

Weekly Interview

Thurston Holt

A Cape Elizabeth man's pursuit of seeing his mother's words in print

By Zack Anchors
Staff Writer

Anyone who drives down Shore Road in Cape Elizabeth from time to time has likely noticed Ledgelawn, one of the more impressive estates situated along the ocean. It is also the birthplace of Thurston Holt. Although his family has not owned the property since 1978, Holt still lives in Cape Elizabeth, in an apartment, and has recently published a book that chronicles the life of a woman whose rich story ranges from Arctic exploration and international adventure to memories of growing up in Victorian era Cape Elizabeth and the challenges of being a mother and wife.

The memoir *People Intoxicate Me* was not written by 86 year-old Thurston, but by his mother, Margaret Thurston Holt, who passed away when she was ninety-four, also in the year 1978.

Thurston has spent nearly 30 years working to publish the manuscript, enduring rejections from a series of publishers that discouraged him but never caused him to give up the project. Determined to see it in a high-quality, hardcover print, he finally turned to a self-publishing company and produced 500 copies of the book last spring.

"My editing was light, because she wrote very well," Holt said. "Almost as well as she talked."

Holt said the genesis of the book was a conversation many years ago between his brother Prescott and his mother.

"Prescott said, 'mother, you've had an interesting life, why don't you write a book?'" Thurston recalled. "She was around 80 when she started writing this... after a while, mother referred to the project as 'my son-imposed task.'"

Thurston said he had difficulty settling on a title for the

book, but eventually decided to glean it from one of the many anecdotes that fill its pages.

"The way the title came about was that mother—who was a teetotaler—was at a cocktail party nursing a glass of tomato juice or tea, with everybody milling about hobnobbing. One of her friends said, 'Oh, Margaret, do you like these parties?' Mother said, 'Oh yes, people intoxicate me.'"

Margaret Thurston Holt was born in Portland in 1983 and grew up living in a home on Deering Street during the winters and at Ledgelawn during the summers.

"In those first summers at Ledgelawn," Margaret wrote, "the only time I left the place was to meet my father when he returned from his office on Exchange Street. So I spent happy summers with the horses, chickens and snakes; the wildflowers, the rocks, and the fascinating life of the sea, and never felt the lack of companionship."

Margaret later attended Waynflete Academy in Portland and

eventually studied at Bryn Mawr College, where she met Francis Hubbard, who would become a lifelong friend. Hubbard was to marry Robert Flaherty, a filmmaker famous for producing some of the first documentary films ever made, such as "Nanook of the North" and "Louisiana Story."

One of the most exciting chapters of her book is Margaret's account of a 1915 trip she took with the Flahertys to explore Hudson Bay and search for iron ore prospects on what are now known as the Belcher Islands. Guided by Native Americans, they traveled by canoe and schooner through the exotic territory.

"They knew there was iron-ore there but wanted to see if it could be profitable to extract," said Thurston. "It turned out the answer was yes, it was."

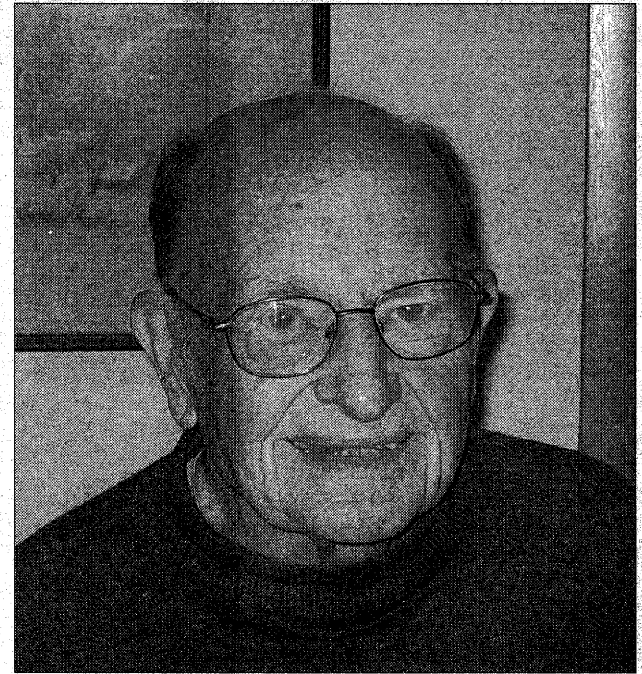
Margaret's trip "aroused a storm of protest from friends and family" who were concerned about the dangers she would face.

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places with you," Thurston said. "Because father was out with the fleet and Franklin was desk-bound."

Although Thurston was the main force behind bringing "People Intoxicate Me" to print, his family worked with him, with one of his daughters helping copyedit and the other serving as the graphics and image editor.

Since its publication, Thurston has sent the book to many of his relatives, who he said have taken a great interest in the story. The book is now for sale at Longfellow Books in downtown Portland near Monument Square, but Thurston expects that additional stores will begin carrying it soon.

"We're expecting it will be available at area libraries soon as well," he said.



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Margaret herself was nervous, but assured her loved ones she would return safely, and despite facing some hardships and challenges, she did.

"Our days were punctuated by excitement every twenty minutes or so by the appearance of rapids to run," Margaret wrote. "As we approached a rapid, the man in the stern and often the bow paddler stood up in order to pick the best possible path through. To us, the uninitiated, all ways looked equally dangerous... After several of these miraculous passages from peril to safety, I began to enjoy the excitement of the quickened tempo when the billows would suddenly almost snatch our canoe from one bit of calm water and hurry it down helter-skelter to the next."

After returning from Canada, Margaret married the lawyer Roscoe Thurston Holt, whom she had known since childhood. Their wedding was in 1917, the same year in which Roscoe became the youngest person ever elected to the Maine Senate. Soon though, as the United States was lured into war, he became an officer in the Navy and was assigned a role on the USS Virginia.

"When I was born," said Thurston, "Father received a letter of congratulations from Franklin Roosevelt addressed to the USS Virginia."

Roscoe and Roosevelt had been classmates years before at Harvard and had worked together on the Harvard Crimson newspaper.

"Franklin was assistant secretary of the Navy at that time and after the congratulations he wrote, 'while this job has tremendously interesting, I would gladly have changed