

**History of the Isles of Shoals
and of Boon Island:
So Close and Yet So Far!**

Peter Fortune

**2011
Revised 2016**

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Preface

For a dozen years I have summered in Annisquam, Massachusetts, a section of Gloucester about twenty miles south of the Isles of Shoals. Over those years I have repeatedly visited the Isles on family boats, coming to appreciate their unique qualities. The peace of the islands on a good day and the protection of Gosport Harbor on a bad day, have made these excursions very pleasant. Added to the pleasure is the long and sometimes dramatic history of the Isles of Shoals. Frequently I have told Shoals tales to friends or family—the Smuttynose murders are a favorite for young grandchildren—often to be asked a question to which I have no answer, or worse, to be corrected. So I decided to find out for myself, to grab the Hog by the tail, latch onto a Star, and put my Smuttynose into the details.

When I first started this research I discovered that every storyteller told a different story: dates were different, sequences of events varied, names changed. My all-time favorite was when I learned that Nathan Hale had been a guest at the hotel on Smuttynose in the mid-19th century; this must have come as a surprise to Mrs. Hale, whose husband was famously hung in 1776. It turned out that there was also a Nathan Hale from Salem so our revolutionary hero was not resurrected, except in local lore.

While the core of the story of the Isles of Shoals was “fact” and is, I hope, correctly given here, readers interested in details are likely to throw up their hands and flee screaming. I have tried to sort out as much as I can, but, dear reader, if you, like me, are anally devoted to details, and if you start Googling or reading local histories, you will step into a swamp—if you aren’t prepared to keep on trudging through the muck, don’t even start! Trust me.

That said, here is the *almost true* report of the *almost verifiable* story of the Isles of Shoals, island-by-island, and of Boon Island to the north.

Peter Fortune
Annisquam Village
August, 2011

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The Isles of Shoals: An Overview

The name Isles of Shoals derives not from the rock ledges that form the islands, but from the abundant “shoals” of fish that once attracted people to the islands. While the islands were known to the French by 1600, the first English explorer to describe them was John Smith in 1614, he of the Jamestown Colony and Pocahontas fame. Smith claimed the Isles for the Crown, calling them “Smyth’s Islands,” He never set foot on the Isles, leaving it to later explorers to chart them.

The history of Isles occupancy goes back to the early 17th century, even further if the Indians (*oops*: Native Americans) are included. The Isles of Shoals are seventeen small rocky islands located about five miles off of the mouth of the Piscataqua River that leads into Portsmouth, New Hampshire. Of these most are simple uninhabitable ledges and rocks. Inhabitants are recorded at only five of those islands. The name Isles of Shoals derives not from the rock ledges that form the islands, but from the abundant “shoals” of fish that once attracted people to the islands. While the islands were known to the French by 1600, the first English explorer to describe them was John Smith in 1614, he of Jamestown Colony and Pocahontas fame. Smith claimed the Isles for the Crown, calling them “Smyth’s Islands,” He never set foot on the Isles, leaving it to later explorers to chart them.



In 1622 the Plymouth Council for New England, formed by royal charter as a joint stock company to encourage settlement in New England, gave a land grant for the area between the Merrimack and Kennebec rivers to Sir Fernandino Gorges and John Mason. For administrative purposes this land was incorporated in 1628 into the new Massachusetts Bay colony, formed by the royally-chartered Massachusetts Bay Company; Gorges and Mason continued to hold title to the lands given to them in 1622.

Boundary disputes between Gorges and Mason occurred and in 1629 the two settlers reached an agreement. Mason formed the Province of New Hampshire between the Merrimack and Piscataqua rivers; Gorges took the land grant above the Piscataqua, calling it New Summersetshire; it is now southern Maine. Mason and Gorges agreed that the boundary line between northern New Hampshire and Maine was established as the Piscataqua River, which flows through Portsmouth NH, and it passes through the Isles of Shoals.

Eager fishermen soon populated the Isles. In 1661 all of the Isles were established as the Town of Appledore, named after an English town in Kent. In 1679 the Mason family sold the Province of New Hampshire to the Crown and the Royal Colony of New Hampshire was created. With New Hampshire a separate jurisdiction, the provinces of Massachusetts Bay and Gorges's New Summersetshire were non-abutting areas under the Massachusetts Bay Colony.

Precisely where the New Hampshire-Maine boundary passed through the Isles was not clear and became the subject of some disputes. In 1682 New Hampshire and the Massachusetts Bay Colony agreed to define that state line as passing through the center of the harbor between Star and Smuttynose Islands, thus formalizing and making more precise the boundary line agreed to earlier by the two families. The northern islands—Hog (later renamed Appledore), Malaga, and Smuttynose—were assigned to Maine, the southern—Star, Cedar, Lunging, White, and Seavey Islands to New Hampshire.

In the seventeenth 17th century—the Isles' Golden Age—the bulk of the population was on Hog/Appledore and Smuttynose Islands. Fishing was the primary occupation and as many as 600 Isles residents were reported. An exodus to Star Island began in 1682, when those two islands were firmly established as part of Maine and, therefore under Massachusetts's jurisdiction. This was prompted by differences between taxes in New Hampshire and Massachusetts: New Hampshire was then, as it is now, a low-tax area. By 1689 most of the forty houses on Hog/Appledore had been moved—lock, stock, and clapboards—to Star Island, leaving only a few of the poorer fishermen on Hog and Smuttynose. Perhaps those modern Massachusetts residents who frequent New Hampshire liquor stores and factory outlets have Shoalers among their ancestors.

With Hog Island virtually deserted the Town of Appledore was disestablished in 1689. In 1715 New Hampshire incorporated the Town of Gosport on Star Island. Gosport was a well-populated fishing village with local Indians as its only threat to security. But in the mid-1740s (during the French and Indian War) the French also

became threats. Nothing will make an Englishman as defensive as a Frenchman, so a small fortification was built on Star Island; this helped to cement Star's position as the premier island among the Isles of Shoals. A small gazebo on the northwest corner of Star Island now sits on the fort's site.

Star, Cedar, Smuttynose and Hog Islands formed a crude harbor opened to the waters between them. That harbor was greatly improved over time by the construction of breakwaters. In or about 1815 Smuttynose was linked to tiny Malaga Island by a breakwater built by Samuel Haley, owner of Smuttynose; this formed Haley Cove, now called Smuttynose Cove. In 1821 Smuttynose Island was linked to Cedar Island on its south by a breakwater built by the U.S. Government. That breakwater was soon destroyed by a fierce storm and later rebuilt. Finally, in 1913, during the late Taft or early Wilson administrations, a federal breakwater project connected Cedar Island to Star Island; that breakwater also has been damaged by storms and repaired several times. The granite blocks for that project came from the Pigeon Cove quarry at Rockport, Massachusetts.

