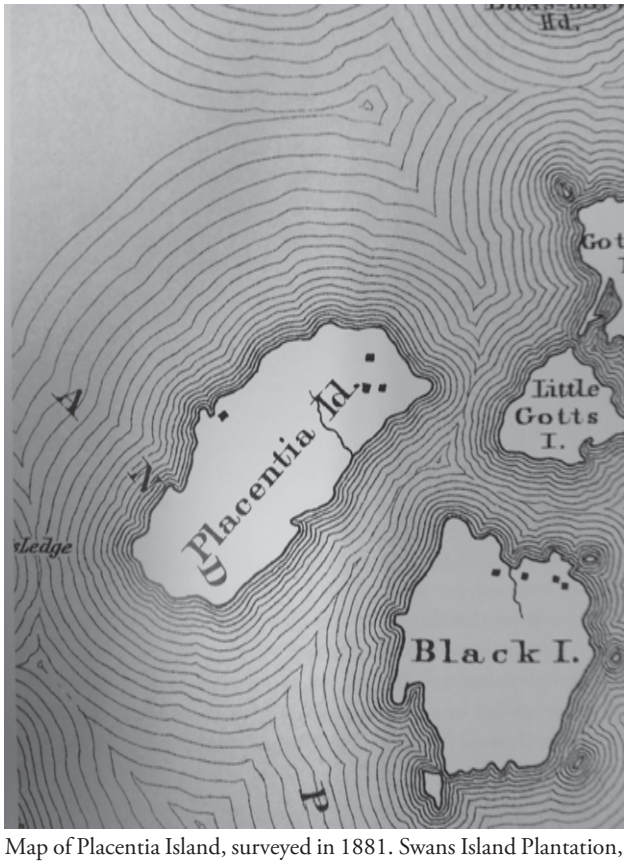


Map of Placentia Island, surveyed in 1881. Swans Island Plantation, Bucksport Town, Hancock County Atlas, S. F. Colby and Co. *Collection of the Mount Desert Island Historical Society*

Going Against the Tide: The Kellams of Placentia Island

Peter P. Blanchard III

By setting off on their own in their mid-thirties, trading a comfortable home and secure employment in California for a solitary and tenuous life on a Maine island, Art and Nan Kellam were pressing hard against the tide. Husband and wife were following a long-held dream of living in isolation in a natural setting. However solitary their life would become, however, they could depend on one another's love and companionship. The couple claimed as their home Placentia Island, a 550-acre kingdom of pink granite ledge and spruce forest, lying two miles out to sea from

Mount Desert Island on the mid-Maine coast. In choosing an idiosyncratic path and sticking to it, the Kellams were resisting societal expectations about how life should be lived in the mid-twentieth century. In moving to Placentia Island, Art and Nan were choosing a lifestyle more reminiscent of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries than of their own.

Regardless of how Art and Nan actually spent their insular days over a period of some thirty-six years—whether hauling lumber for the construction of their house or rowing their dory across the bay, or reading to one another in a sheltered forest nook, the couple presented a mystery to the outside world: the lobstermen, other locals, and summer visitors who sailed or motored by the island and, on occasion, attempted to land. The Kellams' motivations for removal from the mainstream of American life became the source of speculation and local legend. For if an individual swims against the tide in this life and bucks all the trends, his or her identity and even sanity may be questioned.

Taciturn, somber, and imposing in appearance, Art, in particular, took on sometimes sinister roles from the public's perspective. At varying times, he was considered to be a German agent left by a U-boat during World War II; a Russian spy; a victim (whether psychological or physical) of a terrible accident, and, most famously, a creator of the atom bomb dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. In actual fact, Art had worked as an engineer on fighter jet hydraulics during World War II. Although a part of the military industrial complex, he was certainly not a nuclear physicist.

The narrative of *We Were an Island: the Maine Life of Art and Nan Kellam*, from which the following two chapters have been drawn,[1] is interwoven with excerpts from the couple's own writings. These writings are derived from various sources: the daily journals carefully kept by Nan, the couple's own narrative (entitled "the Big Book," but never completed), and their correspondence. As the narrative unfolds, the Kellams' story becomes somewhat larger than life, for there are universal implications in their endeavor.

