11-2014

UM Marine and Freshwater Sciences Come to Wentworth Point (1960s)

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UM Marine and Freshwater Sciences
Come to Wentworth Point (1960s)

There was a great deal of interest in oceanography in the private sector during the early 20th century that led to the creation of private institutions that would eventually become incorporated into universities.¹ The long period of growth of American oceanography began with World War II. The war provided a jump start to a field that until then had few practitioners in the United States and little in the way of support.² Oceanography grew into a major area of research in the next few decades with the development of new instrumentation and the construction of research vessels to conduct extensive expeditions in all of the world’s oceans. In the 1960s oceanography was riding a new wave of popularity. There were new journals, new trade publications, new programs, new ideas, and even new enthusiasm for oceanography in the U.S. Congress.³

In the fall of 1963 the University of Maine hired Peter Crolius to be their public relations and development officer. Shortly thereafter he visited the office of Kenneth Allen, head of the Department of Zoology. Mr. Crolius pointed out that a state like Maine with its coastline and history should have a marine station at its University. Mr. Allen heartily concurred and stated that it was part of his plans for the Department of Zoology to obtain such a facility so faculty and graduate students could pursue their research interest and possibly conduct a summer teaching program. Several weeks later Peter suggested a meeting with President Lloyd Elliott to discuss how to proceed.

In 1963 President Elliott appointed a Feasibility Committee to explore the desirability of resuming marine research at the University of Maine, and to advise on the best steps to be taken to have this accomplished. He wanted a solid plan for a marine station including what was needed for a program, the cost, and how many of the UM faculty at the time would use the facility. He appointed the Graduate Dean, Franklin Eggert as chairperson, and appointed Peter Crolius, Kenneth Allen, and Richard Campana (Head of the Department of Botany) as committee members.

In 1964 the committee held a series of meetings with interested faculty. The enthusiasm was not high and there were a great number of skeptics. News of the Committee’s activities spread beyond the campus and several talks on marine stations and their importance to a university were given to civic groups and at least one church group. The Committee culminated its activities with a meeting with President Elliott and several marine biologists from the Marine Biological Laboratory (MBL) Woods Hole, Mass. The visiting scientists included Drs. John Welsh (MBL and Harvard University) and Mel Carriker (MBL). Following an evening discussion the Committee gave their report to President Elliott. The committee concluded that in view of Maine’s relationship to the ocean a marine station could provide needed information to both the University and the State of Maine.

After several weeks President Elliott reconvened the committee and asked the committee to find an appropriate site for a marine station. He renamed the committee the Marine Station Committee, counseled the committee to proceed cautiously, and charged it with locating a gift of real property, or finding a gift of money to purchase land for a marine station. Potential sites were studied in a region from Bar Harbor southward to Boothbay Harbor. About 15 specific sites were investigated. A representative of the Division of Special Facilities of the National Science Foundation was called to Maine for special consultation. The features that were sought for UM’s marine station were salt water frontage, unpolluted clear water, depth to provide easy dockage, a minimum of 25 acres of land, a fresh water supply and a site favorable for disposal of wastes associated with such research and teaching. The site that was eventually selected, and deemed most closely to meet the minimum requirements of those criteria, was the Ira C. Darling property.

The Marine Station Committee called on a number of individuals regarding the university’s interest in obtaining a marine station. In the summer of 1964 President Elliott contacted the committee and said a Mr. Darling, a retired insurance executive, wanted to give property for a forest research station. The president asked the committee to look at the property because it was on the coast. President Elliott, Vice President Austin Peck, and Kenneth Allen visited the
Figure 1: A 1965 aerial view of Wentworth Point and the newly created Ira C. Darling Center for Research, Teaching, and Service (left side of the photo); McGuire Point is in the right side of the photo.
Darlings that summer. In a future letter to the first director of the DMC, David Dean, Mr. Allen later recalled that a second visit to the Darlings occurred a few weeks later for Mr. Darling was not convinced a marine station was what he wanted on his property. Mr. Allen wrote, “The second trip was a story in itself.” Mr. Darling had the land (not the buildings) appraised in November, and was intrigued by the appraiser’s consideration that because of the saltwater shorefront the land would be an excellent site for a first-class residential development. Future U Maine President Winthrop Libby also remembers visiting Ira Darling at Wentworth Point. He recalls Ira Darling was driving a Buick very loosely over the field, and also recalls Ira Darling had just been denied his Maine driving license. Mr. Darling took Mr. Libby over the site pointing out the advantages of the Wentworth Point property.

