



Charles W. Eliot, President of Harvard University 1869-1909



John Gilley, Maine Farmer and Fisherman

## Charles W. Eliot and John Gilley: Good Hope for our Island

*Jaylene B. Roths*

Charles W. Eliot, president of Harvard University (1869-1909) and founder of the Maine summer colony of Northeast Harbor, was also an author of some repute. Dr. Eliot captured forever the spirit of a local fisherman and farmer in his pocket-sized profile entitled *John Gilley: Maine Farmer and Fisherman*, first published in 1899. The essay by this early 'rusticator'<sup>1</sup> came to be loved by generations of summer and year-round Mount Desert Island residents. In the essay, Eliot asked about Mr. Gilley, "Is this life a true American type? If it is, there is good hope for our country."<sup>2</sup>

John Gilley's hard work, independence and responsibility to family and community caught Eliot's attention. He believed Gilley's life to be symbolic of America at her best. Charles Eliot respected working people and theorized, in a later essay, that the sons of laborers had advantages over the sons of rich men.<sup>3</sup> He maintained that a laborer's son learned the joy of work, physical and mental, at a young age. Eliot postulated that a young man, who was able to contribute to his family, gained pride in himself and was better suited to make a success of life on his own. Whereas, he wrote, the wealthy urban youth who did no labor for himself would not survive in the world if he ever found himself without money. Despite his prominent position and advantages, Eliot himself lived modestly and spent most of his life working to increase the quality of education and life for the general public.

Charles Eliot and John Gilley represented the two communities, summer and year-round, on Mount Desert Island at the turn of the century. Both communities shared a passion for the land. At times, the year-round and summer residents had conflicting views and perceptions about the use of the land. Nevertheless, both the resident voters and the summer taxpayers loved the island's natural setting enough so that, despite the conflicts, the communities cooperated to create Acadia National Park--a monument to Mount Desert. The park was established during a period of economic transition, when fish stocks were decreasing and the era of the great sailing ships was drawing to a close. The business created by the island's growing summer population made it possible for

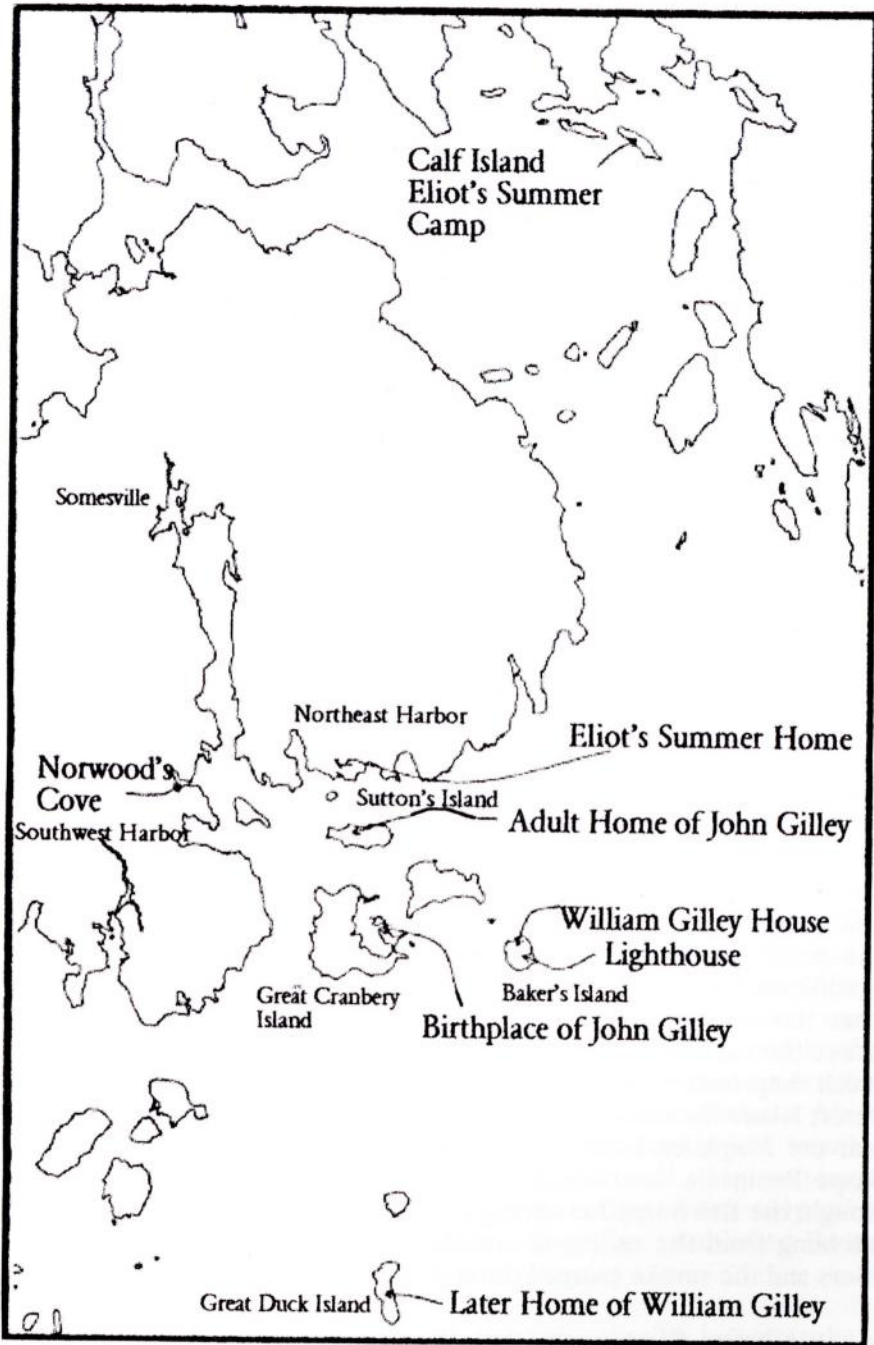
year-round inhabitants to remain economically self-reliant. The land, now known as Acadia National Park, was preserved for the entire country to enjoy as a result of cooperation between summer people, who had the funds and inspiration to promote the cause, and year-round residents, who provided support for the idea and labor for the construction projects.

