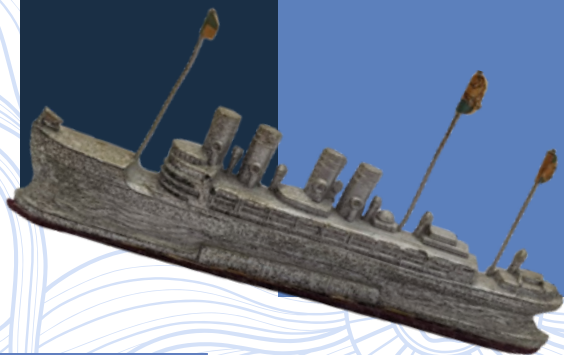


LA ROCHELLE

Museum Guide **2026**



Bar Harbor Historical Society
Culture • History • Community

Bar Harbor Historical Society



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Culture • History • Community

Bar Harbor Historical Society

Est. 1946

Mission Statement

To effectively display, preserve, and interpret Bar Harbor's rich past through our unique collections ensuring access, enjoyment, and educational opportunities for all.

Board of Directors

Richard Cough (President), Tom Testa (Vice President), Laura Johnson (Treasurer), June Beallor, Jeff Dobbs, Deborah Dyer, David Higgins, Amanda Gardener, Lisa Parsons, Carolyn Rapkivian, Christina Walker, and Heidi Wittwer

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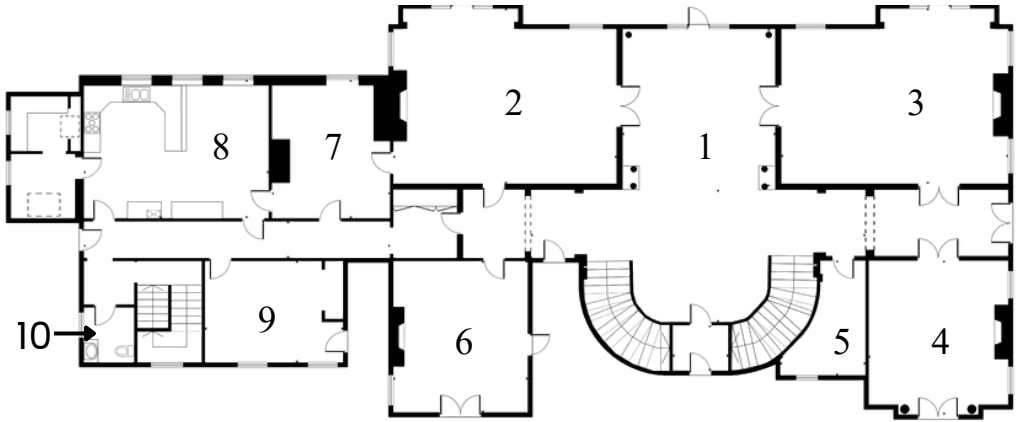
Did you know?

We have 6 levels of membership, including one for businesses!

Learn more by visiting our website!

barharborhistorical.org

FIRST FLOOR



1. Foyer

- From Away

2. Dining Room & Sun Porch

- Era of the Grand Hotels

3. Living Room

- Raising Democracy

4. Reception Room

- Shaping of Bar Harbor

5. Flower Room

- Beatrix Farrand

6. Library

- In Defense of Inalienable Rights

7. Butler's Pantry

- How We Got Here

8. Kitchen/ Studio

- Classroom & Workshops

9. Gift Shop

- Edith's Boutique
- Visitor Restroom

10. Visitor Restroom



Have any questions?

Look for our docents with gold name tags; they'll be happy to answer any questions you may have.

THE FOYER

FROM AWAY

The first tourists, known as “rusticators,” came to Mount Desert Island (MDI) for its untouched beauty and promise of outdoor adventure. These early tourists often stayed in tents or with local families.