In December 1964 after a three day hospital checkup in Illinois for 80 year-old Ira Darling and his wife Claire, and on the advice of their doctors, the Darlings decided to give up the farm at Wentworth Point they loved so much. They quickly bought a house in Kenilworth, Ill. Mrs. Darling forwarded Christmas presents to the Leemans from Illinois, and Mr. Darling wrote Keith that he’s sure the boys will have a grand day.

In a letter dated 6 March 1965 from his Kenilworth home Ira Darling wrote Keith Leeman, the caretaker of the estate at Wentworth Point, that:

P.S. Confidentially, Mr. Elliott of the University of Maine is coming to see me on Monday. I was very hopeful that we can come to some understanding about the farm, but from a conversation my attorney had with him I am doubtful. Say nothing about it please, and I will keep you advised. I say doubtful, because I do not want to get your hopes up too high.

Mr. Darling had also wanted to give the Wentworth Point estate to one of his favorite grandchildren Peter Allen Whidden. However, at the time Mr. Darling had to make a decision about the estate peter may have gone to college or joined the Navy. Mr. Darling wanted his estate to go to good use & be used; he was a good American.

In a reply to a letter from the land appraiser dated 20 March 1965 Ira Darling wrote him, “ . . . I am only sorry at this time to tell you that I do not know what disposition I will make of the farm.” Keith Leeman called President Elliot to inform him of Mr. Darling’s frustration with the negotiations. In a letter from President Elliott to Keith Leeman dated March 25, 1965 it is clear that while negotiations continued between Mr. Darling and the university, a decision had been made to offer the University of Maine the Wentworth Point estate. In a letter dated 10 April 1965 from Ira Darling to President Elliott, Mr. Darling expressed his pleasure that the University of Maine will begin employing Keith Leeman on 15 April 1965, and enclosed his formal proposal offering the University of Maine the Wentworth Point property (126.6 acres, more or less) on condition that:

1. [the gift be accepted no later than May 1, 1965].
2. [if accepted gift is conveyed by quit-claim deed May 1, 1965].
3. [UM assumes responsibility for all property taxes and expenses after May 1, 1965].
4. The property shall be named: THE IRA C. DARLING CENTER FOR RESEARCH, TEACHING AND SERVICE UNIVERSITY OF MAINE which shall be inscribed on a suitable plaque or marker displayed on the premises.
5. [The property shall be used as a marine biology laboratory and for other University activities].
6. [It could only be sold if proceeds of sale be used for substantially the same purposes of (5) with the name of (4)].
7. The property shall be maintained in an attractive state, with adequate care provided for the buildings, landscaping and trees.
Figure 2: First page of the inventory list of items the Darling family left behind.
At a regular meeting of the Board of Trustees of the University of Maine, held on 21 April 1965, it was voted unanimously to accept the offer of Ira C. Darling.

In a letter from Ira C. Darling from his home in Kenilworth dated 15 May 1965 and written to Keith Leeman, Mr. Darling writes:

It was only today that I have passed title of the farm to the University of Maine and also gave them the Bill of Sale of all the items that you and McGuire reported on . . .

