

Kennebec Current

Discovering, preserving, and disseminating Kennebec County history since 1891

Volume 31 Issue 2

KENNEBEC HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

March–April 2021

Winthrop History Group Buys Former Bank Building

Winthrop school athletes take pride in being known as the Ramblers, but another group in that town is busy putting a permanent end to its own rambling.

The Winthrop Maine Historical Society has bought a building at 107 Main Street that once housed a branch of KeyBank and is converting the acquisition into its new headquarters, which will be called the Winthrop History and Heritage Center.

“We’re going to be able to have our monthly meetings there, with speakers and so forth,” the group’s president, Lynda Pratt, said in a telephone interview.

The society also expects to set up historical displays, a gift shop, and a research room in the building, which Depositors Trust Co. erected in 1940. KeyBank acquired Depositors decades later.

After a two-year search, the society bought the building in mid-February for \$100,000, which Pratt described as a price that was far below the property’s market value. In effect, KeyBank was contributing to the society’s capital campaign by accepting that amount as payment. The society is spending about \$30,000 for improvements needed to open the building this year, and it hopes to raise \$50,000 more by the end of next year to pay for additional work.

The society already has raised more than \$100,000, including a \$10,000 allocation from town government, to cover most of its expenses so far; and it has negotiated a loan from Kennebec Savings Bank to handle the rest, Pratt said.

The building consists of a ground floor and a basement. It includes two bank vaults, a kitchenette, and a bathroom. The society hopes to build a second bathroom so one will be available on each floor. Part of the basement will be used for storage.

In the research room, the society expects to expand the amount of computer equipment it has now.

“We have a small amount, but we are going to need to acquire more,” Pratt said.

The society was founded in 1971, the year the town celebrated its 200th anniversary of incorporation. The group functioned for many years but then disbanded. Residents resurrected it about 10 years ago, Pratt said, changing its name from “Winthrop Historical Society” to “Winthrop Maine Historical Society” to end ongoing confusion with a Massachusetts organization that also uses the Maine group’s original name.

The society now has about 120 members, most of whom live in Winthrop. A 10-member board of directors governs its activities.

Pratt said the society hopes to open the building to the public in June or July this year, which also is the year of Winthrop’s 250th anniversary of incorporation. Winthrop became a town on April 26, 1771, when Maine was still part of Massachusetts.

Town Council Chairwoman Sarah Fuller said the grand opening of the Winthrop History and Heritage Center is one of several activities that will be held to celebrate the 250 years of the town’s existence. (See related story, Page 4.)



The former home of KeyBank in Winthrop will become the new headquarters of the Winthrop Maine Historical Society.

Photos by Joseph Owen



A painted thermometer on the Winthrop Maine Historical Society’s Main Street building shows the group’s fundraising progress in mid-February. Since then, the total raised has exceeded \$100,000.

— by Joseph Owen

President's Message



There is much excitement at the Kennebec Historical Society these days. We hope it won't be long until you get to see the design by E.S. Coffin Engineering & Surveying, Inc. for the expansion of our existing building.

With only 400 square feet of climate-controlled space, our current home at 107 Winthrop Street in Augusta holds only about half of our current collection in rooms designed to preserve it properly. Also, getting into our home is difficult. We are on a steep hill and our visitors must climb many stairs. These obstacles and many more make it difficult for us to carry out our mission to preserve our Kennebec County history and see that it's available for folks to use for research or just enjoy a trip down memory lane.

In January 2018 the Carriage House Expansion Committee held its first meeting. The committee co-leaders are Kent London and I. The other members were Joe Owen and Ernie Plummer, and Scott Wood provided staff support. The committee lost one original member, then-Archivist Ernie Plummer, who moved out of state. Emily Schroeder, our new archivist, joined the committee. Since that first meeting, many people have attended the committee's meetings and offered suggestions. Some have experience with additions to buildings, such as Lithgow Public Library, the Children's Center, and others. We appreciate everyone who has helped along this journey.