The end result is a cozy protected harbor open only to the west, called Gosport Harbor after the town of Gosport on Star Island. Gosport Harbor is a very active area, with ferries carrying meditators between Portsmouth and Star Island's nondenominational religious retreat, boats of all kinds stopping over for the night as they travel along the coast, and local boaters enjoying a quiet visit.



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The Sinking of the *Squalus*

Since before the American Revolution shipbuilding has been a staple industry of Portsmouth, New Hampshire. Royal Navy warships were built there until 1777, and U.S. Navy ships thereafter. In 1800 John Adams established the Portsmouth Naval Shipyard (PNS). In 1917 the yard began building submarines; the last submarine built there—the nuclear fast-attack sub *Sand Lance*—was launched in 1969. Today the PNS is a much-reduced facility limited to refueling and maintenance. The largest building showing the PNS's former glory is the long-closed Portsmouth Naval Prison, an imposing and strangely attractive wreck that looms over the Kittery, Maine, side of the Piscataqua River.

The diesel submarine *Squalus* was commissioned on March 1, 1939. She soon began a series of sea trials. In May she began the final phase of sea trials—crash dives to test her strength at depth and the functioning of systems required in a sudden dive. On May 23 she suffered a fatal problem when the valve closing the vent that fed air to her diesel engines failed to close during a crash dive. The engine room quickly flooded and the boat sank in 240 feet of water at the location 42° 54' N and 70° 36' W—just five miles south of Star Island. Twenty-six sailors in the aft section died quickly, but all thirty-three in the forward section survived.

Normally a sinking submarine is a death sentence for all on board, but not so for many of the *Squalus*'s immediate survivors. They were rescued because of two chance events. First, the submarine had settled right side up, placing its conning tower and escape hatch in a position easily reached from the surface. Second, Commander Charles Momsen had just invented the Momsen Lung, formally called the McCann Rescue Chamber. This was a large diving bell that could hold several men. When dropped onto the submarine's hatch a pressurized seal was created allowing the hatch to be opened so men could transfer to the Momsen Lung, which would then be lifted to the surface. The *Squalus* was the first field test of the Momsen Lung, and it exceeded all expectations—all thirty-three of the crew who survived the initial sinking were rescued.

The *Squalus* was eventually raised and towed to PNS, where it was rebuilt and recommissioned as the *Sailfish*. While the Isles of Shoals played no direct role in either the sinking or the rescue, this very famous event has always been associated with the Isles.

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Smuttynose and Malaga Islands

Smuttynose Island gets its name from a dark patch of seaweed that settlers observed on the small “nose” that projects into Gosport Harbor at Smuttynose’s northwestern end. Smuttynose is a featureless 27-acre rock. Its highest point, on the eastern end, is marked by an ancient cairn probably used as a navigation aid in a much earlier era; there are stone cairns on Appledore and Star Islands as well, each placed on the rocky eastern side of the island.

At Smuttynose’s northwestern end, on the smutty nose, there is a small habitable area with sparse vegetation. A tiny settlement began there in the 17th century—it grew, dyed, grew again—and is now gone. Among the early settlers on that site was Captain Samuel Haley Sr., a sea captain who arrived circa 1750 and soon began exploiting the limited commercial opportunities in the Isles. His house—the Samuel Haley House—was located in the small habitable area on the “nose.” Samuel Haley Sr. died in 1811 and is buried in the small Haley Cemetery near his old house. His son, Samuel Haley Jr., occupied the Samuel Haley house and continued his father’s commercial activities until his death in 1839.



Original Samuel Haley House, circa 1990

One should not take the title “original Samuel Haley house” too literally. The structure above has been moved eastward from its original location. Celia Thaxter wrote that it once had a widow’s walk and a covered porch at ground level that ran the length of the house. None of those are seen in the above photo. The roof was completely replaced after a 1939 storm, and in the early 1990s the structure was restored by a carpenter who did it *gratis* if he and his family could have the right to stay in the house one week each summer. The restored house, shown below, has only two front windows in place of the

original four, and it is missing the widow's walk and porch.. Still, the current house has the DNA of the 1800 Samuel Haley House.



Restored Samuel Haley House, 2011

Legend (and perhaps truth) says that in 1814 Samuel Haley Jr. found four bars of silver on Smuttynose. He sold them for \$4,000 to finance construction of the breakwater between Smuttynose and Malaga islands and of a stone wharf jutting into Smuttynose Cove. That breakwater has been repaired many times, but it stands now as it stood after the Great Blizzard of 1978. The source of the silver, if it ever existed, is unknown, but island lore holds that Blackbeard was involved. Later we discuss another possible source of the silver.

By providing a secure mooring the Smuttynose-Malaga breakwater enhanced the value of Smuttynose as a tiny but protected area for fishing vessels and commercial activities. Sometime around 1820 Samuel Haley Jr. built the sixty-guest Mid Ocean House of Entertainment—this was the first resort hotel on the Isles, and among the very first on the New England coast. Over time he and his successors constructed hotel-related commercial activities—a brewery, a bakery, a blacksmith shop, a gristmill, and so on. He also built a ropewalk building on a stone wharf, providing rope for local fishermen. Samuel Haley Jr. was quite an entrepreneur for such a remote location.

By the last quarter of the 19th century Smuttynose also had several residences other than the ancient Samuel Haley house. These included a house adjacent to the Mid Ocean House (probably for staff or for cooking) and a duplex that became known years

later as the Hontvet house. These fell into sporadic occupancy and were, for the most part, abandoned by 1900.

Samuel Haley Jr. died in 1839. A Portsmouth businessman named Thomas Loughton purchased Smuttynose Islands and Star Islands from the Haley estate, and he bought Cedar Island, Smuttynose Island and Malaga Island from the State of Maine (created in 1820). Loughton wore many hats—he was also the White Island lighthouse keeper and the editor of Portsmouth's *New Hampshire Gazette*—but the remainder of his life was spent as an Isles of Shoals hotelier with his wife, Eliza. Loughton restored the Mid Ocean House while still serving as lighthouse keeper.

In 1841, the year he was elected to the New Hampshire legislature, Loughton moved his family from White Island to the Samuel Haley house on Smuttynose. White Island got another keeper. In 1843, after Thomas completed his first and last term in the legislature, the Loughton family moved back to White Island where they resumed lighthouse keeping but continued to summer at the Haley house and operate the Mid Ocean House.

