

Coastal Maine town remains undiscovered — thus far

BY JIM WINNERMAN
CORRESPONDENT

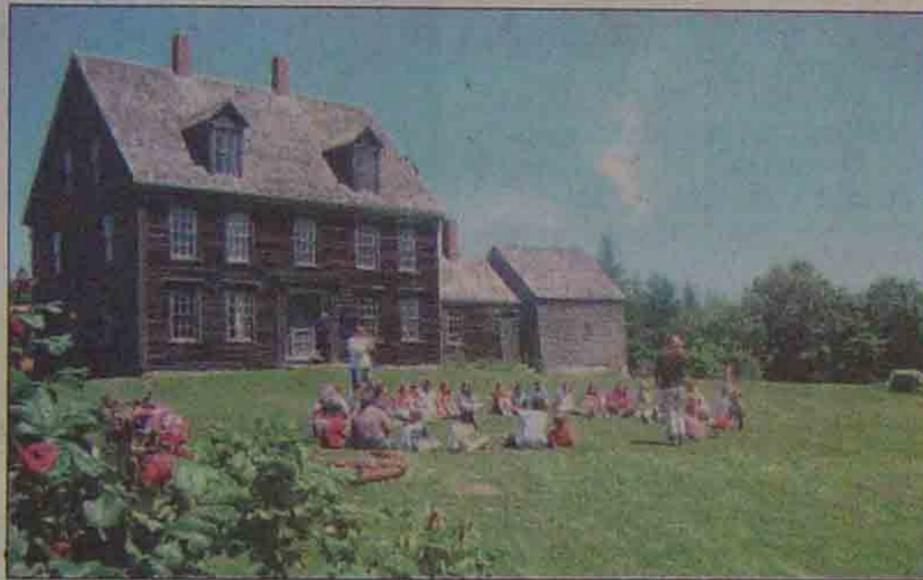
A friend suggested we visit Rockland, Maine, because it was a "real working town not yet messed up with tourists or trinket shops," and on our next trip east we decided to check it out.

After three days in the seaside port, it was apparent he was right. However, this seaside village of 8,000 is slowly becoming a center for artists and gourmets, and tourists surely will follow.

Two in-town institutions seem responsible for the change taking place in Rockland. The first is the Farnsworth Museum located on the main street in town. Surprisingly large with eight galleries, it restricts its collection and exhibitions to artists associated with Maine.

The Wyeth family has had a summer house nearby for decades, and many paintings by Andrew and Jamie Wyeth are part of the permanent collection of the Farnsworth. In fact, the farmstead in Andrew Wyeth's well-known painting "Christina's World" is owned by the museum and is open to visitors. It's just outside of town.

Wyeth did more than 300 paintings at the farm, and prints of many of those works are hung on the walls next to the scene he



The Maine farmhouse featured in the famous painting by Andrew Wyeth titled "Christina's World" is shown as a school group prepares to go inside for a field trip.

Painted.

A short walk outside the Farnsworth leads past several quality art galleries and to the Maine Lighthouse Museum, which displays one of the largest collections of lighthouse lenses and artifacts in the United States.

The three working lighthouse beacons that continually sweep the inside of the small museum leave the impression visitors are standing on the most perilous part of the Maine coast. It may not be too far from the truth, as

there are 19 lighthouses within 40 minutes of the museum.

The closest lighthouse to town is the 1889 Rockport Breakwater Lighthouse. The mile walk out to the site is made over huge granite stones quarried and cut so that their top is flat, but there is a one-foot gap between each slab that makes it impossible to walk and look up to enjoy the view.

Once safely at the lighthouse, which sits at the entrance to Penobscot Bay, Rockland's status as a "real working town" is apparent. Lobster boats, U.S.

