November 2015

Ruth Sexton Sargent Correspondence

Ruth Sexton Sargent
Dorothy Holder Jones
Maine State Library

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalmaine.com/maine_writers_correspondence

Recommended Citation
Sargent, Ruth Sexton; Jones, Dorothy Holder; and Maine State Library, "Ruth Sexton Sargent Correspondence" (2015). Maine Writers Correspondence. 493.
http://digitalmaine.com/maine_writers_correspondence/493

This Text is brought to you for free and open access by the Maine State Library Special Collections at Maine State Documents. It has been accepted for inclusion in Maine Writers Correspondence by an authorized administrator of Maine State Documents. For more information, please contact statedocs@maine.gov.
SARGENT, SEXTON RUTH
Lives in Peaks Island
May 27, 1969

Miss Ruth Sexton Sargent
Peaks Island
Maine 04108

Dear Miss Sargent:

How nice of you to write about your book! We have already made Abbie's acquaintance, and are delighted that her story has been put into permanent form.

We should like very much to have a copy for the Maine Author Collection. Perhaps you and your co-author know of this permanent exhibit of Maine books. Most of them are inscribed presentation copies, and we also collect biographical and critical material about Maine writers, which is of great value and interest to students and researchers.

We do hope that you and Dorothy Holder Jones will want to inscribe a copy of ABbie Burgess for the collection, and may we have also a little biographical information about you both?

Our best wishes to Abbie, and may the book have a very warm reception.

Sincerely yours

hmj
In Charge of
Maine Author Collection

By the way, has someone already written to you that Wilbert and Edward Rowe Snow are not brothers?
Dear Librarian:

The enclosed will no doubt be of interest to you as it is a local setting and true. I want to take this opportunity to thank you for the many years of fine reading which I have enjoyed and trust the books I sent a few years ago were of help to other readers.

A great deal of my research was done from the many books you sent at my request.

I do not know whether you purchase direct from the publishers or from the authors. I will have a good number to sell and autograph.

With deep thanks for your help.

Most sincerely,

Ruth Sargent
Feaks Island
Maine 04108
A former mid-westerner who lost her heart to Maine a decade and a half ago, Ruth Sexton Sargent has spent nearly all that time on Peaks Island where she enjoys an entire view of Portland harbor from her windows. She terms Peaks the most beautiful spot in the world.

Free lance photo-journalism for the Portland newspapers led to sales of magazine articles and stories for children. They have appeared in Yankee, Downeast, Motorboating, Hi-Lights for Children, and The Christian Science Monitor among others.

When she began her story of Abbie Burgess, whom she had discovered in many of the coastal and lighthouse books, she sent several chapters to a pen pal of several years, Dorothy Holder Jones, for an opinion. Dorothy had 5 teen age novels to her credit, plus an agent and publisher. Mrs. Jones was so enthused over the heroine, setting, and story she suggested collaboration.

After 18 months of intensive research—Mrs. Sargent in Maine and Mrs. Jones in the Archives and Library of Congress in Washington, D.C.—writing back and forth many times weekly, the book was finally finished and accepted for publication by Funk and Wagnalls. Not until then did the co-authors finally meet when the Jones family spent a week on Peaks Island in 1967.

Ruth lives with her son Norman, who served as marine consultant for the book and is a student at the Portland School of Fine & Applied Arts. Her other son Scott is also a sea enthusiast and avid beachcomber. A married daughter and two grand children, also islanders, live a block away.

Dorothy is a member of the Childrens' Book Guild in Washington and on the staff of teachers for the Dixie Council of Writers at St. Simon's Island, Georgia. She lives in Falls Church, Virginia with her husband and daughter, Vickie, who are both employed at CAB in Washington. Her son, Byran is stationed with the Army in New Mexico.
Coauthors of a new book about Maine's Matinicus Island never met until after their joint effort was accepted for publication.

The writers are Mrs. Ruth Sargent of Island Avenue, Peaks Island, and Mrs. Dorothy Hilder Jones of Falls Church, Va., whose book, "Abbie Burgess: Lighthouse Heroine," will be published Tuesday by Funk & Wagnalls.

Their acquaintance began as pen pals when Mrs. Sargent, a free-lance writer, read a magazine article by Mrs. Jones on the trials of writing for trade publications with children underfoot. "She mentioned checks arriving at the crucial time," says Ruth, who has received checks for her writing from children's magazines and "Downeast, Yankee" and "Motorboating" magazines, "It rang a chord."

THE MAIN Free lancer dropped a note to the Virginia writer, and that started a correspondence in which the two compared notes and offered each other encouragement. Ruth confided she had an idea in the back of her mind that might work out as a book for teens, but that she didn't know anything about preparing it or approaching publishers.

Dorothy, with five children's books to her credit, knew the ropes. She also knew that a first book was hard to sell. She suggested they collaborate as she already had an agent and a publisher.

"She also had access to rich sources of research in Washington — the National Archives and the Library of Congress," Ruth said.

Ruth was to plunge into research on the Maine end, at the Maine Historical Society library and the Portland library.

THE SUBJECT was to be an almost-unsung Maine heroine, Abbie Burgess, who went to Matinicus Rock in 1853 at the age of 14. She was the daughter of the lighthouse keeper.

When Abbie was 15, her father sailed to Rockland for supplies and was cut off for a month. "The Rock" was completely uninhabited except for Abbie, her invalid mother and six younger children. The young girl tended the two lights during tremendous storms, cared for her mother and coped with near-starvation until rescue came.

Ruth had read of Abbie in capsule in Edward Roe Snow's "Women of the Sea" and became intrigued with the story. "It fastened in my mind, and after that I'd see Abbie mentioned, but only briefly, in other books on Maine."

