

Local Color

A "Winter Industries" Family: The Smallidges of Northeast Harbor

In 1941, a local organization called "Winter Industries" was formed to promote production of handicrafts which could be made on MDI during the winter or in free time during the high season. Most of the craftspeople in Winter Industries were from the Town of Mount Desert, although other towns were also represented.

Throughout the 1940s, a wide variety of handcrafted products were marketed to summer visitors through the Winter Industries shop in Northeast Harbor. For sale were tables and other pieces of furniture; knit goods that included mittens, gloves, sweaters, hats and socks; hooked rugs of many designs; ship models of all kinds; and even young George Peckham's model fighter planes. Teenager Kathryn Knowles (Suminsby) baked cakes that were sold there. Others brought in fresh breads, cookies and other treats.

Initially, the shop was located in the Holmes Block beside the Post Office. People who consigned their work also volunteered to "keep shop", on top of their other seasonal jobs such as caretaking, cooking and child care.

One group within the membership of Winter Industries formed the "Weavers' Guild." To help the aspiring weavers, the Maine State Department of Education and Welfare located plans for constructing looms. Then, working together in the shop of the Stetson School in Northeast Harbor, Robert Lindsay Smallidge, Frazier Peckham, Kevin Ellis, Arthur Coombs, Rev. Richard Smith and Ludolph Hodgkins built looms that could be sold to weavers for \$20.

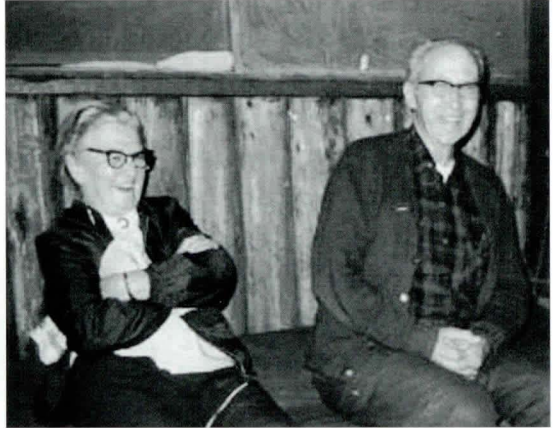
A weaving instructor came from Orono to teach the women and men in the Weavers' Guild. Wool was obtained from Pittsfield Hand Knitting Company. One local resident who had worked in the blanket industry on the West Coast was recruited to manage the weavers' orders and sales. Most of the weavers sold their items through the Northeast Harbor store, although a few chose to sell directly to visitors.

Once woven, the material was sent out to a processor to be fulled and pressed and then returned to MDI as bolts of fabric. Woven fabric was sold for \$5 a yard.

Weaving was a craft for both men and women – and occasionally both husband and wife. Robert Lindsay Smallidge and his wife, Nathalie, wove on the sun porch of their Northeast Harbor home, with six children underfoot.

Lindsay wove for only a few years, but Nathalie continued into the 1950s. Their daughter Jane still has a dark blue skirt and a set of placemats made by her mother.

Among the members of the Weavers' Guild was Charles Small, the local druggist, who wove at the back of his store by the prescription desk. He kept on weaving even as he conversed with customers about their orders.



Robert Lindsay and Nathalie Turner Smallidge

William Holmes, the postmaster, kept his loom on the second floor of the post office building. Philip and Annie MacLean worked at a loom in their greenhouse in fall and early winter, to take advantage of the natural warmth.

In addition to his weaving, Lindsay Smallidge was known for his many other talents. He built ship models and half-hulls. He crafted bows and arrows, gun stocks, hunting knives, ax handles and snowshoes. Also adept with leather, he made belts and sheaths for knives.

“No man in New England has greater skill in both land and sea handicrafts than Mr. Smallidge,” wrote Allen Eaton in his authoritative book, *Handicrafts of New England*.

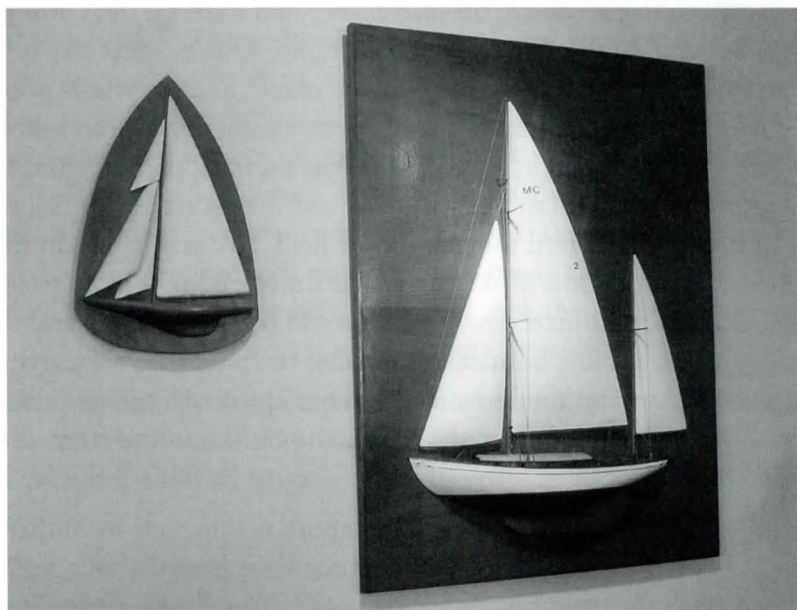
The Smallidge family also operated a dry cleaning shop in Northeast Harbor. It was customary for the Smallidge children to help out in the shop, beginning about age 14 or 15. The children also learned to make items that could be sold or given as gifts; the boys worked with wood,

and the girls knitted, crocheted, sewed and cooked. In summer, the sons also found work as caddies at the Northeast Harbor golf course, at the Northeast Harbor Fleet, on lobster boats, or for the Town of Mount Desert.

Extra income for the family came from Nathalie's springtime work helping clean and open cottages for summer residents. During the mid-1940s, Lindsay Smallidge worked at Farnham Butler's Mount Desert Yacht Yard, building boats for the government.



Thanks to Jane Smallidge and Robert Lindsay Smallidge, Jr. for their memories of Winter Industries and family life. For more information about the Winter Industries Cooperative, see Allen H. Eaton, Handicrafts of New England (New York: 1959). The Northeast Harbor Public Library owns a taped interview with Nathalie Smallidge in which she discusses Winter Industries.



Half-hulls carved by Robert Lindsay Smallidge on display at the Great Harbor Museum in Northeast Harbor.