

LEW DIETZ
Maine Writer

1997

Lew Dietz, 90, the author of 20 books and hundreds of magazine articles and whose best-known work, the 1975 book "A Seal Called Andre," was made into a movie, died April 27 in Rockport, Maine. The cause of death was not reported.

"A Seal Called Andre," which he co-wrote with Harry Goodridge, was the story of an orphaned seal pup who went on to become a famous performing seal. A Maine freelance writer since 1932, he began writing hunting and fishing stories for such publications as Field and Stream in the mid-1940s. He was a founding contributor to Down East magazine and wrote scores of articles, primarily on outdoor themes, from 1954 to 1988.

His works included a series of books in the 1950s that focused on hunting, trapping and guiding. He wrote a half-dozen other works of fiction through the 1960s. He also wrote "The Allagash" in the "Rivers of America" series and "A Touch of Wilderness." In 1977, Doubleday published his favorite work, "Night Train at Wiscasset Station," considered a Maine classic.



SO LONG, BOSTON: The genuine Andre cavorts at NE Aquarium before heading for Maine in 1977.

Andre the seal returns – this time to silver screen

Movies

By PAUL SHERMAN

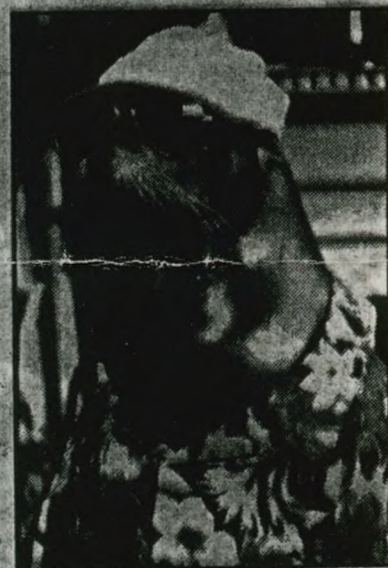
Move Over, "Free Willy." "Andre," New England's answer to last summer's hit tale of human and whale friendship, will spotlight the real-life legend of a seal and a Maine family when it comes to theaters Aug. 19.

Its title character befriended Harry Goodridge of Rockport, Maine, in a Penobscot Bay encounter shortly after the seal's birth in 1962. The Goodridge family raised the seal pup and tried to release him, but he kept returning, even after winters spent housed at the New England Aquarium or Connecticut's Mystic Aquarium in the 1970s.

"He *always* came back," laughed Paula Goodridge Armentrout, the late Goodridge's daughter and a consultant to the film.

Goodridge turned the saga into the 1975 book "A Seal Called Andre," which led to TV appearances and a legion of fans for the seal. Interest in turning the book into a movie started when the film's writer Dana Baratta of Brunswick, Maine, first approached Goodridge in 1989, three years after the seal died.

Goodridge-Armentrout recently traveled to Vancouver to observe the early shooting of the film, which is directed by George Miller ("The Man From Snowy River") and stars Keith Caradine as her father. Only a few exterior shots of Maine locations will be used.



HELLO, HOLLYWOOD: Today's Andre the seal is all dolled up in shade, hat and Hawaiian shirt for his movie stills.

IT BROUGHT HIM FAME, FISH AND ROCKPORT'S ULTIMATE SEAL OF APPROVAL.

With his friendly manner and whimsical style, Andre the Seal won over his hometown, along with thousands who visited each year. As official "Harbor Master," Andre had a love for entertaining that ultimately led to a Hollywood movie about a legend that Rockport, Maine will never forget.



Photo courtesy of Reed McKenney

Andre — the celebrated seal

ROCKPORT, Maine — When *New York Times* humor columnist Russell Baker feels compelled to share his views on South Africa with his readers, it is time for this scribbler — who happens to have lived for eight years in Africa — to tell you about Andre, the great seal of Rockport, if not of the United States.

Andre, a foundling, was adopted on May 18, 1961, by Harry Goodridge of this midcoastal Maine town. He was then a two-day-old pup (Andre, not Mr. Goodridge).

