

MALAGA ISLAND – A HUMAN HISTORY

Little is known about Malaga Island's first people. Native Americans visited the island over the past 1,000 years, but left few traces of their activities. Considerably more is known about those who followed in their footsteps more recently.

Sometime during the 1860s, a small, racially mixed community was established on the north end of the island by descendants of Benjamin Darling, an African-American who owned and lived on nearby Harbor (formerly Horse) Island. By 1900, the community numbered about 40 people, and consisted primarily of black, white, and interracial families whose hardscrabble existence was akin to that of many other fishing communities. But even as



John and Rosella Eason, with unidentified children, in front of their Malaga home in 1911.

the community was growing, a variety of pressures were emerging that would ultimately force them from their home.

Economic decline, the growth of tourism, and



The north end of the island circa 1909. The Marks family home is in the foreground.

the islanders' increasing reliance on town aid converged with racism and a burgeoning interest in eugenics. Muckraker journalism exacerbated the situation, portraying islanders as immoral and degenerate. A growing urgency among town and eventually State officials to rid the island of its residents and their homes culminated with eviction orders, demanding all residents leave the island by July 1, 1912. The island's school was dismantled and relocated to Muscongus Bay, and burials were exhumed and re-interred at the Maine School for the Feeble-Minded (now Pineland), where eight residents were forcibly institutionalized.

For a brief period, all of New England turned its attention to this tiny island. After the eviction, Malaga and its people were quickly and, some might say, intentionally forgotten.

Although a century has passed since Malaga's residents were evicted, evidence of their tenure on the island remains. Shell deposits, foundation holes, wells, and numerous artifacts of everyday existence are haunting testament to the people whose only desire was to make a living in the place they called home.

MALAGA TODAY

Since the eviction, there has been no permanent habitation on Malaga. Local fishermen have used the island for decades to store fishing gear and traps and continue to do so. In 2001, the island was sold to Maine Coast



The north end of the island today.

Heritage Trust at a generous price below market value. The owner wanted to ensure the island's protection from development, its availability to the public, and its continued use for the seasonal storage of lobster traps and fishing gear. After assuming ownership, MCHT opened the island to archeological excavation by researchers from the University of Southern Maine. Their work and the efforts of those seeking justice and truth – including the Maine branch of the NAACP – culminated in an official apology from the State of Maine, delivered by Governor John Baldacci on September 12, 2010.