Among the Mid Ocean House guests were the long-dead patriot Nathan Hale, the writers Richard Henry Dana (*Two Years Before the Mast*), Nathaniel Hawthorne, and a young Franklin Pierce.



Mid Ocean House, Smuttynose Island, circa 1850

In 1846 the Loughtons moved to nearby Hog Island, the largest of the Isles. A young man named Levi Thaxter, a Harvard graduate who had visited them at the Mid Ocean House and at White Island, joined them. Thaxter became the tutor for the Loughton children: daughter, Celia and two sons, Oscar and Cedric.

Upon the Lightons' departure from Smuttynose in 1846 the island was left without permanent residents, though the hotel and its supporting businesses continued operating under Laighton management. The map below shows the basic layout of the Smuttynose facilities in the 1890s, essentially as they were when the Lightons abandoned the island in 1848. The memory map certainly dates to after 1873 because the Wagner Murders are referenced and the Mid Ocean Hotel had been closed (in 1868).

The Mid Ocean House had been converted into a store operated by Lemuel Caswell from Star Island. In 1911 the hotel burned down—the typical end of remote hotels in the days of gaslight and coal stoves. The hotel and all of the houses are now long gone, marked only by foundation stones; only the much-rebuilt and relocated Haley House remains. A second building, called Gull Cottage dates to the 1950s.



Smuttynose circa 1880

This map is from “Sprays of Salt,” a 1944 memoir by John Downs, who lived on Smuttynose as a child. The community on the island at that time consisted of Caswell’s Store (the former Mid Ocean Hotel) at the left, the Samuel Haley house in its original location at the right, and the Hontvet House (labeled “House of Wagner Murder”) in the center. The map shows only the habitable area of the island; it does not show the extensive and treacherous-to-the-foot rock ledges that extend about ½ mile to the left of

the map and make up most of the island. Note that Downs has incorrectly placed the New Hampshire-Maine line as passing through Smuttynose, putting the Haley House in New Hampshire and all other structures in Maine. As we will see, confusion about the precise location of that line has played a part in Isles life.

The same configuration is shown in the tinted photograph below. The Samuel Haley House is at the far right, the Hontvet House is the reddish house behind the wharf building, and the Mid Ocean House is at the far left. The long wharf building that goes out onto a wharf is probably a fish-processing house, though it could be Haley's ropewalk, and the three white buildings are probably commercial structures housing the bakery, brewery, and, perhaps, a tavern. The wharf juts into Smuttynose Cove, also called Haley's Cove.



Smuttynose Community circa 1885

Today Smuttynose has only two standing buildings, neither original: the Samuel Haley House, now used as a hostel for transient visitors and the Smuttynose Sentinels, sits slightly to the left of the Hontvet House. Gull Cottage, a small cottage, is placed a few yards from the hostel. Gull Cottage was built in the 1950s by Rosamond Thaxter, called "Aunt Rozzie." She was Celia Thaxter's granddaughter and the island's owner at that time. The hostel is referred to as the "restored" Samuel Haley House, but it was changed substantially when restored around 2000, and it is at a different location, now on the east side of the Hontvet House location rather than to its west.

The Forbes family of Kittery, Maine, owned Smuttynose until 1951, when half was sold to Aunt Rozzie. Aunt Rozzie established the Smuttynose Rangers, now called the Smuttynose Sentinels; this is a volunteer group that monitors the island, ensuring its ecological health by requiring that visitors respect Smuttynose: no trash, no dogs, no

cooking, no hogging the tiny cove. In exchange, the Sentinels on duty get to stay in the hostel often for a week.

Aunt Rozzie died in 1989 at age 94, and her share of Smuttynose passed to her nephews, Nate and Nicholas Hubbard.



Smuttynose Island in 2011

Smuttynose has had a surprisingly dramatic history for such a tiny and remote spot. Before moving on to Appledore Island, some intriguing Smuttynose lore bears repeating.

The Wreck of the Concépcion

On January 14, 1813 the *Concépcion*, a Spanish ship carrying salt from Cadiz, Spain, was driven at night onto the northern rocks of Smuttynose Island by a fierce winter nor'easter. It came ashore not far from the Haley house and a sign still marks the site. Fourteen surviving sailors crawled toward the lights of the Haley house, but none quite made it. Their cries for help were lost in the wind, and over the next few days they were found frozen to death, some near the house. Local legend has it that one of them died on the doorstep and froze into position as he reached for the front door. Samuel Haley Sr. buried the bodies behind his house, marking each grave with a stone. The Spanish Cemetery can still be seen on the island (it is near the Haley family cemetery).

Recall those four silver bars found in 1814 by Samuel Haley Jr.? Their source might well have been the wreck of the *Concépcion*. If the only cargo was salt, alchemists would love to know how to turn salt into silver, but that secret died with the *Concépcion*.

A more likely source of the bars would be the personal trove of a passenger or of the captain.

There was some early confusion about the ship's name. During the 19th century the wrecked ship was thought to be the *Segunto* or *Seguntum*. The shipwreck of the *Segunto* was immortalized in several poems, one by Celia Thaxter, before the correct identification was made. Later research resolved the confusion: the *Segunto* was another ship from Cadiz that had safely reached port, probably at Newport, Rhode Island, several days before *Concépcion*'s demise.

The truth of the *Concépcion* crew's fate is also murky. We now believe that the "Spanish Cemetery" on Smuttynose does not contain the sailors' remains. Could Samuel Haley Jr. dig graves in winter at a site with only a foot of topsoil over a solid granite ledge? More definitive, but is the finding by a Boston University archaeologist in 1991-92 that small test holes at the Spanish Cemetery site revealed no evidence of bones or even of an early disturbance of the earth. It is more likely that Haley never buried the sailors, pretending to so that he could claim a burial fee from the town of Kittery.

The Smuttynose Murders

A later and more famous story centers on a famous murder case that occurred at the Hontvet house in 1873, a murder memorialized in Anita Shreve's 1990 novel *The Weight of Water*. By 1868 Smuttynose had been abandoned though it was still owned by Thomas Loughton. In that year John and Maren Hontvet emigrated from Norway, first settling in Boston and then moving to Portsmouth, NH. John Hontvet, a cod fisherman, met Thomas Loughton, who asked him to become the occupant and caretaker of Smuttynose, living in a duplex house later called the Hontvet House.

John and Maren Hontvet moved to Smuttynose and settled into the Hontvet House. John bought a forty-foot schooner named *Clara Bella* and began cod fishing on his own. In 1871 John's unattached brother, Matthew, came from Norway to live with the Hontvets and to fish with John. Soon afterward the three Hontvets were joined by Maren's sister, Karen Christensen, who emigrated after the death of her lover in Norway.