At some of our meetings, we talked about how much space we would like and how large we wanted it to be. We are fortunate to have space for construction on our own property. We intend to build the expansion on the footprint of the original carriage house that was attached to the home when it was built in 1836. This will assure that the building will fit in well with the neighborhood. That has always been one of our objectives.

Then, with the help of Jim Coffin, we took our design to the Augusta Planning Board and received unanimous approval. We then decided we need some help with fundraising and hired Gary Friedmann & Associates to conduct a feasibility study to help us determine a capital campaign strategy and a timeline.

This brings you up to date on the planning of the KHS addition. We look forward to the day we will be able to welcome you inside this much needed addition to your historical society.

Stay safe.

— Patsy Garside Crockett, president

KHS Welcomes the Following New Members

David and Samantha Farago — Manchester
Gay and Ron Grant — South Gardiner
Priscille Michaud — Augusta

William Rogers Jr. — Bath
Mabel Smith — Augusta

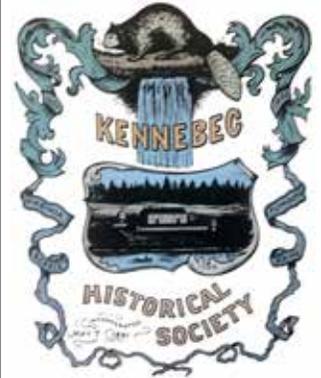
and continues to recognize ...

Sustaining Business Members (\$1,000+ annual)

G & E Roofing
Kennebec Savings Bank
Meadow Park Development

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Total membership:

813 on April 12

Life members: 210

The Kennebec Current encourages letters to the editor. Email letters to kennhis1891@gmail.com. All letters are subject to editing for taste, style, and length.

Off the Shelf: Augusta and the War with Mexico, 1846–1848

Some of Augusta's best-known men served in the Mexican War. In 1836, some American settlers in what was then a Mexican province won the future state of Texas from Mexico. President James Polk, in fulfilling a campaign promise, annexed Texas into the U.S. in 1845. The following year fighting broke out.

There were a number of pivotal battles in the war, which began 175 years ago on April 25. The Kennebec Historical Society has a map, "Battles of Mexico, 1847," that portrays some of them. It is fragile and in need of major restoration, but can be viewed with care.

Seth Williams, nephew of U.S. Senator Reuel Williams, was at Resaca de la Palma, Palo Alto, Cerro Gordo (citation for bravery) and Veracruz, prior to his further service in the Civil War.

Nathan Weston Jr., practicing law at the time in Bangor, was commissioned as paymaster. In an odd accident on March 26, 1847, his horse reared, leaving him with severe impairment of his left shoulder, arm, and hand. He resigned two months later.

Also present at Veracruz was Jonathan Ballard, great-grandson of Martha Ballard, famed midwife and diarist. He went to sea at 15, and by this time was a Navy gunner and assisted with the heavy guns on board. He managed to return home.

The fate of another young Navy man from Augusta was not as good. Midshipman James Madison Ladd, a promising artist, was on the Spitfire. His legacy and talent may be seen in the lithograph "Attack of the Gun Boats Upon the City, and Castle of San Juan de Ulloa. Bombardment of Vera Cruz, March, 1847," published by N. Currier (before there was a Currier and Ives). This work was based on his drawing, made on March 22 and 23, as several vessels took their positions: the Vixen, the Reefer, the Petrel, the Bonita, the Falcon, the Spitfire, and the Tampico. The last two had been seized as prizes when the city of Tampico was captured on November 14, 1846.

Ladd was born on February 23, 1820, in Augusta, the sixth of eight sons, to Joseph and Sarah (Sally) Hamlin Ladd. They also had three daughters: Mary, born in 1821; Hannah, 1825; and Sarah, 1828. His most illustrious brother, George Washington Ladd, was born on September 28, 1818, and went on to be a U.S. representative from Bangor.

