

How a Little Inlet Became a Harbor

The waves lashed the small sloop and it lurched and shuddered through the sea. Capt. Thomas Goss could barely see beyond the bow as wind and rain pelted his old fishing boat. Finally through the storm he spotted a dim light and soon he realized he was headed straight for the rocks off Locke's Neck. He struggled with the rudder and was just able to come about to lurch past Little Neck and into the harbor. How many Rye fishermen longed for the safety of the old harbor in such storms? It wasn't that long ago that the place we call Rye Harbor today was small tidal inlet open to the sea. (The granite jetties were added in 1939.) As a natural outlet for the great Awcomin salt marsh, this small cove must have served early Rye settlers and their boats well. Before any digging or dredging, low tide revealed mostly mud flats where beached vessels could be worked on and so it continued until 1792 when selectmen voted to have a go at digging it out. Now there may have been an earlier effort in 1756, but no records have been found. Imagine 47 men working a total of 133 days that included teams of oxen for 17 days. For the record Nathaniel Goss provided 10 gallons of rum. The historical record tells only part of the story. Ten gallons wouldn't have gone very far in the summer of 1792, not the drink of the common man and not for that number of men for all those days laboring in the hot sun on the flats of the harbor. We all know what house and barn raisings are like with families bringing all the food and drink. Think of the feasts they must have brought to the harbor that summer when the men literally carved out a small trading harbor. Soon it was to thrive with the likes of Captain Thomas Goss and his schooner "Otis" which plied a lively trade twixt the harbor and Boston.