The Kellams' saga celebrates man's attempt to attain distance from his fellows and to achieve a level of inner and outer peace. Their endeavor to serve as "Keepers of the Realm" is at times poignant and at times humorous. In their struggles to maintain a private kingdom, the pair had to be on the alert for the presence of unwanted visitors (whether local or from away), including poachers, timber thieves, picnickers, sunbathers, curiosity seekers, census-takers, and tax collectors.

The two chapters excerpted from *We Were an Island* capture the essence of the Kellams' life experiment. Chapter 3, "Attaining the Kingdom," presents the actual moment in which the pair broke free from a routine

existence: June 8, 1949 was their first full day as island owners on Placentia. Chapter 7, "Dory Crossings: the Long Row and the Lifeline," depicts their dory voyages, each one a four-mile round trip between Placentia and Bass Harbor on Mount Desert Island. Steadfastly, Art and Nan, together, rowed the wooden dory through a wide range of weather conditions and sea states in order to retrieve mail and groceries. While sometimes accepting tows from lobstermen, the couple declined offers to install an outboard engine on their craft. The dory truly served as their lifeline to the world beyond Placentia.

Those perusing the two chapters are invited to contemplate their own personal quest for self-realization and peace. Perhaps readers will find aspects of their own lives mirrored in the strivings and rejoicings of this resolute couple. Fighting tide, current, and wind in a dory passage, Art and Nan must have constantly realized how much easier it would have been to "go with the flow." But, repeatedly and gladly in their life together, they chose not to.

Chapter 3 ~ Attaining the Kingdom: The Arrival and the First Two Days, June 8-9, 1949

There they were, husband and wife, both thirty-eight years of age and high up on the shingle beach of their new found land. Having been ferried ashore with their belongings and supplies, Art and Nan Kellam entered a shared state of amazement and gratitude as they surveyed Placentia for the first time as island owners. The 552-acre island lay before them, resplendent in the Gulf of Maine, two miles out to sea. The Kellams had voyaged out to Placentia in a brand new wooden dory, towed by Cliff Rich, the dory's builder. After relaying his good wishes to the couple at the very edge of their adventure, Cliff turned his workboat toward McKinley on Mt. Desert Island. As Cliff's skiff receded from view, the din of his outboard engine gave way to more subtle and natural sounds. These sounds had prevailed along the Maine coast since prehistoric time—the rush and clatter of beach stones as waves advanced and retreated and the strident cries of gulls, wheeling over the Bar at the island's northeastern tip.

From their vantage point, the newcomers could actually see only a small portion of their kingdom. Nevertheless, they already had a good sense of its entirety. Great ledges of pink granite led off to the south of their position and a shingle beach stretched to the north, linking with the Bar. Behind the couple lay the great wall of an evergreen forest. In contrast, their view to the east was very much unimpeded. Across an expanse of water three quarters of a mile wide, Art and Nan could see their immediate island

neighbor — Great Gott or Gotts Island, which was barred to Little Gotts Island to the south. To the southeast lay the other member of their small archipelago (or group of islands) — Black Island, apparently so named because of the thickness of its spruce cover. Nestled in the center of Great Gott's western shore was the only year-round community in the island group, evidenced by a small cluster of buildings that had changed little since the nineteenth century. In recent memory, the remaining islands had been inhabited, if at all, by summer residents. For two former inlanders, transplanted from California's canyon lands, the maritime world that now extended before them was a new and entrancing reality.

The couple's novel acquisition had a curious name, "Placentia." That name probably dated back to the time of early French exploration along the Maine coast, during the seventeenth century. The translation of the earliest recorded name, "Plaisance," is "pleasure yachting or sailing." "Plaisance" — evidently inspired by the island's long, shiplike profile, as seen from the water — was either misinterpreted or mispronounced by later English settlers in the region. The result was the modern form, "Placentia."[6] Local usage then transformed "Placentia" into "Plasench."