### The Gilley Family

John Gilley, Maine farmer and fisherman, became acquainted with the "Grand old man of Harvard clan"<sup>4</sup> as the summer colony in the village of Northeast Harbor took shape in the late-nineteenth century. Gilley, by then an aged but still active as both farmer and fisherman, supplied many of Northeast Harbor's summer cottages with fresh vegetables from his own garden. He furnished summer visitors with milk and eggs from his wife's cows and chickens, and his family collected and laundered the visitor's clothes. While it is not clear how Eliot and Gilley met,<sup>5</sup> Eliot most likely purchased produce from Gilley for "The Ancestral," the Eliot family's summer cottage. Eliot and Gilley's relationship developed from one of patron and customer into a long lasting friendship. Close friendships among local residents and cottagers were unusual in late-nineteenth century Northeast Harbor. While there was mutual respect between the residents of both communities, local people remained "the help" and did not socialize with the summer visitors.

Eliot acknowledged the difference between a classical and a working education, but held members from both communities in equal esteem. A member of the Harvard Faculty recalled, "It is safe to say that there were few islands in the waters the *Sunshine* [Eliot's sailboat] frequented on which Eliot did not land sooner or later, which he did not explore, and whose folks, whether seasonal visitors...or all-year residents, he did not call upon and pump with questions. The only thing about his questions that used to annoy me is that I sometimes felt that he would be just as much interested in the answer of a carpenter or fisherman as in mine."<sup>6</sup>

Gilley was born February 22, 1822 on Great Cranberry Island in the home of a midwife. His grandfather, William Gilley, settled in Norwood's Cove near the village of Southwest Harbor before 1784.<sup>7</sup> John Gilley's father, also named William, was born in 1782 and married Hannah Lurvey in 1802.<sup>8</sup> The family moved from Norwood's Cove to Baker's<sup>9</sup> Island along with their three children, as early as 1806 (see map).<sup>10</sup> Most accounts place the Gilley family on Baker's Island in 1812.



William Otis Sawtelle remarks in his essay, *The Gilley Family of Mt. Desert*, that William Gilley's name appeared frequently in Little Cranberry Island storekeeper Samuel Hadlock's account book in 1807.<sup>11</sup> It is unlikely that William Gilley would have made routine trips to a store on Cranberry Island from Norwood's Cove because of the distance and, therefore, he was most probably living on Baker's Island at the time. Sawtelle also notes that an interview with Mary Ann Carroll, a first cousin of John Gilley, confirmed that the family was on Baker's Island in 1806.

The early settlers of Mount Desert Island and other parts of the Maine coast fished, farmed and harvested lumber for city markets. The outer islands were in the paths of shipping routes, and only became remote in later years when the automobile took over as the mode of commercial transportation. Island living put men close to the rich fishing grounds, provided natural fences for livestock and offered adequate wood lots.

William Gilley cleared land and made fields on Baker's Island, which had been uninhabited until the Gilley's built their homestead there. The family raised wheat for flour, hay for the livestock, potatoes and other vegetables to feed the growing family. In all, 12 children were born. John Gilley was the tenth, and most of the children were born after Hannah and William had moved to the island.

In the early years of settlement, lobsters, which abounded along the Maine coast, were used to feed families and fertilize fields.<sup>12</sup> The Gilley boys hunted sea ducks and kept or sold the feathers for bedding. The family raised sheep and spun and wove the wool into coarse cloth. In addition, they grew flax for making linen. Most islanders bought little from the mainland, and were mostly self-reliant. The Gilley family earned the cash needed to purchase additional goods by smoking herring, which they boxed and sold for New York and Boston markets. Mount Desert Island fisherman fished for most of their herring from the waters near the Magdalen Islands in the Gulf Saint Lawrence southeast of the Gaspe Peninsula.<sup>13</sup> Fisherman used seines to catch the herring and brought the fish home for salting and pickling. Fish were strung on sticks and hung from the ceiling of smokehouses. Fires were built on the dirt floors and the smoke escaped through holes in the roof.<sup>14</sup>

Charles Eliot wrote that the Gilleys transported timber from Baker's Island to the Somes's sawmill at the head of Mount Desert Island's seven mile fjord. The lumber was used to make suitable boxes for

packing the smoked fish. Somesville remained the major business center on Mount Desert Island into the middle of the nineteenth century.

The seven mile row from Baker's Island to Southwest Harbor made regular school attendance impossible for the Gilley children. Raised in Newburyport and Byfield, Massachusetts, Hannah Gilley received enough education to pass on reading and mathematics skills to her children.

Despite the long row, the family often went to Southwest Harbor for Sunday church services at the Mount Desert Congregational Church. Church attendance was considered integral to community membership in those days. In New England, the Congregational churches cooperated with town governments. The church interpreted the laws of the Bible and the town enforced them. The Commonwealth of Massachusetts supported the Congregational churches until 1834, even though Maine separated from Massachusetts in 1820.

Despite the close ties of church and community, Hannah converted to Universalism and studied the Bible on her own, because she found herself dissatisfied with the teachings of the local minister. Universalism was a doctrine which claimed that all souls are saved. The doctrine, which dismissed the traditional teaching that the fiery pits of hell were awaiting sinners, was not practiced in the United States until the end of the eighteenth century. Charles W. Eliot practiced Unitarianism, a religion with a similar liberal doctrine. These two religious organizations would eventually merge in 1961.