Mr. Goodridge built Andre a pen in Rockport harbor, and taught him tricks. The usual seal stuff: Jumping through a hoop, catching rings on his nose, clapping his flippers for fish.

Schoolchildren flocked to see him, and Andre soon became Rockport's most celebrated citizen, which folks at Camden will tell you isn't the hardest thing in the world to do. He got more mail than anybody in town, which Mr. Goodridge answered, Andre being illiterate.

All work and no play makes for a dull seal, and Mr. Goodridge frequently let Andre out of his pen, particularly for "a few nights on the town" during breeding season. According to Mr. Goodridge, Andre would come back from these amorous occasions "a little beaten up, but he seemed to enjoy himself." Rockport seals are a notoriously rough lot.

When Andre reached his mature playing weight of 250 pounds, dripping wet, he began to make a pest of himself. Rockport watermen took particular exception to his behavior during the dull winter months when — there being few schoolchildren to amuse — he liked to fling himself into their dories for a sunbath. When a 250-pound seal throws himself into a dory, something's got to give, and it's unlikely to be the seal.

So Andre, like other celebrities,

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began wintering in the south, spending the cold months first at Boston's New England Aquarium and later at the Marine Life Museum in Mystic, Conn.

Mr. Goodridge flew Andre to his winter quarters, or drove him down by truck. Andre worked on his tricks during the winter months and, each spring, made the long swim home alone to his birthplace (170 miles from Massachusetts, 230 miles from Connecticut).

His annual arrival in Rockport harbor was hailed by the local merchants, if not by the watermen. It heralded the start of yet another tourist season, when junk miraculously becomes antiques.

In 1975, Andre's fame spread far and wide when Mr. Goodridge, in collaboration with author Lew Dietz, published a biography entitled *A Seal Called Andre*. A chapter about Andre was included in a school book for Minnesota, which is lamentably short of seals. Soon the tour buses were backed up, and Rockport — a wide place in the road between Rockland and Camden — had a parking problem.

In the late 1970s, Gov. Joseph Brennan, who should have known better, got himself in hot water — not easy to do in Maine — by stating the obvious. He said that the people of the state were more interested in reading about Andre than about "the real issues" of the day.

The suggestion that Andre, already immortalized by a marble statue of himself in Rockport's Marine Park, might not be "a real issue" created an uproar in coastal Maine. Gov. Brennan wisely journeyed to Rockport and personally apologized to

Andre. Andre accepted the governor's apology graciously, and all was forgiven, if not quite forgotten.

Last year, Andre achieved true celebrity status when his return to Rockport was recorded for national TV by NBC News. That is, one supposes, fame of a sort, even for a seal.

But the years had hurried by for Rockport's honorary harbor-master, and all was not well with Andre, soon to be 25. He developed cataracts and, when he swam home to Maine from Connecticut this spring, taking it easy all the way, he was nearly blind.

On June 14, moved by that old longing, a nearly blind but still feisty Andre swam out to sea in search of a certain lady friend. There he encountered a male seal, a tough young bull much as he once had been, and Andre came out on the losing end of the fight.

Badly slashed, he made his way slowly toward a quiet cove behind Fisher Engineering, a refuge where he might lick his wounds and rest. That was the last time Andre was seen alive.

Each day for more than a month, Mr. Goodridge searched the coast and checked Andre's pen, in the hope that the old seal might have returned. He tracked down numerous sightings, and inspected five seal carcasses that had washed up on the shore. None was Andre.

Finally, on July 19, Danny Allen found the carcass of a seal on the shore behind Littlefield Memorial Baptist Church. Mr. Goodridge, on the basis of scars from old mating duels, identified the corpse as that of Andre, and buried him in the backyard of his Russell Avenue home.

South Africa will be with us tomorrow; Andre, the celebrated seal of Rockport, who made children laugh, will not. And that's the sad but important news from Maine today.

