

The Gallant Vagabond



THE OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE HENRY BESTON SOCIETY

AUTUMN 2014 EDITION

'The Perfect Home'

McAleer
Collection
donated
to Beston
Society

The Henry Beston Society is pleased to announce that the family of author John McAleer donated its Beston/Coatsworth/McAleer Collection to the Cape Cod nonprofit on May 30.

The collection includes correspondence between Dr. McAleer and Coatsworth, a.k.a. Mrs. Henry Beston, dating from Nov. 17, 1970 to Feb. 1, 1977, along with Dr. McAleer's Beston collection of books and memorabilia.

Dr. McAleer, who died in 2003, was the best-selling author of over a dozen books, including the Pulitzer Prize-nominated biography, *Ralph Waldo Emerson: Days of Encounter*. Dr. McAleer wrote critically-acclaimed studies of Thoreau, Dreiser, the Edgar Award-winning *Rex Stout: A Biography*, and

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"I know my father (John McAleer, pictured above at the Fo'castle in 1971) is delighted that we have found the perfect home and caretaker for the Beston-Coatsworth-McAleer collection! Thank you for keeping this important part of American history alive."

— Andrew McAleer

**DOCUMENTARY
FILM PROJECT**

Campaign
'Kicks' off
at Chatham
screening
Orpheum rough
cut program,
online drive set for
holiday weekend

The Henry Beston Society's documentary film project has been coming together piece by piece, and now there's enough for the public to view on the silver screen.

Fresh off a rough cut screening of film segments in front of 55 people at the Newburyport Film Festival's WIP (Work in Progress) Workshop at the Screening Room Theater in Newburyport, Mass., on Sept. 20, the movie showcase now shifts to Cape Cod for Columbus Day weekend, when producer Don Wilding and director Christopher Seufert (on Mooncusser Films) will host a rough cut screening and Q&A session at the Chatham Orpheum Theater, 637 Main St. in Chatham, on Cape Cod.

The program will be held on Saturday, Oct. 11 at 10 a.m. Admission is free. Doors open at 9 a.m., and coffee, pastries, breakfast sandwiches, and Outermost House theme merchandise will be available for purchase.

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SUPPORT PROVIDED BY:

Attorney Karen Underhill

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Massachusetts area lecture/ rough cut screening schedule



■ **Saturday, Oct. 11 at 10 a.m.:** Special rough cut screening presentation at the Chatham Orpheum Theater, 637 Main St., Chatham. (508) 945-4900 chathamorpheum.org

■ **Thursday, Oct. 16 at 7 p.m.**
Holliston Public Library, 752 Washington St., Holliston. www.hollistonlibrary.org

■ **Wednesday, Oct. 22 at 11 a.m.**
Cambridge Center for Adult Education, 56 Brattle St., Cambridge. Pre-registration required. www.ccae.org

■ **Wednesday, Nov. 5 at 7 p.m.**
Norfolk Public Library, 139 Main St., Norfolk. <http://library.virtualnorfolk.org>

■ **Friday, Nov. 21 at 10:30 a.m.**
Eastham Council on Aging, 1405 Nauset Road, North Eastham. Please RSVP at (508) 255-6164.

■ **Tuesday, Nov. 25 at 2 p.m.**
Cornerstone at Milford, 11 Birch St., Milford. cornerstonemilford.com

■ **Wednesday, March 11 at 7 p.m.**
Brookline Adult Education, 115 Greenough St., Brookline. www.brooklineadulted.org

McAleer: Scholar's collection donated to Beston Society

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the definitive novel of the Korean War, *Unit Pride*. A professor of English Literature at Harvard and then Boston College for more than half a century and, a permanent fellow at Durham University, Dr. McAleer, at the time of his death, was completing the definitive biography of Jane Austen. His essay, *Solar Electricity*, was featured in the book, *Heaven Is Under Our Feet*.

For many years he taught the American Personal Narrative course at Boston College -- a course structured around the works of Henry Beston. He was also a past president of the Thoreau Society.

"I know my father is delighted that we have found the perfect home and caretaker for the Beston-Coatsworth-McAleer collection!" wrote Andrew McAleer, the author's son, in a letter last week to the Henry Beston Society. "Thank you for keeping this important part of American history alive."



Elizabeth Coatsworth, a native of Hingham, was a writer of fiction and poetry for children and adults. She won the 1931 Newbury Medal from the American Library Association recognizing *The Cat Who Went to Heaven* as the previous year's "most distinguished contribution to American literature for children." In 1968 she was a highly commended runner-up for the biennial, international Hans Christian Andersen Award for children's writers.