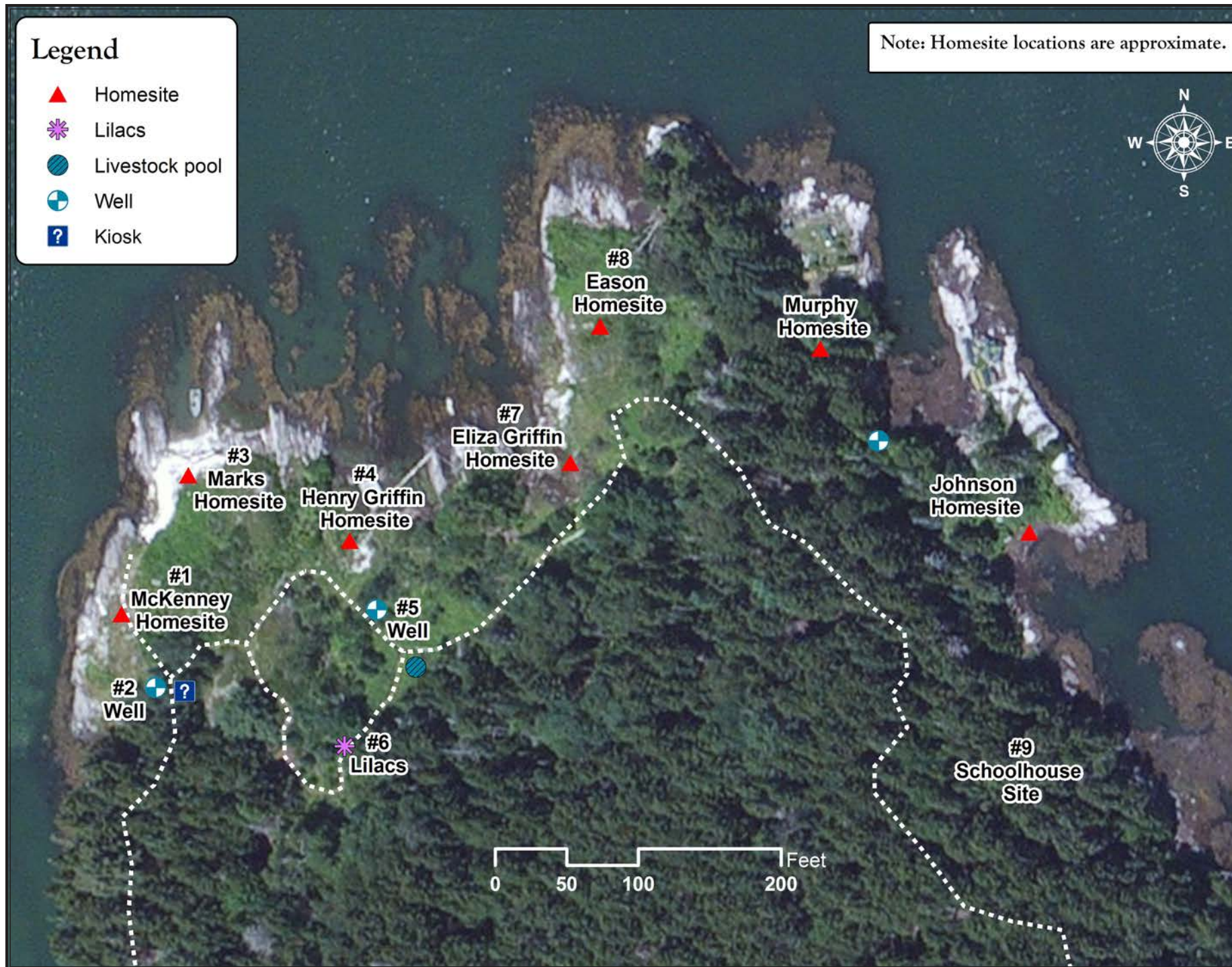
Note: Poison ivy and ticks are common on this part of the island – please stay on the trail!

Learn more at www.mcht.org

Malaga Island Preserve

Guide to Historic Settlement Area





1. McKenney Home Site. James McKenney, a Phippsburg native of Scotch-Irish descent, was referred to as the “King of Malaga” because of his spokesman role and his reputation as the island’s best fisherman. Before a new schoolhouse was built in 1909, Malaga’s children were schooled in McKenney’s home.

2. Stone-lined well. One of several which provided islanders with drinking water.

3. Marks Home Site. Jake Marks built his house at this site, largely upon the discarded shells from the large numbers of shellfish harvested by island residents.

4. Griffin Home Site. Henry Griffin, the first to settle Malaga, originally lived on the southeast side of the island. He later moved to the north end of the island. A collapsed stone foundation, nearly hidden by tall grass and weeds, marks the site of his second house.

5. Stone-lined well. Located next to the trail, about 50 feet southeast of the Griffin foundation.

6. Lilacs. Often planted by dooryards, these robust and long-lived lilacs may have been planted by a Malaga resident.

7. Griffin Home Site. Eliza Griffin, who lived on this site in a schooner’s cabin that was given to her family as a reward, was a laundress at a hotel on the mainland, housekeeper, and fisherwoman. Head of her own household, she reportedly earned more money than any man on the island.

8. Eason Home Site. A master carpenter and mason who often worked on the mainland, John Eason also conducted religious services on the island when poor weather kept people from attending the Nazarene church on the mainland. He was known as “the deacon.”

9. Schoolhouse Site. The Malaga Island School - thought by some to be better than those on the mainland - was constructed in 1909 in this general area. The school was dismantled upon the eviction of the island’s residents, and resurrected the following year as the Louds Island Church.