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# Helen Leidy Hamlin Correspondence

Helen Leidy Hamlin 1917-2004

Helen Leidy Hamlen

Mrs. Robert Earl Lennon 1917-2004

Hilda McLeod Jacob  
*Maine State Library*

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HAMLIN, Helen Leidy

Fort Kent, June 26, 1917-

## HELEN LEIDY HAMLIN

I was born June 26, 1917, in Fort Kent, Maine, and spent most of my childhood in a small French speaking village, called Fort Kent, Mills, just outside of Fort Kent. My mother is of French Arcadian descent and my father is Pennsylvania Dutch. I am the eldest of six children, and I have three brothers- Robert, John and Carleton- and two sisters, Catherine and Elizabeth. Our summers were spent at Cross Lake on the Fish River Chain of lakes, at my grandfather's camps. We had considerable freedom, and at quite an early age we were allowed to have canoes and camping equipment to explore as much of the Fish River Chain as we cared to.

My grandfather, Frank Austin, was a lumberman, and also one of the first game wardens in the state of Maine. My uncle, Cash Austin was also a lumberman, and later a game warden for the state of Maine.

At our home in Fort Kent Mills, which was really a colony of lumberjacks and their families, we came into contact with a great deal of logging and woods lore. I attended the Madawaska Grammar School in Fort Kent, and also the Fort Kent High School. Then I went to the Madawaska Training School in Fort Kent for a two year normal school course. During the summers of 1936 and 1937 I worked as a counselor teaching campcraft and riflery at Camp Arcadia in Casco, Maine.

When I graduated from the Training School I had already set my heart on teaching at Nine Mile on the St. John River, at a very small log cabin school that formally was maintained there for a game warden's and a fire warden's children. The school was discontinued and I applied for the school at Churchill Lake on the headwaters of the Allagash River. I taught school at Churchill for a year, spent another summer at Cross Lake with my grandfather, and was married to a game warden, Willis (Curly) Hamlin in September, 1938.

My husband and I lived at Umsaskis Lake during the winter of 1938 and 1939, then we moved to Nine Mile on the St. John River where we spent two years, from August 1939 to October 1941. "Penny" Susan Elizabeth was born in July, 1941, and we were transferred to Norway, Maine, nearer civilization.

During the first of my stay at Churchill Lake I realized that there was material for writing in this northwestern part of the state of Maine, and during my stay there I kept a haphazard diary and a few notes. In 1941 when we were in Norway and I found considerable time on my hands, I started writing a book. It was three years later that I finally had a manuscript that seemed anything like book material. On the chance that I might get some criticism I sent the manuscript to the W. W. Norton Publishing Company in New York, because I had met a sportsman on the St. John River who had some connection with that company.

St. John River Valley

Is Scene Of Book by

New Maine Author



**AUTHOR AT WORK**—Between housekeeping duties at her Norway Lake home, Helen Hamlen works on her novel, "Nine Mile Bridge" that will appear in early Spring.

#### BY MARION COOPER

When Helen Leidy completed her course at the Madewaska Training School and asked to be assigned to a school in the St. John River Valley, she wasn't looking for material for a book, she just wanted the adventure of living in the wilderness for a year.

She got the adventure, a husband and the material for a book which she has written since she left the "Big Woods" three years and came to Norway to live.

Three years, not one, she spent in the wilds of Maine, for during that first year she taught at Churchill Lake, she met and married Willis Hamlen, called "Curly" by everyone.

And now, she's keeping her house on Norway Lake, caring for her

three year old daughter, Penny, and waiting more or less patiently for Spring when her book, "Nine Mile Bridge," will be released by the W. W. Norton Company.

#### In the Beginning

To start at the beginning, Mrs. Hamlen is a native of Fort Kent, one of the outpost towns of Aroostook County. Always interested in the woods and the activities associated with them, she listened more attentively than some of the other students when the principal at the Madewaska Training school told of his adventures while hunting and fishing in the St. John river territory. She thrilled to the stories of life far from civilization, liked what she heard of existence in lumber camps and when her graduation day drew near, asked for the school

either at Nine Mile Bridge or Churchill Lake, which are in the center of the unorganized territory of Northern Maine. There was no school at Nine Mile in 1937, but she got the Churchill Lake assignment, and then all her adventures started.

It was October when she made her long trek in to the camp. A bout with appendicitis and a subsequent operation made her a bit late in arriving. A long motor trip from Greenville, across the State, into Canada at Lac Frontier and back into Maine on a company owned road brought her to her destination one Sunday afternoon.

#### First Sunday

She wasn't expected, she said, and when she entered the lumber camp dining hall, where she was to eat her meals three times a day for a year with the woodsmen, the men were a sorry sight. They'd seen few women except the wives of some of the lumbermen who had accompanied their husbands into the woods, and not expecting company they had failed to shave or "slick up" very much. They remedied that before supper time, however, and appeared for their evening meal with smooth faces and clean shirts.

