

BEYOND NOISE

No two of us are exactly alike. We all process auditory stimulations differently. If an audible vibration such as the roar of a jet engine annoys us we call it noise, whereas the vibration heard from reeds, strings, or lips we refer to as sound.

Since the replacement of the failing Vinalhaven Light and Power Company plant by a submerged "umbilical cord" cable to the mainland, Vinalhaven has been nearly as quiet as prior to the Civil War, except for noise from automobiles, diesel engines, rock hammers, stone crushers, chainsaws and skidders. From the 1850s to the Depression the Fox Islands thrived as vibrant, active--and noisy---communities. Places cannot be exporters of sheep, wood, granite, and fish without creating noise. Audible vibrations are the sounds of life, work, and prosperity. Presently, with the old power plant gone, the *Cruising Guide to the Maine Coast* writes that Carver's Harbor is quiet, yet it still remains a working, often noisy harbor.

The level of the noise from the power plant that operated from 1914 to 1975 is difficult to remember precisely. Being brought up with it I didn't really hear it. We only started to listen for the power plant when the "power hour" began and individual home generators phased in to help provide the comfort of electricity. When Mr. Hopewell from across the harbor complained about the power plant and the purr from the gasoline-fueled straight piped breathing eight cylindered Buick, Cadillac, and Oldsmobile-driven lobster boats, I said "what noise?" In earlier days from up on Mountain Street I easily heard those glowing red hot, exhaling straight piped six cylinder Chevies and flathead Chryslers. We certainly didn't have to go to the harbor in the afternoon to know that the five-boat Dyer fleet was safely back with each boat revving up their 160 horses for a little racing fun.

From the 1850s to the 1930s, din from the island's many quarries overwhelmed any sounds made by small engines, luffing sails, or pastoral activities. On Vinalhaven, noise (or was it sound?) of many active men yielding hammers, drills, steam engines, and explosives muted sounds from the prosperous fisheries and related factories. According to Vinalhaven historian Sidney Winslow, the industrial period from 1860 to 1920 was a "happier time" for the island: "Times were good, wages were good... Vinalhaven's populace was well fed...[A] great many of the townsfolk were born to the musical click of busy hammers and the puffing and groaning of [quarry] machinery...Many and many a night was the neighborhood lulled to sleep by the incessant puffing of the steam pump and awakened in the morning by the shriek of the 7 o'clock whistle that called the men to work...[T]he quarry's busy clatter came to be synonymous with the sunrise. We paid little attention to the heavy blasts that were set off just a short distance from our dooryard, even though the air was often filled with sticks and stones because of them..." (See *Fish Scales and Stone Chips*, 1952). If Sidney Winslow were alive today he might say Maine and its laws should do less to lead us down the road of being a gated State for vacationers and retirees but do more to create an environment for productive decent-paying jobs. Our educated young people would not have to leave the Islands or the State for meaningful employment.

Today the noise of progress and sustainability and our step forward in the battle for life on these Islands and this planet happens at the site of the former Swenson Quarry, (formerly Maltzman Quarry, Bodwell and Webster Quarry, Carver and Graffam Quarry, and Amaziah Mills farm). If this is to be our Islands' energy producing site, would we prefer oil, coal, or nuclear power over wind? Imagine the noise level created in this area from all the stonecutting required to keep three derricks busy in the quarry and two at their wharf on the shore. Following Maltzman a quieter period ensued until the early 1960s when the John Swenson Granite Co. introduced a technique of freeing granite from the earth with high temperature flames fueled by kerosene and compressed air. Islanders on both North Haven and Vinalhaven thought of it as a jet port with continuous jet departures. Although the Long Cove, Seal Cove, and Mill River neighbors were certainly blasted, Jake and his crew were well received by most folks. They provided local employment, paid their taxes, and brought new money to the island. The Vinalhaven Garden Club members loved visiting the quarry to gather burnt granite dust

for their gardens. Even though the noise level was not quite like that experienced by Sid Winslow, islanders felt excited to see Vinalhaven granite being shipped again.

I empathize with people living near the Fox Islands Wind turbines who are adapting to the changes in their neighborhood. The Norton and Mills families of this same neighborhood experienced change as well with the arrival of the early granite cutting operations. Seth Norton, who farmed the 30 acres west of Gulley Brook, may have walked the short distance down the road and worked as a blacksmith for Bodwell and Webster.

All of us believe we are entitled to the benefits of our infrastructure, which is often associated with noise or some other notable feature. Many of our daily activities on the Island require acceptance of change and in some cases, increased noise. Some of us tell time by the drone of the ferry; some listen to the changing tune of departing and arriving lobster boats. Others put up with the smell, smoke, and noise at our dump and transfer station. Since the road repaving, neighbors of East and West Main Street listen to faster--and thereby often noisier--traffic. Some neighbors of the shooting range wonder when the shooting will stop. How does the quality of life near the wind turbines compare with that of life and property values near our dump, shooting range, airport, sewer plant, busy harbor, gravel pits, school playground, or Main Street?

One billion people, one-sixth of the earth's population, face risk from sea level rise driving them from the land they love and need by the results of our desire for a life style of ease and comfort. (Many of these people live on islands like us.) Let's help keep the fossil fuel in the ground and lower our carbon dioxide output. Let's stop the burning of coal, which deposits ammonia, carbon, mercury, nitrogen, and sulfur on Maine whenever it rains. Let's listen less to our politicians and listen more to our scientists. My science teacher says the wind turbine blades are 50% efficient, and 1.5 megawatts equate to 2,010 horsepower of energy. Therefore the three FIW turbines harvest 6,000 horsepower of the 12,000 horsepower of available wind energy passing by the three 240-foot diameter blade swept areas. Wow! Our electric rates will be lowered and stabilized with *free non-polluting* energy. Fox Islands Wind Project is only the beginning for taking local responsibility to get us off oil and coal. Our local natural resources of tides, sun, and wind, and our educated youth could allow us to become the Samsø Island* of Maine. Let's go Fox Islands. Perhaps one golden opportunity missed was that Fox Islands Wind, LLC did not build *six* turbines in 2009. Up and down the Midcoast, mainland folks look out to sea and admire what North Haven and Vinalhaven have done. Instead of "drill, baby, drill", let's choose "SPIN, BABY, SPIN"!!!

by Del Webster

*Samsø Island in Denmark has become famous for producing all of its own energy, a transition it made within only ten years.