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Over 60 Years Ago:

North Yarmouth's Civilian Observation Post

by Holly Hurd

The combination of a unique local diary, the memories of many people, and intensive research has resulted in a story not well known in 2004. Our thanks to Holly Hurd for this account!

The diary of Isabel Hayes is wrapped in a black oilcloth. Before its use as a journal cover, the oilcloth served as curtains during the blackouts of World War II. Perhaps Isabel was simply reusing materials as was common and necessary during that time. Or perhaps she intended the covering as a reminder of the effects of a world war on her life.

Inside the diary, Isabel describes the trials of running a civilian observation post during World War II from the top of a workshop behind the Hayes' home. The post was manned by North Yarmouth citizens who reported any airplanes they saw or heard during their shift. This program mimicked and was named after the Air Warning Service (AWS) being used in Great Britain, where civilians were helping to alert their country of air attacks from enemy planes. In the spring of 1942, over 300 observation posts like the one at the Hayes farm were set up along the Maine coast with the help of the American Legion and included over 27,000 volunteer observers. Posts were spaced at around 6 mile intervals and extended inland 300-400 miles. Posts stretched southward through eastern coastal states from Maine to Florida and employed as many as 600,000 civilian spotters.

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Inside: NORTH YARMOUTH'S
FALLEN HEROES — Page 6



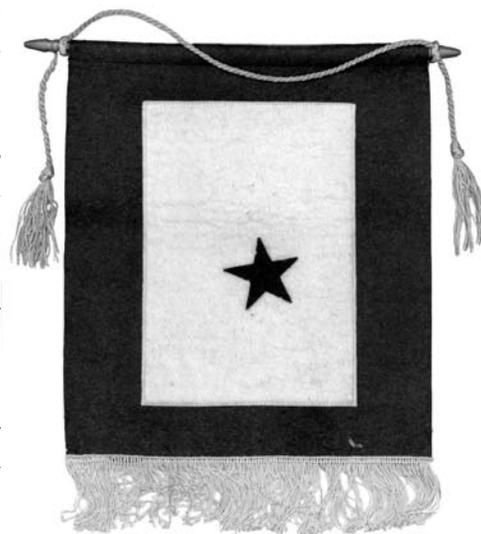
Recent Acquisitions

The item below, now in the collections of North Yarmouth Historical Society, is from the home of Beatrice Richards Bradley, at Crockett's Corner (the intersection of Route 9, Mounfort and West Pownal Roads). Bea was the daughter of Harry Richards; her younger sister was Carolyn Richards Bean and her older sister was Florence Richards Ames. All three sisters married, but none had children. All attended North Yarmouth Academy and became teachers: Florence in North Yarmouth and Gray, Carolyn at North Yarmouth Academy and at Lincoln Academy in Newcastle, and Beatrice in North Yarmouth schools.

This Blue Star Service Banner, sometimes called a Blue Star Flag, was probably hung by Beatrice in her window at her parents' farm during World War II, because her husband John Bradley was a career Coast Guardsman.