In the Spring of 1872 Louis Wagner, a local dory fisherman who had previously lived in Boston's North End, was squatting on Star Island. Wagner was hired for room and board to help John and Matthew Hontvet on their daily fishing expeditions. The Hontvets prospered, and in October of 1872 Maren's brother, Ivan, joined the Hontvets with his new wife, Anethe. That meant the three men and three women—and Maren's dog, Ringe—living in the house.

Louis was now redundant. He moved to Portsmouth and signed on to the fishing schooner *Addison Gilbert*. Soon the *Addison Gilbert* sank in a storm with all of Louis's meager belongings. The crew was rescued, and Louis took up a hard life in Portsmouth, living in a seedy boarding house and taking odd jobs baiting trawl lines for other

fishermen. His ambitions were certainly not being realized, so he hatched a plan to correct the situation.



The Hontvet House circa 1880

On March 5, 1873 Louis encountered John Hontvet and his brothers at the Portsmouth docks. *Clara Bella* had been delayed in arriving for a load of bait and had to stay over until the next morning. John casually told Louis that this was the first night in five years that Maren would be left alone. Knowing that only the three women would be on Smuttynose that night, and that the Hontvets were, by his standards, prosperous—John was saving for a new boat—Louis decided to go to Smuttynose where he expected the women to be asleep and defenseless. He would stealthily steal all he could find and escape to Boston before the news reached Portsmouth.

At about 9:00pm, Louis stole a dory from a Portsmouth dock and began rowing to Smuttynose. He reached the mouth of the Piscataqua River at New Castle Island, where a new resort hotel, *The Wentworth-by-the-Sea*, was under construction. Then he rowed the six miles around the southern end of Star Island to come ashore at midnight on the ocean side of the new breakwater between Star and Cedar Islands. While this course was considerably longer than the direct line to Smuttynose, it had the advantage that he was unlikely to be observed from either Star or Appledore Islands.

As expected, the house was dark and quiet. He let himself in through the unlocked kitchen door and began his search. But the robbery went wrong. Louis had not expected anyone in the kitchen (the only common area), but Karen Christensen had recently been released from her position as a maid at the Appledore House and she was sleeping on a cot in the kitchen. When Louis entered, the dog Ringe announced his presence, awakening both Karen in the kitchen and Maren and Anethe who were sleeping together in a bedroom off the kitchen. Anethe and Maren went to investigate and found an unidentified man struggling with Karen, hitting her repeatedly with a chair. Maren dragged Karen into her bedroom and bolted it, forgetting in her panic that now Anethe was locked out of the bedroom and into the kitchen.

Anethe ran out of the kitchen into the frigid night air, but she froze in terror just outside Maren's bedroom window. The thief picked up an axe from the kitchen (used to break the ice on the well) and caught Anethe. In the moonlight, Anethe recognized him and cried, "Louis, Louis" loud enough for Maren to hear. Maren watched through her window as Louis split Anethe's skull with the axe.

Louis then dragged Anethe's body into the kitchen and set out to dispatch Maren and Karen, using the axe to batter at the bedroom door. Maren, unable to get the barely conscious Karen to flee with her, opened the bedroom window and jumped out, followed by Ringe. Once in the bedroom Louis struck at Karen with the axe, missing his mark in the dark. Failing to kill her by axe, he strangled her to death.

We know that hard work makes for a hungry man! After killing Karen, Louis sat down, made some tea, and ate some biscuits he had brought with him, confident that it would be easy to find Maren on the barren, moonlit, island. When he began his search for Maren he left bloody size-eleven boot prints with a distinct sole pattern in the snow. Maren, with Ringe in her arms to prevent his barking, had fled barefoot and in her nightshirt over the cold and snow-covered ledges along the northern end of the island. She hid in a hollow on the northeast side of Smuttynose, below an out-jutting ledge now called "Maren's Rock." There she stayed through a night of twenty-degree temperature.

Louis gave up his search, sure that the cold would kill Maren. He returned to the boat and rowed the six miles back to the coast. He abandoned the stolen dory near the Wentworth Hotel on New Castle Island at the mouth of the Piscataqua River. In the morning, Maren came out of her hiding place and began waving and shouting to attract attention on Appledore Island, just across the narrow channel. A fisherman came to Smuttynose and took Maren to safety. Celia Thaxter treated her for frostbite, hypothermia, and lacerated feet from her run across the treacherous rock.

At 10:00am, as the *Clara Bella* was returning to Smuttynose, the Hontvet men learned of Anethe's death from a passing fisherman. They joined a party that went to Smuttynose, found the two bodies, and searched unsuccessfully for Louis Wagner. They returned to Portsmouth to report the deaths and to identify Louis as the murderer.

Meanwhile, Louis had walked the three miles from New Castle Island to Portsmouth, where he returned to his rooming house unseen and pretended to have been there all night. In the morning he got a shave and haircut, and bought a ticket on the 9:00am train to Boston, all with \$15 that he had found at the Hontvet House (his careless search had passed over \$600 hidden between shirts in a drawer). When he arrived in Boston, he bought new boots and a suit of clothes. Then he returned to his old boarding house in Boston's North End, at that time a dangerous waterfront area. Apparently he had assumed that Maren had died of exposure so he would not be identified, and that it was safe to return to his old haunts. The Boston Police apprehended him there, without protest—he didn't even ask why they arrested him.

After some legal wrangling it was discovered that Smuttynose was actually in Maine, not New Hampshire, so Louis Wagner was sent to Saco, Maine to be tried in the grand new courthouse at Adams, Maine. The evidence was circumstantial, but it was so compelling that he was convicted and sent to the new high security prison in Thomaston, Maine, to await execution. A few months before the scheduled hanging he escaped because security was lax at the high security facility. He was recaptured within three days after he told a passersby that he was Louis Wagner, the famous murderer—Louis was obviously not the sharpest tool in the shed! Louis was hanged in 1875, proclaiming both his innocence and his conversion to Jesus.

Karen and Anethe Christensen are buried in the South Cemetery in Portsmouth. John and Maren moved to Portsmouth, and Ivan returned to Norway; Matthew's situation is unknown. Smuttynose was abandoned once again, though it had a minor resurgence in the 1880s. After the murders, visitors flocked to Smuttynose to see the Hontvet house and to take away a piece of it. By the time it burned in 1885 there was little left but frame, roof, and beams.

