



# Different Country, Different World: Campobello

Think of Bermuda, lightly chilled.

BY COLIN W. SARGENT

**H**ere and not here, part of the Maine mystique but profoundly abroad—even in another time zone—Campobello Island is so close to our coast you can not only taste it, you can hear it.

Ten miles long and frequently misunderstood, the bewitching Island of Campo Bello, as it was styled in the 19th century, marks the confluence of the St. Croix River and the Bay of Fundy. It also lights the entrance to Passamaquoddy Bay. A nexus of stark contrasts, Campobello Island defines both the international boundary between the United States and Canada and the eternal ties entwining their histories.

Wild and mesmerizing, with great cliffs dropping off sharply to the water, it is the home of the Roosevelt Campobello International Park, which is unique in the world because it is shared by two sovereign nations.

Two years after Eleanor Roosevelt gifted the sprawling 2,800-acre International Park to all of us, President Lyndon Johnson and Canadian Prime Minister Lester Pear-

son both graced the 1964 ribbon-cutting.

Because both countries coexist in the same spot, their differences become clean, clear, and fascinating in the stiff North Atlantic breeze. Example: During national holidays, some staff members of the International Park must work, while those of the other nation simply do not! When you leave Lubec and cross the quaint, ultra-scenic 54-year-old Roosevelt International Bridge, you pass into another time zone. Then you pass through Canadian Customs. Your dog will need a rabies certificate. You must have a “passport or equivalent.” In the span of a second, you’ve left the United States and become a world traveler abroad, though the proximity to home makes your brain dance while you catch glimpses of nearby Lubec and Eastport as you drive around the island. Maybe it’s eas-



iest to think of Campobello as an enormous international yacht parked offshore.

Before air-conditioning, the island was a world destination for rusticators. The Roosevelt family first summured here in 1883. The historic Roosevelt cottage—a stunning 34-room masterpiece, is the main attraction of the International Park. Today, it is a major attraction, with tours, conferences, and special events. Designed by Willard T. Sears,

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the Shingle Style house is a time capsule both for the year 1920 and because it seems as if the film crew from *Sunrise At Campobello* just finished shooting moments before.

Young Franklin Delano Roosevelt and his bride, Eleanor Roosevelt, were given this estate as a present by Franklin's moth-

## One of the most popular Vacationland destinations isn't in Maine, it's not even in the US

er, Sara, who'd bought it for \$5,000 in 1909. The house's first owner, Mrs. Grace Hartman Kuhn of Boston, was a Campobello neighbor and family friend for many years.

**D**uring a recent visit, CBS News expressed surprise that Eleanor continued her New York practice of having tea every day up here in the wilderness. But that's the tension of Campobello: the smart and certain vs. the unknown.



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In this cottage, aged patinated bead-board paneling contrasts sharply with the rustling fragrance and supernatural beauty of Passamaquoddy sweetgrass wastebaskets that are "original to the house," says guide Theresa Mitchell, a "ninth-generation Campobello resident. I'm a dual citizen, because I was born abroad." She winks. "Here, that means across the bridge."

As you tour this immaculate attrac-

tion, stopped in time, you won't forget the way the long green lawn plunges into the sea, the seven gracious fireplaces, or the six stoic original porcelain tubs and sinks that unblinkingly face the future. Most unsettling: Eleanor Roosevelt's enormous megaphone is still on the site. "(If you look out the windows in the living room, you'll see Eastport," Mitchell says. "She used it to call chil-

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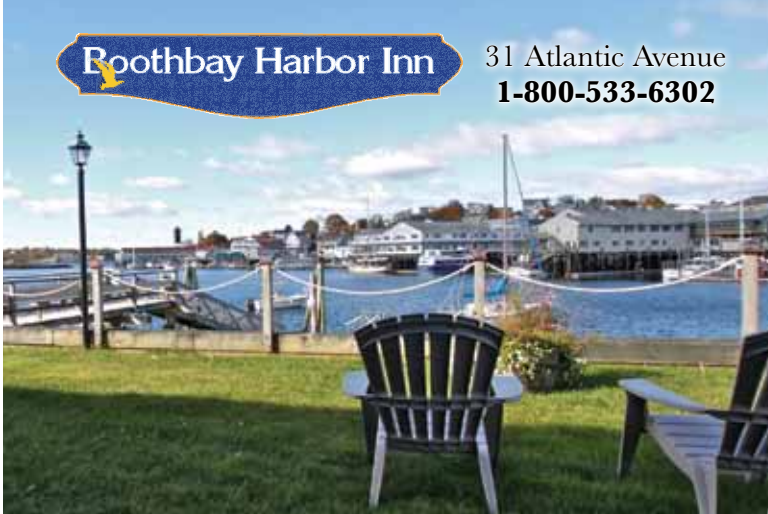
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Yachting with the Roosevelts is a Campobello tradition.

dren primarily. Franklin used it to talk with the men in the fishing boats.”

Like a speaking trumpet?

“Eleanor always called it a megaphone. It is still suspended on the same hook and chain on the back porch.” Venerable and oily from use, “It’s like a pressed cloth and weighs just three pounds. If the wind was right on a calm day, Eleanor could be heard across the water in Eastport. But of course she had that kind of voice.”