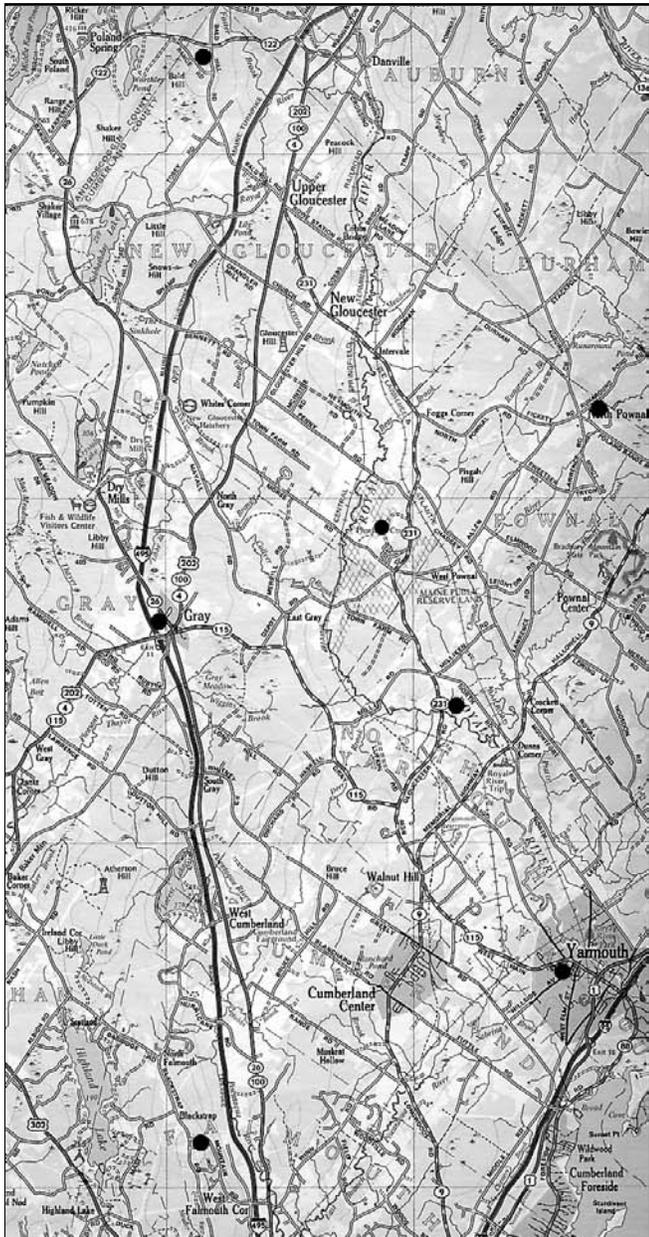
Blue Star Service Banners have hung in windows since World War I and are a way for households to indicate they have family members in the service. The banners date from 1917, when WWI Army Capt. Robert Queissner designed the symbol to honor his two sons who were serving on the front line. The stars are always blue on a white background, often with a red border; if more than one family member is serving in the armed forces, the stars are put one over the other on the banner. When a service member dies in action, the blue star is replaced with a gold star, or a smaller gold star is set on top of the blue star so the blue still surrounds the gold. Theodore Roosevelt's family displayed a banner with a gold star in honor of their son Quentin, who was shot down over France in 1918.

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Observation Post (cont'd from P. 1)

There was an observation post in Yarmouth at the belfry of the Old Meetinghouse on the Hill; one in North Pownal on Runaround Pond Road (where Theona Blackstone watched with her husband Chester); one on Blackstrap Hill off Blackstrap and Mountain Roads in Falmouth; two in Gray—off Route 26 near Gray Corner, and on the hill by the water tower near Pineland's Equestrian Center; and one on Grand View Hill off Bald Hill Road in New Gloucester. Most of these posts



Observation posts in the North Yarmouth area, all located in clear, high places. Information about these locations comes from Marge Devine of Falmouth Historical Society; Audrey Burns of Gray, Allison Strout of New Gloucester, and Edna Menchen of Pownal, all of who served at the posts they recall. (Map from *DeLorme's Maine Atlas & Gazetteer 27th Edition* ©2004 DeLorme, Yarmouth, Maine)

were manned at all times, although some had specified hours. Perhaps the Pineland post was only staffed part time, since it was located close to others. The only posts still standing today are North Yarmouth and Yarmouth's; the others were built solely for the purpose of observing airplanes and later taken down. According to *History, Maine Civilian Defense Corps*, 34 posts were manned by 2,874 volunteers in Cumberland County, including posts in Freeport, Windham, and Gorham. North Yarmouth's civilian post can be seen today at the old Hayes' homestead off Route 231 on the hill above the Royal River (now the home of Jennifer Miller and Ray Spencer).