Eliot was interested in the possibility that Hannah Gilley was of Jewish ancestry. He wrote that the name Lurvey, Hannah Gilley's maiden name, was a form of the German name, Loewe, which was a common Jewish surname. Eliot learned from the Gilley family that Hannah's family originated from Archangel, Russia in the seventeenth century. He noted that many Lurvey family names, such as Moses Lurvey, came from the Old Testament, and that the family had "aquiline noses." That this should interest Eliot is not unusual. He maintained friendships outside his own ethnic group at a time when only white Anglo-Saxon Protestants were accepted in the most established Boston social circles.

While living on Baker's Island, the Gilley family had a stroke of good luck. In 1828, the government appointed William Gilley, father of John, the keeper of a newly built lighthouse on the island. Though they

lived on the island, the Gilleys never purchased land on Baker's and, therefore, were essentially squatters. In 1827, the United States government bought Baker's Island for \$300 from the William Bingham Estate.<sup>15</sup> The government did not grant William Gilley any land on Baker's Island, but he was paid \$350 each year, a fortune at the time, and provided with a house. Unfortunately, for the Gilleys, even lighthouse keepers were subject to political changes and, when the Whig party came into power in 1849, the government replaced Gilley with a man from the majority party.<sup>16</sup>

His sons, Elisha and Joseph, continued to live on Baker's Island in homes they had built for themselves. The two brothers supposedly harassed one of the new lighthouse keepers, Joseph Bunker, until the United States government decided to remove them from the island by claiming that they were trespassers. The Gilleys fought the government and eventually the parties reached an agreement with the government retaining rights to 19 acres and shore access.<sup>17</sup>

William Gilley saved a portion of his salary, which provided enough funds for him to purchase Great Duck Island, near Baker's and Mount Desert, and to make gifts or loans to his sons. At the age of 63, William Gilley went to Great Duck Island where he raised sheep without his wife Hannah, whose health made travel difficult. Hannah died in the home of one of her sons on Little Cranberry Island three years after William moved to Great Duck. William eventually moved back to Baker's Island to live with his son, Joseph, and died in 1872 at the age of 90.

### John Gilley

When John Gilley was 21 years of age, with a small gift or loan of money from his father, he purchased a share in the schooner *Preference*. Seldom did men own an entire vessel, but rather the cost and profit was shared most often among a small group. The schooner carried paving stones (cobblestones) from the beaches on the nearby islands to Boston. The men gathered and transported the stones from the beaches to the schooner in dories. On the return trip, the schooner carried sugar, flour and other goods for sale on Mount Desert. With money saved from his venture in the *Preference*, John Gilley purchased half of the *Express*, a better vessel.

When the weather was unsuitable for fishing or coasting John stayed with his brother Samuel on Great Cranberry Island. He spent the

winter of 1853 shooting birds and collecting feathers. The feathers were intended as a gift for a school teacher from Sullivan who taught that winter on Little Cranberry.<sup>18</sup> He sold his vessel and used the proceeds to buy shares in a fishing boat. In the spring of 1853, he took the new boat to Cape Sable, near Yarmouth, Nova Scotia, to fish for cod and haddock. Soon after, he invested in his own land, 45 acres on Sutton's Island,<sup>19</sup> intending to make a home for himself and the school teacher from Sullivan named Harriet Wilkinson. A homestead was already standing on the property when he purchased it in 1853. Later, he built a new house nearby at Fernald Point on the south west shore of Sutton's Island.

Apparently Gilley made a profit from his sailing vessel investments, as the deed shows that he paid \$850 for the Sutton's Island farm. On December 25, 1854, he married Miss Wilkinson, the school teacher, and began farming on Sutton's Island. Shortly after they settled on the island their only child was born and died. Two years into their marriage, Harriet died from complications suffered from childbirth. Harriet's cousin, Mary Jane Wilkinson, cared for her in her last months on Sutton's Island, and remained to look after the widower. In July of 1858, Harriet's cousin became the wife of John Gilley.

Gilley and his second wife raised cows, chickens and developed small home industries. For a time, Gilley set nets for pogies (menhaden), which were not edible but were harvested for their valuable oil and used as bait. He extracted the oil with a simple device, a screw-press and a kettle. Charles Eliot reports that the oil sold for one dollar a gallon in the mid-1860s and that the remnants of the fish were valuable as fertilizer.

Pogies filled Maine harbors during the 1860s, and 1870s, and provided enough fish to keep 18 factories open along the coast.<sup>20</sup> Gilley returned to the type of work that had engaged his family earlier on Baker's Island, smoking herring. He built a smokehouse in which he also stored fishing and farming equipment and caught and purchased loads of herring that his wife and three daughters<sup>21</sup> cleaned and prepared for smoking.

Disaster struck one evening in the fall of 1874. At the end of the day, Gilley went to the smokehouse to check the fire and feeling secure that it was safe, he went home for his supper. His sense of security was soon interrupted when a neighbor raised the alarm. Unfortunately, by then the flames had engulfed the smokehouse. Gilley had little cash and no insurance. Fires were part of life and the family had only one choice, to start anew.



By the 1880s, rusticators, such as Charles W. Eliot, began to seek land for building homes in Northeast Harbor and on the nearby islands. These developing summer colonies provided a market for local produce. Gilley continued to raise vegetables, and his wife sold eggs and butter. He also sold pieces of his own land in 1886, 1887 and 1894 to other rusticators. Land prices had never been so high. Charles Rockwell Lanman, a Harvard professor, bought the first piece of land for \$500. From the proceeds of this sale, Gilley was able to improve his own home and to lend money to others for interest.

John Gilley had the respect of his community and held positions such as tax collector, selectman and member of the School Committee. He became a prosperous man, leaving an estate totaling more than \$15,000, which included 45 acres of real estate. When he was older and richer, he was no less industrious and continued to sell his vegetables. Eliot noted that Gilley "... arrived with the utmost punctuality, in rain or shine, calm or blow, and alone, unless it blew heavily from the northwest."