There were 2,000 people in the section that Winter, carrying on a big logging project and Mrs. Hamlen had 16 children in her school. Most of them spoke both French and English, although there were three, children of the warden, who spoke no French and three others who knew no English. She speaks both, so there was no language difficulty.



**NINE MILE** camp, where Mr. and Mrs. Hamlen spent one Winter in the St. John River section of Maine, inspired the title of her first book that will appear in the Spring.

#### Never Seen Cities

Some of the children, she said, had never seen anything but the woods and had never visited even a tiny village. Although they were woodwise and knew many things quite foreign to their city cousins, they were ignorant of many things taken for granted by the urban dweller.

For instance, some of them had never seen a fountain pen, were unacquainted with ships of all kinds and had hard work visualizing tall buildings.

#### Enter Curly

The settlement offered some social opportunities, and the young school teacher found herself much in demand at the weekly dances, where everybody went and enjoyed the old fashioned square

dances. Into Churchill Lake one day came the game warden, Curly Hamlen, cutting quite a figure in his snappy uniform, and there went the school teacher's idea of a year in the woods, for by the time school was over Helen Leidy had decided to become Mrs. Curly Hamlen and spend, as far as she knew then, the rest of her life in the St. John Valley.

#### In for the Winter

The Curly Hamlen's first home was at Umsaskis Lake, ten miles from Churchill, and the residents there were their nearest neighbors. Early in the fall they gathered up their supplies for the winter and trekked to their new home, there to stay they supposed until spring. Even after they were snowed in they found living there pleasant, Mrs. Hamlen said. They had brought in plenty of reading material, she read and sewed and time passed quickly.

#### No Food

But the newlyweds hadn't known too much about provisioning for so many months and along about February they ran out of food. It wasn't just that there was no more coffee and jam, but the flour and canned goods were all gone too, so there was nothing to do but start out on snowshoes to travel 38 miles and get some more. They made two stops on the way, one with friends in an adjoining camp and one in an empty ranger's cabin, but they got "outside," had a vacation and got their food back in.

That's when they got the dog team and started training it, with an experienced leader and three other green dogs who gave them some mighty spills and some near run-aways before they got the team under control. After that they could take occasional trips and call on wardens at camps within a ten mile area.

"Nine Mile Bridge" deals with that year at Umsaskis and other at the camp bearing the book's name. It recounts some of Curly's adventures on duty and tells of the daily events in the woods that replace the life in more settled communities.

#### Healthy Climate

Never a cold did they have during the three years they lived in woods camps, Mrs. Hamlen said, though the thermometer went far below zero and they thought nothing of dashing out hatless and coatless to draw water at the well. In fact, climate bothered them for the first time when they moved into town and took a second floor apartment in Norway Village. Cramped quarters and steam heat were more than they could accustom themselves to, so they moved into a little Cape Cod cottage on the shore of Lake Pennesseewassee, where they can enjoy the outdoor life and where Mrs. Hamlen can indulge in her second love, sketching, which follows closely her interest in writing.

This period at Norway Lake is just an interim, however, for when older and circumstances change a bit, the Curly Hamlens hope to go back to the St. John Valley to make their home and enjoy again all the features of woods life they love so much.



**FAMILY AFFAIR**—Both her husband and three-year-old Penny were interested in Helen Hamlen's progress on her first literary effort.

Lewiston Evening Journal  
November 11, 1944

September 1, 1944

Mrs. Helen Hamlin  
Norway  
Maine

Dear Mrs. Hamlin:

The news that we might expect a book from your pen is delightful, especially when we noticed the locality and subject matter. The story promises to be of unusual interest, and we anticipate its publication eagerly.

Possibly you know of the Maine Author Collection. We shall hope that you may want to have an inscribed presentation copy of MAINE WILDERNESS in this exhibit collection. It now numbers about fifteen hundred volumes, written by those born in Maine, resident here, or writing about the state. We gather, too, biographical and critical material; and, although the collection is for exhibit purposes only, it is constantly being viewed and used by visitors and students. The authors themselves have been most generously interested, and the result is a fascinating and valuable representation of Maine's contribution to literature.

Of course we are always happy to welcome a new author, and especially when the book is about Maine. Our good wishes for your book, together with a cordial invitation to visit the library and see the Maine Author Collection when you are in Augusta.

Sincerely yours

hmj  
Encl--1

Secretary

September 21, 1944  
Norway Lake, Maine

Mrs. F. W. Jacob  
Maine State Library  
Augusta, Maine

Dear Mrs. Jacob:

I thank you for your letter and I shall be only too glad to send you a presentation copy of my book. The title has definitely been decided on at last, and it will be called NINE MILE BRIDGE. I imagine it will be available by April or May.

