

BANGOR DAILY NEWS

Untangling the long line of people who owned unique Verona Island



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Eric and Annie Woodbury are renovating this old farmhouse on their property in Verona Island. Beside it are a chicken coop and the skeleton of a greenhouse. [Buy Photo](#)

By Emily A. Schroeder, Special to the BDN

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Verona Island is that chunk of hilly land that one passes through when going from Prospect to Bucksport and beyond. It may be hard to imagine what the rest of it is like, especially if you spend just three minutes driving across the spectacular Penobscot Narrows Bridge, following a left-hand curve to another bridge, and landing immediately in Bucksport.

But Verona does have an interesting history.

Nestled in the Penobscot River, Verona has been described as a mountain coming out of the water. Depending on the resource consulted, the overall size is between approximately 4,000 to

5,600 acres. Perhaps in the latter instance the mass of [McCloud Mountain](#), rising to 344 feet, was taken into account. Prior to its declaration as a town, Verona was at various points considered either part of Prospect or Bucksport.

Originally, the Native Americans called it “Nalagwem-manahan,” which goes without definition. Joseph Nicolai named it “Ahlurmehsic,” meaning “spawning island.” Verona offered an ideal situation for fishing and, later, shepherding and logging. George Varney, in his *Gazetteer of the State of Maine* (1881), stated, “Verona is said to have grown and shipped more wood to the acre than any other town in the county.”

The island is notable in the number of names it has been granted over the centuries. Geographically, it was part of the Muscongus Patent, beginning in 1630. Claim to almost all of Knox and Waldo counties was made by two Englishmen, John Beauchamp and Thomas Leverett. Beauchamp died, leaving the lands to Leverett. This led to the name Lett, or Isle of Lett.

This lasted through four generations, at which point the remaining Leverett divided his holdings to 30 proprietors, including John and Cornelius Waldo. Samuel Waldo came to own the entire expanse, with the exception of 100,000 acres. Samuel’s son was the one who went to England to attract colonists.

With the demise of Samuel came an end to the vast acquisition of land, and Verona represented what was left. So, for a time, it was called Orphan’s Isle. (An alternative explanation was that Verona was deeded to an orphan; I chose not to pursue this.)

It had been passed down to Lucy (Waldo) Flucker (pronounced “Flooker”) and Sarah Waldo. Lucy’s daughter, also named Lucy, married Gen. Henry Knox, known as a land baron in his own right.

In 1790, the older Lucy Waldo sold a quarter of the island to William Wetmore. Two years later, when she sold 3,168 acres of Orphan’s Island to Wetmore, the only holdout was one Peter Abbott who owned 100 acres. He maintained his claim without wavering, and his descendants are still on Verona.

William Wetmore’s interest came through his second marriage, to Sarah Waldo who was the eldest daughter of Col. Samuel and Sarah (Erving) Waldo. A prosperous and ambitious attorney, he was a 1770 graduate of Harvard, settled in Salem, Massachusetts, and later was installed as barrister at law.

By 1792, he felt confident that he could retire from the law and spend all his time tending his property. Three years later the Wetmores pulled up stakes and moved to their island on the coast of Maine. (I can find no evidence of their presence, unless the “Whitmore” family cemetery counts.)

But life was not easy. The judge’s small law practice in Castine did not prove fruitful, however, and he asked for consideration as a judge in Mississippi. Another two years passed, and he asked

Gen. Knox to recommend him for the post of U.S. district attorney for Maine. This fell through as well, but Wetmore was appointed justice of the peace and quorum, and judge of probate for Hancock County in 1801, at which point he had to handle his own bankruptcy.

Financial ruin and the disagreeable climate of the island undoubtedly contributed to the couple's decision to return to Boston in 1804, where Sarah died the following year. The judge gradually curtailed his public activities in the Boston/Salem area, and passed away in 1830.

On March 15, 1839, Verona was organized as a plantation by the name of Wetmore Isle.

The great Wetmore land grab had begun in 1791, and portions were passed among family members and other buyers through 1863, according to records found at the Hancock County Register of Deeds. Two of William's children, Augusta and Thomas, appear as grantors or grantees at various times during this period.

The current name of Verona was adopted on Feb. 11, 1861, some say for no particular reason or connection. Verona is an ancient, attractive and large Italian city.

Claim to fame: One must note that Adm. Robert E. Peary had his ship Roosevelt built here in 1904 and 1905, at the McKay and Dix Shipyard, now the site of a public boat ramp in the northwest corner of the island. She was a most sturdy vessel and travelled to the Arctic twice, in 1905-1906 and 1908-1909, when Peary reached the North Pole on April 6, 1909. Models of this extraordinary ship may be seen at the Penobscot Marine Museum in Searsport and the Maine State Museum in Augusta.

One parting note: Verona residents voted on March 27, 2004, to officially change their name to Verona Island, and state approval came swiftly behind. It's a unique place and wants to stay that way.

Emily A. Schroeder is staff genealogist at the Maine State Library. Information for this piece came from the Maine Law and Legislative Reference Library, Penobscot Marine Museum, Maine State Museum, Peary-MacMillan Arctic Museum, Hancock County Register of Deeds and the town clerk of Verona Island. In addition, there are many published resources on all aspects of Maine at the Maine State Library.

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