I hope you and your family are all fine. Write often for we all miss the farm. Living here is quite different. I find it hard to adjust myself, but I am very glad that the property has gone to the University, and the work that you and I did will be perpetuated, and in addition to the oceanographic work planned. Do keep me posted, for Mrs. Darling and I want to know all the news. With all the best to you, Irene and the children, I am,

Sincerely yours,

Ira C. Darling

Because Ira Darling was not able to return to Wentworth Point the University of Maine agreed to buy the remaining tools, equipment, and odds and ends the Darling family left behind. On April 29, 1965 F.S. McGuire, Superintendent of Buildings and Grounds at the University of Maine at Orono came down to the Center, and together with Keith Leeman inventoried the remaining items valued at $2,807.00.

A research program was planned for the summer designed to begin on a modest scale. The plan included a cataloging and identification of all forms of microscopic and macroscopic marine life in the immediate vicinity. This task was to be a continuing and long term effort. Several staff members were also to use the facilities to maintain experimental material, and several geology projects and several zoology projects were to be transferred to the center. It was also hoped that the site would be used as a base for the marine fisheries program then being conducted in cooperation with state and federal agencies. As soon as the research program was firmly established a program of summer study was to be established implementing university courses on marine biology. It was also hoped to provide facilities for summer use to visiting scientists and scholars.

Until a director was found and hired the research at the center was put under the direction of a four-man committee chaired by Dean Franklin P. Eggert. The other members of the committee were Dr. H. Austin Peck, vice president for academic affairs; Dr. Kenneth W. Allen, head of the Zoology Department; and Dr. Richard Campana, head of the Department of Botany and Plant Pathology. President Elliott sent out letters to the presidents of Bowdoin, Bates, and Colby Colleges inviting their marine biologists to participate in the research activities of the new marine lab.

Soon the Ira C. Darling Center received a steady stream of visitors. There were students, teachers, and administrative officials from the University of Maine. Barbara Ann Cocanour, a graduate student at the Zoology Department in Orono, visited on the 24th of June. She would later come down to the Darling Center to complete her doctorate work on the Growth and reproduction of the sand dollar, Eciacius pama. Dr. John Welsh also visited that day, and later became one of numerous donors to the young DMC Library. Local people visited, and people from away visited. State officials visited, and there were many visitors from other academic institutions.

In June the University of Maine began looking for a permanent director to the Darling Marine Center. During the summer of 1965 the University of Maine’s marine laboratory was operated on a limited basis under the direction of Dr. Don C. Miller of the faculty of Queens College of New York. A survey of flora and fauna in the immediate vicinity of the center was undertaken by Dr. Miller and by Dr. Charles D. Richards of UM’s botany department. In a 1965 publication titled Man and Nature in Bristol, the author Dr. Elizabeth Hoyt, notes the marine laboratory of the University of Maine
listed 254 species of marine invertebrates, not including the protozoa at all; and in fresh water there are still others. Dr. Hoyt along with her sister Anne Hoyt Mavor, both of the La Verna Foundation (La Verna Preserve, Bristol, Maine), visited the center 29 June 1965. No copy of this initial flora and fauna survey has yet been located.

Figure 3: 1965 visitor entries in the guest book of the Ira. C. Darling Center for Research, Teaching, and Service.
POSITION DESCRIPTION
IRA C. DARLING CENTER FOR RESEARCH, TEACHING AND SERVICE
UNIVERSITY OF MAINE

Director of Marine Research Laboratory

The position opens is that of director of a marine biological laboratory being developed at the Ira C. Darling Center of the University of Maine. The director will be responsible for the development, direction, operation and coordination of an interdisciplinary program of research, training and other educational activities related to marine biology. The director will be administratively responsible to the University's Director of Research. The appointment is on a fiscal basis with a one month vacation. Other benefits include the TIAA retirement plan, group health insurance and group life insurance.

Salary is negotiable depending upon the training, experience and potential of the applicant. Appointment date is anticipated to be January 1, 1966.