SUMMER VISITORS ON
PULPIT ROCK, C. 1860

**DID YOU
KNOW?**

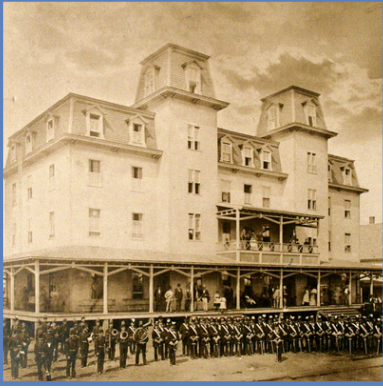
Before the rusticators’, acclaimed artists, such as Frederic E. Church and Harrison Bird Brown, flocked to the Island to paint and capture the land and seascapes. These visitors saw Bar Harbor as an escape from cities of the period, where natural greenery was scarce and coal smoke was plentiful.

Teddy Roosevelt was a famous rusticator!

SAILBOATS, STEAMERS, AND TRAINS (OH MY!)



Before automobiles were allowed on MDI, Bar Harbor was primarily accessible from the mainland by boat. During the nineteenth century, there were several types of vessels you could see in the harbor. Some of these vessels were working sailboats, such as the fisherman’s sloop or schooners carrying cargo, while others were pleasure boats such as the Corsair, J.P. Morgan’s yacht. Most visitors would come ashore on steamers that departed from Hancock, Rockland, or Portland. Some tourists also boarded the Green Mountain Cog Railway taking passengers up Green (Cadillac) Mountain.



RODICK HOUSE C. 1880

DINING ROOM & SUN PORCH

ERA OF THE GRAND HOTELS

The rusticators and artists carried the idyllic images of the vistas of Mount Desert Island home with them, and created interest for would-be tourists. As Bar Harbor began to rival Newport, RI, the demand for lodging caused hotels to spring up.

RODICK HOUSE'S

HEYDAY

DINING ROOM

1000

GUESTS
SERVED A
NIGHT

400

BEDROOMS



The porch was
500' x 25'!

This interest drummed up by the rusticators resulted in a massive hotel boom in the late 1800s.

From 1855, when the first hotel, Agamont House, was built by Tobias Roberts, to 1875, sixteen hotels were built in Bar Harbor. With a year-round population of just over sixteen hundred people, this boom dramatically changed the character of the town. Soon, Bar Harbor became one of the premier summer resorts in the nation.



As Bar Harbor grew as a resort, businesses like florists, retail shops, and tailors grew to accommodate them. Several were recent Jewish immigrants from Eastern European countries, who become year-round residents bringing their culture and families to Bar Harbor.



LIVING ROOM

RAISING DEMOCRACY



CAROLINE HIGGINS

The women of Bar Harbor educated future town selectmen, provided lifesaving medical care to townsfolk during disasters, preserved the culture of Bar Harbor through sewing circles and dances, and served directly as soldiers and sailors.

These women, and women across the United States, served and shaped their community and their country in whatever way they could. Although these women, historically, had not been afforded the same rights and opportunities as their masculine counterparts, the responsibilities of defending those rights and opportunities fell equally on their shoulders.

In this room, you will find people who not only dedicated their lives to those responsibilities and to serving their communities, but who also opened doors for those who came after. People like Mary Schieffelin, who served in a non-combat role during WWI, created an opening for the women of Doris Haycraft's generation to formally hold a greater variety of jobs in the U.S. Armed Forces. By unabashedly shouldering these responsibilities, these women created and protected the Bar Harbor we know today.



Play the square grand piano from the Primrose Cottage, once played by classical pianist of the era, Ignacy Paderewski



BUILDING OF THE ARTS

Listen to music recorded in 1905 on an Edison Triumph wax cylinder machine



RECEPTION ROOM

THE SHAPING OF BAR HARBOR



BAR HARBOR C. 1880

Bar Harbor's culture is shaped by its unique history. For many generations, the region was used as hunting, fishing, and foraging grounds. The Wabanaki Nations were among the first

people to live here, and after European colonization of the area, they were among the first souvenir vendors. They sold their masterly woven fancy baskets and gave guided tours to the tourists.

GREAT FIRE OF '47

On October 21, 1947, strong winds encouraged a smoldering fire to engulf more than two thousand acres quickly and demanded immediate evacuation of Bar Harbor's twenty-two thousand residents. When the fire was declared extinguished on November 14th, more than seventeen thousand acres of land, more than half of which was in Acadia National Park, and more than three hundred homes were destroyed, resulting in \$23 million dollars of damages (more than \$300 million when adjusted for inflation). The scars of this fire can still be seen on the natural landscape, especially from higher elevations.