In the study, “where we have Eleanor Roosevelt’s desk. We also have the original Victrola they listened to,” along with original Stickley furnishings. It was here that FDR “liked to read Shakespeare,” though as a youth he grew up loving Mark Twain, Charles Dickens, and Rudyard Kipling. FDR’s attachment to Kipling’s poem “If” may have sparked a national trend. Mitchell says his love for all things philatelic was undoubtedly a force behind the 20th-century fad for stamp collecting among boys and girls.

For music, it didn’t hurt if Sarah Hubbard, the concert pianist, was one of your neigh-

bors. “She’d come in and play for them on the Hazleton Bros. upright,” which is still here after innumerable retunings in the salt air.

But more than the gracious nature of the house itself, with its quiet creakings and head into the wind, FDR loved this place because lost childhood was here, where he could run and swim and take physical risks buoyed by his early vigor and lifelong love for the outdoors. Islanders taught him to sail small boats with techniques that dated to early fishing smacks.

Back then, there was a sense of something secret and “Indian” about the island. FDR was acquainted with many Passamaquoddies, including Chief Neptune, and soon found himself enjoying canoeing. According to the FDR Presidential Library-in Hyde Park, “one of the canoes that he used at Campobello was a birch bark canoe made by Tomah Joseph, the last chief of the Passamaquoddy Indians, the tribe living in Eastport, Maine, across the bay from Campobello Island.” The canoe is on loan from the Presidential Library and Museum to the Franklin D. Roosevelt International Park

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FDR's birchbark canoe still exists!

Commission, in New Brunswick, Canada. It hangs in the visitor's center just as you walk in.

**W**henever FDR was here, his two worlds collided, at times majestically. Under President Woodrow Wilson, FDR was appointed Assistant Secretary of the Navy in 1913. Thus empowered, "He sometimes turned up at Campobello aboard a destroyer," according to Stephen O. Muskie in *Outtakes, Campobello Island: Far From The Mainstream*. "Although it was against naval regulations, he persuaded the captain to let him take the helm and piloted the ship at full speed ahead through fog-bound waters. The Bay of Fundy's tides and currents were bred into his bones. One of his pet dreams was to harness Passamaquoddy's precipitous tides for purposes of electric power. It was never realized, but perhaps the idea for the Rural Electrification Administration had its origin in those 'eye-straining' nights by Campo's kerosene lamps."

Infamously—some say wonderfully—the Roosevelt cottage had no electric lights during its most famous decades.

Asked about the destroyers, Mitchell drops a bomb: "Franklin arrived at Campobello in Navy ships *three times* as President. One of the ships was the USS *Amberjack*." Then she waits like a slyboots. "The other was the cruiser USS *Indianapolis*."

If you've seen the movie *Jaws*, you've heard about the *Indianapolis*. Years after she visited Campobello with FDR, this doomed ghost ship made a special delivery to the Army Air Corps base on the island of Tinian: "Little Boy," the first nuclear bomb dropped on Hiroshima. After the delivery, the *Indianapolis* was sunk by a Japanese submarine and sank in minutes. Over three hundred crewmen drowned or were eaten by sharks. Or both.

There's another dark sense out here that hits you like an icy breeze when you realize FDR first recognized symptoms of polio during one of his idylls up here, though there are medical disputes about what exactly folded his vigorous six-foot two-inch frame into a wheelchair for the rest of



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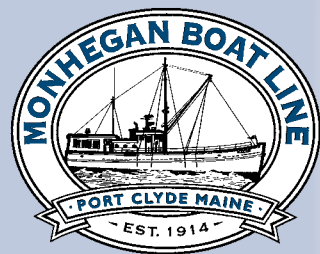
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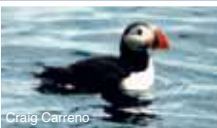
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his life. The chill struck the future president during a vacation that started on August 7, 1921, when he was 39. According to a monograph written by Amy Berish for the Presidential Library, using Jean Edward Smith's *FDR* as a source, "During the summer of 1921, FDR was enjoying a day of sailing on his yacht when he suddenly fell overboard into the icy waters of the Bay of Fundy..."

The next day, "Roosevelt felt a sudden chill. He told Eleanor he thought he was catching a cold and had better not risk infecting the children. He would go straight to bed. Eleanor sent up a tray of food, but he was not hungry. He had trouble sleeping that night and continued to tremble despite two heavy woolen blankets. The next morning he was worse. When he swung his legs out of bed and attempted to stand, his left leg buckled beneath him. He managed to get up and shave and assumed the problem would pass. 'I tried to persuade myself that the trouble with my leg was muscular, that it would disappear as I used it. But presently it refused to work, and then the other collapsed as well.' FDR dragged himself back to bed, and when Eleanor took his temperature it was 102."

"There are some conversations that it may not have been polio but rather Guillain-Barré," a nerve disorder, Mitchell says.

Roosevelt was carried down the long green lawn by neighbors to a waiting boat bound for the train station in Eastport, hidden from the world press. Mitchell tells of "a great conspiracy played by Lewis Howe" [the Roosevelts' friend and political advisor played by Hume Cronin in *Sunrise at Campobello*] who misdirected reporters so that by the time they reached the train, huffing and puffing, "Franklin was already propped up in the window, waving" to the news hounds as the train pulled out.

On arrival in Boston, he was examined in secret by doctors before continuing south to New York. Twelve years later, he would return to Campobello in triumph as our 32nd President. ■



FDR and Duffy the dog at Campobello.

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