At the end of the summer season in 1896, Gilley made his last trip to Northeast Harbor from Sutton's Island. One morning, between Northeast Harbor and the island his boat capsized in a northwest gale and Gilley and a young companion, Herbert White, who apparently had been working on Gilley's farm, fell into the harbor. The boy made it back to the overturned boat, but the sea took the old man.

According to Eliot, Gilley was making these trips to Northeast Harbor to keep the child of a summer resident (who had stayed late in the season) supplied with fresh milk. Eliot wrote that Gilley had finished his errands in Northeast Harbor and had set out for Sutton's island with the young man rowing. The boat began to fill with water and before long a wave turned the boat over. The accident was seen from shore, but it took 45 minutes before anyone could reach the boat. The *Bar Harbor Record* of October 14, 1896 reported that Gilley had been returning from Northeast Harbor on that fateful morning after a visit with his daughter, Mrs. Orrin Donnel, the wife of Charles W. Eliot's boatman.

If Gilley had not been acquainted with Charles W. Eliot, a man who believed in the righteousness of hard work and labor, his life would have been remembered only by his family and friends, and perhaps only for a generation or so. Eliot's small book ensured that John Gilley would not become "one of the to-be-forgotten millions."<sup>22</sup> Eliot stated at the

end of his book that Gilley's life was not unusual for a native Maine fisherman and farmer. Yet, it was a life story worth recording which would serve as an example to succeeding generations. Eliot wrote, "... that it is just for countless quiet, simple lives like this that God made and upholds this earth."<sup>23</sup>

### **Charles W. Eliot**

Charles Eliot was born on March 20, 1834, 12 years after John Gilley, but under very different circumstances. His grandfather, Samuel Eliot, a wealthy self-made Boston merchant, left him a legacy of \$20,000. Samuel Eliot's estate totaled more than \$1.2 million which made him one of the wealthiest men in Boston at the time. Charles' father, Samuel Atkins Eliot, a Harvard Divinity School graduate, chose to follow in his father's footsteps by going into business rather than pursuing a religious career, despite his father's wishes to the contrary. In 1826, Samuel married Mary Lyman, the daughter of a Northwest fur trader, who had become rich through his dealings in the East Indian market. Samuel Atkins Eliot and Mary Lyman had five children. One of their four daughters died in infancy, and Charles was the only son. Charles grew up in one of the grandest homes in Boston at 31 Beacon Street which stood on the west side of the capital building across from Boston Common. The family also summered in Nahant, Massachusetts in a large house resembling a Greek temple. He later wrote of his parents, "they had no luxurious habits--those sure destroyers of family stocks."<sup>24</sup>

Charles was born with a birthmark covering half of his face. As a consequence, he received rough treatment from some of the "tough boys" on the Boston Common across the street from his home. He had a few friends with whom he played on the Common, which he sometimes walked through to reach his school. More often than not, fear of jibes from these boys kept him at home, where he learned read and to amuse himself at an early age. He received his education in a "dame school," a private school for boys and, later, at the Boston Latin School. In addition to the traditional Greek and Latin, his father believed that all boys should learn some manual skills and provided his son with lessons in carpentry and wood-turning. He also set up a small press at the Latin School, where Charles printed the school paper with a fellow student. Charles wrote, "In these various ways, I got some good training of eye and hand for which the programme of my school made no provision whatever."<sup>25</sup> In 1849, at the age of 15 he went to Harvard College.

In 1853, he graduated second in his class despite the fact that his eyesight had deteriorated significantly in his junior year, making it necessary for classmates to read to him. Upon graduation, he announced to his mother he had chosen the teaching profession. While this was a respectable position, it was not what his parents expected. They thought that Eliot was accustomed to a much larger income than teaching would ever provide. His appointment to the position of tutor in mathematics at Harvard came at the age of 20. During his tenure as tutor he served on the Parietal Board which was responsible for the discipline of students. As a result of this, he was not popular among the undergraduates; however, he had the respect of the scholars in his classrooms.

In 1858, the Harvard Corporation made him an assistant professor of mathematics and chemistry. In the previous year, his father, Samuel, had lost money in the financial panic of 1857, which had left him unable to provide for his family. The house on Beacon Street and all of Mr. and Mrs. Eliot's assets were liquidated after a cotton factory in which Samuel Eliot maintained a silent partnership went bankrupt. Charles W. Eliot, using his teacher's salary and the legacy from his grandfather, supported his parents and four unmarried sisters in a house near the college on Kirkland Street in Cambridge. Eliot designed and supervised the building of this house which also offered privacy for Charles and his new wife.

Charles Eliot occupied a portion of the new house in Cambridge with his bride, Ellen Derby Peabody, daughter of the Reverend Ephraim Peabody of King's Chapel, Boston. Ellen and Charles had been friends during childhood and with the assistance of Ellen's well-meaning mother, Mrs. Peabody, they found themselves engaged. Ellen Peabody had a number of suitors, most of whom were financially better situated than Eliot, but Mrs. Peabody believed that Eliot's character made him the most suitable husband.<sup>26</sup>

The couple married on October 27, 1858 at King's Chapel. They had four children--all boys. Ellen gave birth to three children in the first five years of marriage. Their second child died in 1861. Later, in 1866, a fourth child was born, but died before he turned two years old. Charles W. Eliot's surviving children, Charles Eliot and Samuel Atkins Eliot, lived to become respected in their professions; Charles in landscape architecture and Samuel in the ministry.

Charles Eliot continued in his position as assistant professor until 1863. When an anticipated promotion did not come through, Eliot was

left feeling somewhat resentful toward Harvard. As Civil War raged, the United States Calvary offered him a commission, which he declined citing his poor vision and a dependent family. Instead, he chose to spend time in Europe visiting German and French schools studying education and chemistry. With his wife, two boys and a nurse, he departed for England in September of 1863. While in Europe, the Merrimack Company offered him a position as superintendent of its textile mills in Lowell, Massachusetts. They offered him a \$5000 salary and a house to live in rent free.<sup>27</sup> Rather than take what would have been a financially easy course and accept the position, thus alleviating the family's financial concerns, he remained dedicated to seeking an appointment in his chosen profession. An invitation to become professor of chemistry at the newly founded Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) at last solved his financial and professional worries.