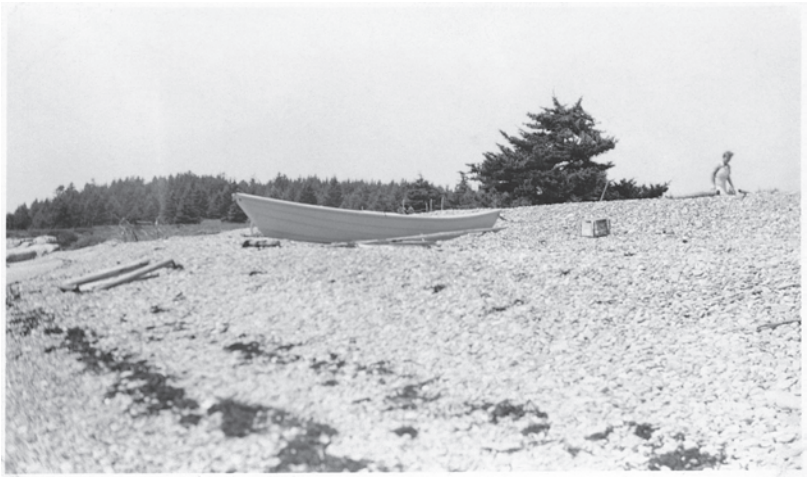
A remarkable transference of identity was soon made by local people who knew of the Kellams' endeavor. The island, the dory, and the couple began to receive the appellation of "Plasench" interchangeably. Watching the dory as it approached the wharf at McKinley or rode the swells of the sea passage, Mainers could readily be heard to say, "Here comes Plasench!" or "There

Moment of first landing – departure of Cliff Rich, June 8, 1949.
Courtesy of the Kellam Family Archives

goes Plasench!" The same expression was applied to Art and Nan when, quite removed from the dory and the island, they were seen navigating on dry land on Mt. Desert. Thus, for example, observant customers would have taken note as "Plasench" passed along the aisles of Reed's General Store in McKinley or pondered purchases at Sawyer's Market in Southwest Harbor.

With little or no nautical experience in their past, Art and Nan Kellam felt that taking on island ownership and residence was like taking over at the helm of a great ship. One playful and joyful thought was that this vessel would never need an anchor or running lights. And she would have right of way over all other vessels at sea! The comparison of spruce-clad Placentia with a sailing schooner or tall ship was provided by Nan in the following passage, which evoked the magic of the morning on June 9, 1949, their first full day on the island.

> Only a few feet away, a barely roughened sea lay pink to the sunrise as I wakened. . . . From a sleeping bag, stretched on a slope of shingle beach, I watched dawn's changing colors heightened on a tranquil, unfamiliar scene. Art stood in the foreground beside a driftwood fire, bending a length of iron rod into a homemade grate. To his left, stem to the water, lay a shining new dory anchored just above the wrack line that marked high tide; beyond on the bank loomed a broad pile of dunnage, stacked off-stage like props of a waiting set.
>
> All of the elements of the surroundings, though strange in themselves, merged easily to a sense of something pleasant dreamed again. June 9, 1949 had dawned at last, and an ocean island had become our home.
>
> While I dressed in stiff new overalls and climbed among the loose beach stones, gathering more wood for a breakfast fire, small unaccustomed smoke clouds puffed off from Placentia's shore. Above them, gray gulls took turns of survey, diving now and then, to question in loud harsh voices our right to their established claim. In the air everywhere hung a lively fragrance, the soft smell of forest and the sharp tang of sea combined closely, harmoniously, like notes of a major chord.
>
> In the midst of this different world, Art worked away, patient as always with a project. Before long, his odd piece



Nan and the Dory at Mitchell Beach, 1949. *Courtesy of the Kellam Family Archives*

of handiwork rested on rock pillars over the glowing coals. Only the first of a long line of island improvisations, the grate would last through many months and meals — in fact, till Old Ocean, shifting the beach in a strong southeaster, buried it beyond recall.

On this quiet morning, bacon browned over the grill, while we ate on the rocks, watching two lobster boats working offshore. The fishermen made a slow, irregular course, hauling in here, casting back there, now and again directing toward Plasench a ship-to-shore glance, frankly curious.

As well it might be. The ponderous pile on the bank must have looked like the birth of a colony or the means of abandoning civilization forever. Actually, for beginners, it was a conservative collection. Our modest tangle of goods matched a wish to leave behind the battle for non-essentials and the burden of abundance — and to build in the beauty of this million-masted island a simple home and an uncluttered life.