THE FIRE OF 1947

Smoke from the fire could be seen from as far away as Boston!!

Who's Who in America

Mrs. Joseph Pulitzer, Mrs. J.P. Morgan, Mrs. George Vanderbilt, Alessandro Fabbri, Clara Spence, the Bowdoin Family, George B. Dorr, and Beatrix Ferrand were all prominent members of the Bar Harbor Village Improvement Association.

FLOWER ROOM

BEATRIX FARRAND



BEATRIX FARRAND

Beatrix Cadwalader Farrand (néé Jones) did groundbreaking and innovative work as a landscape architect and was a trailblazer for women interested in the field. Farrand was raised by her mother, Mary Cadwalader Jones (néé Rawle), and her aunt, novelist Edith Wharton.

While she preferred the more humble term “landscape gardener,” Farrand was one of the first female American landscape designers and a founding member of the American Society of Landscape Designers. Having a natural talent for design, Farrand was trained by Charles Sargent in an informal apprenticeship.

Farrand became renowned for her work, some examples of which include Dumbarton Oaks, the Rose Garden at the White House, Morgan Library and Museum, and Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Garden. Additionally, Farrand worked closely with John D. Rockefeller Jr. in designing the roadsides and vistas of his carriage roads, now in Acadia National Park. She remained a devoted advocate for women’s education and entrance into landscape design throughout her life.

The Flower Room at La Rochelle was designed adjacent to the curve of the stairs. It served as a place for fresh flowers from the greenhouses to be brought, arranged, and placed into each room of La Rochelle. Farrand's designs inspire the gardens around La Rochelle.

FARRAND'S POCKET CAMERA



FARRAND'S BOTANICAL SAMPLE KNIFE

LIBRARY

IN DEFENSE OF INALIENABLE RIGHTS

The first superintendent of Acadia National Park, George Bucknam Dorr, a wealthy summer resident, was both a naturalist and a conservationist.



GEORGE B. DORR

From the French and Indian War to the Vietnam War, Bar Harbor families have served to defend their homes and our democracy. Many of the men whose uniforms and photographs you see in this room were originally “from away” themselves.

The Fabbri family, including Alessandro Fabbri, emigrated from Milan, Italy, and retained close Italian ties. The Ryan brothers, James and Joseph, both served through many armed conflicts in the mid-twentieth century and were the sons of two immigrant parents. The Shaw brothers were both drafted and defended their country during WWI. Similar stories can be found associated with almost every man in this room, even the civilians. George B. Dorr and Dr. John B. Ells played instrumental (and vastly different) roles in defending our democracy.

George Dorr, the first superintendent of Acadia National Park, was a fierce protector of the Island’s natural beauty and the access to that beauty. Dr. Ells, the Chairman of the local Warship Committee, boosted morale in dark times and helped foster international friendships. In their own ways, each of these men was engaged in defending our shared values and way of life.

BUTLER'S PANTRY

HOW WE GOT HERE



Gonya's Pharmacy

The summer resort that more than four million people enjoy annually depended completely on Bar Harbor's working-class residents.

In this exhibit, some of the professions of the year-round population are highlighted. Featured in the Higgins Family Tree, as the center of migration and immigration in Bar Harbor. Follow the family fans throughout the museum to learn more about their impact on the history and community.

The Stafford family, owners of the Mount Desert Livery, were immigrants from Scotland. Their business model and their unique horse breed set them apart from many of the other liverys here. They became one of the largest buckboard and stable businesses on the Island and accomadate the thousands of visitors each summer.

As more tourists came to Bar Harbor to enjoy the fresh air and simple pleasures of hiking and sailing, the risk of disease followed them. In the summer of 1873, an outbreak of typhoid and scarlet fever caused a panic over the water supply. Local businessmen worked together to build a system of wooden water flumes (pipe) supplying freshwater to downtown and averting a possible disaster for the new tourism industry. In the aftermath of the typhoid outbreak, it became clear that more infrastructure was needed in Bar Harbor.