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“Andre was a product of two worlds: His blood responded to the call of the open bay; his heart belonged to the adoptive realm of humankind.” Those words were from the first book, A Seal Called Andre, written by a very dear friend of the family, who happened to be a published author, Lew Dietz. Lew spent hours in my dad's office asking him thoughtful questions, and listening to his answers which often included a bit of pontificating. And the two of them were able to capture what was interesting and important to produce a book the entire family is proud of. I'd like to mention that the book is dedicated to Thalice, my mother, the woman behind the man and the seal, who, heaven knows, could write her own book on the subject.

I'd like to tell you a little about my father, Harry Goodridge, who willingly and happily became a stooge to a harbor seal for 25 years, and also about certain events that helped to set the stage, so to speak, for this unusual relationship.

Harry Goodridge was born in 1916, the youngest of 9 children. In his own words, he “felt a kinship with wild creatures from the first time he was aware of them” and spent most of his young life roaming and hunting the great salt marshes and woods of Salisbury, Massachusetts. He raised baby crows and gray squirrels and trained hunting dogs - not knowing that he was laying a foundation for what was to come. He went on to spend two years in forestry training at the New York State Ranger School, got married, served four and a half years in the army during WW II, bought a house in Rockport, had five children, started his own tree service, and became a professional scuba diver all by the age of 43. His life was relatively normal, and may have continued to be, were it not for his novel idea that a harbor seal might make a good scuba-diving companion in the ocean, much like a beagle was a good hunting companion in the woods.

Each spring, when Harry would take his boat out on Penobscot Bay around Mark Island and Robinson's Rock, he was amazed at how curious the new seal pups were, especially when he cut the engine and drifted. They would often swim right up to the boat, making it relatively easy to scoop them out of the water with a net. So in the spring of 1959, Harry caught his first seal pup and named him Marki. I don't remember much about Marki as I was only 4 years old.

But I know now that in 1959 very little research had been done on harbor seals. Harry didn't realize it, but he was about to become a harbor seal expert. He spent time corresponding with aquariums from Germany to Dallas trying to get any information he could on them, especially on nursing and weaning.

In one letter from the N.Y. Aquarium, a Dr. Christopher Coates suggests a formula for feeding young seals consisting of homogenized oily fish and heavy cream, and adds “It probably will be necessary to feed by means of inserting a tube into the stomach and pumping the fluid into it.”

Harry thought there must be a better way, and remembering the success he had raising wild squirrels, he got Marki to nurse a cloth soaked in warm milk. This worked long enough for Harry to glimpse how quickly a harbor seal could be tamed and trained and adapt to humans. But one morning he found Marki dead, and after an autopsy revealed a piece of cloth in his stomach, Harry became determined to make use of what he had learned from this fatal mistake.

The fact that seals were considered to be nuisances to local fishermen who would often shoot them, was to play a helpful role in Harry's early research. As summer turned to fall, and Harry hadn't come any closer to figuring out a nursing solution, he came across a female harbor seal that had been killed by rifle fire. After examining her anatomy, he found the answers he was looking for, and in hindsight were obvious.

The teats on a mother seal did not protrude as on most mammals, but were recessed for protection from the rough rocks and barnacles.

The following spring, Harry successfully weaned two pups, and named them Alvin and Basil. He had cut a cedar log, drilled a hole big enough to fit a syringe, covered the log with neoprene, the scuba suit material, and had invented, as far as we know, the first surrogate mother seal which we named, "Sadie". A letter from Leslie Scattergood of the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service states: "I think some record should be made of your seal-rearing technique, and perhaps you would be interested in publishing some notes on it."

Training the two seals was easy and within a couple of months, Harry had the diving companions he was hoping for. A letter from Leon Wilson of the McGraw Hill Book Co. came in suggesting a book be written about Harry and his relationship with **Basil and Alvin**, comparing it to Elsa, the Born Free story of a lioness who took up with humans. Life Magazine also caught wind of his two young diving buddies and did a spread on them. Shortly after that, Alvin swam off, never to be seen again. I remember going to the Lobster Festival that summer and seeing Basil swimming in a large tank doing tricks for the public. I thought then, wow, he must be famous if he's at the Lobster Festival! But about a week later, Harry came home one afternoon with the tragic news that Basil had just been eaten by a great white shark. He was able to harpoon the shark which was 12 feet long and weighed 1200 pounds, tow him back to the harbor, and with the help of other strong men, got him up on the Boat Club's grassy lawn. I was only 5 years old, but I remember this day vividly. At first, Harry said no, when I begged to go down and see the shark. Thinking back, it's the *only* time I can recall him trying to shelter me from such a reality. But he changed his mind, and I remember the crowd of people, the stench, and the sandpaper, gray skin of that huge, scary creature. Today, relatively few white sharks swim in Penobscot Bay, but back in the 50s and 60s when the chicken factory in Belfast was in full operation, they were fairly common.