At MIT, Eliot stressed new methods of teaching chemistry. He believed that teachers should encourage students to study chemistry in a laboratory instead of only in a classroom. Traditionally, professors performed experiments in front of the class, without the student's participation. With his colleague, Francis Storer, he published a textbook, the *Manual of Inorganic Chemistry* (1867). While at MIT, he began contributing articles to the *Atlantic Monthly*, addressing "new education" methods that suggested abandoning the traditional Greek, Latin and mathematics curricula for the sciences and modern languages. In 1869, when his new education methods had become well known and widely supported, Eliot was offered the position of president at Harvard. On March 13, 1869, at the peak of his professional success, his wife contracted tuberculosis and died. Five days later Eliot was elected president of Harvard. At his inauguration on October 19, 1869, he stressed the need for intellectual freedom. He planned first to introduce more of the sciences, and abandon the rigid course requirements for an elective system.

During his tenure as Harvard's president, he rebuilt the medical, law and divinity schools. He encouraged the representation of many religious denominations at Harvard; instituted the requirements for a degree before entrance to a professional school; increased Harvard's endowments; tightened admission policies; and, developed a more professional faculty. Charles W. Eliot held the office of president for 40 years, retiring on March 18, 1909.

Eliot possessed an appeal that reached beyond Harvard in much the same way that his story of John Gilley reached far beyond Mount

Desert Island.<sup>28</sup> He was often asked by newspapers to comment and make judgments on the issues of the day. As he progressed in his career, Eliot worked not only for educational reform in institutes of higher education, but also for sweeping changes in the secondary schools. He called for high schools to prepare students for college, not just employment, and he advocated continuing education for adults.

Eliot's best known gift to the American public was his five-foot shelf of books. He suggested that anyone willing to dedicate 15 minutes each day to reading selected books could achieve a liberal education similar to that offered at any good university. A publisher, picking up on this claim, asked him to make good on his assertion and invited him to edit a series of books entitled *The Harvard Classics*. Eliot's bookshelf held what he considered the most important works in the history of human civilization. It contained the works of every period from ancient Greece to the American Revolution, and included, books of poetry, philosophy and fiction. By 1930, the publishers had sold 350,000 of the 50 volume set.

Eliot continued in public service long after his retirement. He campaigned for education, world peace, health and hygiene. He took a special interest in public park lands, spurred by his son Charles' professional devotion to landscapes and public parks. His desire to preserve nature and create spaces for the public led him to make one of his greatest gifts to Mount Desert Island, the idea and impetus for the creation of a National Park on the island.

The history of the Charles W. Eliot family on Mount Desert Island began in the summer of 1871. With his boys, Charles and Samuel, and a group of friends, Charles sailed his new sloop *Jessie* along the Maine coast to Southwest Harbor from Boston. They proceeded from Southwest Harbor to Calf Island off the coast of Sorrento in Frenchman Bay. There they set up an elaborate camp with kitchen and dining tents, where they spent that summer and four summers thereafter exploring the island and making sailing expeditions to and around Mount Desert Island. Eliot's biographer, Henry James<sup>29</sup> wrote, "Eliot ran the commissariat, arranged and led exploring expeditions and picnics and was, in short, skipper, shore commander, housekeeper, host and organizer of entertainments."<sup>30</sup> In the next summer of 1872, he bought a larger sloop, *Sunshine*, which he piloted and captained himself with a small crew.

A change in his family life soon altered Eliot's summer itinerary. On October 30, 1877, he married Grace Hopkinson. This was a true romance that lasted more than 40 years. They shared a love of nature and spent many happy hours walking the trails of Mount Desert. His marriage made camping an impracticality and he began to seek land for a summer home. His son, Charles, spent the summer of 1880 on the eastern shore of Somes Sound with his Harvard classmates. The group, calling themselves the Champlain Society, took botany samples, made historical inquiries and studied the geography. The younger Charles, advised Eliot to purchase land between Somes Sound and Seal Harbor, and he purchased more than 100 acres in Northeast Harbor on Asticou Hill looking towards Bear Island. In 1881, the elder Charles built a house where he passed many summers until his death.

The Eliot couple journeyed to their summer refuge even as symptoms of old age made traveling difficult. In 1918, Mrs. Eliot began to experience heart trouble and eventually became confined to a wheel chair. In August of 1924, she finally passed away leaving a lonely Eliot who, according to his biography, buried his sorrows in his work. After this, he spent only two more summers in Northeast Harbor, and on August 22, 1926, he died in his Asticou home at the age of 92. A small ceremony took place at the Union Church in Northeast Harbor, with funeral services at the Harvard College chapel, and burial at Mount Auburn in Cambridge.

Although some people found Eliot to be a stiff and formal, he held the respect of many local residents of Northeast Harbor, Harvard faculty members and members of the East Coast establishment. *The Bar Harbor Times* reported that both summer and local people attended the services in Northeast Harbor. Emily Phillips Reynolds, the daughter of local boarding house proprietor, remembered Charles Eliot and wrote of him and others, that they "... stand out as patriarchs in my memory. They were such fine strong characters and their sermons inspiring...we did get that good influence and experience that made a lasting impression."<sup>31</sup> A fellow rusticator, William W. Vaughan recalled, "He was a great figure stirring our pride."<sup>32</sup>

While the lives of both Gilley and Eliot were molded by different social and economic factors, they shared a similar perspective: both were self-reliant, believed in the virtues of hard work and loved the land.