In response to the need for better infrastructure, a group of summer residents formed the Bar Harbor Village Improvement Association (BHVIA). This group, still working today on behalf of the residents, created the first roads, sidewalks, and town parks.

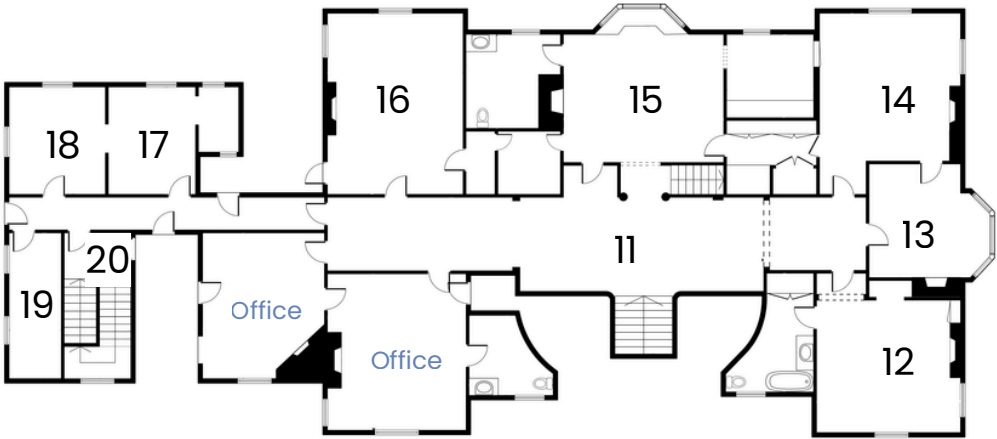


Closed Sundays

Our gift shop, Edith's Boutique, is located in the former servants' dining room. The shop features exclusive La Rochelle merchandise, Maine books, hand-thrown pottery, botanical kitchenware, vintage puzzles, and much more!

SECOND

FLOOR



11. Grand Staircase

16. The Guest Room

- Women & Their Broad Influence

12. Mr. Bowdoin's Bedroom

- Schools of Bar Harbor

17. Head Housekeeper's Bedroom

13. Mrs. Bowdoin's Boudoir

- La Rochelle's Family Tree

18. Head Housekeeper's Sitting Room

- Belonging: Fraternal Orders

14. Mrs. Bowdoin's Bedroom

- Edith Bowdoin's Legacy
- Sewing Circle

19. Linen Closet

15. Edith's Bedroom

- Historic Maps
- Spending Time

20. Servants' Staircase

- Horse Shows of Bar Harbor

MR. BOWDOIN'S BEDROOM

THE SCHOOLS OF BAR HARBOR



GRAMMAR SCHOOL
GRADUATING CLASS 1927

Before the twentieth century, there were few formal school-houses in Bar Harbor, and the small population of school children were primarily educated in family and neighborhood homes.

By 1925, the school population had expanded, and ten schools, including a high school, were spread out over the villages of Bar Harbor. In 1952, a new consolidated grammar school, the Conners School, was constructed on Eagle Lake Road, and a new Emerson Middle School was added to the campus in 1962. A consolidated, island-wide high school opened in 1968 near the middle of the island on Eagle Lake Road. The former Bar Harbor High School became the town offices and district courts building. The building is the town hall today.

The bathroom retains its original marble sink and cast iron tub on a marble pad. The house was built with running water and each 2nd floor bedroom has a bathroom. There were 11 bathroom originally in house.

This room, which was Mr. Bowdoin's bedroom, overlooked the back of the house. Visible from this room were the caretaker's cottage and three greenhouses of La Rochelle. In the 1940s, the backyard acres of La Rochelle were split off and sold as building lots. While the green-houses are no longer standing, the caretaker's cottage remains today, located across the street from the museum. The cottage has undergone numerous expansions over the past one-hundred twenty years and is now privately owned.





LA ROCHELLE CIRCA 1902

MRS. BOWDOIN'S BOUDOIR

Take a break from your visit and rest on the reproduction couch where Mrs. Bowdoin, the original owner of the house, would entertain close friends and family.