Thus goes the official story, as told in Celia Theater's 1875 *Atlantic Monthly* article *A Memorable Murder*, and in David Faxon's 2009 self-published book *Cold Water Crossing*. But there is no interesting story that is told without disputation. Among the contending stories of the Smuttynose murders is Anita Shreve's novel *The Weight of Water*. Shreve imagines that the narrator has come across a manuscript written by Maren Hontvet in her later years. This fictional manuscript documents a tense relationship between Karen Christensen and Maren Hontvet, a tension that explodes in the early hours of March 6, 1873 in fit of passion in which Maren murders both Karen and Anethe, then blames the crime on Louis Wagner. Shreve does not explain why Maren wore bloody size-eleven boots with the same bottom pattern as Louis's boots.

Many questions about Louis Wagner's guilt have been raised. How could Maren have survived a barefoot nighttime run over snow-covered treacherous ledges, and an overnight stay at freezing temperature in a thin nightshirt? (Answer: she knew the terrain well, the moon was bright, she had no choice, and adrenalin works wonders.) How could Louis Wagner have rowed ten miles to Smuttynose and ten miles back, both against the tide? (Answer: he was actually going with the tide both ways, the return was only six miles, and dory men did it all the time, and greed can make a man do wonders.) Why was he found guilty on circumstantial evidence: a button in his pocket that had been in Karen's purse; the newfound money used to pay for the train ticket, the barber, and new clothes; the boot prints; a bloody shirt hidden in his Portsmouth rooming house; and his lack of any alibi? (Answer: the evidence in most murder cases is circumstantial; the real question is reasonable doubt). To some, these and other questions make him a less credible murderer.

Could someone other than Louis have been the murderer? Unfortunately, the police, having quickly found their man, felt no need to look further. Perhaps someone on the Isles or in Portsmouth had heard of money stashed in the Hontvet House (Louis was a remarkable blabbermouth, as well as stupid). Perhaps the culprit was one of the many

workmen staying on Star Island in 1873 while the new Oceanic Hotel was under construction, or even a workman at the Wentworth Hotel in New Castle, also under construction, where the stolen dory was abandoned. Since neither the police nor Wagner's defense team asked anyone about these possibilities, we'll never know. This is great grist for the rumor mill. My view is that Louis didn't act alone—Adolf Hitler aided and abetted while wearing army boots.

A Quick Aside on Malaga Island. It is best to think of Malaga as an extension of Smuttynose, or, of you wish, as the only island in the Isles where you can freely walk your dog—if you can get onto Malaga without setting foot on Smuttynose. Malaga might be named for Malaga, Spain, and is not to be confused with another Malaga Island in Casco Bay. It is a 2½-acre rock with virtually no history except that it allowed a breakwater to be built to form Smuttynose Cove. Long ago there was a house on the island owned by Henry and Rebecca Sherburne, who sold Malaga in 1660. I have found no records of later occupation.

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Appledore (*nee* Hog) Island

Appledore Island, originally named Hog Island, is the largest in the Isles of Shoals. As noted above, it was well populated—about forty houses and 600 residents—until the population moved to Star Island after 1682.



Appledore Island Today

The name Hog Island undoubtedly came from the many pigs kept by early inhabitants, a great source of food and fertilizer. Apparently they were so numerous that early legislation limited their numbers to protect the quality of fresh water on the island.

In 1847 Thomas Loughton and Levi Thaxter moved to Hog Island and renamed it Appledore Island. They formed a partnership to build a large hotel on the west side of the island overlooking Babb's Rock, the rock shown at left center in the satellite image.

Appledore House, the first of the large resort hotels on the Atlantic coast, was completed in 1848. It faced westward toward Portsmouth at the left center of the image above. In the same year Celia's tutor and Thomas's partner Levi Thaxter asked Thomas for 13 year-old Celia's hand. Thomas was appalled and enraged. He ended the partnership with Levi, negotiated a split in ownership of the Island and sent Celia to a school in Boston, where she stayed only one semester. Love will out, and parents can never prevail! Levi and Celia were married in 1851 when she was 16. The Thaxters remained on the island in a house called Thaxter Cottage that Levi purchased from Thomas. During their marriage they had three sons (John, Roland, and Karl). Karl suffered brain damage at birth; he was retarded (*oops*: mentally challenged) and subject to a violent temper. Celia was Karl's life-long caregiver.

In 1852 Nathaniel Hawthorne visited Appledore House with his friend, soon-to-be-President Franklin Pierce. Hawthorne's journal of that visit reports several interesting tidbits: at Smuttynose there were then two houses in addition to the Mid Ocean House, and there was a bowling alley (probably in the ropewalk building); within the last few years there had been a giant wave that crested at the height of the Appledore House cupola (about 50 feet above sea level) before breaking and washing under the hotel's veranda; there was an Appledore ghost named "Old Babb," who was one of Captain Kidd's sailors. Babb was murdered so that his ghost could protect the site where he had buried Kidd's treasure (or, perhaps, so that Babb couldn't blab). Old Babb wore a metal necklace and chain around his neck and "...has a luminous appearance about him when he walks, and his face is pale and very dreadful."

The original Appledore house shown in the first photograph below is a shadow of what Appledore House became. The second photo shows Appledore house spread along the Gosport Harbor side of the island, looming above the small Bab's Cove (remember Hawthorne's Old Bab?), where the Shoals Marine Laboratory dock now stands. The central building with the cupola is the original building; the Thaxter Cottage is at the far left; the houses between the Cottage and the hotel are Loughton-Thaxter houses; and the ferryboat is at the dock. Numerous outbuildings and a large swimming pool are not shown.



The original Appledore House built 1847



Appledore House from Babb's Cove, circa 1890



Appledore House in 1901
(Babb's Cove on left)

In 1855 Celia and Levi left the Isles of Shoals to live in Newtonville, Massachusetts. For many years Celia and Karl spent the summers on Appledore, but Levi, who had respiratory problems, spent long periods in warmer and dryer areas, not returning to Appledore until 1879.

In 1861 Celia published her first poem in the *Atlantic Monthly*; titled *Land-Locked*, it described the losses her feelings about moving away from the islands. This began an ascent to popularity as a writer and poet. Celia spent increasing amounts of time on Appledore, first caring for her father, who died in in 1866, and then for her mother, who died in 1877 after a long decline.

Celia's growing reputation brought eminent figures to Appledore House: the poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, the Boston impressionist Childe Hassam; the artist William Morris Hunt, who drowned off Appledore (reportedly a suicide); writers Nathaniel Hawthorne and Harriet Beecher Stowe; pianist William Morris; President Pierce—a long and illustrious line of guests that didn't include Nathan Hale. Appledore House became both a salon, attractive to the literati, and an attraction for garden lovers who came to see Celia Thaxter's Garden at the Thaxter cottage.