Samuel, his oldest son recalled, "The summer life of the decade 1880-1890 was very simple ... We swam in the ocean, caught our own fish, cut and stored our own ice, kept our own cow, picked our own berries and cut our own wood."<sup>33</sup> The Eliot family set the tone for other early rusticators who also considered such tasks as berry picking and chopping wood an important part of their rural experience. Eliot's biographer, Henry James, wrote that Charles continued to run the Northeast Harbor house much as he organized the camp.<sup>34</sup> Out of respect for his wife's vacation time, Eliot arranged the housekeeping and attended to most of the details of daily living.

Self-reliance began early for both Eliot and Gilley. As a boy, Eliot was educated in the best schools in Boston, yet he believed that the reading he did independently did more to prepare him for life than the purely classical education he received at the Boston Latin School. Later, as a college student, Eliot wrote to his father from the family's summer home in Nahant that he was chopping wood and attending to the horses and gardens. In contrast, John Gilley was without access to formal education, but under his mother's tutelage he achieved basic reading and math skills. From his father he learned navigation, farming, fishing and much that was necessary for survival on the rugged coast of Maine.

Both men were also committed to their communities. Eliot served on national committees for the development better health and education, while Gilley gave time to help create better roads and educational opportunities locally.<sup>35</sup> While Eliot subscribed to the benefits of hard work, he also contended that recreation strengthened both the body and mind. He believed that a working man, especially, had the right to experience the pleasures of the outdoors, and he felt strongly that public places must be set aside for this purpose.

When he first became president of Harvard, the campus was devoid of shrubs, flowers or landscaping plans. In 1887, his son, Charles Eliot, a landscape architect who was a pioneer in the field, was hired to landscape parts of the campus. His son's work inspired the elder Eliot who began to campaign for similar landscape reforms, and for the establishment of land preserves to be set aside for the public benefit. In particular, he used as a model The Trustees of Public Reservations in Massachusetts which his son, Charles, founded in 1891.

The people of Mount Desert Island reaped many benefits from Eliot's love of landscape and his respect for the working people. In the late nineteenth century many of the most scenic areas on Mount Desert

Island were purchased by private owners because of the popularity of the Island as a summer resort. "No Trespassing" signs cropped up all over the island keeping both summer visitors and natives from using their favorite paths. Eliot hoped to preserve some of the most attractive places for the public. He inspired a group of summer residents to donate land to an organization he established called the Hancock County Trustees of Public Reservations. Eventually, land donated for this purpose became Acadia National Park. This outstanding resource was established by the intellectual vision of a summer community and the work of Mount Desert Island's laborers and craftsmen. From its establishment, it has been always utilized by all the community's residents.

On August 12, 1901, Charles W. Eliot wrote to George Dorr, a Bar Harbor summer resident, who was later appointed the first superintendent of Acadia National Park, "I approach the undertaking myself from the cottager's point of view, but I believe it to be a measure on which all persons interested in the preservation of this island as a place for healthful enjoyment could unite."<sup>36</sup>

The Hancock County Trustees of Public Reservations met at the Music Room on Rowland Road in Seal Harbor in August of 1901. The members of Village Improvement Societies of Northeast Harbor, Seal Harbor and Bar Harbor, including leaders from both the summer and year-round communities, voted to establish the group for the purpose of holding lands on Mount Desert Island for the use of the public.<sup>37</sup> The assembly elected Eliot president<sup>38</sup> and George Dorr the executive officer. On January 1, 1903, the Maine State Legislature granted a charter to the corporation which allowed it to function as a tax-free status organization.

In 1903, a small piece of cliff on Cooksey Drive and land on a hill overlooking Jordan Pond were the first gifts. The trustees were inactive until September of 1908, when the "Bowl" (a glacially formed "bowl" of water) and the "Beehive" (a hill resembling a whale's back) became the first significant gifts. These gifts spurred Dorr into action, leading him to seek financing from John S. Kennedy of New York and Bar Harbor, to secure a title for the land on the top of Cadillac (then Green) Mountain. Gradually the trustees received other large tracts of land including Newport, Pemetic and Sargent Mountains among others. Gilley's Baker's Island also became part of Acadia National Park in the late 1950s.



In the winter of 1913, after battling a group wishing to annul the trustees' charter and winning, Dorr headed for Washington, D.C. to seek permanent protection for the land preserve. He offered the lands to the United States government for a national monument. At first, the United States government would not accept this gift. Up to this point, the government had never acquired land as a gift from an individual. It was not until July 8, 1916, after Dorr cut through miles of red tape, that President Woodrow Wilson declared the land on Mount Desert to be a National Monument, and George Dorr was appointed the director of the Sieur de Monts Monument. By 1919, with the support of Theodore Roosevelt, Congress designated the monument Lafayette National Park. It did not become known as Acadia National Park until 1929.

### **The Right Development**

Although the Park was open to the public, the establishment of the land preserve symbolized for many local inhabitants an additional loss of the ability to control the future of their land. Charles Eliot attempted to assuage local fears in his pamphlet, *The Right Development of Mount Desert*, privately published in 1904 for circulation among the voters of the town of Mount Desert. He drew attention to the improvements in schools, roads and churches and remarked that this increase in the quality of life was derived solely from the beauty of the land which had attracted city money to the island. Eliot believed it was in the best interest of the residents to encourage the growth of Mount Desert as a popular resort. He urged voters to treat the whole island, "as if it were a public park." He claimed that the town *did* have the power to make decisions about its own development (although he believed the only "right development" to be that of the park), and beseeched voters to improve roads, light streets and to maintain road sides and other public landscapes.

Local residents mostly feared a loss of income from the prohibition of timber harvesting. The recent creation of the portable saw made lumber on the mountains attainable, lumber which supplied many residents with year-round incomes and their own fuel. The establishment of the land preserve ended tree harvesting on the protected lands; however, while the Hancock Country Trustees protected the mountain forests for the general public, they left land suitable for farming and homes in private hands.<sup>39</sup>

The summer colony feared that if the preserved lands were opened to public use, the exclusivity they had maintained, to that time,

would end. Many thought of the island as their own private playground. Wealthy East Coast summer residents expected that the island would be overrun by common people from whom they sought to isolate themselves for part of the year. Such anxiety continues to this day.