The Center

The Center was established in April 1965 with a gift to the University of Maine of the summer estate of Ira C. Darling. The estate consists of about 130 acres of land with approximately 1 ½ miles of shoreline. The property is located in the town of Walpole, Maine on the shores of the Damariscotta River which is a salt water inlet. Estuarine conditions exist a few miles further up the Damariscotta River. The shoreline varies from mud flats to rock beaches. It is well protected from heavy wave action and there is ready access to open ocean (less than 5 miles by water). The Muscongus Bay and Sheepscot Bay areas are easily reached at about the same water distance. The laboratories of the Bureau of Commercial Fisheries and of the Sea and Shore Fisheries are located nearby in Boothbay Harbor.

The property has a caretaker's cottage and an 11 room house with all utilities which will be the Director's residence. In addition, there is a three car garage and six farm buildings which have development potential for other purposes.

Qualifications

Doctoral degree desirable.

Training and experience in field related to marine biology.
Publications record and scientific status sufficient to work with scientists and command their respect.

Ability to coordinate a program of research and academic training at all collegiate levels of education.

Capacity to write and to communicate.

Responsibilities

The Director will be the principal officer of the Marine Research Laboratory of the Ira C. Darling Center. He will be responsible for budget preparation, for accounting for all official transactions, for managing all other details of operation of the Ira C. Darling Center and for providing liaison with related marine research facilities.

Current Program

A limited program of research has been started. This consists primarily of efforts to catalog the marine flora and fauna in the immediate vicinity of the Center. A study of the genetics of the herring has been initiated in cooperation with the laboratory of the Bureau of Commercial Fisheries. The program at present is most active during the summer period. It is anticipated, however, that eventually the Marine Laboratory will be in year-round operation.

Application

Persons interested in applying should provide information relative to education, experience and include a listing of personal publications.

The names of three individuals to whom we may write for reference information should be included. Inquiries should be addressed to:

Dr. F. P. Eggert
Dean of Graduate School and
Director of Research
76 Library
University of Maine
Orono, Maine 04473
Phone - 207-866-7229

Figure 5: Second page of job announcement for a director to the Darling Center.
Figure 6: University of Maine President Lloyd Elliott on the right conferring on Ira Darling the honorary degree of Doctor of Laws.
Figure 7: Attendees to the ceremony for conferring on Ira Darling an honorary law degree. September 9, 1965.
In June 1965 the UM Board of Trustees voted to confer the honorary degree of Doctor of Laws on Ira C. Darling. In a letter to President Elliott thanking him for the honor Mr. Darling wrote, “With your acquisition of my property in Maine and the prospects of what you hope to accomplish, I feel very much a part of the University and look forward to your accomplishments.” Mr. Darling was unable to make the trip to the University of Maine that summer because of continuing health problems, and instead President Elliott travelled to Kenilworth. On September 9, 1965 at high noon in the Darling’s flower garden President Elliott conferred upon Mr. Darling the honorary degree of Doctor of Laws (LL. D). About 15 people attended the ceremony including family members and a few close friends. President Elliott submitted his resignation in July of 1965, and was replaced in the fall by Edwin Young.

August 17, 1965 was a particularly busy day for the nascent marine lab. 52 people entered their names into the Darling Center’s guest book that day. One could guess there was some kind of open house or meeting. Most, but not all, of the visitors were from academic institutions and/or marine stations. Three people signed in from the Graduate School of Oceanography at the University of Rhode Island, including future DMC faculty member Bernard McAlice.
Figure 8: The Horse Barn. Darling Marine Center. 1965.
Figure 9: Damariscotta River. Darling Marine Center. 1965.
Figure 10: Farmhouse. Darling Marine Center. 1965.
Figure 11: The Farmhouse and the Horse Barn of the Ira C. Darling Center, Walpole, Maine.
Figure 12: White birch trees, and Ira Darling’s tree farm, at Wentworth Point. November, 1965. (Courtesy of Jim Blake)
Figure 13: The Point [Wentworth Point] Walpole, ME. November, 1965. (Courtesy of Dr. James Blake)
David and Louise Dean visited the Darling Marine Center on the 29th of September. In November, 1965, the University of Maine announced the hiring of Dr. David Dean, a marine biologist and assistant professor at the University of Connecticut, to be the first director of the Ira C. Darling Center. Future DMC boat captain Oliver D. Brainard and future DMC Ph. D candidate James Blake (Systematics, reproduction and larval development of Polydora from eastern North America (Polychaeta : Spionidae)), and their families, both from the University of Connecticut visited that month. The Deans visited the Leemans shortly after Christmas.