Now we are up to 1961. It was a new beginning -

Really *exciting* things were happening here in Rockport, and I might say that at that point Andre was the least of them. Helena Bok was in the process of building her dream of a Children's Chapel.... And an enterprising couple had moved here from Massachusetts with their four children and a dream of starting a restaurant and marina, what was to become the Sail Loft Restaurant and the Rockport Marine. That incredible accomplishment by this amazing couple is another book waiting to be written. But... getting back to Andre...

In my mind, I see my dad walking up the steps with a baby seal squirming in his arms. He plunks him down on the office floor, and the office immediately smells like the briny sea. He's all dry and fluffy from the ride in except for around his big beautiful brown eyes. I ask permission to pat him, and if we can keep him. His fur is soft and warm. He flops into the kitchen, kroohing softly, and over to the white stove. He presses his whiskered nose against the side of it, up, down and all around, searching for something to eat, and eventually, when Harry offers Sadie, full of warm, rich formula, he takes to it almost immediately.

Little did my father know that at that moment he was making a 25-year commitment.

For most of the next 12 years, Andre lived in a floating pen during the summer months, since that was when the harbor was the busiest, and was set free for the remainder of the year. This would give Andre the chance to return to the wild if he wanted.

During the summer, as Harry would put Andre through his growing routine of tricks at dinnertime, he noticed that people were gathering along the waterfront to watch, and as the summers progressed, the crowd increased. Word was spreading about the seal that performed in Rockport Harbor every evening at 7:00.

Harry was constantly in awe of Andre's intelligence and often came home exclaiming about some amazing thing Andre had done. Occasionally Harry would travel a little during the summer and ask me if I

wouldn't mind feeding Andre while he was away. I was more than happy to do this and really quite pleased that he trusted me to. I would go through the entire ritual I had watched him go through hundreds of times –

Twice a day it was down cellar to the freezer to pry 8 lbs of whole herring off the block of frozen fish and put them in the plastic bucket. Up the stairs to the kitchen sink to fill the bucket with warm water. Once the fish were thawed, drain the water, leave a couple of them whole, slice the rest into 1" pieces, and out the door. Andre would launch himself onto the platform of his pen, eagerly craning his neck as I got out of the car and headed to the skiff.

Splash! into the water he would go, then back up on the platform as I rowed out to him. "Hello Andre" I would say as I clumsily landed the skiff, and wondered if he thought, oh no, not her again. I would always enter his pen cautiously remembering Harry's words, "Andre is a wild animal, and wild animals can be unpredictable." But in only a moment, the look on Andre's face said, "well, what do you want me to do first?" So we would start the routine of shooting baskets; dancing; jumping through the bicycle tire; posing, blowing the whistle and playing dead, just to name a few. When the fish were gone, I would put the empty bucket down on the platform so he could check it for himself.

Then he would do little things that suggested he wanted me to stay and keep him company for a while. He would look at me and slowly pull his head back into his neck wrinkles, wait for a moment or two, then pop out at me, as though he was trying to scare me. So I would pretend to be startled. The more I laughed, the more he'd act up. He'd grab a rope and slat it around, or push the basketball up onto the platform and look at me as if to say, come on! Let's play! So I'd throw the ball in the water, and he'd shoot a basket, bring it back to me and, I'd tell him he was wonderful and maybe ask for a kiss. It was always a wet and salty kiss, and his whiskers felt like plastic. Then I would turn the bucket over and sit on it for a while to keep him company, and he would just float and close his eyes and pretend to doze. But the minute I got up to leave, he would start swimming around again.