Of course, so grand a goal must be far ahead. But preliminaries had ended. Time had come now to sort out our own most urgent needs. They could easily be narrowed down to three: fresh water; a shelter above our heads and a weatherproof place to store supplies. — BB[2]

Art and Nan chose a natural cover for their first two nights on Placentia. During their one reconnaissance mission to the island in the spring of 1948, Berl Gott, a lobster-man and guide, had shown the couple the remnants of several aging structures — a tottering barn and a small wooden shed — on the wooded hillside, well inland from their landing beach. During their first days in residence on the island in June 1949, Art and Nan regarded this site as their base of operations and began to haul belongings up to the barn. Nevertheless, the Kellams were determined to sleep, at least for the first few nights, under a magnificent white spruce that dominated the northeastern shore. Well over one hundred years ago, this giant appeared to have stepped forward from the line of the forest to take a solitary position at the crest of the beach, nearer the water's edge.

Art and Nan spent the night of June 8 in their sleeping bags, side by side, under the boughs of the great evergreen, which they named the "Lonesome Spruce."[3] This tree was to become a physical and an emotive landmark — a rallying point of their island days. There was a gentle breeze from the south, and the constellations, with which they would soon become very familiar, intensified in the darkening sky. Most probably, sleep for Placentia's two new denizens came quickly. The feel of the flat, shifting beach stones under their bedding, the novel sounds of the advancing and retreating tide within feet of their resting place, and the excitement at spending the night on their very own island were probably countered by exhaustion. Their writings are a bit mysterious about that first night, other than noting its serenity.

Given the significance of those first days on island — days in which Art and Nan had to take bearings and literally establish a foothold — a review of the corresponding Journal entries is illuminating. The following two entries from the Journal provide an introduction to the Kellams' idiosyncratic vocabulary — a special avenue of communication that existed between husband and wife. Examples from the extracts below include "*BLB*" (Bear loves Beum, the name of their wooden dory), "Bear" (Art), and "Bears" (Art and Nan). As was her custom, Nan made the following journal entries in pencil and in graceful script:

> [June 8, 1949]
> Wednesday about 3 p.m. arrived on Placentia Island in the *BLB*, purchased June 7th from Mr. Clifton Rich, its builder, in Bernard, Me.
>
> With some help from Mr. Rich, deposited part of our gear in shack, waved farewell to our tow and began island life

The Old Barn and Little Homewood, 1949. *Courtesy of the Kellam Family Archives*

on our own. Long exploration tour thru the woods. Bear worried about the tide vs. the *BLB*, and hurried on to rescue it. When Beum [Nan] rounded the bar corner, there was a bear Bear shaking hands with himself gaily. He had been swimming in the ocean, making the boat safe. Full moon. Best dinner ever — driftwood fire. Two happy bears settled to sleep on the beach — at home at last!

[June 9, 1949]
With intent to start working hard, we arose to the clamor of the sea gulls on the bar at sunup, cooked breakfast, and made for new headquarters, the shepherd's shack, ½ mi. above dory mooring. Located in a daisy meadow, surrounded by spruce and fir. Mr. R. [Rich] pointed out an old apple orchard, which perhaps we can salvage. Built a ladder; re-shingled part of Lil' Homewood [the Kellams' first island shelter]; tacked a strip of gay awning material . . . over the roof's ridge. Investigated old sheep barn, finding plenty of good boards for a new shack floor, shelves, etc. Another nite on our excellent pebbled beach; moonlight on dark, densely-wooded Black Island and meager settlement on Little Gott. Able to see Bass Harbor Light better than expected and hope to find a beach for landing there. What wealth could one exchange for these beautiful days and nites

and our glorious freedom! Like prolonged vacation, and Art is my darling—enthusiastic and very sunburned.—NJ[4]

Chapter 7 ~ Dory Crossings: The Long Row and the Lifeline

During the period between 1949 and 1985, lobstermen hauling traps frequently caught sight of a grey wooden dory in transit between Placentia and Bass Harbor. This vessel, rowed by a crew of two, was on a mission. Both symbol and lifeline of the Kellams' islanded condition, the dory, the *BLB*, carried the couple on regular, vital crossings for food, supplies, and mail.

