



Making waves with a cookbook - a winter project

Over 21,000 gifts of experience, history, and local cuisine

by Bill (Pappou) Drew, photos by Bill Drew and Jim Cerny



Looking southwest toward Portsmouth out my living room window, New Castle, N.H. (Bill Drew photo)

Winter has arrived. The elements are descending, the deck chair is idle and floats are at their winter moorings with lobster pots stacked high waiting for spring.

At December's potluck supper in the New Castle Church's Parish Hall a winter resident of Florida asks, "What do you folks DO here during the winter?" My response is: "The sun still shines, and we go on living.... hopefully." Again, he pressed, "No... WHAT do you really do here in the winter?" I guess one thing I could have told him is that we receive emails from those who have traveled south for a few months. One email arrived today from a *Rye Reflections* surfer saying, "I'm having a swim in my OUTDOOR pool!" We dare him to come back here for The Polar Bear Swim in a few weeks!

In answering the Florida snow bird, the word "sunshine" sparked an awareness in my mind. We're sitting in a room which has been the focal point of town activities for more than four decades;

receptions, birthday parties, rummage sales, Christmas fairs, dinners, AA meetings, and organizational and committee meetings of all sorts. This parish hall is here due to the vision and follow-through of *Sunshine*, and the team she assembled, organized, and pushed to accomplish the task.

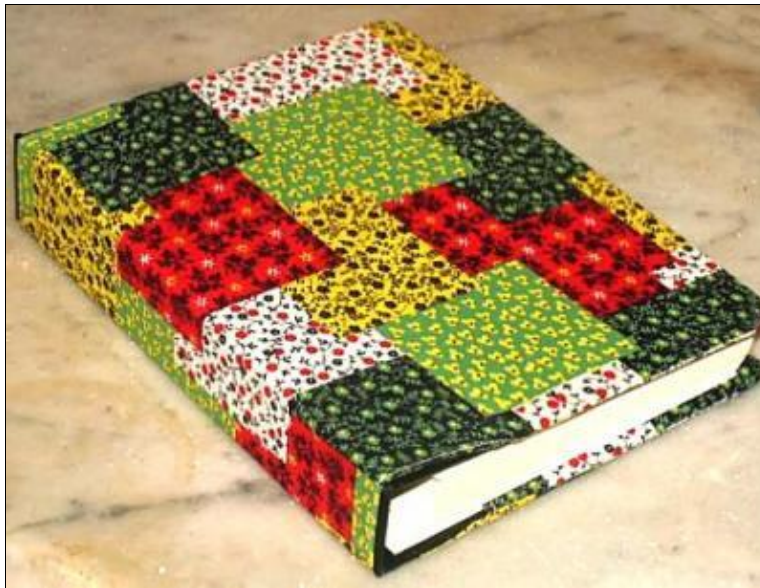


This is the New Castle Church's Parish Hall, where monthly potluck suppers as described above are held. It was built with the profits of the Guild's cookbook project. (Bill Drew photo)

Who is *Sunshine*? Each week in church I grasp the hand of the woman who sits behind me and greet her with "Ahhaaa, how's Sunshine today?" She conceived of, brought together a team, nurtured, lives and continues to promote a New Castle Church Guild project, sponsored by the church titled, *The Great Island Cookbook*, a.k.a. *The New Castle Cook Book*.

In the fall of 1964, additional money was necessary to fund a few kitchen appliances to replace a two-burner hot plate and other meager accessories. Peg MacDonald at the church's Guild meeting made up of ten or so women expressed an idea: "Why don't we put together a cookbook made up from recipes from town residents? I will offer to chair and select a committee and report back to you on the progress." Every other church, school, and other organizations in the world have ventured into similar territory with successful but limited financial results. One benefit of such a project is, like the actor on stage seeking success, getting the audience involved. A cookbook would sell itself and so begins the making of waves.

Decisions, decisions, decisions. Those made during those initial informal meetings between friends, both female and male, have been the key to the unusual success of the book: A smallish loose leaf three ring binder, a calico hand sewn cover by Mary White, and cards requesting three recipes sent to the residents in the town by Ruth Lanham who worked in the Post Office. Both Mary and Ruthie became an integral part of the team.