In 1884 Levi Thaxter died at age 60, to be followed by Celia in 1894, the year her book *An Island Garden* was published; she was 59. During her last twenty years she

suffered from depression, reportedly from the strain of caring for her parents and her son, and from the isolation at Appledore.

In 1905 Appledore House was the site of the negotiation and signing of the Portsmouth Treaty, the peace treaty that settled the war between Russia and Japan after Japan's great naval victory at the Battle of . Theodore Roosevelt mediated the negotiations, for which he won the 1905 Nobel Peace Prize—one of the few times that award was made for merit during a long history of low-merit winners, the latest being U.S. President Barack Obama.

As time passed Appledore House became a less popular destination, its decline hurried by the development of other resort hotels on the mainland, difficulty of transportation to the hotel, and death of a famous resident. It burned down in 1914, ending Appledore Island's role as a tourist attraction.



“Celia Thaxter’s Garden” by Childe Hassam, 1890

The Star Island Corporation now owns Appledore. In the 1960s it became a site for marine biological research, and in 1974 it was leased to Shoals Marine Laboratory, a joint venture of Cornell University and the University of New Hampshire. Since then, the SML has built a number of structures, including laboratories and houses for visiting scientists. There is no public transportation to Appledore, but boaters are welcome to drop off at the SML dock and traipse the island, and during the summer there are weekly walking tours of the island.

The main landmark on Appledore is a tall tower constructed during WW II as a submarine watchtower. Built to protect the Portsmouth Naval Station, only ten miles away, from German submarines, it was to be expanded to a radar but the equipment was never installed.

The geology of Appledore is interesting, particularly to my son-in-law—a geologist with the Army Corps of Engineers. The northern end is bare ledge that has been cut by nature into large blocks that look man-made, as if it had been a quarry. The area is populated by “trap dikes” long empty tunnel-like vertical clefts in the granite radiating from the shore toward the interior. The trap dikes are created by erosion cutting through softer stone surrounded by granite.



Trap Dike on Appledore's North End

Star Island

Star Island, the second largest at 95 acres, is located in New Hampshire. It has a long history of continuous use, getting an early boost in 1682 when Appledore's community of forty houses moved there to avoid Massachusetts Bay Colony taxes. Star Island was incorporated in 1715 as the town of Gosport, New Hampshire. Gosport was evacuated during the American Revolution and has never returned to its former population.

Several small hotels existed on Star in the mid-19th century, among them the Gosport House and the Atlantic House. In 1873 (at the time of the Smuttynose murders) John Poor (remember Stickney and Poor's spices?) built the first Oceanic Hotel by connecting a number of existing hotels. The Oceanic immediately burned down in the fall of 1874 and Poor built a second Oceanic Hotel in 1875 by combining the Atlantic House, the Gosport House, and the surviving Oceanic buildings; this is the large structure that still survives.

In 1875 Oscar and Cedric Lughton, Celia Thaxter's brothers and owners of Appledore House (Celia had sold them her share), bought the new Oceanic Hotel.



Oceanic Hotel, Star Island, circa 1910

The town of Gosport, long having shown disinterest in its New Hampshire connection by refusing to send a representative to the legislature and by not holding town meetings, was disestablished in 1876. Star Island then became a part of the town of Rye, New Hampshire.

By the 1890s the Oceanic had developed a dearth of customers. It was rescued in 1896 when Thomas Elliott and his wife visited the Oceanic. Learning of its difficulties, they proposed to the Laightons that Unitarians and Congregationalists use it as a summer conference center. A successful trial summer was followed by more success, and in 1915 the Star Island Corporation was formed to buy the Oceanic. At present the entire island is devoted to use as a nondenominational religious retreat since 1896.

Star Island is served by the ferryboat *Thomas Loughton* and several smaller ferries. In addition to the Oceanic Hotel and numerous small houses it has a fieldstone chapel built on the site of a meetinghouse constructed in 1800; two cemeteries (the Caswell and Beebe families); a tall obelisk at the southern end built in 1914 to honor John Tucke, a Portsmouth preacher who served the Gosport community from 1733 to 1773; and a low-standing memorial to John Smith, the island's discoverer.

Miss Underhill's Chair

The long history of such remote and barren islands contains more tragic deaths than those on Smuttynose Island. Miss Nancy J. Underhill, a resident of Star Island and variously reported as either a hotel employee or an island teacher, was accustomed to walking to the eastern side of Star Island and reading while sitting on a shelf high above the surf; that shelf became known as "Miss Underwood's Chair."



Miss Underhill's Chair, circa 1880

One day in 1848 Miss Underwood was sitting on her chair with a male friend when a giant rogue wave arrived. Horrified to see the approaching crest they attempted,

too late, to escape. The friend survived but Miss Underhill was swept out to sea, not to be seen again until her body washed up on the beach at York, Maine. Celia Thaxter, who knew Miss Underhill, wrote a popular poem, *Kittery Annie*, about this event.

Rogue waves were (and are) a fact of life on the sea, and recent research indicates that they are far more common than previously thought. Nathaniel Hawthorne's notes on his 1852 visit to Appledore reported that a giant wave had struck "a year or two" before then. That would fit the timing of Miss Underhill's demise. So there might be merit to the story.

In any event, Miss Underhill soon washed up on the mainland at Rye Beach. The newspaper reported that when she was found her hat was still placed on her head and her clothes were neatly arranged; she looked as if she were alive.

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Cedar Island

Cedar Island, connected by breakwaters to Star and Smuttynose Islands, is a tiny dot about of about 13 acres. It is the smallest inhabited island, but it ranks high in local color. Descendants of early Shoalers of mixed ancestral origin now own it, as we will soon discover. The current residents are engaged in lobster fishing. The island is said to be named for the cedar trees that covered it long ago. That cedars could exist on a rocky ledge subjected to salt and vicious storms is a miracle akin to Christ feeding the multitude.

One would think that such an unwelcoming spot would have little interesting history, but that would discount the delight Shoalers take in the vigorous protection of their rights—even if they're wrong. Take, for example, the Siege of Cedar Island reported in the Boston Globe on March 12, 1896.

The Siege of 1896 was a property dispute between families. As noted above, the Laightons bought Cedar Island from Maine in 1839. But the Caswell family had purchased it from a Mrs. Goss around 1775 and it was now “owned” by Lemuel Caswell, born in 1820, who had inherited it from his father. The Caswells had two problems: first, they had originally gotten the island before title insurance was invented and in an era when deeds and transfer documents were rare and often missing. Second, the Caswell's documents stated incorrectly that the island was in New Hampshire.