If there is any other information you wish to have for the Maine Author Collection, please feel free to write for it. I'm afraid I'm very new at this game and I don't know just exactly how to go about this.

When I am in Augusta again, and not so rushed for time as I was on my last visit, I shall call at the Library.

Yours truly,

*Helen Flanders*



September 22, 1944

Mrs. Helen Hamlin  
Norway Lake  
Maine

Dear Mrs. Hamlin:

Thank you very much for the generous promise of an inscribed copy of NINE MILE BRIDGE for the Maine Author Collection. We shall look forward to its publication with eagerness.

As for information: we like to know the vital statistics about our authors (birthplace, birth date, education, marriage and so forth), and anything else they want to tell us! As for inscriptions: they are as varied as the inscribers. For instance, there are tributes to the loveliness and inspiration of the State of Maine; there are pen-and-ink sketches by those artistically inclined; there are bits of original verse, some lofty in sentiment, some amusing; there are autobiographical anecdotes; and occasionally the inscription sets forth some incident in connection with the conception of writing of the book. There is no rule, you see; and the variety of inscriptions is one of the most fascinating parts of the collection.

We certainly hope you will find it possible to call at the library when you are in town; you would find even a brief glance at the collection interesting, and we should have the pleasure of meeting you. Our good wishes for the satisfactory completion of publication details; and good luck to NINE MILE BRIDGE.

Sincerely yours

hmj

Secretary

April 12, 1945

Mrs. Helen Hamlin  
Norway Lake  
Maine

Dear Mrs. Hamlin:

Each book review magazine that arrives is eagerly scanned for mention of NINE MILE BRIDGE. It seems many long months since we began to wait for your book, but we have not yet seen notice of its publication.

Now patrons are beginning to inquire for it, and we venture to write to you for information. Do you know when NINE MILE BRIDGE will be published?

We have not forgotten your brief but pleasant visit, nor the fact that we may anticipate an inscribed copy of the book for the Maine Author Collection. We hope when you send it that you will have time in which to send us also a biographical sketch. We like to have all the information possible about our authors.

Our very good wishes for the success of your book.

Sincerely yours

hmj  
Encl--1

Secretary

April 14, 1945  
Norway, R.F.D.#1., Me.

Mrs. F. W. Jacob  
Maine State Library  
State House,  
Augusta, Maine.

Dear Mrs. Jacob:

I received your letter and I thank you for your interest. I have not forgotten the inscribed copy for ~~the~~ Maine Author Collection, and perhaps instead of sending it I may bring it in to you, also the biographical sketch.

The book will not be out until May 25th, but I think reviews might be published around May 1st. A few copies have been released by the publishers, such as the one Mr. Stobie has. I also received a very few advance copies which went to the family, but will later receive additional copies. One of these will be for the library.

As a matter of fact, I really know very little about the publication of the book and I think Mr. Buxton of the Maine Development Commission can tell you more about it than I can.

I am looking forward to calling on you again.

Sincerely yours,



April 16, 1945

Mrs. Helen Hamlin  
RFD 1  
Norway, Maine

Dear Mrs. Hamlin:

Thank you so much for setting us at ease about NINE MILE BRIDGE. We didn't see how we could have missed its publication, but incoming requests for the book made us wonder! We will be patient, awaiting with delight not only the book but also a visit from you.

Sincerely yours

hmj

Secretary

May 28, 1945  
Norway, Me.

Mrs. F. W. Jacobs  
Maine State Library  
Augusta, Me.

Dear Mrs. Jacobs,

I'm ashamed that I have not sent  
this letter and a book off to you  
sooner, and I'm sorry I have to  
write it in longhand. Am having  
typewriter difficulties.

I don't know as this biography  
is what you had in mind,  
but if not please feel free to  
write me. I hoped I could come  
into the Library before this but  
will have to put off that pleasure  
until later.

2/ When I do get into Augusta  
again I will certainly call at  
the library.

Hoping you will forgive me  
for not having sent the book  
along sooner.

Yours truly  
Helen Hamlin

June 6, 1945

Mrs. Helen Hamlin  
Norway  
Maine

Dear Mrs. Hamlin:

NINE MILE BRIDGE arrived for the Maine Author Collection, with its clever artistic inscription; but where are the words to thank you, not only for your generous gift to the exhibit, but also for putting into permanent record these days and ways that you have known?

Surely no reader can fail to find enchantment in these pages; but the ones who will really appreciate it are those who know something of what you write. I spent my early years in the woods, in canoes and lumber camps, with the sound of the pungent "Canuck" phrases in my ears; to read NINE MILE BRIDGE is like coming home.

Thank you very much for the biographical sketch, which is exactly what we wanted. Thank you for the collection copy of NINE MILE BRIDGE (which we hope is only your first book). And thank you for writing it.