Shown is the calico pattern of the hand sewn book covers used for the first groups of cookbooks that were published. Due to an increasing volume of sales a switch was made to a blue-covered book with a printed poem on the front.
(Bill Drew photo of book owned by Ruth Lanham)

It was decided that supplemental information about the town, the church, the fire and police department, history, and the stories that make up the fabric of a town would be included. The *Great Island Cookbook* is born.

It took all winter and late into the spring of 1965 before the combined efforts of all began to come together. Just imagine the initial diplomatic ground that needed to be traversed in receiving three recipes from individuals, each claiming theirs to be an original recipe, then selecting one for inclusion into the book with a individual's name assigned to it. There were a large number of submissions of recipes for Chocolate cake. For all it was a first-come first-to-be-considered situation. There were tense times. Feathers were ruffled. The recipes that were finally chosen to be included in the book were then individually tested and approved by members of the team: Quality Assurance.

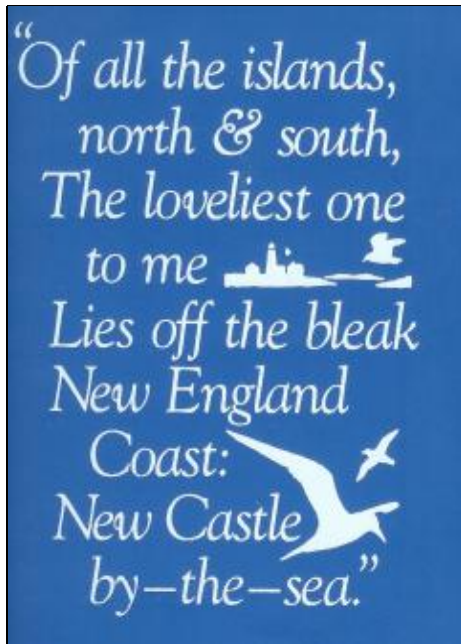


Every page in the book was hand-lettered and illustrated with drawings related to the subject at hand. In the book she owns, Peg has colored the

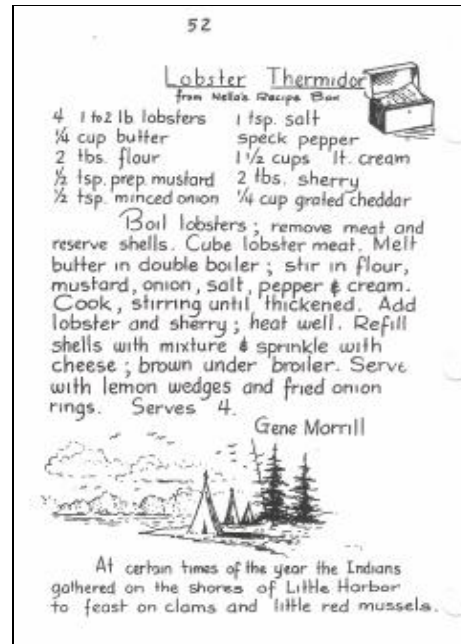
pages with pencils. In the later versions another change to some stylish computer text became necessary. (Jim Cerny photo)

Now the design team consisting of Peg, her husband Douglas, with close friends Gene Morrill and Clayt Sisson, spent many long hours, after coming home from their day jobs, lettering, making drawings and assembling and putting to paper the large amount of information. Others also helped in the transcribing process. Free-hand drawings adorning each page added character to the contents as did the history content accumulated and compiled by still other members of the team. The book neared completion.

In between final preparations funding became the hurdle to overcome. Sponsors, bake and food sales, mini-auctions, plant sales and any activity where a few dollars could be brought in were tried.



The current cover of the three ring binder (Bill Drew photo)



A first edition page still in the book (Bill Drew photo)

The time had come. Money was necessary for the printer to begin. Lacking \$125, Peg approached Bill Priestley, treasurer of the church, for a loan and reluctantly he approved it. Upon her leaving he turned to his wife Betty and commented, "Well, you can kiss that money good-bye. What the heck. The church only has about \$165 in the treasury anyway." He later revised his opinion by saying it was the best investment he ever made.

Nobody had any idea of the success that was to follow. As my father used to say, "Success breeds success." This case proved the point. To date, December 28, 2007, twenty-one thousand, three hundred and fifty-four (21,354) books have been sold and that number continues to grow.