Joseph Ladd had come from Deerfield, New Hampshire, with his father to Mount Vernon, originally intending to be a clergyman. His career interests shifted to goods: manufacture of lumber, wool, cloth, grain, and farming. He was a merchant in Augusta, and even managed to build a line of packets which traveled from Maine to Florida. This may have led to his son's interest in the Navy. Sadly, the father died of yellow fever when in Florida in 1835.

James joined the Navy four years later; by 1844 he was attending naval school in Philadelphia. Following graduation, we find him assigned to the steam gunboat Spitfire. He was reportedly wounded at Vera Cruz, but died November 26, 1847, at the naval hospital in Norfolk, Virginia — ironically, of a fever. He was 27.

His mother, Sarah, lived on in Augusta, at 6 Melville Street, until her demise in May 1874. She rests in Mount Vernon Cemetery with her husband and children James, J.W., Hannah, Joseph E., and Theo (Theophilus).

For more information, come in and check out the following articles by Augusta historian Anthony Douin:

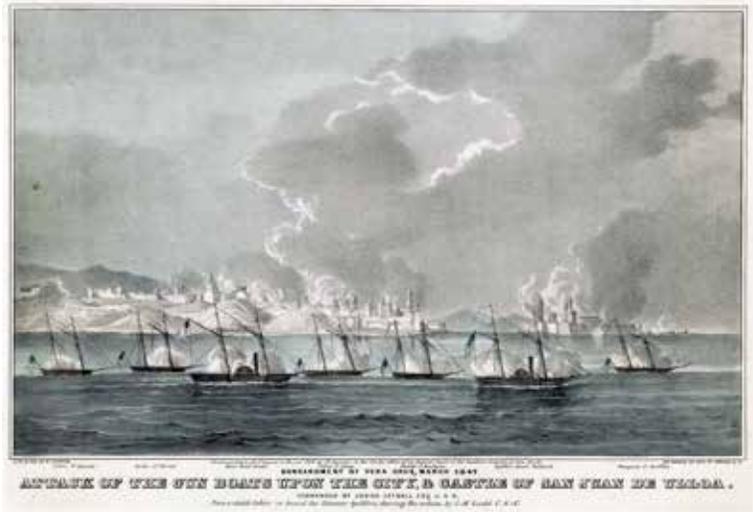
"President Polk was Here," *Capital Weekly*, July 3, 1997

"Hospital, Historic Commission Preserve 'Spirit of 1847,'" *Capital Weekly*, December 26, 1997

"Augusta's Forgotten Hero Almost Took Lee's Surrender," *Capital Weekly*, August 5, 1999

"Augusta Men Pitched In to 'Conquer a Peace' from Mexico," *Capital Weekly*, May 25, 2000

Until next time!



A lithograph print by N. Currier shows the bombardment of Veracruz by American warships under the command of Josiah Tattnall.

Courtesy Library of Congress

Municipal Quadruplets Hit Quarter-millennium Mark

You can call it a semiquincentennial, or a sestercentennial, or a quarter millennial. Whatever you call it, be sure to wish happy birthday to four Kennebec County siblings who share the same birthday and are turning 250 years old this year — namely, the city of Hallowell and the towns of Vassalboro, Winslow, and Winthrop.

April 26, 1771, is the date on which the Massachusetts colonial government incorporated all four of the communities as towns. They remained part of Massachusetts until Maine achieved statehood in 1820.

The ongoing coronavirus pandemic seems to have tamped down the scale of events that might have been held to celebrate the 250-year mark, but all four municipalities are planning at least some observances.

In Vassalboro, resident Don Breton has assembled a commemorative calendar to celebrate the quarter-millennial anniversary of his town's incorporation. It includes images of 47 antique postcards depicting various buildings and landscapes in the town.