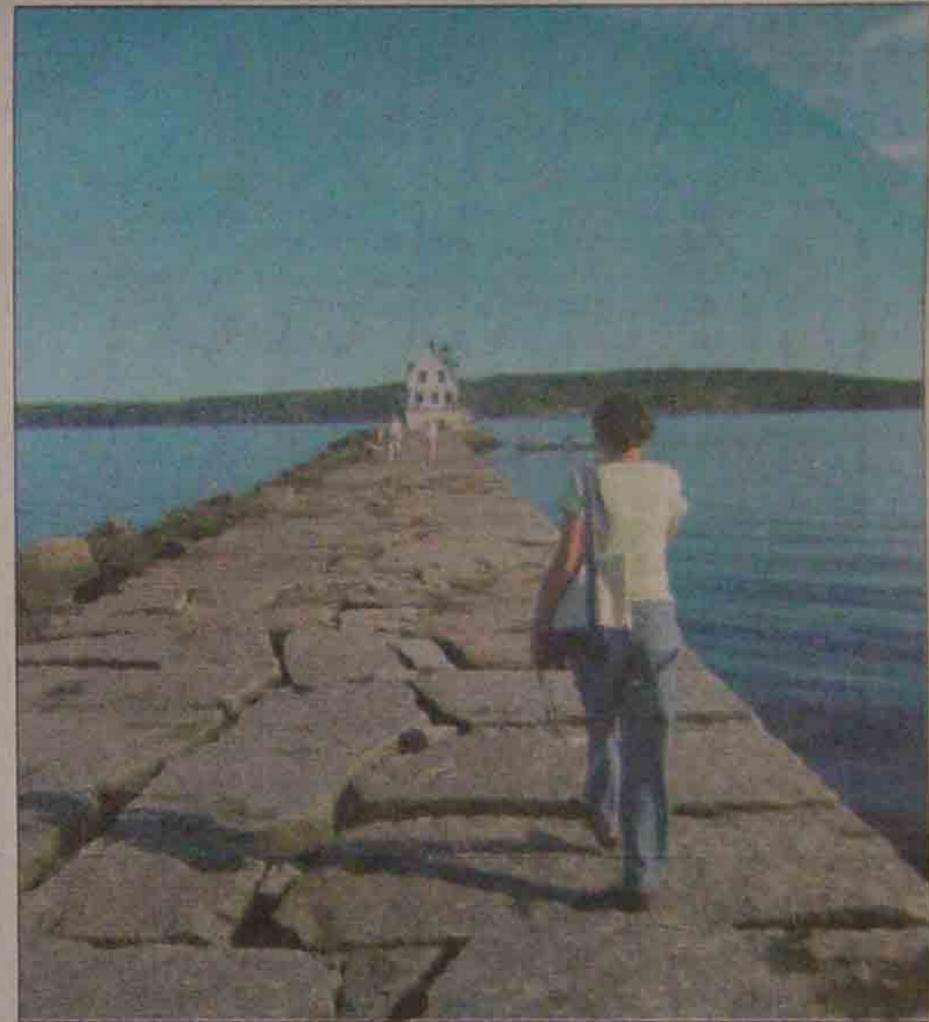
Coast Guard craft, ferries, a small sardine fleet and boats that supply the larger lobster fleets are constantly entering and leaving port.

However, a few boats in the two-mile wide harbor do cater to tourists. The Stuart Taber is a three-masted Yankee Clipper that takes 20 guests on six-night cruises, and the Morning in Maine and the Jenny Norman are smaller schooners taking visitors on two-hour sails.

We opted for a trip with "Captain Jack" on his traditional working lobster boat. As he dropped new traps and pulled up others containing lobsters he would sell later in the day, he seemed happy to have company and never stopped answering questions about the lobster industry.

Nearby there was plenty to see using Rockland as a base. The town of Camden is minutes up the coast and boasts a picturesque harbor at the base of a 50-foot waterfall. South of town the Owls Head Transportation Museum sits on the runway of a small airport and is memorable for its collections of antique aircraft, and its restoration workshops which are open to visitors.

A stop at the Main State Prison Showroom located in a renovated century-old building



The way out to the Rockland Breakwater Lighthouse in Maine is over large stones cut and placed to make a path through Penobscot Bay.

was interesting. Since 1823 Maine inmates have been learning about woodworking and selling products. The sales clerk took our credit card for the wooden boat we bought for a grandson but immediately turned it over to one of two uniformed prison guards, who handled the transaction.

The bed and breakfast industry in New England is well established, and there are several historic inns in Rockland. Our choice was the LimeRock Inn. The home is an 1890 turreted Queen Ann listed on the National Historic Registry and is an easy walk to all the galleries, museums and waterfront.

Innkeepers Frank Isganitis and P.J. Walter helped us plan daily itineraries with suggestions and maps while they cooked a

different three-course gourmet breakfast each morning. For lunch they directed us to the Penobscot Bay Soup Company, where soup recipes have been passed down from five generations of ship captains. Made in the same quantities needed to serve a ship's crew in the 1800s, it was fun to realize we were "tasting history."

Despite plenty for tourists to do, so far Rockland has escaped the onslaught of franchises of any kind. However, several local residents we spoke with had heard a rumor that a major hotel chain was about to buy a prime waterfront parcel. So, if you are headed to New England, try to get to Rockland before it changes.

Jim Winnerman is a resident of Creve Coeur.