LA ROCHELLE'S FAMILY TREE

Other owners included:

- Bernard "Bun" Cough (1943-1944)
- Colket Family (1944-1972)
- Maine Seacoast Mission (1972-2019)


Step back in time and see Bar Harbor's summer cottage, La Rochelle, in a new light. Built in 1903 for George Sullivan Bowdoin and Julia Grinnell Bowdoin, La Rochelle stands as the largest waterfront estate on West Street.

The Bowdoins had three children: their son, Temple, and two daughters, Fanny and Edith.


Edith lived with her parents at La Rochelle during the summer months and inherited the house upon her mother's passing in 1915.

Edith never married, and upon her passing, the estate was inherited by her nephew and business partners. They then sold it to the Cough family in 1943.

BUILT IN
1903

 Built by Andrews, Jaques & Rantoul firm of Boston

BUILT FOR
BOWDOINS

 George Bowdoin was a banker and partner of J.P. Morgan investment company.

ROOMS

12
BEDROOMS

41

9
BATHROOMS

MRS. BOWDOIN'S BEDROOM

EDITH BOWDOIN'S LEGACY



JULIA IRVING GRINNELL
BOWDOIN

This room, a partial recreation of the room's historic appearance, features the stories of two Bowdoin women, Julia Grinnell Bowdoin and her daughter, Edith.

Mrs. Julia Bowdoin (1838-1915) was the wife of a prominent investment banker for Drexel, Morgan, & Co., George Sullivan Bowdoin, and spent most of the year in New York City in their Park Avenue home. When the family was in Bar Harbor for the summer, Mrs. Bowdoin was an active community member, often entertaining guests, including her husband's business partners. All the members of the Bowdoin family were equestrians. They were frequently seen at, and were the patrons of, Bar Harbor's horse shows. You can learn more about the horse show in the servant's staircase on the other end of the hall.

Her youngest daughter, Edith Grinnell Bowdoin (1869-1943), outpaced her mother's dedication to community service and her love for horses. Very active in the ASPCA, Edith sponsored the building of horse watering stations, including steel watering buckets and granite horse troughs—which can still be found today dotted around Bar Harbor and New York City. Edith was also a very active member of the Bar Harbor Village Improvement Association and was a contemporary of Beatrix Farrand, the landscape gardener, in the organization. After her mother's passing in 1915, Edith fully inherited this estate, La Rochelle, in which she spent her summers and continued her humanitarian work until her death in 1943.

EDITH BOWDOIN'S BEDROOM

HISTORIC MAPS

As resort communities developed, civic groups formed to establish an island wide system of trails, and in 1891, they began publishing maps and guides.



THE "CHAMPLAIN MAP"
BY ROBERT ABBE, 1916

These maps also chronicle the inception and expansion of Acadia National Park, the trail system, the carriage roads, and communities. Trail maps tell the story of how Bar Harbor grew. Early maps of Bar Harbor show homes of local residents and cottages for summer vacationers. As a testament to the Island's sailing industry, ferry route maps and sailing charts are also on exhibit in this room.

SPENDING TIME

Tourists have always wanted keepsakes from their visits to Bar Harbor. The first sightseers, the rusticators, created their own keepsakes by sketching the island's vistas.

As the tourist population diversified during the late 1800s, the demand increased for more affordable and attainable souvenirs. Many brought home fancy baskets, specifically produced by local members of the Wabnaki Nations, for sale to tourists. Postcards and ceramic goods were also very popular with visitors and were often hand-painted overseas

and then resold in Bar Harbor gift shops. In fact, modern manufacturing and the globalized economy enabled gift shops in Bar Harbor to carry a large variety of consumable keepsakes, which they still feature today.



BAR HARBOR SOUVENIR
CHINA PLATE



THE WILLOWS

THE GUEST ROOM

STRONG WOMEN AND THEIR BROAD INFLUENCE

Down the beach from La Rochelle is the Atlantic Oceanside Hotel, the core of which is the “Willows”, an estate built by Charlotte Baker for her and her partner, Clara Spence.

In 1892, Clara Spence started the Spence School in New York City with support from her former partner, Jessie Prentice. Serving the daughters of the very wealthy, the school advocated social progressive ideals of education and service to the community.