The town plans to rededicate Monument Park, located near the China Lake boat landing, on April 26 to take note of recent improvements carried out there. The work included removal of dead trees, disassembling a cyclone fence, addition of a granite bench, and the installation of pavers around the town's 1905 monument to the Civil War and on the approach path to it, said John Melrose, chairman of the Board of Selectmen.

Vassalboro also expects to host a 250th anniversary parade during the annual Vassalboro Days celebration, to be held on the second weekend in September, according to Jan Clowes, president of the Vassalboro Historical Society.



An early-20th-century scene shows China Lake in Vassalboro.

Postcards from the KHS collection



Fort Halifax is Winslow's signature historical site.

Just up the Kennebec River, Winslow usually holds its Fort Halifax Days celebration in June, but the town canceled the event in 2020 because of the pandemic. This year's celebration has been postponed until August 28 for the same reason, but although it will be delayed, it also will be the framework for celebrating the town's 250th anniversary.

Amanda McCaslin, the town's director of parks and recreation, said the event is scheduled for noon to 4 p.m. and will include a parade and musical entertainment, including La Famille LeBlanc, a French Canadian band. Many of the workers at the mills that once operated in the area were French-speaking immigrants from Canada or were of French Canadian

descent. The town also expects to sell commemorative coins, sweatshirts and T-shirts, McCaslin said.

Winthrop hopes to kick off its celebration by ringing church bells through the town. Then in a few months, on a date yet to be determined, the Winthrop Maine Historical Society will host a grand opening at its new headquarters in a former bank building on Main Street.

Town Council Chairwoman Sarah Fuller said the town also plans to issue "passports" that look like bingo cards that recipients will use to collect souvenir marks at various events, enabling them to claim a prize later. Finally, officials are developing a daylong or weeklong event to pay tribute to Winthrop's outdoors heritage.

In the fourth community, Hallowell, the Row House historical group is marking the anniversary by publishing *Hallowell in Olden Times: Columns from the Hallowell Gazette*, a collection of observations about late-18th-century and early-19th-century local life that first appeared in print in 1863 and 1864. A copy can be ordered online from www.rowhouseinc.org.

Also online, a 35-minute video about the city's celebration of Maine's statehood bicentennial, the design of the state seal, and early consideration of Hallowell as a possible location of the state capital is



A trolley trundles past Winthrop's Methodist Church in this early 1900s postcard image. The artist who designed the card appears to have omitted the clutter of overhead electrical wires that powered the vehicle.

Continued on page 5

available at <https://vimeo.com/534998291>. At Hubbard Free Library, an exhibit scheduled to open April 27 will showcase artists' concepts of how the state seal could look if it were being designed today.

The city's annual Old Hallowell Day event was canceled in 2020 because of the pandemic. If it's held in July this year, the Historic Hallowell Committee plans to offer trolley tours of the city core, according to Bob McIntire, a committee member. If Old Hallowell Day is canceled for 2021, the committee will make maps available for self-guided walking tours.

Also, in August the committee hopes to unveil a 20-by-30-foot historical mural painted by artist Chris Cart on the side of the former Knights of Pythias building at 89 Water Street, at the northern corner of Winthrop Street.

Of the four communities incorporated in 1771, Hallowell is the only one that later also was incorporated as a city — in 1852. Its population peaked in the 1850 decennial census at 4,769, however, and it has declined since then to only half that size. Today each of the three other birthday quadruplet communities has far more residents than Hallowell does.

Hallowell and Vassalboro are named for Benjamin Hallowell and William Vassall, respectively, Massachusetts merchants and members of the original Kennebec Proprietors, holders of land that the British monarchy originally granted to the Plymouth Company in the 1620s. Winslow takes its name from General John Winslow, who directed the construction of Fort Halifax there in 1754 — and who, the following year, commanded the British troops who conducted the infamous expulsion of French-speaking Acadians from what is now Nova Scotia. Winthrop probably derives its name from John Winthrop, who in the 17th century was a four-time Colonial governor of the Massachusetts Bay Colony.

