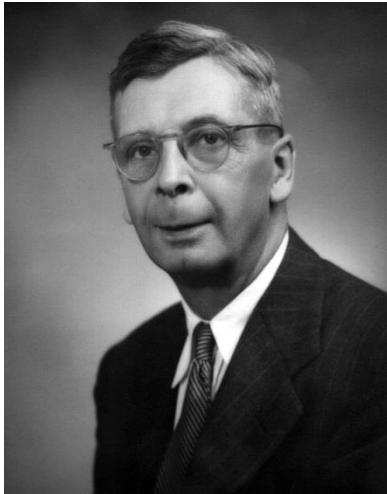


STORIES OF A STOREKEEPER

FDR Arranged First Flight Over Eastport

By Gerald White

Sitting before his old fashioned roll top desk, Edward L Wadsworth, owner and manager of the nation's easternmost store, can spin dozens of tales of people and events that have been tied in with Eastport's history. Ned Wadsworth's firm, S. L. Wadsworth & Son, is not only the easternmost in the country, jutting out into the waters of Passamaquoddy Bay on the city's principal wharf, but it is also one of the oldest marine stores in the entire country.



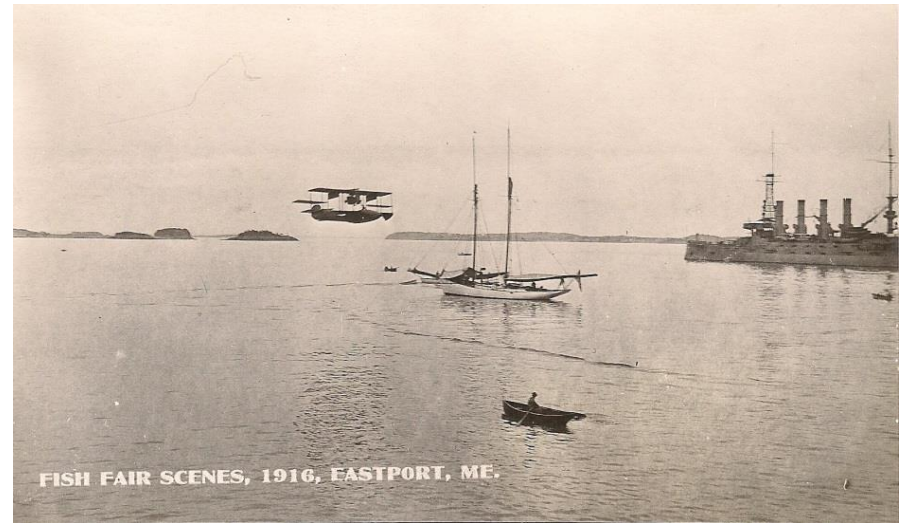
Among all the stories that Ned Wadsworth can tell of Eastport events, these two are among his favorites:

One happened in the summer of 1916 when the USS North Carolina was anchored in Eastport harbor, to participate in the Fish Fair activities then being held. Lieutenant Louis Maxfield, one of the young naval aviators aboard the North Carolina asked Wadsworth if he'd "like to go up." Enthusiastically Ned allowed that he'd like to fly over Eastport.

Both passenger and pilot were dismayed when the ship's skipper vetoed the idea. Still dressed in his flying gear he'd donned in anticipation of his flight, Wadsworth went on deck to see his new friend take off when he was greeted with: "Why, Ned, what're you doing in that navy outfit?"

Turning, he was astonished to see his old boyhood chum, Franklin D. Roosevelt, then assistant secretary of the Navy. Explaining that he'd

planned to fly with Lieutenant Maxfield until the project was nixed by the ship's captain, Roosevelt said "Go ahead I'll fix it up with the captain." Thus did Ned Wadsworth become the first Eastporter to fly over Eastport.



The other story concerns a phone conversation with a friend in Bangor during one of Maine's exceptionally rainy seasons. Basements all over the state were flooded, and as Ned spoke he reported that the rains were pretty bad in Eastport, too. "In fact," said Wadsworth, "the water is 18 feet deep under my office right now." For a moment or two the Bangor man was stunned with the severity of the storm raging in Eastport. Then, sheepishly, he recalled that Wadsworth's office always had water under it, anywhere from 4 to 28 feet, depending on the tide.



When founded, the Wadsworth store was a typical ship's chandlery, catering to the sailing vessels that plied Eastern Maine waters. All sailing ship needs were carried: groceries, tobacco, marine hardware, canvas for sails, rope and other ship staples.