Maine was a respite from the city and afforded Spence time to create individual student curriculums, programs with guest speakers, and outings that provided the girls with the most dynamic possible education. Spence and Baker adopted four children and were pivotal in the development of adoption as we know it today. This passion for developing opportunities for all children, underpinned by Spences' belief that all children had the promise for greatness lead to the founding of the Spence Chapin Center for Children and Families which to this day connects children and families globally.

THIS EXHIBIT HAS BEEN HELPED IN PART BY:



Spence-Chapin
YOUR JOURNEY. OUR PURPOSE.

Present Impact

Both of the organizations Clara Spence co-founded, the Spence School and Spence-Chapin Services, are still in operation and helping children today.

HEAD HOUSEKEEPER'S BEDROOM

The head housekeeper occupied this set of rooms, with this one used as the bedroom. This is the only servant's room on this floor, with the rest being

located on the third floor. The small room in the view of the ocean may have been used as a sewing room. At the end of the hall, the balcony was used to dry the linens and clothing for the family and was within easy reach of the head housekeeper's rooms. What you see in this room today is a recreation of the room's historic appearance.

HEAD HOUSEKEEPER'S SITTING ROOM

**BELONGING: FRATERNAL
ORDERS AND SOCIAL CLUBS**

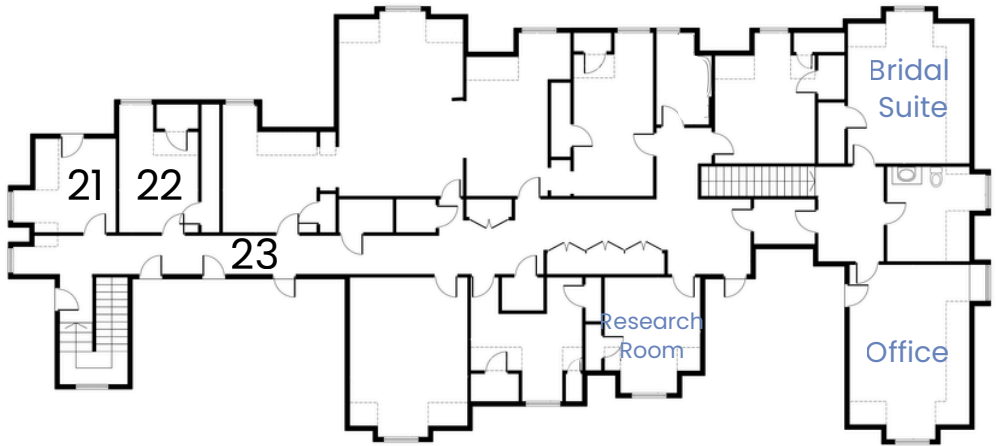
Social clubs and fraternal orders were once a popular and important part of the community engagement. These groups were often very selective with their membership; the Masons only accepted religious men, and another local organization, the Hayseeders, only allowed year-round residents. This selectivity aside, these social clubs were also catalysts for charitable works and community improvements. In this room, you will see a number of objects belonging to various social clubs and fraternal organizations, including organization uniforms, pins, and photographs. Most of the clubs and organizations featured in this room are still active in Bar Harbor today.



Be sure to check out the linen closet before making your way to the third floor!



THIRD FLOOR



21. Coachman's Room

- MDI Auto Wars

23. Callbox

22. Maid's Room

24. Bridal Bathroom

- Open to the public



PLANNING AN EVENT OR A WEDDING?

With stellar, million-dollar views, La Rochelle is the perfect choice for your special day. For pricing and a tour, contact us at info@barharborhistorical.org and start your planning today!



MOUNT DESERT STREET C. 1919

COACHMAN'S ROOM

MOUNT DESERT ISLAND CAR WARS

As established in the Foyer on the first floor, the main way to get to Bar Harbor in the 1800s and early 1900s was by steamer from Hancock Point, Rockland, Portland, or Boston.

