

The Squire Tarbox Inn

The Samuel Tarbox Family Homestead



Figure 1 Tarbox homestead ca. 1845

which was originally situated on a hill to the north of the property. This building was likely built by the original property owner Gabriel Stone. The 18th century ell retains its original beams and fireplace and connects the main homestead with the carriage house. It has served as the dining room since 1956.

Samuel Tarbox (1780-1861) became known as the Squire probably because of his wealth and stature as a businessman and founding father of the Town of Westport. He was born in Litchfield, ME. In 1806, soon after marrying Mary "Polly" Brown, he bought the land on Westport from Stephen Parsons. (Westport was then Jeremisquam or Squam Island, a part of Edgecomb.) Samuel Tarbox's distinguished civic service, included serving as: a Captain in the War of 1812; a member of the House of Representatives from Edgecomb in 1827 (where he played a role in facilitating Jeremysquam's Petition to Separate from Edgecomb); Westport's first First Selectman after its incorporation as a town in 1828; and Westport's first Postmaster in 1829.

The Squire Tarbox Inn is at once an iconic historic homestead and, what a former owner called, "a country inn at the end of a road to nowhere" — his way to describe a restful retreat on acres of lush country fields. The Inn has been on the National Register of Historic Places since 1985.

Anchoring the line of buildings that make up the Tarbox Inn is the federal style homestead built by Samuel Tarbox ca. 1825. An expansion soon after at the back of the house served as the kitchen until 1956. The oldest part of the house is the 1763 ell

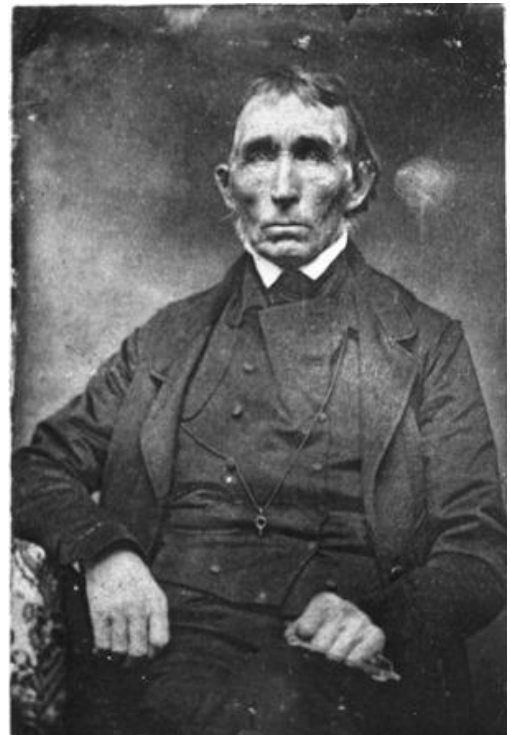


Figure 2 Squire Samuel Tarbox ca. 1850



Figure 3 Stephen Webber home, Stephen Webber (r)

When Samuel purchased land on Westport in 1806, he was a joiner and a carpenter. He is known to have built a house on the Hodgdon property in 1800. His business interests evolved and included: farming, land trading, fishing stations, fishing schooners, and a sawmill. As a familyman, he and his wife raised 12 children on the family homestead.

The Webber Farm

Stephen Prescott Webber (1826-1897), the Squire's grandson, came to Westport from Bowdoinham in the mid-1800's to operate the Tarbox family farm, which, according to a *Bath Independent* reporter, "when properly worked is one of the best in the town." Under the will of his grandfather Samuel, in addition to the care of the farm, he assumed the care of his uncle J. Wesley Tarbox. Stephen, like his grandfather, also served as Postmaster for many years. Upon his death, his wife Caroline was able to purchase the farm which became known as the "Webber Farm."

Stephen's son, Eugene P. Webber (1852-1917), acquired the home after his mother's death. Eugene was an engineer in the U.S. Revenue Cutter Service (later the U.S. Coast Guard). He and his wife, Margaret, and daughter, Maud, lived on the Westport farm in the summer, and Portland in the winter. Webber hired a manager for the farm and became a member of the local grange. His renovations to the property included a porch in 1909.