Sincerely yours

hmj  
Encl--9¢  
postal refund

In Charge of  
Maine Author Collection

# NINE MILE BRIDGE

*Three Years in the Maine Woods*

HELEN HAMLIN

Helen Hamlin comes naturally to the way of life she has chosen. Both her grandfather and her uncle were game wardens in the State of Maine. Curly was also a game warden when she encountered him at a lumbermen's Saturday-night dance in the wilderness country, fell in love and married him.

This is the vivid and lively record of their first three years in the woods, near the lumber-camp settlement at Churchill Lake in a country peopled by Allagash folk and French Canadian families. Here was the center of lumbering activity in a timberland area, the largest in private ownership within any single state—much of it not yet completely surveyed. There were only a handful of people in those fifteen thousand square miles of unbroken country and the young couple lived snow-bound for months out of the year, fifteen miles from their nearest neighbor. Trappers, foresters, lumbermen, woods-queer folk, wild animals, good fishing and the training of their dog teams form the background for the dramatic change of seasons in this north country where the only link with civilization is the telephone wire of the forestry service.

*Nine Mile Bridge* comes straight from the pine-scented forests of Maine. In its complete integrity, its honest relation to nature, and as a rich record of good living this book is outstanding. It is refreshing and reassuring to read the experiences of this young couple who wanted a kind of life they were courageous enough to get. You live with these Ham-lins and you agree with the author when she tells a French Canadian at Lac Frontiere, "We are rich. We are healthy and we live the way we want to live."

*With decorations by the author*

\$2.50



HELEN HAMLIN

## *About the author:*

Helen Hamlin writes of herself: "I was born in Fort Kent, Maine, one of the outpost towns of Aroostook County, and lived there until I was twenty. My summers were spent at my grandfather's camps on Cross Lake on the Fish River chain of lakes. By the time I was fifteen I had explored most of the Fish River chain on long canoe trips. After high school, I went to Madawaska Training School, a normal school to train teachers to cope with the language problem in the St. John Valley. There I listened with eagerness when the principal told of hunting and fishing adventures in the St. John River territory, and thrilled to stories of life in the lumber camps; when graduation came I asked for and got the school at Churchill Lake near the headwaters of the Allagash River. Then my adventures began."

These adventures, following her year of school-teaching, are recounted in *Nine Mile Bridge*, the story of her life with her game-warden husband, Curly, in the heart of the big woods. A remark Helen Hamlin made in a letter to her publishers might well characterize the utter honesty of her book: "We don't believe in telling tall tales to greenhorns."





Marion B. Stubbs

February 7, 1947

Mrs. Helen Hamlin  
Easton  
Maine

Dear Mrs. Hamlin:

One of the pleasantest bits of news which we have seen in a long time is mention of your new book, GAY AROOSTOOK. It promises to be not only highly interesting, but also valuable for information. We look forward to its publication, and hope that your generous interest in the Maine Author Collection will continue, and that we may be privileged to add an inscribed presentation copy beside the ever enchanting NINE MILE BRIDGE.

Sincerely yours

In Charge of  
Maine Author Collection

hmj

*APR 14-30-47  
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with the Robert  
Merrill at  
in the  
in the*

May 25, 1948

Mrs. Robert Earl Lennon  
Durham  
New Hampshire

Dear Helen Hamlin:

The library copies of PINE, POTATOES AND PEOPLE have been ordered, and we look forward with great interest and eagerness to their arrival.

We hope that the Maine Author Collection will also have an inscribed copy to accompany NINE MILE BRIDGE. If the new book has half the enduring appeal and charm of the first, there can be no doubt of its instant popularity and lasting success.

May it enjoy a warm welcome.

Sincerely yours

In Charge of  
Maine Author Collection

hmj

June 16, 1948

Mrs. Robert Earl Lennon  
Durham  
New Hampshire

Dear Helen Hamlin:

Mrs. Buxton very kindly mailed the Maine Author Collection copy of PINE, POTATOES AND PEOPLE to us, and we are delighted to add it to the collection. Of course, no more appropriate inscription can be imagined than the famous Aroostook crop which appears beneath your autograph.

We hope that before your Augusta afternoon waned, you were encouraged by more visitors than we observed. It was a nice picture in the paper!

Again thank you so much for your interest in the collection, and for honoring it by inscribing the copy of PINE, POTATOES AND PEOPLE. We hope it is a huge success, and that the new book progresses to your satisfaction.

Sincerely yours

hmj

In Charge of  
Maine Author Collection

June 16, 1948

Mrs. Alice Buxton  
15 Weston Street  
Augusta, Maine

Dear Mrs. Buxton:

It was very kind of you to trouble with the mailing of PINE, POTATOES AND PEOPLE. Please accept our thanks.

Sincerely yours

In Charge of  
Maine Author Collection

hmj