WHEN RUTH really started digging, she found that "writing a biography is really detective work in its most pleasant form.

"Several times we had a good lead on something, then found it vanished without a trace," she said.

Ruth traced and wrote to Abbie's descendants, "and they," she said, "would refer me to someone else."

Her long chain of research-correspondence had an interesting climax when one of her contacts, who knew of her interest in the 19th century Maine heroine, referred her to Abbie's great-grand-daughter, Mrs. Lois Marshall, Deake St., South Portland. Mrs. Marshall had just discovered a treasure trove of "Abbie" mementos in the family attic.

"It was almost like meeting Abbie herself," Ruth said. "I saw her family Bible, silver albums and notes."

BY THIS TIME, the letters, with data and photographic material, were flying between Maine and Virginia several times weekly.

The two Abbie enthusiasts did not meet, however, until the book was finished and accepted for publication.

Dorothy, who never had seen the rockbound coast of Maine, came and spent a week on Peaks Island last summer. The two friends who had never met had much in common — a book they had produced. But it had yet to materialize.

"Now we have the dust jackets," Ruth reports. "And I'm waiting for reviews from the National Fisherman, Downeast and Yankee magazines to send along to Dorothy."

That episode in this unusual pen pal friendship should occur next month.
May 12, 1969

Miss. Ruth A. Hazelton
Augusta, Maine

Dear Miss. Hazelton:

I am wondering if you would be interested in a reviewer's copy of my first book which has just been published by Funk & Wagnalls. Since it is a true story of a lighthouse keeper's daughter on Matinicus Rock, Maine a century ago it should be of great interest to young readers in our state.

The book was co-authored with Dorothy Holder Jones who has 5 other teen girl's books in print, also published by Funk & Wagnalls. Miss. Lysla Abbot and Mrs. Marianna Rowe of the Portland Public Library have both been reviewing it the past few weeks.

If you are interested, I would be most happy to have a copy sent to you.

Most sincerely,

Ruth Sexton Sargent

(Peaks Island, Maine 04108)
June 9, 1969

Mrs. F.W. Jacobs  
Maine State Library  
Augusta, Maine 04330

Dear Mrs. Jacobs:

I would be delighted to send you an autographed copy of "Abbie" but it would take a lot of shifting back and forth to have Dorothy Jones autograph it too, seeing she lives in Virginia. I hope the one signature will suffice.

I am enclosing a bit of information about each of us and we feel very honored to be included in your records. I am sending off a big batch of books tomorrow to be returned to your library and I will put Abbie in a separate envelope with your name on it.

Yes, I discovered the error in the relationship mentioned about the Snows. That's the tricky part of writing, you get so close to the material for so long these little things slip by you sometimes. But thanks for reminding me.

Most sincerely,

Ruth Sexton Sargent

Encl:

(Peaks Island, Maine) 04108
Abbie Burgess was only fourteen when she first stepped upon Matinicus Rock, off the coast of Maine, but she was no ordinary girl, as this story of her first eight years there amply testifies.

In 1853, Samuel Burgess was appointed Keeper of the lighthouse on Matinicus Rock and the family went to live on this barren and lonely station. Since his wife was not well, Mr. Burgess counted on Abbie to take care of the household and her three little sisters, and on his son Benjamin to help him in tending the whale-oil lamps in the twin towers of the lighthouse. But within a year, Benjy left to join a fishing fleet, and Abbie was now the only one her father could count on. Despite its isolation, Abbie loved the "Rock" and the sea around her, and she gladly added Benjy’s chores to her own. Her devotion to duty was matched by her courage. During the long and violent storms of 1856 and 1857, her father was unable to return from the mainland, where he had gone for supplies, and each time Abbie, singlehanded, kept the lights burning to save ships from disaster on Maine’s rockbound coast.

Accounts of Abbie’s bravery have been related in many books; even in her own time, her name became a legend among seamen and throughout all of New England. The authors felt that such a heroine richly deserved a book of her own.

Jacket by Joseph Cellini

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

DOROTHY HOLDER JONES attended schools in Texas, Kansas, and Georgia, and studied commercial art at Georgia Evening College in Atlanta. After marriage, she turned to free-lance writing. She now resides with her family in Falls Church, Virginia. Mrs. Jones is a member of the Children’s Book Guild of Washington, D.C. Among her previous books—all novels for girls—are:

AN UNDERSTANDING HEART
DRESS PARADE
THOSE GRESHAM GIRLS
THE OLDEST ONE

RUTH SEXTON SARGENT has lived in Maine for thirteen years, is devoted to island living, and is thoroughly familiar with boats and the sea. Her research for this book consisted of interviewing the great-granddaughter of Abbie Burgess, as well as experts in various fields, and of reading scores of books on Maine. She and her family live on Peak’s Island, Maine.
OTHER BIOGRAPHIES
Of Distinguished People Whose Lives Will Inspire Today's Teen-Agers and Young Adults

by Mildred Allen Butler
TWICE QUEEN OF FRANCE: Anne of Brittany

by Lois Hobart
ACTRESS IN SPITE OF HERSELF: The Life of Anna Cora Mowatt

by Laura Kerr
Patriot's Lady: The Life of Sarah Livingston Jay

by Virginia Frances Voight
WONDER OF HIS WORLD: Charles Willson Peale
LOUISA: The Life of Mrs. John Quincy Adams
FOOTLIGHTS TO FAME: The Life of Fanny Kemble

by Evelyn Wells
UNCAS: Sachem of the Wolf People
MOHEGAN CHIEF: The Story of Harold Tantaquidgeon

by Leonard Wibberley
CARLOS P. ROMULO: Voice of Freedom

by ZEBULON PIKE: Soldier and Explorer