Figure 4 Eugene Webber home ca. 1909



Figure 5 Maud Webber (r)

After the death of her mother in 1945, Maud Webber (1878-1957), who never married, became the last Tarbox descendant to live at the family farm. She and her mother had become full-time residents of Westport by the time of her mother's death, and Maud was very involved in town activities. She became Westport's first female Selectperson in 1928, serving for several terms. Maud was also a member of the grange and the Westport Community Association, and she drove a "public car," or taxi, on the island.

The Summer Kitchen and the bakery that followed

In 1956, Eleanor Harriman Siebert bought the Webber Farm from Maud giving her a life tenancy. After renovations, which included converting the 1763 addition into a dining room, Eleanor Siebert opened the “Summer Kitchen”, a tea room and dining establishment. Her sister, Mary Wright, opened Wright’s Antique Shop in the adjacent buildings. About 200 guests attended the grand opening tea; among those pouring tea for the occasion were four descendants of Squire Samuel Tarbox and his brother Cornelius: Miss Maud Webber, Mrs. Paul Hilton, Miss Adeline Tarbox and Miss Dorothy Tarbox.



Figure 6 The Summer Kitchen ca. 1958

The Summer Kitchen specialized in “Old Time Maine Cooking of Distinction and the Charming Atmosphere of a Century Ago.” Specialties came from old Westport Island recipes “brought back by ship captains from ports of the Seven Seas” and included: Kennebec Lobster Stew, Lobster Newburg Summer Kitchen, old fashioned apple crisp and Shellfish Marie Antoinette.



In 1959, Eleanor’s son, Otto, and daughter-in-law, Phyllis, bought the Tarbox homestead from her and moved to Maine full time. Eleanor had remarried and set off on a tour of the world leaving the younger Sieberts living at her former home. Soon, Phyllis started the first gourmet bread company in the area. From 1960 to 1972 she baked bread three times a week, turning 1000 pounds of flour into bread weekly and delivering to area restaurants and hotels up and down Route 1. In 1972, she was offered a position as the Governor’s chef at the Blaine House in August where she would subsequently serve for 23 years and 5 governors.

Figure 7 Phyllis Siebert, Maine First Lady Cora Davison Reid & Virginia Cromwell Anderson, 1960

The Squire Tarbox Inn

In 1971, prior to Phyllis assuming her duties as the Governor’s chef, she and Otto sold the Tarbox homestead back to her mother-in-law, Eleanor Siebert Smith who would begin its next chapter. According to a subsequent owner, “the birth of the Squire Tarbox Inn was in 1972, when two Harriman sisters, Eleanor Siebert (Smith) and Mary (Wright), welcomed neighbors and their friends, [and] summer visitors to have supper and to sleep at the farm.”

Eleanor sold the Inn again in 1976, and from 1976 until 1983, partners Dorothy “Anne” McInvale and Elsie White owned and operated the Squire Tarbox Inn and spent “seven idyllic summers” there hosting guests from all over the United State and other parts of the world. Phyllis Siebert came back to the Inn as the chef in their first three years to help carry on the tradition of distinctive old time Maine fare before returning to the Governor’s mansion in 1978.

In 1983, Bill and Karen Mitman purchased the Squire Tarbox from Anne and Elsie and left city life behind to become innkeepers and restaurateurs. Once again, the homestead became a working farm with chickens, goats, pigs, donkeys and horses. Goats were the focus of the Mitmans who fancied themselves as “goat missionaries who rent rooms to people from the city”. Karen Mitman was the goat herder and cheesemaker in chief. At the height of their operation, the farm produced 16,000 pounds of milk and 2,500 pounds of cheese a year; and they employed 22 part-time area residents. The Mitman’s operation earned awards as a restaurant, goat dairy, and cheese operation bringing them recognition in many news, travel, and country living media outlets.