On February 1st, 1966 the Dean family moved to an apartment in Bangor, and Dr. David Dean assumed the directorship of the Darling Marine Center. For the next 4 or 5 months Dr. Dean operated out of an office at Lord’s Hall while visiting the Center one or two days a week. It was felt that in the initial planning stages for the development of the Center Dr. Dean’s time could be most profitably spent at the Orono campus where policies could be developed and plans for construction laid. In addition it was an opportunity to be able to work with people in Orono, so that when Dr. Dean worked at the DMC full-time he could work with them more effectively over the phone or through correspondence.

Over these next 4 or 5 months Dr. Dean and his colleagues worked on curriculum development for the Center and on plans for the development of the facilities. Additionally discussions were had about what degrees to offer in marine science. At that time UM offered a doctorate degree in Zoology, but none in marine biology or oceanography. As the plans progressed, Dr. Dean spent less time in Orono and more time in Walpole. Meanwhile Lou Dean juggled running two households while pursuing graduate work in library science. Louise was also an avid gardener, and in May conveyed to Mrs. Darling that the myrtle, primroses, and narcissus were in bloom, and how fine everything looked at the Center.

Plans were made to remodel the upper level of the Horse Barn into dormitory quarters for students and faculty. The main floor was to be used as temporary laboratory space. The basement of the farmhouse was to be converted for temporary use as a laboratory. Also included in renovation plans were the conversion of the Plume of Feathers into a dining hall, and installation of central heating in the home of the caretaker, the Leeman House. Renovation plans went out for bid in early April and opened on April 26th. The renovation plans had a setback when the lowest bid of $28,087 was $12,000 over what Dr. Dean, UM engineering services, and architects had anticipated. In addition this bid did not include contingencies or the new septic system required for the increased load. Keith Leeman would later recall cleaning the poop out of the hen house to make room for a hen house.6

In a letter to Dr. Darling dated March 4, 1966 David Dean noted the need, in order of priority, of a 1) substantial dock and launching ramp at Wentworth Point (the remains of the Darling’s pier were beyond repair), 2) a modern research facility with running seawater near the dock, 3) classrooms, 4) more housing facilities. Preliminary plans were made for a flowing seawater lab and a pier.

With the increasing interest in oceanography, Maine and New Hampshire held their first conference on oceanography in Portsmouth on Monday April 11, 1966 to advance mutual cooperation in exploring and exploiting the continental shelf. About 20 industry, science, and education leaders were invited from each state. Dr. David Dean was one of the speakers. In May a bi-state commission on oceanography was formed with 6 representatives from each state. Dr. Dean was appointed one of the commissioners from the state of Maine, and the commission held its first meeting in Portsmouth May 23, 1966. All were optimistic on the future of oceanography.