Beyond sharing the same date of incorporation, the four communities have at least one other thing in common. They all originally covered a larger territory than they do today. In fact, combined, they occupied nearly half of what is now Kennebec County. Over the years, however, Hallowell ceded land that became all or part of what is now Augusta, Chelsea, Farmingdale, and Manchester; Sidney was carved away from Vassalboro to become a separate town; Winthrop gave up the terrain that now comprises Readfield; and Winslow shed what is now Oakland and Waterville.

— by Joseph Owen



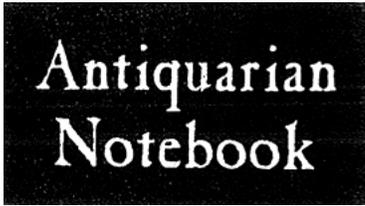
Hallowell is known for its once-thriving granite industry, which reached its peak more than a century ago.

❁ In Memoriam ❁

John V. Finnegan, 69, of Augusta, a longtime Kennebec Historical Society life member, died March 11 at his winter home in Stuart, Florida. Born in Buffalo, New York, he moved to Augusta as a child. He graduated from Cony High School in 1969 and matriculated at the University of Maine at Augusta and the University of Maine, in Orono, with degrees in criminal justice and English. He was a partner and president of Macomber Farr & Whitten Insurance Agency from 1975 until his retirement in 2016; was a past president of the Maine State Insurance Agents Association and the Maine Insurance Council; and served on the University of Maine at Augusta Board of Visitors, the Augusta Board of Trade, the Kennebec Valley Chamber of Commerce and several Augusta municipal boards. He taught insurance and financial services at UMA. A self-taught pianist, keyboardist, and vocalist, he performed in many musical groups, including the Cahoots classic rock band into his 60s alongside twin brother Mike. In his 30s, he was the church organist and choir director at St. Andrew's Catholic Church. His survivors include his wife, Nancy; two children; five grandchildren; and five siblings.

Daniel Gregory DuLon Stevens, 72, of Augusta, who served twice as the Kennebec Historical Society's president, died March 10. An Augusta native, Stevens graduated in 1967 from Cony High School and in 1971 from Nasson College, in Springvale. Except for his time in college and a few months in France, Stevens always lived in Augusta, mostly in a home that has been in his family for nearly a century. He worked 10 years with the Maine Legislature, 25 with the Maine Education Association, and 12 seasons with Historic New England as a docent at Wiscasset's Nickels-Sortwell House. He was involved in the Augusta Historic Preservation Commission, the Augusta Historic District Review Board, the Old Fort Western Board of Trustees, and local Episcopal Church parishes. Previously, he volunteered with the Augusta Conservation Commission, the Augusta Symphony Board, the Maine Old Cemetery Association, the National Trust for Historic Preservation, and the Maine Lesbian Gay Political Alliance. He also is remembered for Halloween cemetery tours he gave around Augusta. He is survived by a sister-in-law and many nieces and nephews.

Thoughts on the “Antiquarian Notebook”



Editor's Note: In 1997, KHS contributing member and local historian Anthony Douin began writing a historical column for the Capital Weekly that ran for 12 years. Life member and contributor Sally Furber Nelson has catalogued those articles and will be contributing her thoughts on Douin's content in the coming issues of our newsletter.

When I started volunteering at KHS in late summer 2019, I was given the assignment of cataloging the “Antiquarian Notebook.” These articles, researched and written by Anthony Douin, were published in the *Capital Weekly* from September 1997 until May 2009. The articles dealt with the history of Augusta from its beginnings as a trading post to its emergence as Maine's capital city.

Now, after 18 months, a pandemic, and a new computer system, I am finally finished with this enormous task. And what a joy this has been! Although I grew up in the area, I have learned so many things that I did not know. For example, did you know about Augusta's connection to the Great Atlantic and Pacific Tea Company? George H. Hartford, a co-founder of the A&P stores, was the grandson of early Augusta pioneer Daniel Hartford and spent much time in this area. When he died, his family donated the site and money to build the Hartford Fire Station. And did you know that John Philip Sousa and his band played “The Stars and Stripes Forever” for the first time at a concert at the City Hall in 1897?