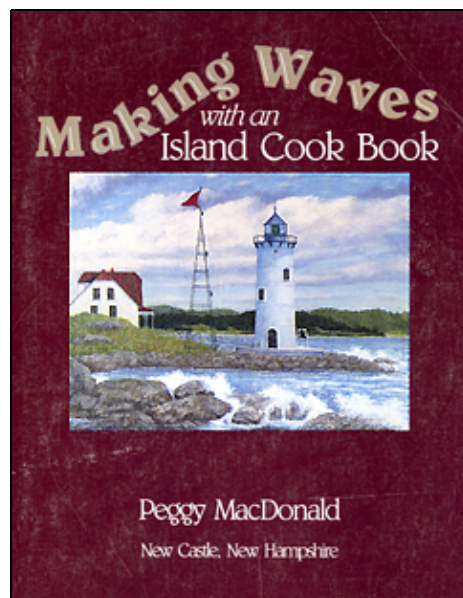
It came about due to the success of a creative idea and superb execution by a team of devoted participants working long hours over many months to make it a quality product. Various avenues were pursued to distribute knowledge of the book's existence and generate sales.

Sales received a significant boost when Boston's WRKO radio talk show host Gene Burns, a noted chef, highlighted it in his endorsement of the value of its contents. A surge in orders arrived yet each had to be dealt with one at a time. Each book sale sells more copies. It's called exponential growth; increases at an increasing rate. The book has the qualities necessary for success and is ideal for house presents, bridal showers, wedding gifts, birthdays, and seasonal

presents.

It has been a labor of love and its return phenomenal. The profits enabled the parish hall to be completed. Subsequent profits provide support in numerous areas, necessity as well as charitable. Imagine the labor required to publish and distribute 19 editions with each book over 300-400 pages long multiplied by 21,000+ copies which equates to more than seven million pages that need to be handled. The current edition has 104 pages of history and 354 pages of recipes for a total of 458 pages. Then consider that each book requires assembly and is shipped usually in very small quantities — one or two at a time. Finally it has acquired a sales force numbering in the thousands which is also growing. Now there you have a few winter projects.

The biggest reward is the joy and satisfaction it brings to those who prepare and partake in the consumption of its suggestions. Close friend Kalifornia Kate remarked, "Somehow really old recipes are thought of as special when probably only the ingredients are. There seems to be something therapeutic about combining components to create an offering using your knowledge, experience and inventiveness, sometimes at great risk, to make it truly unique and distinctive. It's like a passing on a very personal gift of the originator."



The front cover of Peg's book (Jim Cerny photo)



The back cover of Peg's book (Jim Cerny photo)

Peg has written and published her own account of the history of the book and her life experiences and involvement with it. She named it *Making Waves with an Island Cook Book*. It's a wonderful narrative, complete with expressions of joy, disappointments, anxiety, frustration, nervousness, and humor. Unfortunately, her book is now out of print and difficult to find except in libraries. The New Castle and Rye Public Libraries each have a copy.

The cookbook continues to be sold and sell. Recently, I purchased eight of them myself. Four have already been given away and another on its way. For me it makes the ideal gift particularly for one (me) who basks in subsequent rewards.

To obtain one, just look for the woman at any of the functions of the church. You'll recognize her. She's the one with silverish hair, each one well earned and well deserved. There will be a pile of blue books in front of her. Watch out, she's a salesperson.

At this past summer's "Clothes-line Art Fair," one woman was astounded at the success of the book and asked Peg how much money she had received from her involvement with it. Peg answered, "Nothing." She responded with, "You mean



Peg MacDonald (Jim Cerny photo)

In 1902, [Karen Douglas Wiggin](#), (1856-1923) wrote a short love story called [The Old Peabody Pew](#). It's about a group of women of a small New England church who pooled their talents to take on a task where there was no funding, no males who were interested in helping and the interaction of a wide spectrum of strong personalities. The play, using the book as a guide, has been performed at the the New Castle church on several occasions

you did this for nothing?". Peg answered in her own inimitable way. "I'm working my way into heaven. But I've cussed the book a few times, so I may be going down below."

It's a success story of a group of women and men with a dream and no money. It became a fruitful winter project and continues to be one. What's this year's winter project? Peg, are you available, rested, or retiring? As they say in the Navy, to all those who participate in a success, and appropriate for this book, "WELL DONE."

Copies of the New Castle Cookbook are available at the New Castle Public Library located at the entrance to the New Castle Common on Rt. 1B.

An interesting complementary link is shown below.

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