Eastport, being the birthplace of the sardine industry, used to see a lot of sailing ships in its harbor, and they used, of course, a great lot of rope. And Wadsworth's has sold rope since long before little Hector was a pup. In fact, S. L. Wadsworth & Son is the oldest customer on the books of the Plymouth Cordage Company. Through sailing vessels relative curiosities in Down East waters now, Wadsworth still sells a lot of Plymouth rope.

It has survived the number of fires, and even violent storms have not been able to paralyze the business. The hurricane in the fall of 1945, which even Ned Wadsworth admits was a "bad storm," washed away so much of the wharf that a door which opens from the store on to the wharf opened instead to a great void -- and an angry, churning sea. So it was that a salesman came to Eastport to call on Wadsworth's.

Observing the store was swaying crazily on the 30 foot pilings the salesman hesitated, and suggested he could come back another day. With casual nonchalance Ned laid a board across the gaping hole and calmly led the salesman into his office. "Never wrote an order so fast in his life," Ned now observes mildly.



Old records of the firm indicate that it was established sometime between 1812 and 1821 when Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's uncle Samuel Bartlett Wadsworth, founded the store sometime after his arrival in Eastport in 1812.

In 1862 George Richie, a brother-in-law of the founder, became a partner in the business, and the name of the establishment was changed to Wadsworth and Richie.

Upon Richie's death in 1867, Samuel Longfellow Wadsworth, the founder's son was taken into the business, and the name again changed, to S. B. Wadsworth & Son. Upon the death of the founder in 1870, the firm's name was again changed, to S. L. Wadsworth.

Thirteen years later the present name was adopted when Frank Tenney Wadsworth entered into partnership with his father. "S. L." died in 1906

and his son operated the business alone until 1915 when his son, the present owner, joined the business. A veteran of World War I, Ned Wadsworth became manager of the business in 1927, and sole owner in 1945. A year later his son, Edward G., joined the firm, following three years' war service overseas.



Early in his business career Ned Wadsworth came to know a group of comic strip artists who had established a summer colony at nearby Meddybemps Lake. Among that zany band of comics was Clare Briggs of "When a Feller Needs a Friend" fame; H. T. Webster who created "Casper Milquetoast;" the "Toonerville Trolleys" famed Fontaine Fox and Bob Brinkerhoff, creator of "Little Mary Mix-up."

Since Wadsworth's wharf is the only one in Eastport where boats can tie up while their owners go ashore on shopping expeditions, Ned usually meets everyone of importance who visits town. And he meets them in informal, casual ways. He likes to recall the time when Charles W Nash, founder of the Nash Motor Car Company, stopped off and chatted briefly. His eye caught a tricky knife sharpener he thought he'd like to own. Ned promise to order one and send it to him. Not knowing the price off hand, Ned arrange to send Nash the bill later on. Nash was reassuring saying that his credit reputation was pretty good.

Another time, in the mid-thirties, William Phillips, Ambassador to Italy, was visiting President Roosevelt at nearby Campobello Island. Ned took Phillips out to Quoddy Village to show him work in progress on the ill-

fated Tidal Power Project, and a working model of the proposed hydro-electric plant. Phillips insisted that he go incognito. Days later, Army officers and other high officials were furious at Ned for failing to introduce his distinguished guest. Wadsworth blandly turned aside their complaints with the observation that the idea was Phillips', not his own.



On the way back to Eastport from that incident, Phillips was taken to a spot in Eastport known as Smith's Corner and urged to get out of the car and look around. For perhaps 10 minutes he gazed at the broad sweep of the Chamcook mountains on the New Brunswick horizon, the far reaches of Passamaquoddy Bay, dotted with a score of picturesque islands, and then he remarked to his host that in all his travels all over the world he had seen few spots that were as beautiful.

Ned Wadsworth feels pretty much the same way. From his office window he has a superb view of Passamaquoddy Bay, and scarcely a fine day passes that he doesn't drive to Smith's Corner on his way to the office, just to look again at the familiar scene he enjoys so much.

One of the things Ned Wadsworth likes best to do, and does very well, too, is to lean back in his chair and start reciting an entertaining yarn of early and sometimes not so early Eastport, prefacing his story with the question:

"Did I ever tell you about the time.....?" From then on it's Ned's story, and anyone who has heard him spin a tale, will tell you it'll be a good one.

