

Press release: Contact person Barb McKeever 646-2321

Concerts on the Waterfront

**Presented by the Sackets Harbor Historical Society every summer Sunday afternoon
at the Battlefield State Park in Sackets Harbor**

Note - For 26 years, the Sackets Harbor Historical Society has presented the Concerts on the Waterfront series in Sackets Harbor. In honor of the thousands who have attended over the years, we have brought back audience favorites this year, plus new groups that are sure to become favorites.



Bill Smith with Don Woodcock- July 4, 2010

The Sackets Harbor Concerts on the Waterfront series continues on July 4th with a presentation by Adirondack raconteur and musician **Bill Smith**, with **Don Woodcock**, master fiddler. The project is one of 11 concerts in the Sackets Harbor Historical Society's Concerts on the Waterfront, presented on Sunday afternoons on the spacious tree lined lawn of the Battlefield State Park located within the village.

Bill Smith hails from near Colton in St. Lawrence County. He grew up in a time before television defined our evenings and you had to visit a comedy clubs to find laughs. Gathered around the old round oak stove, Bill's extended family, and an endless stream of visiting characters, wove tall tales to delight the youngsters and themselves. Most of the stories revolved around the theme of how a city slicker (or anyone official, like a game warden) is dazzled and sometimes hoodwinked by the wise and crafty rural hero. Prepare to meet Lanty Martin and his blue tick hounds, Uncle John and Aunt Lillian, Ira Irish and the Reverend Waterson.

Bill, the youngest of ten children, was born in the Adirondack foothills to Emily Bicknell and Roy Smith, a woodsman who delivered provisions to lumber camps over 70 years ago. Emily boarded the loggers as they traveled from camp to camp, so there was a steady supply of North Country originals, all with a story and a song. Bill remembers that his mother Emily always had a song going. Once he learned how to play the guitar, Bill began hanging out with the fiddlers at Cook's Corners and learned hundreds of the old timey tunes and ballads. He has spent his life in the Adirondacks, as a hunter, trapper, logger, fisherman, basket maker and guide, and has the tales to prove it. And no story, as they say, ever lost anything in Bill's retelling.

His songs are winsome and nostalgic, the fiddling pure Adirondack style, but it is the story telling that defines Bill Smith. Prepare to laugh your head off at Bill's tall tales and step back in time as he describes country life in the old days.

Bill will be joined at this presentation by **Don Woodcock** on the fiddle. Don holds the title of Grand Champion Fiddler of New York State, having won the state championship contest three times: in 1977, 1979 and 1982. His peers say Don Woodcock's playing is technically superb and he is widely recognized for having one of the greatest repertoires of traditional fiddle tunes anywhere around. Alice Clemens, herself a well-known traditional musician, said of Don Woodcock: "When [he] is playing, the music just seems to flow from his heart and soul. It reflects the inner goodness of Don Woodcock...The feeling and flow of his music is magnificent."

In an introduction to LaMar Bliss' radio interview in the Fall/Winter 2001 Journal of New York Folklore, Varick Chittenden of Traditional Arts of Northern New York (TAUNY) calls Bill Smith "an icon of life in the Adirondack Mountains". Mr. Chittenden notes that "Bill received a grant from the Folk Arts Program of the New York State Council on the Arts to study storytelling with an acknowledged master of "big stories," Ham Ferry of nearby Sevey's Corners. Since that apprenticeship, Bill has become well known throughout the Northeast, traveling almost constantly to one place or another to tell Adirondack stories and sing old songs. He has performed in hundreds of schools, town halls, church meeting rooms, and banquet halls, as well as sites as widespread as the National Folk Festival in Lowell, Massachusetts, and the Augusta Heritage Center in West Virginia. He has appeared in dozens of publications, including National Geographic and Dirty Linen, and has recorded a half-dozen albums of songs and stories. Despite his travels and many acquaintances far from the Featherbed, Bill still takes his greatest pleasure in swapping stories with old friends around home. His is such a deep well of tales that you can always hear a new one, or an old one with a new twist. And if you sit back and close your eyes, you can easily imagine that you too are around the old cookstove, just waiting for one more good one to be told."

The Concerts on the Waterfront is a free program of the Sackets Harbor Historical Society. Major sponsors for the series are the Watertown Savings Bank, the village of Sackets Harbor and the Town of Hounsfield Committee for the Advancement of Tourism. This event is made possible, in part, by the New York State Council on the Arts (NYSCA) Decentralization program, administered in Jefferson, Lewis and St. Lawrence Counties by the St. Lawrence County Council on the Arts. Additional support is provided from businesses and organizations throughout the North Country, and our tradition of "Pass the Hat".

All concerts are held from three to five o'clock on Sunday afternoons at the Battlefield. Bring a blanket or lawn chair, picnics welcomed. Rain site is the United Presbyterian Church.