For many years (John McAleer, pictured above) taught the American Personal Narrative course at Boston College -- a course structured around the works of Henry Beston.

Screening: Chatham event Oct. 11

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The holiday weekend also marks the beginning of a second campaign by the Beston Society on Kickstarter.com, a well-known crowdfunding website. The Beston Society has a goal of raising \$10,000 in 30 days to cover production costs (which includes video services, and fees for actors, clothing, and other props).

The campaign is an all-or-nothing proposal; the target goal (in this case, \$10,000) must be achieved by Nov. 10 to claim the amount pledged.

In 2012, the Beston Society ran a successful Kickstarter campaign, raising \$5,000. This enabled the Beston Society to produce a five-minute video trailer while also collecting enough footage to produce a 10-minute episode from the film. Production of the feature-length project is broken into small fundable sub-projects that will be streamed as "webisodes," while also being used to help in soliciting distribution channels, such as PBS.

Kickstarter campaigns feature a

scale of "Rewards" for those who contribute to the project. Books and other media, along with photography and artwork, will be among the items offered for various levels of contributions.

The rough cut screening at the Newburyport Film Festival was one of two films presented at the WIP Workshop Series, along with another seaside-theme film, *Rise and Fall*, an eight-minute feature by filmmaker Casey Atkins about erosion on Plum Island along the North Shore of Massachusetts.

The presentation included a new episode that focuses on how Henry Beston went from a stint as an ambulance driver for the American Field Service in France during World War I to his recovering from the horrors of the conflict on Cape Cod's Outer Beach.

Support for the Beston Society documentary film project was made possible in part by the Cape Cod Five Cents Savings Bank Charitable Foundation Trust, the Arts Foundation of Cape Cod, Glenn and Sheila Mott, the Inn at the Oaks, Silver Hollow Audio, and Paul Kourlouris.



Entrance to the Henry Beston Society office in North Eastham on Cape Cod.

CONTACT US

- Visit our websites at www.henrybeston.org and www.outermosthousemove.com
- Follow us on Facebook and Twitter.
- Call us at (508) 246-7242.
- E-mail us at henrybestonsociety@yahoo.com
- Mailing address: P.O. Box 407, North Eastham, MA 02651
- Our office is located at Main Street Mercantile Plaza, 3 Main St., Unit 31, in North Eastham (just off Route 6, across from the Fairway Restaurant). Office hours by appointment only.

Thank you to eCape.com/Cape Cod Today for hosting our website since 2002, and to the Cape Cod Times/ capecodonline.com for hosting our blog since 2007.

The Outermost House goes to London

Nearly 5,000 miles of ocean separate the outer beach of Cape Cod and England, but that didn't stop one of the Cape's biggest icons from being featured in the Chelsea Flower Show in London this spring.

Henry Beston's classic book, *The Outermost House*, was front and center in the Massachusetts Garden, an exhibit at the Chelsea Flower Show that was sponsored by the Massachusetts Office of Travel. Designers Susannah Hunter and Catherine MacDonald created a Cape Cod garden, inspired by the beauty of the sand dunes, the coastline and dune shacks of the Cape.

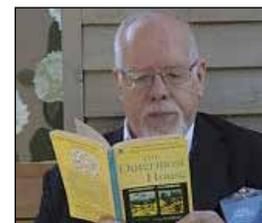


Susannah Hunter

The exhibit also included a worn copy of Beston's book from the collection of the Henry Beston Society. Wendy Northcross of the Cape Cod Chamber of Commerce arranged the loan of the book from the Beston Society, brought it to London, and then returned it to the Cape Cod nonprofit. During this process, *The Outermost House* mingled with folks with ties to the Tracey Beaker series of children's books, a United States Ambassador, and The Beatles.

Hunter, an internationally known designer of handbags, accessories, and furnishings (clients include Nicole Kidman and Uma Thurman), first got the idea for the exhibit after a visit to Provincetown last summer. "There was something so extreme about the beauty and scale of nature there," Hunter said. "I saw the dune shacks there and Rob Costa from Art's Dune Tours gave us some tales of the people who had inhabited them over the years and some history surrounding that."

After returning to the United Kingdom, work



Pop artist Sir Peter Blake reads the Beston Society's copy of *The Outermost House* in London.

began on this concept, and architect Julian Hunter was commissioned to design it. That's when *The Outermost House* entered the picture.

