



**Capt. Charles Burnham Morrill
was captain of the Steam Boat Aucocisco
for more than 30 years on its daily run between
Portland and Orr's and Bailey Islands.
Born Feb. 4, 1865 and died Dec. 19, 1952.**

Charles Burnham Morrill was born in Livermore Falls, Maine in February 1865, the son of John and Emma Waterman Morrill. His father John B. Morrill had been discharged from service in the Civil War with the 24th Maine Infantry in August 25, 1863, but both parents perished when Charles was 4 years old. It appears he may have had an older sister and brother but he was sent to the Bath Home for Orphans where he remained for approximately 10 years.

About 1879 young Charles made contact with his uncle, Stephen Morrill, himself a Civil War veteran and a resident of Orr's Island. Stephen and wife Emily were childless and agreeable to take the fourteen year old onto their farm adjacent to the Orr's Island cemetery. Stephen was a popular figure in the Island landscape. He

owned a barn with an open dance floor and stage on the upper floor where dances and suppers were held for the islanders and the summer cottagers that were beginning to frequent the island now that Steamboats were finally beginning to service the eastern side of Casco Bay. However, Charles seemed drawn to the Sea more so than farming and shortly thereafter began his long association with the sea when he went fishing on a vessel owned by Capt. Bill Thomas of Bailey Island. By twenty he was cook on the vessel "Hascall" with Capt. Charles Bolton. This trip was made in February and when the vessel returned after five days, the crew could not get the sails down due to the amount of ice on them. They received \$45 for the trip.

In a newspaper interview with Alfred Eldon, in 1948, Capt. Morrill remembers of a trip aboard the fishing vessel "Mary E. Daniels" when he was a young man. She was a Gloucester schooner built in Essex. Capt. Frank McIntire of Orr's Island acquired the "Daniels" and headed out on a trip to the Western Banks. 80 barrels of salt to preserve the catch and 20 barrels of salt clams for bait were loaded and the vessel set sail for Cape Sable where they took on seven more crewmen to bring the total to 14 men. After a day of good fishing the crew began the process of splitting the catch and storing it below when the wind began to increase from the northeast. By 9 P.M. the anchor was dragging and the crew rigged a sea anchor to keep the vessels head into the wind. The fish that had not been dressed were pitched overboard and sail was reduced to a small riding sail. For four days the crew could only stand a watch lashed to the rigging while they waited for the weather to moderate. On the fourth day a large sea knocked the "Daniels" on her beam and the barrels of salt shifted. A hole was chopped in the bulkhead of the after cabin to allow the crew to enter the hold and the salt was passed with buckets up to the deck where it was thrown overboard. After several hours of work the vessel was brought nearly to an even keel and the storm began to let go. When stock was taken later it was found that all six dories were gone and of course the salt.

Between 1885 and 1888, Charles served as mate and pilot on the New York harbor tow boats "Kemp", "Mary J. Finn" and "Viking".

In 1888, at the age of 23, he began employment with the local Harpswell Steamboat Company, and with the exception of 1898 when he made a trip to the Klondike gold fields, he remained with them throughout the remainder of his career. Continuing after the Harpswell Line was bought out by the new Casco Bay Line.

In February of 1898 the papers were full of gold strikes in Alaska. At that time Morrill had worked his way to Mate on the Steamer Sebascodegan under Capt. James Long. The pay was small and Gold Fever was rampant. He caught the fever and went looking for a party headed north and west.. He found them holding a meeting at Will Barnes shoe store in Portland and; "they asked me to join. We left about February 20th from the Union Station on the mountain division for Montreal. We found a guide that said he knew the country and would go if we would grubstake him." "He was a big hard looking man, about 6' 3" and 240 pounds. Claimed to be a fighter, wrestler and champion swimmer and ex Mountie, But in the end he proved no good."