You can see the train wreck coming. The Laightons saw the Caswells as squatters with no title; the Caswells saw the Laightons as usurpers with an invalid title. Still, there was some sort of resolution because the Caswell's continued to occupy Cedar Island long after Laighton bought it in 1839. So what upset the apple cart?

In the early 1890s there were two houses, one occupied by Lemuel Caswell and the other by Clarence Caswell under a lease from Lemuel. A third party was brought in when Lemuel sold the island to Moses Stevens of Newburyport, Massachusetts. Moses was Lemuel Caswell's brother-in-law, husband of Lemuel's sister, Lydia Caswell, since 1848. When Lemuel sold Cedar Island to Moses both were in their seventies—prime fightin' age for a Shoaler. In exchange Lemuel received cash and a lifetime lease on the island allowing him to stay on the island.

Lemuel then rented his house to a Fred Austin of Portsmouth, and things came unglued. Clarence Caswell and Fred Austin did not get along, and the conflict created a cooling in the affection between Lemuel and Clarence. So Lemuel brought suit against Clarence in New Hampshire court to have him removed, only to find that Cedar Island is in Maine (that pesky border again! Will the Shoalers never learn?). The New Hampshire court had no jurisdiction so Lemuel sued in Maine. The case was dismissed when Clarence showed a lease contract from Lemuel expiring at year-end 1895.

When Clarence's lease expired on the last day of 1895, Clarence vacated it and moved to Smuttynose, but for just one day. Then he returned to Cedar Island planning to reoccupy his old house under a lease from Fred Hoyt, to whom Thomas Loughton, the "other island owner" had leased that house. Now the teapot was boiling—Clarence was back, Lemuel was upset, and Moses Stevens and the Loughtons were at loggerheads about who really owned the island and had the right to lease it.

On the fateful day of March 7, 1895 Clarence left his Cedar Island house to go to Portsmouth for supplies. (Does everything exciting on the Isles happen in March?) Moses Stevens went to the Isles with some cronies and occupied Cedar Island. They dumped Clarence's belongings on Smuttynose and removed the doors and windows from Clarence's (Lemuel's? Moses's? Loughton's?) house to make it uninhabitable—they said it "needed airing." Clarence heard of this and returned from Portsmouth on a tugboat with a Boston Globe reporter aboard. He laid siege to the island, attempting to interdict supplies.

And so it stood. Clarence was been removed from the Island and Moses was installed, but he under siege from Clarence. Only the courts could say whether the Moses had the land by title passed through the Caswell right of occupation (adverse possession) or whether the Loughtons had it by valid Maine title. Clearly, this was an instance where title insurance would be helpful.

Regrettably, the denouement is unknown. What is known is that there are now three small houses on the island, the earliest built in 1850. The Hall and Foye families—sixth generation lobstermen on the Shoals—occupy the island as beneficiaries of a Maine trust titled "Heirs of John Hall," and the siegers and siegees are long gone. Peace reigns on Cedar Island.



Cedar Island

Lunging Island

Called Londoner's Island in its early days, Lunging Island is a very tiny barbell-shaped rock to the west of Star Island. At a high spring tide only the ends of the barbell show, making it two islands; at low tide the middle section appears and it is one island. The middle section has a nice sandy beach on its east side—an anomaly at the Isles of Shoals—and is reported to have a cavern underneath.



Lunging Island

Lunging Island is (they say) the place where Captain Edward Teach (Blackbeard), while evading the Royal Navy, stopped in the early 1700s with his 14th fiancée for a wedding and honeymoon, and to bury treasure. He buried his share of the treasure on Lunging Island; his crew buried their shares on Smuttynose (remember those bars of silver found by Samuel Haley Jr.?) In 2000 the History Channel came to Lunging Island with a team of geologists and several actors to investigate, all at the invitation of then-

owner Prudence Crandall Randall. You'll have to see the show, but you know the answer.

Shoals lore says that when Blackbeard departed he left his new wife behind (is that how he got to 14?) to guard the treasure until he returned, which was never because he had a date with death in a sea battle in 1718. Of course, this sort of story is told on almost every island on the Atlantic coast, suggesting that Blackbeard had many wives and many treasures. That Blackbeard's normal cruising ground was the Carolinas and Caribbean (though New England was on the fastest route to England), and that (unlike Captain Kidd) he was not known to bury treasure, are mere facts that can only mar an otherwise interesting story. At any rate, it is said that the wedding was loud and lusty.

In the 1890s Oscar Leighton, Celia Thaxter's brother, built a house on the northern bell of Cedar Island; he whimsically called it "Honeymoon Cottage." In the early 1920s the island was sold to an architect who restored the house. It was sold again in the late 1920s to the Rev. Crandall of Salem, Massachusetts. The Crandall descendants still own Lunging Island, and Honeymoon Cottage is still occupied in the summers.

But the real mystery is, where is Blackbeard's wife? Can her ghost still be seen in the moonlight wandering Lunging Island? Can you still hear the ghostly wail, "When will you come back?" Has she hooked up with Old Babb?

The Isles of Shoals almost became a victim of progress when in 1973 Aristotle Onassis proposed using Lunging Island as the base for an oil pipeline sending 40,000 barrels a day to Durham, NH. Apparently, since Blackbeard's yellow gold couldn't be found, Onassis's black gold would be a substitute. Tankers would offload oil at the island, pumping it into the pipeline. True, the Isles economy would boom, but nobody was there to support the idea. As you can imagine, a citizen's revolt emerged as New Hampshireites contemplated the potential for tanker mishaps on rocks, oil spills, effects on fish populations, offshore eyesores, and transformation of the university town of Durham into a modern economic disaster. Fortunately for those who love the Isles, the plan was abandoned in 1974 after a voter referendum soundly rejected it.

Much more recently a similar plan was proposed only a few miles south at Gloucester, Massachusetts. In 2014 the energy company Kinder Morgan proposed constructing a platform ten miles offshore for offloading natural gas and sending it by pipeline into the New England natural gas pipeline system. In April of 2016 Kinder Morgan abandoned the plan, citing in part the sharp decline in natural gas prices that severely weakened the economic foundation of the project.

White and Seavey Islands

White Island is a perfect rock for a lighthouse—and that is exactly what is there. The island was established as a life-saving station in 1820 and the current lighthouse was built in 1859, replacing earlier structures. This is the lighthouse kept by Thomas Laignton back in the 1830s and 1840s.