The park developed during a time of economic transition for the people on the coast of Maine. From the period of the island's settlement to the end of the nineteenth century, the residents of Mount Desert Island made their living almost entirely by farming, fishing and foresting. Shore property was purchased by summer residents at prices that many local residents could not refuse, and the days of the seaside farming came to a close. Few year-round residents could sustain themselves by farming land in the interior alone, and certain fish stocks decreased. Many of the most desirable wood lots were purchased for the park and by summer residents. To some extent the summer trade augmented the income of local residents in the late-nineteenth century. The "season" lasted only for two months and many community people believed the resulting supplemental income allowed them to enjoy a better quality of life.

After the turn of the century, year-round residents looked more toward the summer colony to provide long-term income, in light of the shrinking wood lots, reduced farm lands and dwindling fish stocks. At the same time the automobile slowly replaced the coasting schooners that employed sailing crews and ship builders. As the island became more popular, the demand for carpenters and builders soared, giving displaced ship builders needed employment. The park required men to build roads and to maintain the scenic overlooks and trails. The carriage roads established John D. Rockefeller, Jr. created year-round employment for many years, starting in 1914 and continuing through the depression.

While factions of both the summer community and the year-round inhabitants objected to the building of the park, the majority of residents favored the project. In 1916, at the Sieur de Monts National Monument dedication ceremony, the Maine secretary of state noted the "... cordial good feeling that exists between summer residents and native."<sup>40</sup> At the Bar Harbor Town meeting of 1919, voters unanimously made a resolution to express thanks to George Dorr for his work with the park.

He has overcome obstacles that no other friend of this section would have commanded the courage to overcome and has finally secured for us and for our posterity the Lafayette National Park on Mount Desert Island. We

regard the achievement as a crowing event in a life much of which has been devoted to the interests of Bar Harbor.<sup>41</sup>

In 1920, year-round residents offered their support to John D. Rockefeller when he began to make additional enlargements to the park. Rockefeller began construction of additional park roads, and a group of summer residents asked him to reconsider the project. He believed that the inner areas of the island should be accessible to all, while others held that building roads through unspoiled woodlands would ruin their charm. Two hundred year-round island residents came to Rockefeller's aid by signing a petition of support for his projects.<sup>42</sup>

Regardless of their opinions on the matter of the park, summer and long-term residents agreed on the beauty and the magic of Mount Desert Island. In his memoirs, Richard W. Billings, a year-round resident of Seal Harbor, wrote: "To us the island was home. You couldn't help but have a warm feeling for people who admire your home, and brought their families there year after year to enjoy it...Nature was the attraction, breathtaking scenery of ocean grandeur, woods and mountains...There were some who worked hard to retain and maintain this condition."<sup>43</sup>

Whether summer people and year-round residents succeeded in developing the island in the "right" way is still debated. Certainly, the island has been preserved as a monument for all the world to enjoy. The standard of living has risen steadily over the years, but the ability to maintain the traditions of self-reliance, which were so important to both Gilley and Eliot, has decreased.

In 1904, Eliot contradicted his earlier promotion of the self-reliant life style when he wrote in *The Right Development of Mount Desert*, "The support of the permanent population is now derived almost exclusively from the summer residents; and this support is a much better one than the people of the island enjoyed before..."<sup>44</sup> Eliot could not have anticipated that the path of development for Mount Desert would leave so many jobless in the winter. In many instances, local residents became entirely dependent on their summer income, and this often acted as a deterrent to developing year-round industry. Today, the lack of year-round industry still leaves many jobless when summer businesses close for the winter. But in the current economic environment, summer income is often not enough to sustain a family for an entire year. The fear of some summer residents and the dream of Charles Eliot has been realized--the island is now a play ground for the public at large. The

concern that the establishment of the land preserve inhibits or contributes to curbing development on the island has proven false. Townspeople have not been able to depend on the summer colony to control such growth. The towns must manage tourism on their own along with local business associations. As a neighbor of all the communities on Mount Desert Island, Acadia National Park functions almost like an independent town.

Charles Eliot and John Gilley symbolized the best the two communities could achieve working together. Eliot's short history of the life of his neighbor helped to create a bridge of understanding between the year-round residents and the island's summer visitors. Without this slender book, John Gilley's life might have been quickly forgotten; but, as he is remembered, so is Charles Eliot. Over the years, many year-round residents have come to know about and appreciate Eliot through his interest in and writing about John Gilley. Eliot's respect for the local people earned him support for the establishment of the park. It is through the hard work of people such as John Gilley, as well as through the democratic beliefs of Charles Eliot, that we have Acadia National Park today. As long as the memory of their deeds exist there is not only "good hope for our country,"<sup>45</sup> but great hope for the future of Mount Desert Island.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Rusticator was a term used by people living in rural areas in the nineteenth century to describe the people visiting the community from urban areas who were seeking rustic experiences.

<sup>2</sup> Eliot, Charles W., *John Gilley: Maine Farmer and Fisherman*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Century Company, 1899), p. 4.

<sup>3</sup> Eliot, Charles W., "Advantages of Poor Man's Sons," in *Late Harvest*, (Boston: The Atlantic Monthly Press, 1924), p. 84.

<sup>4</sup> Scythe, Herbert Weir, an untitled report in verse on the Mount Desert Town Meeting of 1913, in *An Informal History of Mount Desert*, ed. Gunnar Hansen, (Mount Desert: By the Town, 1989), p.150.

<sup>5</sup> John Gilley's daughter, Laura, married Orrin Donnel, Charles W. Eliot's caretaker and boatman, in April of 1883. Most likely Orrin Donnel introduced his father-in-law to Eliot.