No cars were allowed in Bar Harbor until 1913, when the population voted to allow vehicles into town after a contentious campaign to keep them out fell short. Summer residents, who preferred horses and carriages, worried automobiles would take away from the scenic, peaceful landscape. However, the following summer the town was busier than it had been in years, potentially due to the new ease of accessibility to MDI. In this room, you will see telegrams about the “Auto Wars” vote that finally let cars into Bar Harbor addressed to George B. Dorr and businessman Fred C. Lynam. Many coachmen became chauffeurs after Bar Harbor allowed cars in town in 1913.

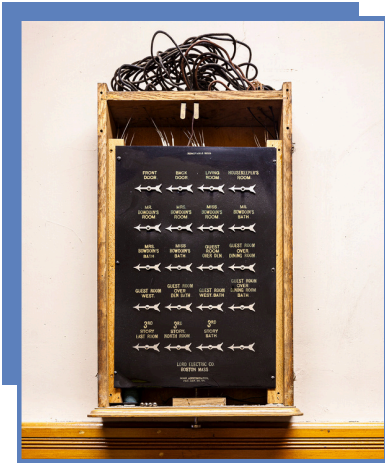
MAID'S ROOM

In 1910, the Bowdoin family had nine household servants, (six women and three men), who lived with them in their Park Avenue, New York City home. Servant roles at this time included head housekeeper, butler, lady's maid, chambermaid, parlor maid, dining maid, laundress, valet, chauffeur, footman, cooks, and chef. The Bowdoins probably brought their servants with them to La Rochelle when they summered in Bar Harbor.



CALL BOX

THE BOWDOIN ANNUNCIATOR



The second floor bedrooms of La Rochelle were connected through the closets with small doors between them. This would have allowed their servants to travel through the bedrooms, completing their work while remaining out of view.

Notice the electronic call buttons throughout the cottage, these call buttons were to alert the servants that they were needed in a certain room. While these buttons are no longer functional, they serve as a reminder of La Rochelle's past life as an elegant family home. Throughout the house you'll notice small white buttons on the wall.

But wait, there's more outside!



Exit the ocean front porch and turn left to visit our maritime exhibits. Facing the water, we present pieces of the shipwrecked Tay. The building on your left holds our Working Waterfront exhibit and partnership with The First Coast project, as well as the Buckboard and Sleigh exhibit.



WORKING WATERFRONT

THE FIRST COAST PROJECT



Bar Harbor's scenic waterfront has always been primarily a working waterscape. The citizens of the Wabanaki Nations called it Moneskatik or "the place where clams are dug."

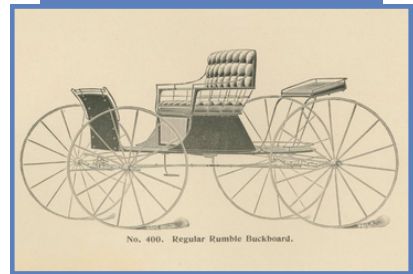
Along with the bounty of lobsters, clams, haddock, flounder, and scallops, this harbor and its resources have welcomed many to its shores.

Today, it is used by lobster fishermen, sightseeing vessels, an international ferry to Canada, and cruise ships. Bar Harbor's working waterfront thrives thanks to a tradition of independence, grit, and hard-working spirit that transcends generations.

BUCKBOARD

DAVIS BUCKBOARD CO.

Similar to an English carriage, a buckboard is a four-wheeled horse-drawn vehicle used for carrying passengers.



Davis Buckboard

Henry E. Davis and W. Howard Davis, grew up working in a carriage factory. The brothers created the Davis buckboard on display. This buckboard was unique compared to contemporary carriages because it adapted the simple form of a working wagon into an improved passenger vehicle. Built especially for pleasure driving, the buckboard was a readily available necessity for hotel resorts and thus became the quintessential vehicle for summer touring in Bar Harbor.



THE LA ROCHELLE GARDENS



Faerie Garden

Be sure to spend time outside enjoying La Rochelle's beautiful grounds and take in the breathtaking view of Bar Island and Frenchman Bay. Beatrix Farrand prepared a master plan for the grounds and gardens, which included the original sunken garden and a walled terrace on the bayside of the mansion.

There is also a special faerie garden where guests of all ages can build faerie homes while escaping the summer heat in the cedar grove. The grounds and gardens are lovingly maintained by BHHS volunteers and groups including the Bar Harbor Garden Club and the BHVIA.