"I showed him pictures of the Provincetown dune shacks and he began his research and quickly discovered *The Outermost House* and was completely inspired by the whole concept of Henry Beston and the house and the fact the house was moved and finally swept away, giving it an almost legendary quality," Hunter recalled. "It was only then that I read the book and thought it was amazing. It should be essential reading for everybody! We then got really lost in that being pivotal to the whole atmosphere and design of the garden."

Quotes from the book were laser-etched on to the steps and posts and the cedar bench inside. "My favorite quote is 'Of the three elemental voices, that of ocean is the most awesome, beautiful and varied,'" Hunter said. "Maybe it's because I was brought up by the sea in Scotland."

Dame Jacqueline Wilson, author of the Tracey Beaker series of books and a one-time frequent visitor to the Cape, took a photo of the book to get a copy. Matthew Barzun, the U.S. Ambassador to the U.K., "was obviously familiar with it as he'd spent every childhood holiday on the Cape," Hunter noted.

Then there was pop artist Sir Peter Blake, best known for co-creating the sleeve design for the Beatles' classic album, *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*.

"Sir Peter Blake was indeed reading (the Beston Society's) copy (of *The Outermost House*) and was fascinated by the idea of the book," Hunter said. "To be honest, I don't think the book has ever had much profile in the U.K., but I'd love to be able to track if there has been an increase in sales here at all, as so many people I spoke to at the show said they were off to buy a copy!"

The Massachusetts Garden received a silver medal placement in the show.

Classrooms head out to the Great Beach

Beston Society executive director Don Wilding will once again be interacting with students from Tahanto Regional High School. Last year, it

NEWS AND NOTES

was at the school in Boylston, Mass. This time, it will be on the Outer Beach of Cape Cod.

For the last couple of years, TRHS faculty members Peter Doherty (English), Steve Pacheco (social studies) and Lisa Sequeira (science) have presided over an interdisciplinary stud, with Henry Beston's *The Outermost House* taking center stage.

Wilding will be leading a walk with the Tahanto students at the Cape Cod National Seashore in mid-October.

It will be Wilding's second seashore walk with students in 2014. In May, Wilding led a group of students from Franklin Pierce University of Rindge, N.H., in a walk at Coast Guard Beach in Eastham. The students were reading Henry Beston's *The Outermost House* as part of their Coastal Ecology class.



Don Wilding of the Henry Beston Society, third from left, leads a walk with students from Franklin Pierce University at Coast Guard Beach, Eastham.

"Thank you so much for taking the time to share your deep knowledge of *The Outermost House* with our class, wrote instructor Brett Amy Thelien in a note to the Beston Society. "Our walk with you added another layer of understanding to the students' reading of Beston, and underscored the dynamic nature of life on the Great Beach. I can't wait for the film!"

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Wilding's *Henry Beston's Cape Cod*

presentation also made its way into the classroom this summer as part of a class for Nauset Continuing Education at the Nauset Middle School in Orleans.

Expanded into a three-hour class over three one-hour sessions, six students signed up to get an even more detailed account of the story of Henry Beston and *The Outermost House*.

Wilding extended thanks to the class: Molly Mead, Robin Hubbard, Arrona

Ashton, Cami Hanson, Chuck Hanson, and Richard Kapit.

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Back in June, Peter Wells submitted this item to our Facebook page:

"Henry Beston's poetic prose has sometimes been compared to The King James Bible and to Shakespeare. And, since June is Henry's birth month (June 1, 1888), here, with apologies to Cole Porter's *Kiss Me Kate*, is a little birthday greeting.

THE BARD OF NAUSET-ON-OCEAN

But the writer of them all,
Who will bring forth your emotion,
Is the writer people call
The Bard of Nauset-on-Ocean.

Brush up your Beston.
Start quoting him now.
Brush up your Beston,
And your readers you will wow!

(to the tune of "Brush up your Shakespeare")

THE GREAT WAR TO THE GREAT BEACH

THESE ARE THE SECOND TWO INSTALLMENTS IN A SERIES about Henry Beston, author of the Cape Cod nature classic, *The Outermost House*, and his service in World War I, which began 100 years ago. For more, visit the Beston Society blog. (www.henrybeston.org, click on "Blog.")