Mr. Sumner Pike, another commission member, rode back to Bangor with Mr. Dean. They stopped by the Darling Center and David Dean noted in a letter to Ira Darling how impressed Mr. Pike was with the Center’s potential. He also noted that Mr. Pike had been a member of the oceanography commission in Washington since it was formed in 1957, and that he was still a member of the state legislature. He thought Mr. Pike should make a significant contribution to the development of oceanography in Maine. The Deans would continue to correspond with the Darlings for the next few years. Mr. Darling passed away in 1969.
Figure 14: An aerial view of the Ira C. Darling Center taken May 16, 1966. Wentworth Point and the Darling Marine Center is left to center. McGuire Point and Clarks Cove are on the right. The straight solid lines on the left side of the picture are penciled in property lines as they existed in 1966.
Figure 15: A close-up of Wentworth Point (also currently called lower campus) from that 1966 aerial photo. On the right is the pier which was at the time in a state of disrepair. The Point is clearly discernable in the lower right corner of the image. In the top center of the image is the log cabin which has since been torn down, excepting the chimney which at present remains.
Figure 16: A 1966 close-up of the now Ira Darling Road as it goes down to the Damariscotta River shore along the present day Mowed Field (in the right of the image). The red arrow in the center of the image points towards the Wentworth Point Cemetery. I would speculate that the vertical whitish line that runs through the cemetery is daylight. The straight lines in the top left corner of the image are penciled in property lines. In the top center of the image there seems to be an oval racetrack-like shape in the present day Mowed Field.
Figure 17 (preceeding page). A close-up of that 1966 aerial image of the present day upper campus of then Ira C. Darling Center for Research, Teaching, and Service (ICDC). The long straight lines on the left of the image, and in the upper right corner of the image are the then property lines for the ICDC. The Leeman House is to the left at the top of the image. The red arrow points to a hedgerow in the farmhouse backyard, of which there are presently remnants no longer in a row. The blue arrow points to an unknown similarly shaped object.

Mr. Darling took up tree farming during the last years his family owned Wentworth Point. In a letter from David Dean to Ira Darling dated May 24, 1966 Dr. Dean reports all 13,000 trees have been planted at the Center, and they look good. Their planting was supervised by the area forester as well as a representative from the forestry group at Orono. They were to be cared for in accordance with the forestry practices set forth by the School of Forestry.

On May 12th the University of Maine announced it had been awarded a grant of $20,800 from the National Science Foundation for the support of research on marine worm life. The work was to be carried out over a two year period by David Dean and his research assistant George Noyes at the university’s marine research laboratory at Walpole. In a letter to Mr. Darling, David Dean described other research projects listed by students and staff members who would be using the center that year. It included a study of parasites of the sea gull, physiology of mussels and the sand dollar, a study of marine sediments, and a study of endocrine glands in fishes.

In June the Deans, their 3 children, and their dog came down to Walpole for the summer to live at the farmhouse at the Center. They would occupy the farmhouse until 1979.

NOTICE

Effective June 16, the offices of the Ira C. Darling Center for Research, Teaching and Service, 205-210 Lord Hall, will be closed permanently and moved to the oceanography center at Walpole, Maine.

All future communications should be forwarded to:

Darling Center
University of Maine
Walpole, Maine 04573

Telephone: 563-5340

Figure 18: The Darling Center’s Orono campus closing notice.

Darling estate provides opportunity for interdisciplinary research center

Figure 17: Title of a July 22, 1966 Maine Campus news article about the Darling Center. It states that with an ideal central location on the Maine Coast, the Darling Research Center will be used by Colby, Bates Bowdoin Colleges, and of course the University of Maine at Portland and at Orono. As the facility expanded, it would encompass work in marine biology, as well as chemical, physical, and geological oceanography.
Thus the beginnings of the Darling Marine Center.

Notes

This is a revised third and final edition of the original history bulletin put into book chapter form. It was edited and reissued in 2017.

* The Records of the Darling Marine Center at Special Collections, Fogler Library, University of Maine were reorganized in 2016. There appear to be items in the finding aid that I had not seen when I previously visited Special Collections, and I have not seen to date of this publication. This note meant to aid in any further or future study or enquiries into the records or history of the Darling Marine Center. Of special interest to this author are 2 collections listed in the category Related Materials: 1) Raymond H. Fogler Library Records, UA RG 0006.012.001 includes records on the Darling Marine Center. 2) Office of the President Records, UA RG 0004 includes records of the Darling Marine Center. This author has not viewed these records.

Source

Information not cited comes from the DMC Archives, Louise Dean Library, Darling Marine Center, Walpole, ME.

5. DMC Archives. Ostheimer Visit Notes 10-10-81. Local History