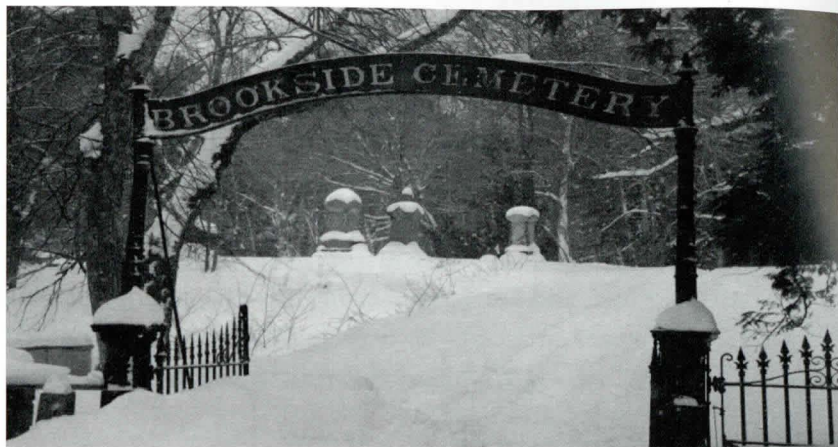


Thoughts While Keeping Warm on January 25, 2011

Bill Horner, MD



About two weeks ago I impersonated Abraham Somes at a gathering that was the first of several to celebrate the 1761 landing of that gentleman at today's Somes Harbor, 250 years ago. Today, I visited him at Brookside Cemetery, a day in which the temperature had barely emerged from subzero readings. The setting was lovely: a gurgling brook, mallard ducks grateful for open water, deep and unmolested snow with more falling, skeletonized winter hardwoods adding dignity with their drapery of white, and the varied monuments of the dead. As I contemplated this gathering place of some of our most celebrated island pioneers, I was struck by how appropriate a winter visit is to the reality of their lives. While the temperate months certainly presented some challenges, it must have been the assertion of winter that selected those who made this place their permanent home.

Cold is insistent and omnipresent. It constantly presses in from without, especially at ten degrees below zero Fahrenheit. The earliest Somes and Richardson settlers, by virtue of their Gloucester ancestry, can be assumed to have become inured to winter cold. But having moved two latitude degrees or 120 nautical miles further northward, one wonders what went through Hannah Somes' mind when Abraham, stepping from their Chebacco boat, presented her and their four daughters with only a cellar hole. Was there time enough to build an adequate shelter and dry enough

fuel before the inevitable and unforgiving cold of winter? Standing in Brookside Cemetery with snow up to my knees and cold pressing in to my well-insulated body, my heated truck but a few yards away, I marveled at the perseverance of these stalwart people. How different and how much tougher they must have been than I.

Ninety-four members of the Somes family rest in Brookside Cemetery.¹ Abraham I, one of three so named and interred, rightfully claims primacy. Of his thirteen children, the graves of four can be found: Abraham II, Lieutenant John, Daniel, and Isaac. Abraham I and Hannah produced seven daughters who married into the families Reed, Flye, Thomas, Dodge, and Thorne. Five of their six sons married into the families Babson, Richardson, Beal, Gott, and Kittredge. From this first prolific generation began a genetic diaspora that came to involve other surnames familiar to us today: Clark, Fernald, Higgins, Hodgkins, Leland, Lurvey, McFarland, McKay, Mitchell, Stanley, and Wasgatt.

There are 650, more or less, additional grave markers at Brookside—the families Allen, Blanchard, Brown, Grant, Grindle, Holmes, Mason, Parker, Pray, Smith, and Thompson adding the largest numbers. Two Somesville institutions, spanning into the modern era, rest there: A. C. Fernald, Jr. and A. Victor Higgins. Of special significance to me are the architect and trail blazer Robert Wheatly Patterson, local historian and author Virginia Somes Sanderson, and the incomparable team of *belle lettres et l'Académie française* Madame Marguerite Yourcenar and Grace Frick. There are also the markers of those whom we of today hold closest to our hearts.

Spring's flowers and summer's warm verdure will make a visit to Brookside pleasant and memorable. The monuments will have emerged from winter's cloak, rewarding a day's exploration by revealing all that they have to say. But, what do the spirits living there have to tell us of fortitude, endurance, and proud independence? I favor a cold day in winter.

Notes

¹ Thomas F. Vining, *Cemeteries of Cranberry Isles and the Towns of Mount Desert Island* (Bar Harbor: V. F. Thomas, 2000), 262-64.