The Hayes' workshop was used as an observation post starting on April 15, 1942, as recorded in Isabel's diary. The windowed cupola was built onto the roof of the workshop in the late fall of 1942 by Isabel's husband, Maurice, who was the post's chief observer, and a few other local handymen including Harold Baston. The cupola, which allowed a greater view of the surrounding area, has windows on all four sides and was accessed by wooden stairs from within the 16' x 20' workshop. The cupola's internal dimensions are about 5' by 5', just enough space to fit a few chairs for the observers on duty. A wooden shelf facing the river held a telephone, binoculars, a logbook for signing in and recording aircraft activity, and a manual with pictures of American, German, and Japanese airplanes.

Two observers generally worked together. When they saw or heard a plane, one called "army flash" on a telephone that had been installed with a line separate from the Hayes' home party line. The phone number started with VA9 (for Valley 9, the prefix for North Yarmouth) and had four other digits, as recalled by Phyllis Smith. The call went to the Army Aircraft Filter Center in Portland, given at once to the Army observation network and relayed to the District Warning Centers of Civilian Defense (North Yarmouth's was at the Portland YMCA), so that the plane could be followed by other observers. Spotters provided a description of the plane—the number of motors, its estimated height, distance in miles, and the direction it was traveling. Esther Walker, who worked an afternoon shift with her mother Edith Chadbourne, recalls that they were a "pretty poor team as neither of us had any sense of direction." (She fondly remembers getting lost with her mother while picking blueberries one year.) Dick Baston recalls participating in an Army-sponsored course, probably held at the North Yarmouth Congregational Church vestry, which was designed to help civilian observers identify planes. Dick also recalls that planes were more often heard than seen and observers had to be careful not to call too quickly when they heard something because it was often the train going by. He figures "lots of calls were made reporting trains."

The observation post was manned by North Yarmouth volunteers for 24 hours a day in four hour shifts: 8 AM-12 Noon, 12-4 PM etc. Generally, the women in town worked during the day, and the men worked at night. Teenaged children worked the post on weekends or in the summertime with their friends or parents like Norma (Fountain) Grover who worked with her friend Ellen Hamilton from 12- 4 PM on Saturdays. Phyllis (Barter) Crichton recalls working the 8-noon shift with her friend Eleanor Sawyer; they were followed by Phyllis' sister Jennie (Barter) Ginn and her friend Bertha Tompson. Some younger children came to the post with their parents; Bill Hayward was 11 or 12 years old when, with his mother Lou and father John Hayward, they spotted a large dirigible approaching from the south. As it traveled northeast, they could see the words "US Navy" on its side. (The blimp was likely being used to calibrate radio direction finders at various Navy radio stations along the New England coast.) Bill remembers that his mother reported what he believes was the town's only "red alert," which he thinks could have been the sighting of the dirigible. Marion Reed saw it too, and photographed it—see p. 2. Claudia Quatticci remembers at the age of 3 or 4 seeing an airplane fly over when she was at the post with her mother Edith Atkins.



Top: The old observation post, with (bottom) its big sky view as seen from the cupola

Since two civilians worked at a time, 84 people were required to man the post each week. Some believe they went to the post once a week while others think that most went every other week. This schedule required as many as 168 people from North Yarmouth to be involved in airplane spotting. The town's population at that time was about 700 people, so the post likely included at least one or two members from most families in town. Participation in the observation post was high because townspeople wanted to help with the war effort. Since family members and friends were serving in the war, many people, like Phyllis (Barter) Crichton who had a brother overseas, felt that "the boys were making such a sacrifice, we were glad to be doing a little bit to help." However, even though many townspeople worked at the post, Isabel Hayes' diary is full of accounts of people not showing up for their scheduled shifts. Isabel and Maurice always checked to make sure the post was manned and, if it was not, they filled in.