As one might expect, many of these articles deal with the men who helped to settle Augusta — men with names such as Howard, Cony, Williams, Sewall, and Weston. However, I learned that it was a woman who actually owned most of what is now Augusta. Hannah Flagg North was the daughter of Gershom Flagg, the man who owned the land on both sides of the Kennebec River, including what is now downtown Water Street. Flagg left all this land to his daughter, then the wife of Joseph North. Married women could not own property at that time, so her husband is listed as the seller of lots to the new settlers; but the land really belonged to Hannah North. Perhaps Augusta should have been named Hannahsville?

Other Augusta women are featured in these articles. Jane Howard (no relation to the founding Howard family) was a dressmaker who was an active member of the Female Benevolent Society formed in 1827. Martha Ballard and her famous diary are mentioned frequently in the “Antiquarian Notebook.” The Augusta Ladies Aid Society met every Wednesday during the Civil War period to sew clothing for hospitalized soldiers. Susan B. Anthony visited Augusta in 1857 and inspired local women to support the cause of women's suffrage.

In other articles, Douin wrote about the many famous visitors to Augusta. My ancestors John Alden and John Howland were here in the 1630s to oversee the Plymouth trading post. Talleyrand and the future king of France Louis Phillipe visited the area in 1794; and in 1775, Benedict Arnold dropped by on his way to Quebec.

In the years before radio and television, politicians would often travel to Augusta to seek the support of voters. President James Polk visited in 1847. Stephen Douglas, the Democratic nominee for president, came to solicit votes in 1860 (he lost to Abraham Lincoln). Ulysses S. Grant and his family were entertained in Augusta on August 3, 1865. President Theodore Roosevelt was treated to a parade when he visited for two days in 1902. Charles Evans Hughes, the Republican nominee for president, sought votes here in September 1916. Franklin Delano Roosevelt, then the Democratic nominee for vice president, attended a rally in Augusta on September 3, 1920. Vice President Calvin Coolidge visited Augusta in 1923.

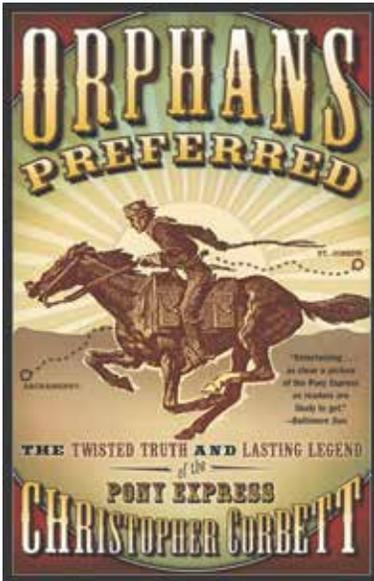
Not all the visitors to Augusta were political. Nathaniel Hawthorne, a college friend of Augusta native Horatio Bridge, was a frequent visitor to Augusta. Ralph Waldo Emerson was among the many people associated with the Lyceum Movement who spoke at Winthrop Hall. Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show came to Augusta in 1895. Jumbo the elephant, the star of P. T. Barnum's circus, came in 1882. In March 1866, Laura Keane, one of America's famous actresses, brought her theatrical company to Augusta to perform “Our American Cousin,” the play that Abraham Lincoln was attending when he was shot by John Wilkes Booth.

The discovery of gold in California in 1848 lured Augusta men west. The first group sailed in December 1849 on the *Ellen Maria* with Edward Hoyt of Vassalboro, as captain; the fare was \$150. The second group sailed in late September 1849 on the *James B. Thompson*, a ship built in Augusta. U.L. Pettengill sent letters to Russell Eaton, owner and editor of *The Maine Farmer*, describing the voyage from Bath to San Francisco, a voyage which took 177 days and included a major storm at the tip of South America. Douin wrote, “Of all the Augusta men who went out to California to the gold mines, none ever made a fortune but they brought back memories of adventure, hardships, sickness and death.”