It was difficult to leave him because it was just so obvious he truly enjoyed the company... as did I.

During his months of freedom in 1973, Andre got into a bunch of mischief which convinced Harry that he needed to do something about Andre's freedom. When he wasn't confined to his pen, it seemed he was either swamping someone's dinghy, pulling at oars, or pulling flippers off unsuspecting scuba divers. I think the final straw was when he capsized a canoe with two people in it. Shortly after, the New England Aquarium was contacted and a winter plan was established: Come November, Andre would be flown by Downeast Airlines to Boston and take up residency at the aquarium. In April he would be released in Marblehead harbor, 180 miles south of Rockport...

a harbor he had visited, and returned from, on his own, about ten years earlier.

For the next 11 years, news of his annual trek spread nationwide and beyond. The phone would be ringing off the hook with calls from people who had caught a glimpse of him along the way and wanted to let us know. Andre's life was one exciting event after another.

In 1974 the National Marine Fisheries Service descended on Harry informing him that he was in violation of the Marine Mammals Protection Act passed in 1972. The fact that he released Andre each spring and then "recaptured him" made it illegal. The media found this confrontation between an innocent seal and the big bad feds irresistible, and letters began pouring in.

A Seal Called Andre was published in 1975, the same year he swam home with a treble hook attached to a 1-pound jig lodged in his lip. Surgeons from the aquarium came up and removed it successfully.

In 1978 the Andre statue was created by artist, Jane Wasey, and unveiled by Andre himself with over 1000 people in attendance

1979 was a big year. In the spring, Andre made the 180 mile swim from Marblehead to Rockport in a record time of 65 hours!

Then Governor Joseph Brennan made the mistake of saying that the Maine media was more interested in stories on Andre, than in the "real" issues of the day. He got so much flak from newspeople and Andre fans, he journeyed to Rockport to apologize to Andre in person.

In the fall, Andre and Harry were dual recipients of the Chamber's "Townsperson Award" and they went to the Whitehall Inn to receive their award – the first time Andre had been on an indoor stage.

In 1980 Andre was 19 and I was 26 when he was the ringbearer for my wedding which took place on the float at the Marine Park. He retrieved the rings on cue from my brother who was waiting underwater across the crick. We had a lot of fun rehearsing for that day, and Andre did everything perfectly.

In 1981 Andre began the first of four winters at the Mystic Marine Life Museum in Mystic CT and in the spring swam 230 miles from Provincetown to Rockport

In April, 1985 Andre made his final swim home from Provincetown, and the following December, after refusing to eat for 11 days at the aquarium, Harry drove to Mystic and brought Andre home in the car. Andre was free that last winter of his life, and died early in the summer of 1986 shortly after losing a fight with a young bull seal in his own Rockport harbor.

I'd like to end with a short quote by Harry from the 7th chapter of the book, which goes like this:

"I don't expect I'll ever learn all there is to know about Andre, but certainly my long association with harbor seals has confirmed my youthful conviction that animals are well worth knowing."

Hollywood takes liberties with story of Maine seal

By **RAY ROUTHIER**

Staff Writer

Andre, Maine's most celebrated harbor seal, is being portrayed by a sea lion in a major Hollywood film.

And, in typical Tinsel Town fashion, the movie producers are substituting the Pacific Coast of Canada for Andre's Rockport Harbor splashing grounds. The story of Andre's 25-year relationship with his trainer, the late Harry Goodridge, has also been spiced up to include bad guys and an attempt on Andre's life.

The film, called "Andre," stars Keith Carradine as Harry Goodridge and Chelsea Field as his wife, Thalice. Financed by Paramount Pictures and Turner Pictures Worldwide, the film is being shot now around Vancouver, British Columbia. A late-summer release is planned.

"The story itself is kind of made up," Stephen A. Goodridge, Harry's son, said Thursday. "People rejected the authentic story."

The real Andre was known for

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File photo

Andre the seal is being portrayed by a sea lion in a film being shot in British Columbia instead of the authentic Rockport locale.