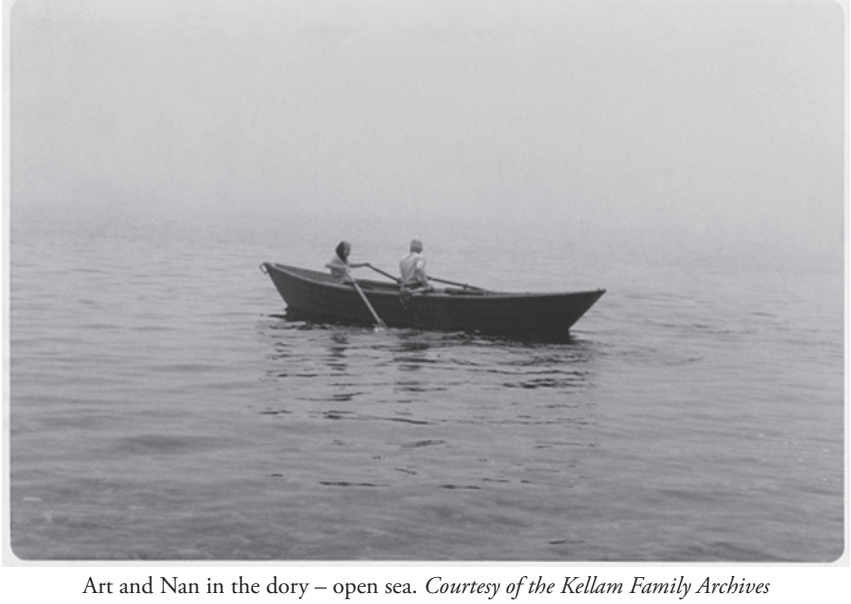
The day before their island adventure began, Art and Nan first encountered and then purchased their lifeline. The *Bear Loves Beum* (the *BLB*) had recently been built and was awaiting their arrival in Bernard, "at anchor" on the lawn of Cliff Rich's workshop. The vessel truly fit the definition of the classic work boat, used by fishermen over the centuries. According to the dictionary that Art owned, the *BLB* fit the bill as a "flat-bottomed boat with high, flaring sides, sharp bow, and deep V-shaped transom . . . noted for [her] qualities in riding seas." Although a sail would eventually be fashioned for her, the *BLB* was initially powered by Art, a solitary oarsman. By modifying the oarlocks so that the oars could be pinned in place and by adding a second rower (using oars specially crafted by Art), the Kellams were able to increase the speed and efficiency of their passages. With characteristic self-consciousness, Nan acknowledged how the pinning of the oarlocks—an arrangement typical of rowboats on inland waters—might be perceived locally: "Surely not one of our friends in Bass Harbor, be he boat builder, fisherman, or shoreside critic, honestly approved the innovation, but all of them knew how to hold their tongues" (BB).

In the Kellam saga, boats often became synonymous with islands. Vessels at sea can be viewed as smaller islands in motion, each holding in microcosm a condensed life and a particular endeavor. The seventeenth-century name for the Kellams' island, "Plaisance," represents an early recognition of this parallel. Launched by Art and Nan from Mitchell Beach with an ample shove toward deeper water, the dory did indeed become a surrogate island. Although mobile, the *BLB* was a small and water-hemmed world of which Art and Nan were masters.

Similar to an island, the dory was self-sufficient to a high degree. The boat was replete with essentials, ranging from a compass and a flashlight (for returns in fog or at night), to a tow rope, and to a bailing scoop and a tarpaulin (in case of rain). The cargo hold of the *BLB* was a large basket placed on a platform of boards in the stern. Outbound cargo usually

consisted of such items as mail for delivery, library books for return to the Southwest Harbor Public Library, extra clothing, and the "inevitable lists" drawn up separately for each store to be visited. As relayed by Nan, "Art's separate responsibility covered his list of tools or building supplies, the car keys, and a watch, set by the sundial and wound especially for the journey" (BB). If stranded on the mainland by a change in the weather, the Kellams had adequate supplies, including sleeping bags, for an overnight stay in the shelter of their 1936 Ford Coupe.[5] On the homeward bound passage, the dory's cargo corresponded closely to the couple's needs. At various times during its thirty-six years of service, for example, the *BLB* carried out—in addition to its crew—furniture; a cook stove; a shower stall; and an array of material for Homewood's construction, including windows, lumber, pinewood paneling for the interior, and shingles for the roof.