— Sally Furber Nelson, KHS contributing editor

Upcoming Facebook Programs

May: “Orphans Preferred” The Twisted Truth and Lasting Legend of the Pony Express



O*rphans Preferred: The Twisted Truth and Lasting Legend of the Pony Express*, written by Christopher Corbett, is the first attempt to explore an American tall tale. Rooted in fact and layered with fabrications and outright lies, there are few memories of the Old West more endearing or enduring than that of the Pony Express. But many of those memories are not true. The story of the Pony Express is a beloved piece of frontier lore that includes Horace Greeley, the British explorer Sir Richard Burton, Mark Twain, Wild Bill Hickok, Buffalo Bill Cody, and some legendary Hollywood directors such as Maine-born John Ford.

Corbett, our KHS speaker, is also the author of “The Poker Bride: The First Chinese in the Wild West,” published in *The Atlantic* magazine, and of the novel *Vacationland* (Viking). A former editor with The Associated Press, he started his career at the *Maine Times* and later worked as a reporter for the *Portland Press Herald* and the *Central Maine Morning Sentinel*. Corbett has taught journalism at the University of Maryland for 30 years. He is a native of Waterville and a graduate of Northwestern University.

To view this presentation, head to the KHS Facebook page at 6:30 p.m. May 19 and the video will air live. It will also be available to watch later. If you have a question, please submit it in the comments during the live video presentation. Here is the link to

the KHS Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/KHS1891>. If you have questions about the program, please call Scott Wood, executive director, at 622-7718.

June: “A History of Maine’s Railroads”



June KHS speaker Bill Kenny

Photo courtesy of the author

Maine is populated with intriguing characters who set in motion a fascinating, compelling story of railroads and the unique communities they helped to build. One of the first states to build railroads and trolleys in the United States, Maine at one point had more than 90 communities with trolleys. Standard-gauge and “two-footer” rails crossed the state, including the St. Lawrence & Atlantic, the Boston and Maine, and Maine Central Railroad. From the first and only international trolley in the United States to the attempted World War I dynamiting of a railroad bridge between the United States and Canada, Maine is home to a rich rail heritage. You will hear about the importance of two Maine governors and of the men who needed railroads to transport both product and people in support of their businesses and how one Maine man was instrumental in opening up Maine to the movement of goods and people from Canada.

Join KHS Speaker Bill Kenny as he takes you on a journey from the first tracks made of wood to today’s Amtrak Downeaster train. Kenny, a former career Air Force officer, directed the movement by rail and ship of more than 3,000 tons of military equipment from the U.S. and Europe for the 1991 Persian Gulf War. He also managed the military railroads at Loring Air Force Base in Maine, at Eielson Air Force Base in Alaska, and in South Korea. He now consults in the movement of oversize and outsize cargo around the world via rail, ship, and trucks.

To view this presentation, head to the KHS Facebook page at 6:30 p.m. June 16 and the video will air live. It will also be available to watch later. If you have a question, please submit it in the comments during the live video presentation. Here is the link to the KHS Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/KHS1891>. If you have questions about the program, please call Scott Wood, executive director, at 622-7718.

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Category: Individual (annual) - \$20 ___ Family (annual) - \$30 ___ Senior (60+) (annual) - \$15 ___

Senior Family (annual) - \$25 ___ Student (full-time) (annual) - \$15 ___

Life (1 person) - \$200 ___ Life Family (2 people) - \$300 ___

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Nonprofit group (annual) - \$35 ___ Donation (optional): \$ _____

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Mailing address: P.O. Box 5582, Augusta, ME 04332-5582

Telephone: (207) 622-7718

E-mail address: kennhis1891@gmail.com

Web site: www.kennebechistorical.org