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It had only four months since Henry Sheahan, who would later come to be known as Henry Beston, author of *The Outermost House*, left the comforts of Quincy, Massachusetts, and arrived in France to serve as an ambulance driver in France's battle with Germany in "The Great War." It wasn't long after he was transferred to the Bois-le-Pretre (the Priest's Woods) that he would be introduced to the worst that the conflict, later to be known as World War I, had to offer.

"He'd been closer to it than a lot of people — they put him on the front lines because he spoke fluent French," said writer Gary Lawless, who has also been the caretaker for Beston's "Chimney Farm" in Nobleboro, Maine, since 1986. "He saw some awful stuff — wholesale slaughter and just that indifference to human pain and suffering."

On his way to the front, Beston met up with a French soldier, who wanted to know where the U.S. stood when it came to the war.

"The soldier was very, very anxious to hear what the people in the United States thought," noted Beston biographer Daniel Payne. "Do they think we'll win the war? Will the United States enter the war?" He and Henry talked at some length about American

attitudes in the war."

"Just then, they hear a shell coming in. They dive for cover, it passes and explodes nearby ..."

As Henry described the scene in his book, *A Volunteer Poilu*: "I saw the sentry crumple up in the mud. I was the first to get to him. A chunk of the shell had ripped open the left breast to the heart. Down his sleeve, as down a pipe, flowed a hasty drop, drop, drop of blood that mixed with the mire."

Payne described Beston's "rather grim jest" following the incident: "All the American volunteers had a two-week crash course in identifying shells. At the end of the two weeks, those who passed the course went to the funeral of those who didn't."

Four months later, Beston would be transferred to the front at Verdun, a fortified city in the French interior. What awaited him there was what would later be referred to as "the greatest battle in the history of the world." His journey through hell was only beginning.

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In 1915, 27-year-old Henry Sheahan (later known as Henry Beston of *The Outermost House* fame) came to France to serve as an ambulance driver in the American Field Service during the First World War. Early on, the American volunteers were kept away from the front, but it was only a matter of time before they were right in the heat of battle.

After witnessing his first death up close, there were more horrors to witness, even before he was called into service during the Battle of Verdun in February 1916, which *The Patriot Led-*

ger of Beston's hometown of Quincy, Mass., recognized as "the greatest battle in the history of the world," in April of that year.

At Verdun, Beston later said that "the German atrocities were probably the greatest. They launched a whole laboratory of gases into the French; and gas masks saw great service." As Francis Russell would write many years later, Henry would "live through the somber slaughters of the Marne and the Somme with extraordinary luck."

In *A Volunteer Poilu*, Beston wrote that "the first village on the road to Metz had tumbled, in piles and mounds of rubbish, out on a street grown high with grass. Moonlight poured into the roofless cottages, escaping by shattered walls and jagged rents, and the mounds of debris took on fantastic outlines and cast strange shadows. In the middle of the village street stood two wooden crosses marking the graves of soldiers. It was the Biblical 'Abomination of Desolation.'"

Beston came across "the oddest sight (he had) ever seen," at Bois le Pretre, he told *The Patriot Ledger* after his return from France: "In walking through the wood, cut and but with a little more than the trunks standing we saw an object in the tree. We investigated and found, pinned in a branch, a human heart. Someone had been blown to bits and by a strange chance the heart had found lodgment in the tree."

By February of 1916, he was transferred to the Western Front on the hills north of Verdun-sur-Meuse in northeastern France. For a long time,

Verdun had been considered to be one of the quieter places on the Western Front, but a week after Beston's arrival, the Germans began attacking the fortified city.

Beston biographer Daniel Payne, whose critical literary biography of Beston, *Orion on the Dunes*, is due out from Godine Publishing next year, tells a story of a wounded French lieutenant that Beston ferried back from the front lines.

"The lieutenant said they had lost one of the men in their unit and went to look for him, but they hear a voice coming from a shell crater, in French but with a German accent, 'Frenchman, Frenchman, come over here,'" Payne said during an interview for the Beston Society's documentary film project. "It turned out to be a German officer with a group of his men who were mortally wounded, and were down in this crater, and he was begging the lieutenant to kill them. At first, the French lieutenant says, 'No, we're not going to do that,' but then realized it was the only humane thing to do. So he and his men lobbed grenades into the crater until the cries and the moaning ceased, and then they returned back to their lines. So this is the kind of thing that Henry is seeing and hearing about on a constant basis during the battle at Verdun."

Beston would leave the front in April of 1916, but the fighting at Verdun continued into the summer. In 2000, it was estimated that the 10-month battle claimed over 714,000 casualties; another estimate had the number at 976,000.



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