Proceeding seaward with Art at the stern oars and Nan at the shorter oars in the thwart before him, the Kellams quickly developed confidence in their craft, regardless of the vagaries of New England weather. Nautical advisors—local friends and acquaintances—had urged them to attach an outboard motor to the *BLB* so that the dory could make headway against strong currents and prevail against the sea in all its moods. Recognizing that they were "to the galley born," Art and Nan steadfastly declined both the advice and the offers of donation. However, they were not averse to accepting a tow when an appropriate opportunity presented itself.



Art and Nan in the dory – open sea. *Courtesy of the Kellam Family Archives*

Whether they sailed or rowed (or a combination of both) under calm conditions, the Kellams often experienced uneventful but, nevertheless, memorable crossings. Two such voyages were captured in brief journal entries:

> [October 20, 1954]
> Dory loaded, Bears took off [from Mount Desert] on our sunset sail — a memorable one. With some help from Bear's oars, we sailed all the way across the bar home — lights at Great Duck and Bass Harbor showed up before landing — also Mont's [Monty Gott's] small glimmer on his shore [at Gotts Island].

> [August 2, 1959]
> Just before sunset, Bears took off, rowed home in what they called afterglow, lovely row. — NJ

Viewing the dory's slow progression over a calm sea in light air, an observer might have regarded the boat as stationary, perhaps even suspended in time. For the crew of the *BLB*, however, the suspension was between imperative errands on the mainland and peace on the homeland shore. From the perspective of the toiling crew, the dory was indeed making steady progress.

In the following passage from the Big Book, Nan chronicled the *BLB*'s performance in wind, rain, and fog during its first year and described the welcome intervention of the dory's builder, who provided assistance at a critical moment.

> Between Wilford's wharf[6] and our island's shore, the 2 mile row took from 75 minutes to 2½ hours, course and speed being subject to the state of the sea.
>
> Wind made the worst of the dory's trials. Of a sudden, it seemed, rolling waves began to break or showery rain began to drive. The ocean looked alive and powerful from a rowboat; the waves, when there was a sea, large and close and threatening. Speed and strength of stroke would increase instinctively at times, and only after a breaker had passed did one notice that the pace had changed. But the safest small boat on any sea was still a dory, and the best attitude toward a hard windy row was to follow oars and orders automatically while thinking of chores well ahead. For once, disregard of the moment made for a happier hour.

Compared to wind, rain . . . was no trouble really, save when tarpaulins had been left at home. . . . When [in the absence of a tarpaulin] supplies took a shower, for days there were bags of flour and sugar sitting on the shelves behind the stovepipe, dozens of cans to be unpacked and polished dry. In general, though, damage was not hard to mend. Rain one could overlook. But for lasting awareness of the Powers That Be, a first round with ocean fog would do.

It was late one dim September afternoon when we began a homeward row along McKinley's shores. As the dory moved easily down harbor in a rare calm, lights flared up in buildings on the wharves and in the kitchens of waterside homes. Once I watched a door open and a man with an armload of wood stride across the threshold into a big bright room beyond.

In the half hour between the start of our journey and the harbor's head, though, a mist descended, and the next open door showed shapeless in a blurred unstable light. As we left the village behind, rowing toward open water, visibility continued to wane. A slight wind from the sea stirred perceptibly, and just opposite the lighthouse [Bass Harbor Head], with darkness entire and two miles still ahead, we were met and surrounded by fog. Simultaneously, the lighthouse bell buoy began to toll. In lieu of a compass, the bell served as a guide, and we rowed the harder into a cloud, making time while still sure of the way. One hundred strokes or so and a clear stretch emerged. We rested the oars, listening for the clang of the bell, alone in it, with all the near islands quite out of sight.

Somewhere behind, a motor boat could be heard heading out from the harbor, and slowly, like a purring phantom, she appeared from the gloom. The beam of a searchlight swung first to the east, then to the west, pointing down toward water level. Once, its bright gleam rested on the dory's stern, shifted, and returned then the boat began to move in our direction.

> Shortly, as she pulled alongside, we recognized Cliff and his son [Robert] in Bob's power boat.
>
> "Throw us your painter," they said, and we did.
>
> Right away, lively, the dory tailed off into another dense cloud. For [a] time hard to measure, the line joining boat to boat seemed a taut unattached object, impelled by invisible sway to pull us homeward. But gradually the night air lightened, and we could make out the stern of the vessel ahead. Then, in simultaneous distinctness, Placentia and the stars appeared.