The plan was to go as far as possible by rail, build sleds and buy horses and cross the rest of the country on crust over trails that were marked on the railroads maps. The guide and Harry Nevens started off about a week ahead of the rest of us for Edmonton

to build sleds and buy 15 horses, make up the harness and pack saddles, order supplies and be ready when the rest of us arrived..”

A week later, on February 20, Wm. Jones, of Cape Elizabeth, Vick Bruster and Harry Philips, both of Portland, met Morrill at the train station headed for Montreal. Arriving there about 6 am they hunted up breakfast and went sightseeing, shopping and left the next day for Winnipeg.

“We bought canned salmon, bread and butter for sandwiches on the train, but planned to buy our supplies in Edmonton. We stopped at Calgary and took the Edmonton train which consisted of baggage and one passenger coach. We got stuck in a snow bank in the mountains and all hands turned to with shovels and in a few hours we were on our way to Edmonton. About 3 am we arrived at the end of the road.”

“The town was on the other side of the river and there was a ferry.” “We found our guide and Nevens staying at a small tavern. Edmonton was a small place with two story buildings. Store on first floor and living quarters upstairs. Ranchers and Indians come here to trade. A few parties going to Alaska took this road. At last we got ready to start about 2PM on an early March day.”

We were mixed donkey/two-horse teams with bobsleds. I was the only one that knew anything about horses. Quite a job hitching up 6 double teams. The horses acted bad. We got about 10 miles and stopped at a road house and slept on the floor. It was a rumrunner joint. There were about a dozen men there for that purpose and they didn't look like Sunday school children so I remarked we had better stand a watch.

[The narration stops here but Capt. Morrill has some notes which outline more of the story.]

After the rum runner tavern it seems they headed for Egg Lake in Alberta and they had 2 horses break away. After two nights of travel they put up at a small two room ranch where a French man and his eight children lived. That was the last house they saw for a time. They spent the next night in the woods listening to the wolves howl. Their next camp was near a Hudson Bay Trading Post on a river which they proceeded up on the ice to Slave Lake.

Capt. Morrill's notes end here. From Slave Lake the crew seems to have headed for the Peace River but hit weak ice and took to the woods. They decided it would be easier to cut green timber and build two flat boats to carry them up the Peace to Hudson's Hope a distance of 280 miles. However they ran into a canyon which they had to portage around for 12 miles. They burned the boats to recover the nails and made several trips to ferry their supplies but while they were engaged in the portage a large part of the goods which had been cached behind were stolen by other groups which were finding the travel challenging as well. The next stop was Fort Graham where they prepared for the final part of the trek to the town of Peace River. There they built new boats for the final push to their destination of the Black River region. Harry Neven took the horses overland



The rest of the trip is not recorded.

At a reunion of the "Klondike Gang" in 1922, the men admitted they did not make it to the Klondike gold fields and found little to no gold for their troubles where they were 600 miles NW of Edmonton. but it was an adventure they would not have missed before deciding their taste for adventure was not up to expectations. With their remaining supplies running short, we have to assume their return was also an adventure in the same manner as the trip west, but was likely less boisterous upon their return to Portland. To his credit, Capt. Morrill never revealed the name of the "not so good" guide.

To my knowledge the furthest north Capt. Morrill ventured after that was to for hunting game in Aroostook County near Wytopitlock Lake.

His adventure did not seem to have disturbed his standing with the Harpswell Steamboat executives and he officially became Captain Morrill by 1903 as master of the vessels "Sebascodegan" and later "Aucocisco".

The Sebascodegan and her Captain had a close call in July of '03 when the revenue cutter Woodbury maneuvering in Portland Harbor in thick fog plunged her bowsprit into the wheelhouse and destroyed it and half of the main deckhouse. There were no injuries but The dazed Captain was found standing aft clutching the broken spoke of the steering wheel. Within three weeks both the "Auco" and her Captain had recovered and were back on the Orr's Island run.

Captain Morrill had wide ranging interests and contacts. In 1907 he began a long running relationship with Arctic explorer Robert E. Peary in effect becoming Peary's real estate broker for the purchase of several Casco Bay Islands.