Several recall that Isabel was "extremely dedicated" (*as her diary shows; see p. 9*) even though she writes "ever since it started ...what a headache." It obviously took a heroic effort to monitor the post and cover for those who couldn't keep their scheduled shifts, and her entries reveal Isabel's frustration. Even so, the Hayes persevered with their commitment; their strong sense of responsibility must have been augmented by the service of their sons Isaac and Shailer in the Navy. Isabel's descriptions of the civilian post are interspersed with entries about her boys—a poignant example of one family's interrelated war effort at home and abroad.

Another North Yarmouth observation tower, manned 24 hours a day by army soldiers who reported to Fort Williams in Cape Elizabeth, stood high on Walnut Hill above the Baston's house on Route 115 *cont'd, p. 9*

Observation Post (cont'd from Page 5)

(see *North Yarmouth 1680-1980, An Illustrated History*). The proximity of the army's listening post (as it was called) to the civilian observation post led some to wonder, especially after the war, whether the civilian post at the Hayes farm was redundant. This feeling may explain the following entry in Isabel's diary. "Joys of airplane spotting! Chilled the insides of my knees trying to show Lewis Hatch and Fred Barter where to hit the road in back of the house with the tractor. (They were trying to plow access to the post.) If I ever get out of this mess the President will never catch me again if there were 40 wars. It's all hoey anyhow and I am the world's prize jackass.

Manning the Post

Excerpts from Isabel Hayes' Diary

Jan 19, 1943 Rather than ride all over town to pick up spotters, Maurice and I took over the day watches.

May 5, '43 Did four hours for _____.

May 13, '43 Had a rotten night's sleep and got up to come out on the post at 3:40, but _____ came on duty unexpectedly. It is lovely these starlight nights on the post, but...

May 14, '43 _____ tripped up and did not come on duty so it was 12-4 for me. And instead of finishing cleaning my kitchen I cleaned windows out in the "Crow's Nest."

May 18, '43 I have had three different cracks on the post today and wound up at eight o'clock...

May 22, '43 Did eight hours on the post and reported 38 planes.

June 19, '43 ...because there were two boys not patriotic enough to come on a midnight watch we meandered out on duty.

July 13, '43 Post goes kind of hard these days, especially nights.

July 20, '43 They were terribly anxious once but are falling into bad ways now as far as the post is concerned.

July 22 '43 Just came off the 4-8 PM shift. Had supper there, Maurice and I and the cat. The cat loves it better than I. Hope to get a good night's sleep, but probably someone will get cold feet and not appear on the midnight shift.

Aug 5, '43 Of all the fools I am the biggest! I have put in eight hours out back today, picked raspberries and peas and cooked and got my meals. Have called the operator 46 times and if everyone else in the telephone exchange has done that they must have been some busy.

Sept 3, '43 Did 9 hours watch on the cussed post.

The army and Maurice collaborate to make me such." Some townspeople, such as Don Smith, came to believe that the civilian posts were organized more as a way to help people feel involved in the war effort and to keep morale high rather than as a necessary service.

Although many airplanes were spotted at the civilian post, those reported were solely U.S. aircraft. A common sighting was of the P38 fighter also known as "Lightning" or the "Fork-tailed Devil," for its double tail (see photo on Page 1). These airplanes and others flew over North Yarmouth as part of training exercises on enemy surveillance, or they may have been heading overseas. From an entry in Isabel's diary on June 17, 1943, "Mildred Smith reported 74 planes today from 8-12. They have gone over in droves. Looks like everything we can spare is going across for the great invasion." A typical shift on the post usually included at least a few calls to headquarters, so the airspace above North Yarmouth must have been very different than it is nowadays, when airplane traffic is sparse. Residents regularly spotted planes flying over town both from the post and as they were going about their daily lives, hence airplane sightings were a memorable part of the townspeople's experience of the war. Don Smith recalls a pair of training planes flying over the crossroads of 115 and Route 9 just barely above the trees!

In spite of some periods of abundant aircraft activity, much time on the observation post was quiet and uneventful. Townspeople recall spending their shift time talking, knitting or crocheting, reading, playing cards, or even sleeping (hopefully only one at a time). The cupola afforded a beautiful view of the surrounding countryside and must have been, at times, a pleasant spot to sit with a friend or, more commonly, a relative. Norman Reed worked a nighttime shift with his father-in-law Phillip Knight, Norene Grover staffed the post on afternoons with her mother Alice Grover, Don Smith and his wife Katherine did the early morning shift (4 AM-8 AM), Rosalyn Baston went up with her father Theodore Clark, Phyllis Smith worked with her mother Grace Ross, and Shirley and Henry Fountain worked a shift, as did Madelyn and Harold Freeman; Marion Reed worked a day shift with Candace Hilton or sometimes Carolyn Bean, Frances Barter worked the post with her friend Lydia Kimball, and Roy Barter worked with his buddy Laurence Loring. Others mentioned in Isabel's diary who served on the post were George Crichton, Helen Sawyer, and Hazel Anderson. Dick Baston believes his mother Florence helped fill in shifts when people could not come. There must have been many more townspeople who participated as well, given the number required to cover all the shifts.

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Isabel and Maurice Hayes must have enjoyed the social aspect of running the post from their home, as they often came out to visit with the spotters and also brought coffee to the nighttime workers. Dick Baston remembers Maurice chatting with his father Harold during their 8-midnight shift. Harold Small and Lou Fuller arrived to relieve the Baston men and served until 4 AM, a shift Harold found appealing, according to Dick Baston, because “he could get home just in time to milk the cows.” Interestingly, many townspeople remember who came on duty immediately after them, perhaps because they were looking forward to the end of their shifts.

Town records indicate that civilian defense cost North Yarmouth some money. Fuel for the woodstove to heat the post cost \$181 in the municipal year from March of 1942 to 1943 and \$182 the following year. The stove stood in the workshop below the cupola, as did a small electric light that was used by the nighttime workers; the cupola itself was kept fairly dark for better visibility. The town paid for the lights and telephone calls, which cost \$11.25 the first year, \$13.75 the next year, and \$4.50 the last year the post operated. The first year the town had an appropriation of \$250 for civilian defense and received \$15 from the Gray American Legion, but materials to build the cupola cost \$96.81, and chairs and other supplies plus miscellaneous expenses brought the town’s expenditure to about \$324 (not counting fire pumps that were considered part of civilian defense). The remaining money was paid from the town’s contingent fund, but the following year only \$19 had to be paid from the contingent (appropriation was \$200).

Although North Yarmouth’s observation post required a big commitment from townspeople toward civilian defense, blackout exercises and air raid drills also required participation and volunteers. The purpose of these exercises was to reduce the lights around Maine towns to make it more difficult for enemy submarines or airplanes to use illumination to focus on their targets in the event of nighttime attacks. Phillip Knight was North Yarmouth’s Chief Air Raid Warden and as such was responsible for

making sure townspeople complied with blackouts in which black curtains were pulled down in homes and car headlights were dimmed with black paint. In addition, he was probably well informed as to the town’s emergency procedures for air raids. Henry Fountain was Chairman of the Police Division and likely helped with blackout enforcement. Phyllis Crichton recalls that her father Roy Barter also helped with civilian defense. Residents remember that whistles were blown around town to indicate blackout status. Phillip owned 4 armbands (colored red, blue and white) that he may have received as honorary badges for his work as Chief Warden. To obtain an armband a person had to be enrolled in a service, trained for it, and pass an examination on the subject.

Phillip Knight also had an “OBSERVER” armband that was worn on the civilian plane spotter’s left arm. Observers received a pin with an insignia like the armband that recognized their volunteer efforts as “the eyes and ears of the Army.” In addition, airplane spotters were required to have an identification card with their signature and thumbprint or photograph on the back. Merit badges were given to those serving a significant number of hours in civilian defense; however, North Yarmouth apparently did not certify its volunteers to the Augusta office as the records show no merit badges awarded to its residents. Undoubtedly, many in town were deserving of recognition, and certainly, Isabel and Maurice Hayes must have served 1,000 hours or more on the post. Even through volunteer hours were not acknowledged, the Army had regular inspections of the post and Isabel writes with pride: “June 19, 1943. We had an army inspection and they say we are one of their finest posts.” Presumably this glowing report was a function of good record keeping and a commitment to keeping shift hours.



An Observer pin (above left), owned by Norene Grover of Yarmouth. Two of Phillip Knight’s honorary armbands (left); and his more ornate “Observer” armband (above), were donated to NYHS by Phil’s daughter Marion Reed. Marion’s Observer ID card (front and back) appears at right.

As the U.S. changed its strategic plans from defense to offense, the Army decided to dramatically reduce civilian observation post hours after 18 months. The Civilian Defense Corps believed that manpower could be used more effectively elsewhere, and support for the posts began to wane. Hence on October 4, 1943, Isabel records that “This is a very important day. About 8:15 this evening right out of a clear sky we had word from headquarters that the observation post is to be discontinued till further notice, barring a four hours watch Wednesday afternoons. I have thrown my hat right into the sky and can’t think of anything else.” After another half a year with one watch per week, and no more troubles reported by Isabel, the Army observation posts were permanently discontinued on May 29, 1944. On reflection of the previous few years, Isabel summarizes with the following. “Leaves us with a dog house stuck on top of the workshop, a leaky roof, and a lot of experience.” Luckily, the town of North Yarmouth is still left with that lovely cupola, 60 years later, as a reminder to current residents of our forerunners’ heroic contributions to the war effort.

Sources used for this article:

- *Defending the Homefront: Civilian Defense in Maine, 1940-1943* by Stephen B. Provost
- *Portland Head Light & Fort Williams* by Kenneth E. Thompson, Jr., 1998
- www.radomes.org (website of the Air Defense Radar Veteran’s Assn.)
- *History, Maine Civilian Defense Corps, 1941-1944*, foreword by F.H. Farnum

Many thanks to all who graciously answered questions and assisted with research for this article. Special thanks to Dixie Hayes for permission to use parts of Isabel Hayes’ diary.



History Mystery

by Sue Clukey
and
Katie Murphy

Q: What's the story on this veteran's grave in North Yarmouth's Walnut Hill Cemetery?



Sue Clukey

A: Stephen Hall of North Yarmouth is one of Walnut Hill's earliest veterans, yet strangely enough, his gravestone looks very new...and it is. Not long ago, Town Clerk Debbie Allen received an incorrectly engraved granite stone from the Veterans Administration to mark the grave of another North Yarmouth veteran. She ordered a replacement, but was left with the faulty stone. Deb “recycled” the stone by turning it over and asking Collette Monuments of Lewiston to engrave it with Stephen Hall's information, which they did at no charge. At last, Hall's previously unmarked grave is now identified, and, along with other veterans' graves, is marked each Memorial Day with a US flag.

Cronicles (cont'd from Page 3)

/But the voice of the men from the hill Country...prevailed over the men of the City/And the men of the City were filled with wrath ("The fire engine vote failed AGAIN!!").../So they sent messengers unto all the people...so that the people met at the time appointed (Sounds like a Special Town Meeting) .../And they were encamped one over against the other on the way as thou goest unto Sligo (Town Hall at that time was at the corner of Sligo Road and Main Street; those on opposite sides of the issue probably stood in sullen groups on either side of Sligo)... the men of the City fell down winded before the men of the hill country ("The fire engine vote failed AGAIN!!")...

The dispute, as told by the Cronicle, grew to even greater proportions, and the final result was the separation of Yarmouth from North Yarmouth, approved by the legislature in August 1849, after some back room deals were struck between Yarmouth Democrats and the leaders of the state's Democratic party.

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