The Kellams received and, from time to time, accepted offers of tows from local lobstermen. The Islanders described as "good Samaritans" the fishermen who trailed the *BLB* and its two passengers astern without charge. The welcome assistance was provided by some individuals whom the Kellams knew, but also by some who remained anonymous. Even under calm conditions, an unexpected tow could materialize, courtesy of a local friend, as Nan recorded on August 13, 1962: "13th *Mon.* Off at 8:30 [a.m.] to McKinley for supplies—A boat right off the Mitchell Beach seemed to be waiting as the dory was lowered—it was Ralph Benson who towed us all the way, with a pleasant visit" (NJ).

The Kellams' dory found tows behind lobster boats hailing from several ports, primarily Frenchboro (Long Island), Swans Island, and McKinley. A partial roster of the vessels and their skippers (when known) included: *Burnt Coat* (Levi Mouldin); *Mr. Bush*; *The Blue Streak* (Cliff Rich); *Cruiseabout*; *Esther II* (Orville Trask); *Eva M.* (Ralph Benson); *The Favorite*; *The Lone Wolf*; *Nereid*; *Norma and Gwen*; *Silver Dew* (Charlie Gott); *Sonny* (a Mr. Smith); and *Whitewinger* (Ronald Rich). In the following Journal entry, Nan captured the flavor of an interchange between the Kellams and an anonymous "good Samaritan." Art and Nan had just loaded the *BLB* at McKinley and were rowing hard, attempting to catch a tow from the *Seawind*, the mail boat, before she departed:

> [October 30, 1957]
> [We were proceeding] down the harbor in quite a gale to make *Seawind*. But we missed her, for she started at 1:55 [p.m.]. Nice L. I. man [lobsterman from Frenchboro, Long Island] saw us wave frantically. "Did you miss the wind?" he asked.

> "Then I can tow you down — goin' that way." A great help it was, too, and a congenial ride in his little cabin on the board seat & oilskins he spread for me. Wish we knew his name.

A sequence of tows was required during particularly challenging conditions. Once, outbound from Placentia, the Kellams had reached Bass Harbor Head Light but were unable to gain further headway. Barely holding their own against the wind, waves, and current, the crewmembers of the *BLB* were greatly relieved to receive a tow from *Burnt Coat*, a Swans Island lobster boat. Assistance was again needed for the return passage:

> [October 12, 1964]
> [We had assembled] on the Town Float, where a kind soul in *Norma and Gwen*, a small open lobster boat with a windshield, offered to tow us out. He cast us off without a backward glance [at Mitchell Beach] on the other side of the bar and headed back to the lighthouse. This had been one of the most helpful tows we ever received. — just a favor evidently, and how grateful Bears were. Back home in time to make b'd [bread]. — NJ

On rare occasions, the *BLB* herself became cargo. In the fall of 1949, during the early stages of Homewood's construction, the Islanders arrived at a novel solution to a transportation challenge: the need to convey themselves, the dory, and a massive amount of fresh lumber to Placentia. With the aid of Cliff Rich and Les Morrill, a local fisherman, the dory and the lumber were hoisted onto a barge at a McKinley wharf. For the outbound voyage, Nan and Art occupied their seats in the *BLB*, as they would during a normal crossing. Several local children stood on the deck of the barge or upon the piled lumber. Before it could reach the open sea under tow, however, the barge had to pass the review of assembled cannery workers. Amid unanticipated excitement and commentary, Nan admitted that she felt, for a moment, like Cleopatra processing down the Nile on her royal barge.

The near loss of their dory during the first summer on Placentia underscored the vital role of the *BLB* in the Kellams' island existence. As a storm approached on the night of June 13, 1949, five days after their first landing, Nan described how an initial concern for the boat rapidly escalated into a crisis response. In fading daylight, Art and Nan had walked down to Mitchell Beach to inspect the dory at its haul-out, well above the high tide line. At that moment, they found the *BLB* in its accustomed location. As Nan related:

The breeze blew gentle then, but with darkness came a change to gusty. Un-accustomed sounds rose from all sides. Before midnight the swaying of the trees and the roll of rising surf drove us into warmer gear and back by flashlight thru black nite to check the dory once more. By then, each few feet down hill strengthened the voice of the storm.

Jackets flying, we stepped onto the beach to behold a churning, white-capped sea, washing farther and farther up the bank, and no boat in sight. In frantic haste, we searched along the shore. No trace of a wreck on the rocks; no floating object on the dimly moonlit water. The dory had disappeared.

Any rescue measures that occurred to us then would require the morning light, so for several hours—long hours—we waited in a mood less marooned than bereaved. At last, deliberate as daybreak and with it, simultaneous, the stray boat came to light. She was rocking gently half a mile from shore. Slowly she had dragged her anchor on out to sea.

Art prepared to swim off at once and tow her back home; only after hard debate was he persuaded to build a rescue raft instead. He worked fast there on the beach among the driftwood, prodded by the chance of losing his boat forever.—BB

Art never had need to launch his jury-rigged raft due to an alert response by a local lobsterman. While tending traps, Charlie Gott on the *Silver Dew* had heard the sound of hammering and then had noticed an untenanted boat adrift. He used a boathook to free the dory's anchor, which had become tangled with a trap line, and then guided the *BLB* into shore. Art waded out in hip boots and, with the help of Nan, was able to haul the errant vessel well up on the beach. With a sense of great relief, the Kellams then secured the boat with a painter tied to a wooden post, which Art had driven into the shingles. The *BLB* would never roam again without the knowledge of her skipper and crew.

As revealed to Russell Pettigrove, a lobsterman hauling traps off Rich's Cove, the dory had a very special, private function for island dwellers who loved to read. Russell was attempting to locate a float, which marked a

trap set several days before, when he came upon a most unusual sight. His lobster buoy was tied to the bow of a great grey dory. Edging closer to the dory, Russell noticed a lady resting comfortably on her back in the bow. She was cushioned by several pillows and was evidently entranced with her reading. Nan looked up at the intruder and queried, "Am I bothering you?" "No, Mam, stay put," Russell answered. He later described the sequel in his own words: "I grabbed the float, hauled my trap, and then left her right in tow" (Russell Pettigrove, oral communication, July 2002). Throttling up his boat's diesel engine, Russell departed, leaving the dory and its occupant gently rocking and still attached to its temporary mooring.

Describing a change in plan, Nan further portrayed the dory as both a mode of transportation and as a quiet retreat.

> [August 17, 1956]
> Expected people, Malcolm [MacDuffie] at least, but no one came. By Saturday morning, weather and provision shelves seemed to point to a trip to town. Bears made all the preparations, launched the dory, even, but the sea, by that time, was a little rough across the bar, and suddenly our plans turned us back home. We packed a lunch and rowed around past our high cliffs, red rocks, boulders tossed ashore, to the first cove on the Blue Hill Bay side. There we bobbed and read . . . for a while, then moved to the Bobby Cove. The big rock used for an anchor worked well, just enuf breeze to be comfortable. Bear rowed Beum home, reading all the way.—NJ

Beyond its service as a physical lifeline for the Kellams and as a floating retreat, the dory harbored a deeper significance in its passage through the Placentia years. Nan hinted at this significance in one isolated, undated sentence (handwritten on the back of a typed draft), in which she referred to a visitors' boat as it receded from view, on a course for the mainland: "A rowboat on the ocean gives the impression that it may vanish at any moment—like the sun just before its setting."

The image of a vanishing rowboat, set against an eternal sea, could be viewed as a reminder that both island tenure and human existence were ephemeral. Although derived from observation of another vessel, this image could well have served as a self-portrait of Art and Nan in the *BLB*.

Notes

[1] © University Press of New England, Lebanon, New Hampshire. Reprinted with permission.
[2] The designation "BB" refers to the Big Book.
[3] Art and Nan initially misidentified this significant tree, calling it the "Lonesome Pine" until they were able to make a correct identification.
[4] The designation "NJ" refers to Nan's journal.
[5] The Journal relates that the Kellams spent a number of nights in the confines of the Spizzler, their 1936 Ford coupe, at various locations in Acadia National Park. The parking lot above Thunder Hole, a natural sea cave, was a favorite destination.
[6] Wilford Kittredge's wharf at McKinley. The Kellams first stored the Spizzler in Mr. Kittredge's garage.