<sup>6</sup> James, Henry, *Charles W. Eliot: President of Harvard University*, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1930), p. 321.

<sup>7</sup> Thornton, Mrs. Seth, *Traditions and Records of Southwest Harbor and Somesville Mount Desert Island, Maine*, 2d ed., (Bar Harbor, Maine: Acadia Publishing Company, 1988), p. 31.

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<sup>8</sup> Gray, Ruth ed., *Maine Families in 1790*, vol. 2, (Camden, Maine: Picton Press, 1990), p. 104.

<sup>9</sup> On early deeds the name of Baker's Island was spelled with an apostrophe 's'; however, the National Park Service, which controls the island today uses the name Baker without the apostrophe 's'.

<sup>10</sup> According to William Otis Sawtelle author of, "The Gilley Family of Mt. Desert," account books kept by storekeeper Samuel Hadlock on Little Cranberry Island show that William Gilley purchased the supplies necessary for a homesteader. Charles Eliot claims the family moved to Baker's Island around the year 1812.

<sup>11</sup> The Samuel Hadlock named here is the father of Samuel Hadlock, Jr. mentioned in Rachel Field's *God's Pocket: The Story of Captain Samuel Hadlock, Junior of Cranberry Isles, Maine*, (New York: MacMillan, 1934).

<sup>12</sup> Duncan, Roger F., *Coastal Maine: A Maritime History*, (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1992), p. 424.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> The island was granted to Maria Therese de Gregoire, the granddaughter of early explorer Antoine de la Mothe Cadillac and her husband Bartolemy de Gregoire, along with other nearby islands and the entire east side of Mount Desert Island. The couple sold most of the land to Henry Jackson in 1796. Jackson in turn sold large tracts of land to William Bingham who died and left the land to be managed by his estate.

<sup>16</sup> Eliot, Charles W., *John Gilley: Maine Fisherman and Farmer*, p. 28. Another source claims that William Gilley was turned out of his position in 1848.

<sup>17</sup> "The Elisha Gilley House," collections of Acadia National Park.

<sup>18</sup> Eliot, Charles W., *John Gilley: Maine Fisherman and Farmer*, p. 25.

<sup>19</sup> Eben Sutton arrived in Southwest Harbor in 1755 along with the island's first settler, Abraham Somes. At the time Sutton purchased Sutton's Island for two quarts of rum from the Native Americans who owned it. The island came to be known as Sutton Island without the apostrophe 's'.

<sup>20</sup> Duncan, p. 424

<sup>21</sup> John and Mary Gilley had three daughters, Hattie, who married George Springer; Laura, who married Orrin A. Donnell, the Eliot family boatman; and Mary E. Stanley who moved to Friendship, Maine where descendants of the family still reside.

<sup>22</sup> Eliot, Charles W., *John Gilley: Maine Fisherman and Farmer*, p. 10.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid, p. 43.

<sup>24</sup> James, Henry, *Charles W. Eliot: President of Harvard University*, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1930), p. 11.

<sup>25</sup> Eliot, Charles W., "How I have kept my Health and Working Power till Eighty," in *Late Harvest*, (Boston: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1924), p. 3.

<sup>26</sup> James, Henry, p. 77.

<sup>27</sup> James, p. 143.

<sup>28</sup> Sawtelle, William Otis, "President Eliot and the "Life of John Gilley," in *John Gilley: One of the Forgotten Millions*, (Bar Harbor, Maine: Acadia Publishing,

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classmates, Professor Adams Sherman Hill ... told me one day that the best thing I had ever written, and the thing that would last the longest as literature, was "The Life of John Gilley." Sawtelle also reported that the Gilley book was thought to be 'an educational gem' at the Harvard Graduate School of Education.

<sup>29</sup> Henry James (1879-1947) was the son of philosopher William James and nephew of novelist Henry James. The James family lived across from the Eliot family while Charles W. Eliot was the president of Harvard. Henry James graduated from Harvard in 1899. His biography of Charles W. Eliot won the Pulitzer Prize.

<sup>30</sup> James, p. 321.

<sup>31</sup> Reynolds, Emily Phillips, *Down Memory Lane*, (Maine Printing Company: Portland, 1975), p. 23. Vaughn, William W., *Northeast Harbor Remembrances by an Old Summer Resident*, (White and Horne Company, 1930), p. 72.

<sup>32</sup> Vaughn, William W., *Northeast Harbor Reminiscences*, (White and Horne Company, 1930), p. 72.

<sup>33</sup> Eliot, Samuel A., [Summer life of the Decade 1880 to 1890], *Bar Harbor Times*, (1935), quoted in ed. Gunnar Hansen, *Mount Desert an Informal History*, (Mount Desert: Published by the Town, 1989), p. 74.

<sup>34</sup> James, p. 177.

<sup>35</sup> *John Gilley: Maine Fisherman and Farmer*, p. 35.

<sup>36</sup> Dorr, George B., *Acadia National Park: Its Origins and Background*, (Bangor: Burr Printing Company, 1942), p. 4.

<sup>37</sup> *The Hancock County Trustees of Public Reservations: An Historical Sketch of a Record of the Holdings of the Trustees*, (Bar Harbor, Maine: 1939), p. 8.

<sup>38</sup> Charles W. Eliot was president of the Hancock County Trustees of Public Reservations from 1901 until his death in 1926.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10.

<sup>40</sup> "National Park Fityly Dedicated," collections of Acadia National Park *Bar Harbor Times*, (Bar Harbor, Maine), 8 March 1919.

<sup>42</sup> Roberts, Ann Rockefeller, p. 93.

<sup>43</sup> Billings, Richard W., *The Village and the Hill*, (Augusta, Maine: Baymountain Publishing Company, 1995).

<sup>44</sup> Eliot, Charles, W., *The Right Development of Mount Desert*, (Privately Printed, 1904), p. 2.

<sup>45</sup> *John Gilley: Maine Fisherman and Farmer*, p. 39.