

# Kennebec Current

Discovering, preserving, and disseminating Kennebec County history since 1891

Volume 31 Issue 4

KENNEBEC HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

July–August 2021

## KHS Puts Expansion Project on Pause to Look at Other Options

The Kennebec Historical Society is reassessing its plan to expand its headquarters building in Augusta after receiving a consultant's report that concluded the society should expect to be able to raise only about half of its envisioned \$4.85 million fundraising goal.

The society's Board of Directors voted August 12 to ask the ad hoc expansion committee to weigh other alternatives, such as acquiring space elsewhere to house part or all of the growing, climate-controlled, KHS archive, which ran out of storage space several years ago. The alternatives also might include building a reduced version of the proposed expansion project.

"I believe," KHS President Patsy Crockett said, referring to the board members, "that everybody just wants to take a look at what's available, and if that might suit the problem that KHS has." That problem is simply a lack of archival space, she said.

The overcrowded archive was the main impetus that, in 2018, prompted the society to begin planning the expansion of the Henry Weld Fuller Jr. House, located at 107 Winthrop Street. The society paid Coffin Engineering to develop plans for a three-story annex and a small parking area. The Augusta Planning Board approved that plan on July 14, 2020. The society also hoped to create a ground-level North Chestnut Street entrance and handicapped-access parking spaces and to install an elevator, all for the benefit of visitors with mobility problems; and to buy and install additional computer work stations to aid researchers.

The board foresaw a \$4.85 million fundraising campaign, most of which would have covered the cost of building and equipping the annex and the parking lot. The rest would have been invested in an endowment fund to provide income for operating the building, which was expected to generate twice the amount of fuel, utility, and maintenance bills as the current structure does.

Last spring, KHS contracted with Gary Friedman & Associates, of Bar Harbor, to conduct a feasibility study of the anticipated expansion campaign. After preparing a draft prospectus outlining the project and conducting comprehensive interviews with 31 prospective donors in April and May, the agency submitted a report on June 3 that said only \$2.5 million would be an attainable goal. It attached several conditions to that conclusion, including the establishment of a campaign steering committee, generous contributions from the entire KHS board and the steering committee, establishment of a comprehensive donor database, and carrying out a vigorous marketing campaign.

The agency found what it termed "a high level of regard" for the society among survey respondents, support for its goal, and a willingness to donate money; but many of the participants "expressed concerns about the difficulty of raising funds for endowment." Some survey respondents encouraged the society to look for space elsewhere in the community.

Also, after the society received the Friedman report, one donor whom the report envisioned as key to making a \$2.5 million campaign feasible told KHS in July not to expect a contribution to the project this year because the donor had other commitments.

The expansion committee is scheduled to meet on August 25 to discuss the board's request.

— by Joseph Owen



The proposed building and expansion at 107 Winthrop Street is shown, as envisioned in a plan by Coffin Engineering.

From the KHS collection

## Annual Meeting to Feature Return of Live Lectures

Live, in-person Kennebec Historical Society lectures are scheduled to return at the society's annual meeting, which is scheduled for 6 p.m. September 16 at South Parish Congregational Church in Augusta.

The meeting will begin with reports and an election of officers and board members. Unlike in past years, no potluck supper will occur. (See page 3 for board election candidates and page 11 for lecture details.)

Continued on page 4

## President's Message



**T**hank you to each and every Kennebec Historical Society member for allowing me to have the honor to serve as your President for the past four years. It has been a wonderful experience to meet and chat with so many of you and learn how much you appreciate being a part of this society. To all the volunteers who help keep the society running, a special thanks.

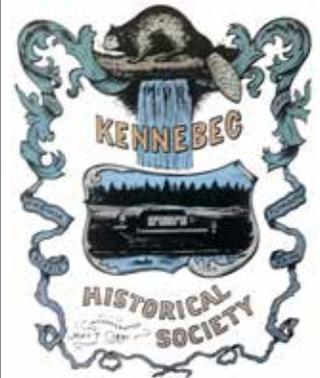
When I took the helm of KHS we had 425 members, and as of today we have 800 members, thanks to the hard work of so many volunteers. One of those leading the charge to increase membership is no longer with us. Glenn Adams was co-chairman of the Membership Committee and the leader in increasing our membership. We miss you, