Ken Miltner – The Man Behind the Sign

JOAN MacCRACKEN

Just how many times have you driven on the Coastal Road and noticed the sign “Fine Finishes” hanging on the large oak tree? Have you ever been curious enough to drive up the long driveway or have you just wondered what it all meant and driven on?

Several years ago, a friend of mine from Bangor showed me two beautiful antique brass chandeliers that she had discovered in the basement of her very old home and had them refinished by a man in Brooksville. Because I had an old tarnished metal Arabian lamp from my grandparents that I wanted to resurrect, she sent me to Ken Miltner, the sole owner of Fine Finishes. He brought my lamp back to life, and I learned just a little bit about this fascinating character.

But that was many years ago, and since then, I have wondered how he was doing as I passed the sign so many times. So this fall, I dropped in to meet him again and see if perhaps I could write an article on him for the Breeze. He said he was very busy getting ready for winter, bringing in wood, closing down the gardens, and finishing up a small addition to the house. I asked if November would be a better time to chat, and he agreed to that. It was finally December before I could catch him for that chat.

Lois and Ken Miltner have a lovely home set on 26 acres and have lived there since the mid-70’s. When the crowds, congestion, and chaos of Long Island, NY, finally got to the couple, they decided to move north with their three children. Though they initially bought land on a lake near East Machias, they later discovered Blue Hill and because of George Stevens Academy, they decided to settle in this area to send their twins to freshman year at GSA and younger daughter to Brooksville Elementary School. They have remained here ever since.

Ken was born in 1928 on Long Island, completed high school, and started working at a metallurgy business sweeping the floors. After a stint in the Army during the Korean War, he returned to his trade of metallurgy. Slowly he started a business with one other person, which became over twenty years a company of forty workers. The business was hands on, and Ken learned the tricks of the trade through experience. In New York, his company did metal plating with a majority of the work done for the US Defense Department. He told me that his company plated several metal pieces that made it to the moon. But as his company grew, life became more chaotic; he was never home. He and his wife yearned for a quieter setting to raise their family.

Once here, Ken decided to refrain from doing any plating due to many of the toxic chemicals which were used in the process. Instead, he chose to work with brass primarily. He advertised in the Weekly Packet as a refinisher of brass, not knowing if he could make a living from that focused business. But almost immediately he was in demand.

Then his stories begin, but as he told me, these stories must be off the record. He regaled me with tales of his adventures with celebrities from this area who wanted their brass beds refinished or antique brass door knobs installed throughout their summer coastal homes or on their yachts. Maine Maritime hired Ken to refinish antique fixtures from an old ship. Word of his work spread as he professionally polished brass items from Seal Harbor to Rockland. He operated out of his basement, using all the “tricks of the trade,” enjoying his work and visiting some amazing estates.

(Continued on page 2)
Ken Miltner

About two years ago, he decided to retire from the business, though he hasn’t yet taken down the sign. Ken, 85, says his job now is to maintain his home and his land for as long as he can. Lois, his wife of 56 years, says that Ken can’t sit still for five minutes and is always changing things within the house. His latest plan is to remodel the dining room by removing a wall, though he is insulating the house right now. Lois admits they are constantly changing and adding to the house. “It’s just what we do,” she says.

Lois has enjoyed her years in Brooksville. In the past she served with the Jolly Helpers, which sadly is no more. She has always worked on crafts of all kinds, but at this time she loves designing stained glass creations. Her lamp shades are beautiful, giving the appearance of a Tiffany shade, to a novice’s eye. She has never quite gotten around to selling her fine work.

The Miltners have three children (Brad, Debbie, and Barbara) living in Blue Hill, Florida, and South Portland, respectively. Brad manages Viking Lumber in Blue Hill. Their younger daughter has her own lamp shade business, “Barbara Gail’s.” This past year Barbara sold 1,000 lampshades. Both Barbara and Ken’s grandson Michael have dabbled in the finishing business in different ways.

Though Ken is 6 feet 4 inches tall, he told me that taking the sign down will require some assistance, as the sign is pretty high up in the tree, and he’d like the ladder steadied when he tries. He told me with a smile that he would really like to exchange the sign for one that says, “Finally Finished.” Ken Miltner, a quick talking, energetic octogenarian, appears to have many more projects before he is finished. And who knows, perhaps in the future “Fine Finishes II” might appear.

On Wednesday, December 4, the pre-K and K classes from Brooksville Elementary School visited the Brooksville Library to decorate their own gingerbread houses with some assistance from volunteers Audrey Peasley, Judy Lebel, Pat Farr, and Sylvia Tapley. After attentively listening to a story, the twelve children dove into their projects with great enthusiasm. After the children washed their hands of sticky frosting and candy, they circled the room to view each creation and listen to a short summary by the individual “artists.”

A special thank you to Audrey and Berwyn Peasley, who made the twelve houses for the children to decorate. It was something they will long remember.

— Sylvia Tapley
Brooksville Friends and Neighbors recently received news that they had been awarded a grant from the National Park Service to assist with developing a plan to construct a wheelchair-, walker-, and stroller-friendly nature trail to be located on two acres of town land on Young’s Point Road. This land was donated to the town by Sumner Lymburner over ten years ago. The selectmen have agreed that this would be a good use of the land, and at the March 2013 town meeting, a vote supported the idea.

The dream for this trail was envisioned by Lola Bogyo, West Brooksville resident. After the selectmen suggested this available location, a small group of interested volunteers came together to move the process along. Jason Lepper, John Gray, Al Abrahamson, Brian Keegstra, and Joan MacCracken walked the boundaries and found the land was relatively flat, had a wonderful diversity of trees, fertile ground cover, and a small running stream. These attributes made the creation of a beautiful and varied nature trail a possibility.

BFN became aware of the National Park Service’s Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance program (RTCA) and decided to apply for a grant. Julie Isbill, the NPS representative, did a site visit and spoke with MacCracken and John Gray. She felt it was an excellent project and fit into the requirements for the grants. The application was completed by August 1, but due to the federal government shutdown, the announcement of the awardees did not occur until November. This RTCA grant does NOT award any funding, but instead provides consultative expertise to help support the planning and perhaps give ideas for possible funding sources. Julie Isbill will be our consultant and can remain with the project for up to two years.

With its RTCA program, the National Park Service has helped communities design trails and parks, conserve and improve access to rivers, protect special places, and create recreational opportunities through locally led partnership. Over the last decade, RTCA has been involved with such Maine locales as Belfast, Bethel, Brunswick, Houlton, North Yarmouth, Waldo County and Calais, to list only a few.

At this time, for our Young’s Point Road Nature Trail project, we are investigating other financial grants. We have constructed a timeline with the hope that 2014 will be a time for surveying and designing a trail layout, for clearing dead and fallen trees, for checking with the Department of Environmental Protection, for partnering with potential users such as the school and the nearby nursing home, and for estimating the cost of materials, et cetera.

The Young’s Point Road Nature Trail for wheelchairs, walkers, and strollers will transition from a dream to a reality only if we can raise the funds to make it happen. Construction could begin as early as spring 2015. We hope to explore several options for funding with a talented local grant writer. We know that all outside funding sources notice if local support, especially funding, is present. Stay tuned. We believe this trail would provide safe walking and an outdoor area for many residents to enjoy.

Town Reindeers . . . oops! . . . Reminders

- Dog licenses expire Dec. 31. Please renew by Jan 31 to avoid $25 fine.

- Nomination papers available for selectman, tax collector, clerk, treasurer, fire chief, road commissioner, school board, planning board, and budget and advisory committee. Due by January 19, 2012. Info: Amber Bakeman.


- Put on your 2014 calendar now: Town voting, Monday, March 3
  Town Meeting, Tuesday, March 4
Tom Hoey, Brooksville’s Local Vintner

JOAN MacCRACKEN

When I first arrived at The Sow’s Ear Winery, Tom Hoey, the owner and winemaker, gave me a tour of his business, directing me first to the pressing shed where the apples, rhubarb, chokecherries, and blueberries are crushed. He explained the stages of production. His 1938 hand-built hammer mill, bought and shipped from Ohio, is capable of pressing fourteen bushels at a time by the rack-and-cloth method which he demonstrated. The final powerful squeeze of the rack stack is accomplished with an old, trusty house jack. The remaining pomace of the fruit is devoid of flavor and liquid, and pigs will “reject it in ten seconds.” Tom gives the squished, dehydrated pomace back to the fruit trees by laying it around the base of the tree. The white wine is made by smashing the fruit and taking the juice out immediately, whereas with red wines, one crushes the fruit and allows the mash to sit with the skins, releasing the color and tannates. At the beginning of his commercial wine-making adventure, he tried grapes, but found that a futile project and switched to more easily grown local fruits.

Once the fruit is pressed, the juice is stored in one of his two cold cells. Sixty-gallon oak barrels, as well as larger stainless steel tanks fill the basement rooms, with the fermentation process under way. His sparkling cider bottles sit inverted in a “riddling rack,” allowing the sediment to settle in the neck of the champagne bottles. He will eventually freeze the neck of the bottle and then remove the frozen sediment with a slick craft of expulsion, called disgorgement (French degorgement), then recorks the clear “champagne. Then the process of refermentation occurs with no more bubbles being released.

An obvious question to Tom was why the strange name of your winery? Of course he has been asked this many times and was ready for it. The name of the company, The Sow’s Ear, comes from the statement “You cannot make a silk purse out of a sow’s ear,” originally coined by Reverend Jonathan Swift (1801). Attempting to make something worthless into something valuable. *Wiktionary* says of the maxim: “to produce something refined, admirable, or valuable from something unrefined, unpleasant, or of little or no value.” However, the phrase can also imply the impossibility of making something valuable out of something worthless.

Tom was born on Long Island, NY, and raised in Reading, Pennsylvania. He attended Johns Hopkins University, majoring in English, and served with the Peace Corps in India. Later he studied towards a master’s in anthropology at Temple University. Tom has lived in Brooksville for thirty-five years and has created an apple orchard on three of his five acres with 100 trees of 60 different varieties with many heirloom apples. He used to collect apples off site, but now has enough of his own apples for his cider production. His Sedgwick Reds (his name from where he took the graft of this heirloom), Russets, and Northwest Greenings are only a few of his varieties, most of which have been grafted with a “scion,” or cutting. Tom does have access to one special huge Baldwin apple tree located in Deer Isle. “Baldwin’s are my favorite apples,” Tom added.

With his commercial business, Tom must interact with the federal Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms, which is interested not in the quality of the wines but in collecting the tax on his alcohol. The state Department of Agriculture makes their visits. Tom is not licensed as organic, but he does no spraying of his trees. For his other wines, he buys organic blueberries from various sellers and organic rhubarb from King Hill Farm. Recently Tom discovered a landowner near Patten, Maine, on the East Branch of the Penobscot River, who owns many chokecherry trees. “If the bears haven’t gotten ’em, you can have ’em.” So Tom gathers this precious fruit for his specialty wine.

The original small farmhouse, built in 1870 by Lem Fowler and sold to Tom by Frank Fowler, is located on the Coastal Road at the junction of the Herrick Road. Hoey’s home has grown gradually with two additions (1995 and 2006), the newest post and beam section of the house constructed by Tom with wood harvested from his eight-acre wood lot near Parker Pond. Large, beautiful pine boards create the floor while thick pine beams give the support. A few simple wood stoves heat this living space. “I love wood heat,” Tom comments.

For twenty-nine years, Tom and his wife, Gail Disney, lived here,
initially raising four daughters who attended Brooksville Elementary and GSA. Tom dug clams, cut pulp wood, and worked as a tree surgeon to remove the diseased Elm trees. Gail was a weaver. Then in 1991 they started making wines. In 2004 Gail died at age 67 of breast cancer. Now Tom has one daughter living in Surry and one in Pennsylvania, a stepdaughter in Penobscot and another in Massachusetts. Great joy comes from the visits of his eight grandchildren, as I notice many children’s books piled by the sofa. He was expecting a good crowd for Thanksgiving.

In the summer, the tasting room is open Tuesday through Saturday, noon to five, and many curious visitors enter. Though Tom sells his wines and sparkling ciders at farmers’ markets, he is unable to allow tastings at those sites due to alcohol-licensing rules. Buck’s Harbor Market, Max’s Blue Hill Wine Shop, and the Winter Farmers’ Market at Mainescape carry Tom’s wines. The Sow’s Ear is listed in the Maine Wine Trail, and tourists enjoy visiting wineries on this trail. In the tasting room, located in a building just down from his home, eight varieties are on display. In July when it’s hot, his light rhubarb wine, similar to a New Zealand Sauvignon Blanc, is popular; blueberry wine sells in August ($18). His best-selling wine is his Wild Berry ($14), which he makes from a combination of fruits. His sparkling wines, the apple and rhubarb, take five times longer to make, and thus they cost more ($21). I particularly enjoyed the Sparkling Rhubarb. The hard apple cider, which has an alcohol level of 8%, is a bargain at $13. This year, The Sow’s Ear Winery produced 125 bottles of Wild Choke Cherry wine ($23). When Tom began his winery in 1991, there were only three wineries in the Eastern Maine/Coastal area. Now there are over two dozen. Most of these wineries do not grow their own fruit. Tom enjoys knowing that he loves the agricultural part of the process, tending the trees, harvesting the apples. He corks roughly 6,000 bottles a year, “and that is small for a commercial operation.”

Tom gets a kick out of the visitors, many from far away. He laughed when he told me that recently he was able to make a classic Maine comment to one of his customers when asked, “Have you been here all your life?” “Not yet!” Tom replied.

So if you’re driving by the winery next season, consider stopping by for a taste of these fermented fruits. Luckily, in Brooksville, continuing along the Coastal Road, you can find fresh goat’s cheese and superb, freshly baked bread to complement your wine-tasting adventure.
Activities

Brooksville Elementary School
See the school website for schedules and information • Info: 326-8500 or www.brooksvilleschool.org.

Brooksville Free Public Library
Hours: see box to right • After-School Reading Program: begins Mondays, 3–3:45 pm. For children K–4 and homeschooled • Book Club: 2nd Monday, 10 am • Readers’ Cafe: 3rd Sat., 10–11 am, to discuss a wide variety of books • Family Movie Night: third Friday of each month, 7 pm. Theme-related craft at 6 pm • Watch for other programs and activities this fall • Info: 326-4560 or www.brooksvillelibrary.org.

Brooksville Friends and Neighbors
Meets 1st Wed. of every month, 6:30–8 pm, Town House • Info: Lola Bogyo, 326-4530.

BKS Iyengar Yoga Center
Iyengar Yoga for precise alignment and safe, progressive development of skillful action and harmony • Spacious, well-equipped studio • Day, evening, weekend classes • Weekly “specific needs” classes for those with injuries or physical conditions • BKS Iyengar Center, 1499 Coastal Rd. • Info: 326-2037 or www.iyengaryogamaine.com.

Brooksville United Methodist Church
Buck’s Harbor Sanctuary, 713 Coastal Rd. (next to the market) • Christmas Eve service: Dec. 24, 6 pm • Worship: Sundays, 10 am • Info: 469-7850 or garyven-cill@gmail.com.

Get Strong, Get Healthy
Come join us for exercise at the Community Center • Mon., Wed. & Fri., 7:30–8:45 am, $5 per class (first one free) • Leader: Sylvia Wilder • Info: 326-4801.

Brooksville Community Center
Call for information about events or rentals • Betsy Jones, 326-8296.

Genealogy Research Assistance

Brooksville Historical Society
Meets every second Wed. of the month at 7 pm at the Town House. All are welcome.

Reversing Falls Sanctuary
Women’s Circle: Jan. 5, 4 pm • Nourishing/Flourishing: Jan. 12, 4 pm • Martin Luther King, Jr. Celebration: Jan. 19, 4 pm • Labyrinth Walk: Jan. 25, 1–3 pm. Inside or outside at the Noble’s, 29 Drury Lane • Family Secrets, an exploration of the impact family secrets have on our lives: Jan. 26, 4 pm • Women’s Circle: Feb. 2, 4 pm • Caterpillar Hill Initiative: Feb. 9 • Love 2: Feb. 16 • Truth & Reconciliation Commission: Feb. 23 • Women’s Circle: March 3 • Lenten series begins March 9 • 818 Bagaduce Rd., North Brooksville • Info: www.reversingfalls.org or 326-8564.

Neighborcare
Neighbors helping neighbors. Volunteers provide free health-related services, respite, transportation, errands, etc. Call for assistance or to volunteer at 326-4735.

Daughters of the American Revolution
The Majabigwaduce Chapter will be on their winter break from Dec. 10 to March 10. Ladies 18 years and older are invited to join our chapter. • Contact Chapter Registrar Blake Hotchkiss for details at 326-8570.

West Brooksville Congregational Church, UCC
1597 Coastal Rd. • Christmas Eve candlelight service of lessons and carols: Dec. 24, 7 pm • February special offering for local fuel assistance. Donations may be sent to church at P.O. Box 295 • Sunday School: 9–9:45 am • Sunday Worship Service: 10 am. All welcome • Rev. Barbara Brakey • 326-8283 or wbcc@myfairpoint.net.

Happy Holidays from all of us at The Breeze to all of you!
A lot changes in thirty-five years. Computers replaced typewriters, photocopiers replaced mimeograph machines, and texting is as common as calling. Our school had two major additions. What hasn’t changed is our school secretary. Mary Ellen Andrews, “Mrs. Andrews” to us, remains a constant. If you have ever called the school, you’ve likely heard Mrs. Andrews’ famous greeting, “Brooksville Elementary School, Mrs. Andrews speaking.” What you might not have considered is that she has offered that same professional, friendly greeting since the fall of 1977. Since November 3, 1977 to be exact, when she began serving as the secretary at the school. That’s 35 budget seasons, 35 graduations, and 34 first days of school. It includes countless Band-Aids, loose teeth that fell out, and upset stomachs. It includes watching her grandchildren enter preschool and then graduate from eighth grade.

On November 3, 2013, the staff and students celebrated with Mrs. Andrews in a “Survivor-style” party. Those of us who see her regularly know that one of her favorite TV shows is Survivor. For those of you familiar with the show, no one was “voted off” at our party, but grades 5 through 8 did participate in a series of challenges to entertain Mrs. Andrews and the younger students. Teachers Nada Lepper and Corinne Pert organized the party and the challenges, and Susanne Dodge made a cake. For nearly an hour, we did our best to honor and celebrate Mrs. Andrews. More importantly, we were careful not to get hurt and cause Mrs. Andrews to leave her own party to get someone a Band-Aid.

Mrs. Andrews is currently planning to retire from her long-time position at the end of this school year, “but I haven’t sent my resignation papers in yet!” she said with a smile.

If you stop by the school, once you see Mrs. Andrews at the front door, you might notice several new faces. Denis Howard, serving as interim principal for the school year, became familiar with Brooksville Elementary when he served as interim superintendent for Union 93. Another new face is special education teacher Robin Jenkins. Kristen Burch is our new speech and language teacher. Brian Adams is the new language arts and social studies teacher for grades 7 and 8 and also teaches French to all grades, a position we were unable to fill last year. A very recent addition is Mr. Andrew Sarto, who is substituting for Joe Devine while he is deployed to Kuwait.

That’s our news from Brooksville Elementary.

Volunteers Needed

The After-School Reading Program at the Brooksville Library is in need of volunteers willing to spend time each week reading one-on-one with children in kindergarten through fourth grade. The program runs from 3:00 to 3:45 every Monday.

Please call 326-4560 to volunteer.
The Brooksville Breeze
The Newsletter of Brooksville Friends & Neighbors
Published quarterly — Spring, Summer, Fall & Winter

Brooksville Friends & Neighbors (BFN)
P.O. Box 101
Brooksville, ME 04617-0101
Phone: 326-0916

Newsletter By:
Joan MacCracken, Sheila Moir, Jean Webster, Katherine Clifford, Gail Page, Leslie Moore

The Brooksville Breeze originated as a newsletter to increase community communication, thus supporting the mission of Brooksville Friends & Neighbors (BFN) to strengthen and encourage local activities that promote health, both physical and emotional. The Breeze welcomes your comments, suggestions and donations to offset costs of printing and mailing. It is published four times a year.

Tell us who you are:

Brooksville Friends & Neighbors, P.O. Box 101, Brooksville, ME 04617

Name
Address
City ___________________________ State _____ Zip ______
Phone _________________________
E-mail _________________________

We hope you enjoy this free quarterly newsletter. Since our printing costs have increased, we would appreciate any donation—$5, $10, $20 or more—toward these expenses. Summer resident? You can receive The Breeze by e-mail for your off-season enjoyment.

We continue to welcome your comments and suggestions for articles:

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

Winter’s not all shoveling and shivering

Have fun, but be safe