

Bangor Tarratine Club Owner Of Three Prized Early Indian Portraits

Hardy Oils Catch Mood Of The Past

Three beautiful and unusual portraits hang in the reading room at the Tarratine Club in Bangor. They are likenesses of Penobscot Indians who were personal friends of the 19th-century artist who painted them, Jeremiah P. Hardy.

The thick-set man whose black eyes sparkle from a large face with high cheek-bones, a small mouth, and a roman nose is John Neptune, who was a governor of the Penobscot Tribe for many years. A close friend of the Hardys he was a strong, handsome man, noted for his wit and intellect among both whites and Indians.

The portrait hanging beside



JOHN NEPTUNE

his is of his beautiful daughter, Sarah Polasses. She posed in her tribal finery, wearing a red gown set off with ribbons and silver brooches, and a man's tall heaver hat banded with silver and plumed with ostrich feathers. Across the room hangs the portrait of Sarah's mother, the bitter, sarcastic old woman whose name, Molly Molasses, contradicted her character and conduct.

Fannie Hardy Eckstorm of Brewer, a great-grandniece of Jeremiah P. Hardy, tells in her book about "Old John Neptune" that he was a great hunter, notable orator, and a man of courage, endurance, and intelligence. He would come to the cabin of her great-grandfather in Brewer and sit by the fire for hours chatting familiarly. Old Molly Molasses came also. She was rugged, cross-grained, and faithful to John Neptune, defying the conventions of the generally chaste, virtuous Penobscot people to bear him many children out of wedlock.

Little did the orthodox Hardys know that John Neptune and Molly Molasses, though baptized by the French, were feared and respected for their witchcraft and supernatural powers. They both were shamans, or "m'teoulin", whose magic, the Indians believed, gave them power to communicate with demons, ghosts and ancestors.

The Neptune family can be traced back to the 17th century. Its members served as chiefs and signers of documents for more than 200 years, and there were Micmac and Passamaquoddy Neptunes as well as Penobscots.

Elected in 1816, John Neptune was only lieutenant governor of the tribe, but he exceeded his superior in personality and

authority to wield great influence over his people.

The fantastic stories about the magic powers of "old John Neptune", told to Mrs. Eckstorm by the Indians, would have been discounted by the Hardys, who thought they knew John Neptune well. But occult tribal magic and the identity of the shamans were never revealed to the white settlers in that century.

Not only do the stories record John's own mysterious feats, but also the feats of his ancestors were attributed to him. The powers of the shamans were hereditary, and the Indians, having no method to record, or sense of the passage of time, "telescoped" together

the lives and feats of fathers and sons for generations.

Little is known of Old Molly, other than that she, like John Neptune, was feared by the tribe for her magic powers. Her death was obscure, but the beautiful daughter, Sarah Polasses, married Dr. Attean Lola and lived a comfortable and quiet life.

Looking at these paintings, one can imagine and wonder at the strange lives of the early settlers who sat at the fire with these handsome and friendly Indians. They got along well with the Penobscots and Passamaquoddies, but they knew no more than they were told, and that was little, of the mystic Indian tribal life.



SALLY POLASSES



MOLLY MOLASSES

In Brief

The Reserve Officers Training Course at Bangor High School, which was started in 1861 and which became a part of the armed services in 1919, is the oldest high school course of its kind in the country.

The Bangor Daily News first missed a day of publication on December 31, 1962 after over 125 years of continuous service. That day snowfall buried cars in and practically all activity in the city ceased.

The new Bangor High School building on Outer Broadway is said to be the largest secondary school installation in the state.

Maine State Museum

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Tuesday, September 14, 1999

Donna M. Loring, Representative Penobscot Tribes
55 North Front Street
Richmond, Maine 04357

Dear Rep. Donna M. Loring:

Enclosed is some information I uncovered this week concerning the portraits of Molly Molasses, Sarah Molasses and Captain Neptune.

The portraits were done by artist Jeremiah Pearson Hardy (1800 - 1888). Hardy also painted two portraits in the State House collections.

The Bangor Historical Society presently has an exhibition of Jeremiah P. Hardy paintings on display until December. They include the three Native American portraits "on loan" from the Bangor Tarratine Club. I spoke to Norma, a curatorial assistant of the Bangor Historical Society. Norma spoke highly in particular of the paintings of Molly and Sarah, both wearing hats. All three portraits were painted from life, not copies from another source.

I thought you should know this latest information of the locations of the Penobscot portraits. Although she did not have the paperwork during our phone conversation, the curator believed the paintings were "on loan" from the Tarratine Club of Bangor but the original building was now all business offices. She was not able to tell me how and where they were kept before being loaned. She added the Penobscot Chief also knows about these paintings.

The Bangor Historical Society is open M-F 12-4PM. Saturdays by appointment (942-5766). We thought you might want to further inquire about these authentic portraits, their future, in view of the current Resolve L.D.1898 to have Maine Indian portraits represented in the State House Collection.