In the 1990’s, the Mitman’s added the newest building to the Inn complex, the southernmost barn, to support its expanding farm operation. The 19th century barn was moved from Bowdoinham.



Figure 8 Mario & Veronica "Roni" De Pietro, ca. 1996

After 20 years, the Mitmans were ready to retire and sold the Inn to Mario and Veronica “Roni” De Pietro who were looking forward to becoming country innkeepers. When they saw the inn, they knew it was where they wanted to be. Their mission: to create “a savory journey into country simplicity” by hosting a tranquil retreat with fine dining, locally sourced foods, and a farm offering fresh herbs, eggs and vegetables in season. Swiss-born Mario had apprenticed as a chef in Switzerland and worked as a chef and in the restaurant business in Italy, Germany, and New York. Roni was educated in Europe, had training in hotels and catering and had worked as a flight attendant for many years. With the support of their children and residents, the De Pietros gave the inn their distinctive touch for 16 years.

In 2020, the Inn is owned by friends and business partners Lisa Dalton and Michelle Adams who purchased it in 2018. They repainted the Inn inside and out and undertook renovations to balance modern comforts with historic charm, including rebuilding and remodeling all bathrooms. Other renovations, like removing the 2nd floor of the old barn to create a spacious venue were done to expand the capacity of the Inn to host events like weddings, family reunions, musical festivals and corporate events. They look forward to adding to the story of Westport Island’s historic inn.

Timeline:

ca1763 A cape-style structure that was later moved and incorporated in the Tarbox homestead, was built on land owned by Gabriel Stone; land later owned by Stephen Parsons

1806 The newly married Samuel Tarbox (1780-1861) bought Stephen Parsons’ land and house.

1814 Capt. Samuel Tarbox led the Company manning Fort McDonough at Squaw Heights during the War of 1812

- ca1825 Squire Samuel Tarbox built a 2-story home; subsequently adding an expansion which served as the kitchen until 1956; at some point before or after the 1820's Tarbox moved the 1763 Parsons house to its present location where it was incorporated as an ell on the newer main house
- 1827 Samuel Tarbox was elected to the House of Representatives from the town of Edgecomb
- 1828 Jeremysquam separated from Edgecomb and was incorporated as "Westport"
- 1828 Samuel Tarbox was elected a Selectman
- 1829 Samuel Tarbox was appointed as Postmaster
- 1861 Upon the death of Samuel, the family homestead went to grandson Stephen P. Webber and his wife Caroline. Stephen had been managing the farm, but now he and his wife were the primaries for the farm and the care of his uncle J. Wesley Tarbox
- 1907 Eugene P. Webber (1852-1916) bought out his siblings subsequent to his mother's death, and the homestead became a summer home shared with his wife, Margaret, and daughter, Maud
- 1945 Maud's mother, Margaret, dies, and Maud takes over the Webber Farm
- 1956 Eleanor Harriman Siebert bought the house from Maud Webber, the last Tarbox descendant to live in the family homestead
- 1956 Eleanor Siebert and her sister Mary Wright opened the Summer Kitchen and Wright's Antique Shop in the historic home
- 1959 Phyllis & Otto Siebert bought the Tarbox home from Otto's mother
- 1960 Phyllis & Otto Siebert moved to Maine and Phyllis (08/09/1931-) opened the first gourmet bakery in the area turning 1000 pounds of flour a week into bread for local markets and restaurants. She did this until 1972 when she accepted an offer to become the Governor's Chef at the Blaine House in Augusta.
- 1971 Eleanor Siebert Smith bought the house back from her son and daughter-in-law
- 1976 Elsie White & Dorothy "Anne" McInvale purchased the Tarbox homestead from Eleanor Smith; Phyllis Siebert returned as chef until 1978 when she returned to the Blaine House
- 1983 William and Karen Mitman purchased the Inn
- 2002 Mario and Veronica "Roni" De Pietro purchased the Inn
- 2018 Lisa Dalton and Michelle Adams purchased the Inn



Figure 9 2019, Squire Tarbox Inn Gathering Room, a view from the backyard & the dining room