Since 1986 it has been unmanned, as are all lighthouses on the Atlantic Coast except Boston Light. The light keeper's house and a wind tunnel giving it access to the lighthouse still exist. For 150 years the fifteen-second flashing white light has kept vessels from disaster on the Isles of Shoals. I'd call that a good investment.



White Island Light

Seavey Island is really an extension of White Island: at low tide they form one island but at high tide they are visually separate. The Audubon Society maintains a tern restoration project on Seavey—it is an island of good terns.

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Boon Island: A Distant Shoal

Boon Island is thirteen miles to the north, ten miles off of Cape Neddick. However, it shares a number of the characteristics of some of the Isles of Shoals, and is included here for that reason.

Boon is a large rock with smaller ledges surrounding it. With some notable exceptions it has never been inhabited. The island's maximum height at high tide is fourteen feet, making it uninhabitable in any storm and poor ground for vegetation, of which there is none.

In 1799 a low wooden day marker was placed on Boon, followed by a stone marker (cairn) when the wooden marker was washed away after five years. This was followed in 1811 by a 32-foot stone lighthouse, to be replaced by a 49-foot stone lighthouse in 1831. In 1855 the present lighthouse became operational. Standing 133 feet high, it is the tallest lighthouse on the Atlantic coast. For many years it was manned with light keepers and their families. The reports that come down to us are of the devastating isolation of life on the ledge—no vegetation, no protection from winds and storms, no place to keep a boat, and all supplies boated in only when weather allowed. The half-life of a happy light keeper was short.



Boon Island Light

The reason for the construction of the light was, of course, a history of shipwrecks, sometimes in the dense Maine fogs, sometimes in the storms that wrack the coast, sometimes in storms that took control of a sailing vessel, and sometimes just because at night the island is almost invisible until a ship is on it.

The first known wreck was in 1682, when *The Increase*, a coastal trader with four men aboard, came onto the rocks. The crew survived for a month on fish and gull eggs.

At the end of their visit they saw smoke rising from the mainland six miles away and lit a fire to announce their presence. Local Indians came to rescue them, which they pronounced “a boon,” hence the island’s name; or so they say; but the name “Boone Island” had been used as early as 1650.

Perhaps the most famous wreck on Boon Island was the *Nottingham Galley*, carrying cheese from Greenwich to Boston. On December 11, 1710, it ran aground in the dark, in fog, and with heavy seas. The Captain, seeing the island jump up in front of him, attempted to “wear” the boat to gain traction in another direction. But it was too late. All fourteen crewmen survived the grounding but two died on Boon Island during their month-long ordeal, and two drowned while manning a crude raft in an attempt to get to the mainland.

Sheltered by a small piece of sail canvas, and with only some cheese and a few pieces of beef bone that had washed ashore, supplemented by rockweed and some mussels, the crew was soon hungry. During their time they could see lights on shore, could sometimes hear sounds of activity, and watched ships entering and leaving Portsmouth to the south. But without fuel or firewood, they could not signal their distress.

The story of the *Nottingham Galley* became famous for the cannibalism that ensued. The cook was the first to die; it was before starvation set in so he was un-*et*: they set him afloat with the hope that his body would drift ashore, be found, and cause a search. Two weeks later, when visions of lollipops must have danced in their heads, the carpenter died; by that time, even Eleanor Roosevelt would have looked good on a platter. The carpenter, described in the Captain’s report as “...a fat Man, naturally of a dull, heavy, phlegmatick constitution and disposition...,” became the delicacy *du jour*; the Captain’s report goes into fine detail on the manner of filleting.

A crude raft was constructed and two crewman set off to reach the shore. The men were lost but the raft went ashore and was found, along with one body found a mile away. The second man on the raft was never found. As he was a Swede, he might have just swum back to the Old Country.

The discoveries led to a search that included Boon Island, where the starving crew was found on January 2, 1712. Weather prevented their removal for two days, and on January 4, 1712 the ten survivors were rescued and taken to Portsmouth, where one man broke into a home with the family at dinner and wolfed down their food.



Wreck of the Nottingham Galley, 1711

In February of 1944 a 428-foot British freighter, the *Empire Knight*, went onto Boon Island and broke into two sections. The stern sank in deep water about 1½ miles from the island. The vessel's hold carried about 16,000 pounds of mercury in glass flasks; some of it was released but the bulk is still intact at 260 feet. As one can imagine, Boon Island swordfish are not much sought after.

Lighthouse keepers reported that during major storms the sound of rocks being broken and thrown around was deafening, and that after a particularly bad storm they would spend days levering boulders away from the lighthouse. A storm in 1932 was reported to send 70-foot waves crashing over the island, and during the Great Blizzard of 1978, one of New England's fiercest storms, the keepers' house was flooded to five feet in a 20-foot storm surge; the two lighthouse keepers had to be rescued by helicopter from their refuge within the lighthouse. After that storm, the lighthouse was repaired and it was automated with solar power.

In 2000 the lighthouse was transferred to the American Lighthouse Foundation, a private group pledged to restore and maintain it. To promote the opportunity to fund the effort, the Republic of Boon was formed in 2003. Recently the Regent of the Republic of Boon, who also serves as chairman of the foundation board, announced plans to build a casino and hotel on the island. Vive la République!

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Summary

We end our journey through the pages of the Isles of Shoals and Boon Island. God placed those barren rocks and watched nothing happen for millions of years. Then man arrived, creating an interesting history out of arguably the most barren rocks on the New England coast. We, the people, cling to life in the most difficult circumstances, and we have leave behind us a tapestry of events—constructions, destructions, abandonments, and disputes—that have undoubtedly entertained Him. Perhaps we are the ultimate reality show.

As always, history is recorded in the names of particular people at the forefront—Samuel Haley, Thomas Loughton, and Celia Thaxter are prominent in the Isles of Shoals history. The lives of the common folk are generally unrecorded except in court records and property transfers. So we construct our history rather than observe it, we are always filling in the blanks. Still, the separation between fable and fact is far from a sharp line—it is a murky region between “Everything could have happened” and “This happened.” It is precisely this murkiness that makes the story of the Isles of Shoals so interesting. At least for me!

Barbara Tuchman, a prominent popular historian, now long deceased, argued that history is *A Distant Mirror*, the title of her book about the plagues of the 14th century. Through history we not only discover who *they were*, but also who *we are*. We are not much different from the early residents of the Isles of Shoals—we love our families, we dispute with our neighbors, we praise ourselves, we blame others, we huddle together for protection, and we seek a better life. Only our external world has changed, dramatically to be sure.

If you’ve read this far it means you are interested in the Isles of Shoals. Now start Googling!

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