Deanna Bonner-Ganter

Acting Curator of Fine Art, Graphic Art and Archives

cc. Rep. Donald G. Soctomah

Rep
DONNA LOVING
For your interest
cleaner
Banner-Glaster
09/16/99

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Jeremiah Pearson Hardy: *Portrait of a Community*

JUNE 5 - DECEMBER 11, 1999

Front Cover
25
Park Holland
1752-1844
By Jeremiah Pearson Hardy
Oil on Wood. 1840, 30 1/2 x 17 1/2
Bangor Historical Society



Isabel Graham Eaton 1845-1920

Isabel Graham Eaton was born in Bangor in 1845 the eldest daughter of Isabella Dutton and the Reverend Joshua Eaton. Her father was a missionary for islands in the Penobscot Bay. She was educated in the Bangor public schools. She received her instruction in portraiture from Jeremiah Pearson Hardy. Later she went to Boston to train as a lithographic artist. She also studied with John Paul Selinger of Boston. Isabel opened a portrait studio in Newton, Massachusetts. She returned to Bangor in 1890, and continued to work as a portrait artist. In 1896, she joined the staff of the Bangor Commercial, working for many years as a newspaper writer and a pen artist. Her writing included fiction and poetry.¹⁵⁰

1. *Molly Molasses 1775-1867*

Painted by Isabel Graham Eaton
Signed upper left, "I. G. EATON/1894"
Oil on canvas mounted on aluminum, 1894,
33 1/8 x 27 1/8
Tarratine Club, Bangor

Molly's real name was probably Mary Belassee Neola. Born to Penobscot parents in 1775. She gained her reputation as a honest, tough, independent woman. She was granted free passage aboard steamers on the Penobscot River. General Samuel Veazie issued orders to let Molly ride on his Bangor-Old Town railroad. She was considered a great shaman and it was "believed she possessed 'm'teulin' or magic."¹⁵¹ People attempted to stay on her good side, pressing coins in her hands in the streets. Next to the tribe's governor, she was the most influential member of the Penobscot Indian Nation. According to Fannie Hardy Eckstorm, her people believed, "If she said you would die, you would die... The tribe actually was afraid of her and took care not to cross her, even white people, particularly those with guilty consciences, preferred not to anger her."¹⁵² Molly Molasses died in January 1868.

This portrait was painted twenty-seven years after the subject's death. Eaton probably painted this from a photograph.

¹⁵⁰ Vatne, 13.

¹⁵¹ Eckstorm, *Old John*, 21.

¹⁵² Eckstorm, 21.

17

Mr. Solomon Hardy
1774-1852

Oil on canvas, circa 1820s, 32 x 27
Colby College Art Museum

Jeremiah Pearson Hardy's father was Solomon Hardy. In 1811 Solomon Hardy and his wife Anne Greenleaf Pearson moved from Pelham, New Hampshire, to Hampden, Maine, with their three children, Jeremiah P., Jonathan T. and Mary Ann. They settled near the Lower Corner where Solomon made a tan-yard and carried on his trade of tanning fine leather.

Eckstorm felt that the paintings of Hardy's parents had been interpretive... "that the artist is not concerned with accessories or textures, they barely exist; everything centers upon the face.... the face stands out, strong-featured, like his son's, a wide, firm, but sensitive mouth, a broad chin and eyes that still look at you as you look into them."¹²⁵

18

Lt. Governor John Neptune

Oil on canvas, circa 1835-1840, 33 x 27
Tarratine Club, Bangor

John Attean was elected chief of the Penobscot Nation and John Neptune his subordinate. They were called governor and lieutenant governor. Neptune was considered a shaman of the tribe, "who could make his voice heard a hundred miles away."¹²⁶ In 1832, the tribe split and half the tribe moved to Brewer with Neptune. They maintained the Brewer branch for twenty years. They lived near the Hardy's, and became good friends.

There are two oil portraits of Neptune done by Hardy. Fannie Hardy Eckstorm recalled "that the later portrait shows the Governor old and haggard, too much so, said my father. It was only a sketch, made at a single sitting, wrote the artist's daughter,

he was superstitious and feared the Great Spirit might frown upon his posing. Father told us that he got much information about Indian legends while he was working."¹²⁷

19

Sarah Polasses

Oil on canvas, circa 1828, 31 x 25
Tarratine Club, Bangor

Sarah Polasses was a Penobscot. Her father was John Neptune and her mother was Mary Balassee Necola, known as Molly Molasses. Attian Lola married the beautiful Sarah, after a prominent Bangor man had deflowered her (he avoided Molly when he could and paid blackmail when he couldn't). Although she did not inherit her parent's shamanistic powers, she lived comfortably and grew stout.¹²⁸

Sarah Polasses is a masterly portrait, a striking picture of an Indian beauty arrayed in her finery. Both portraits of Governor Neptune and Sarah Polasses hung in Hardy's studio until after his death when Anna sold them to the Tarratine Club.

Sarah's picture accurately represents the dress of Indian women of the time. Her ornaments-wampum, cross, and beaver hat vividly illustrate years of cultural upheaval in Native American life. Wampum evolved from being a prestigious commodity indicative of status into a common currency, then dissolved to jewelry. Beaver hats, highly fashionable in Europe, created a voracious commercial market for beaver skin that transformed the customs and landscapes of the native peoples. The small cross: is it a sign of Sarah's Christian faith (brought to Maine by Europeans) or just another decorative ornament?¹²⁹

¹²⁵ Eckstorm, 43.

¹²⁶ Fannie Hardy Eckstorm, *Old John Neptune and Other Maine Indian Shamans* (Portland, Maine: The Southworth Anthoensen Press, 1945) 6.

¹²⁷ Eckstorm, 65-66.

¹²⁸ Eckstorm, 22-24.

¹²⁹ Courtesy of Robin Haynes.