress, Robin Hood Books, c1988.
4. Chase, Fanny. *Wiscasset in Pownalborough*, The Southworth-Anthoensen Press, 1941 (pp. 24-25)
5. Maine Memory Network: <https://www.mainememory.net/artifact/105039>

### 4. Camp Molly Hall at Clough Point

Camp Molly Hall— a dance hall — Operated by Everett Sylvester Cromwell (Uncle Vest) and Melvin Cromwell, was situated on land now part of the Clough Point Town Preserve on Westport Island. “Uncle Vest” leased a small lot from Uncle William Patterson of Wiscasset, who then owned the former Decker parcel. Uncle Vest and his brother Melvin run the dances. Music was provided by Mr. Mahars of Wiscasset.



## Historic Settlements at Clough Point, 1800 – 2020



Figure 6 - Camp Molly Dance Hall Located on What is now the Clough Point Town Preserve (Post Card 570)

Pictured behind the trees was the dance hall. The dance hall was operated in the 1890's and early 1900's. Saturday night dances were held at the hall from the Fourth of July to Labor Day each year, until it was torn down after Everett's death in 1912. Camp Molly was located at the shore of the island's north end so that people from Edgecomb and Wiscasset could easily patronize the weekly dances.

The name "Camp Molly" came from an island legend about a Penobscot woman named Molly Molasses who was traveling in the vicinity of Westport around the 1840s. She reportedly saw a group of merrymakers having a clambake at the north end of the island and stopped to share how her people prepared a clambake. The land where this exchange of good will took place became known as Camp Molly. Molly Molasses was also known as Mary Pelagie (1775-1867).

Uncle Vest died on the 29<sup>th</sup> of January, 1912, age 54 years, 6 months and 24 days. The hall was torn down after Everett's death.

Verlie Greenleaf recalls meeting her husband Fred at one of the dances:  
*"I don't remember the first time [I met my husband Fred]. Most likely it might have been to a dance. ...we had that dance hall up at the North end, up Camp Molly. [It was] right on the tip so they could come from Edgecomb or Wiscasset or wherever by boat... We ran dances from the Fourth of July to Labor Day."*

### References for Camp Molly Hall:

1. Maine Memory Network, <https://www.mainememory.net/artifact/105126>
2. Note from Verlie Greenleaf dated 1987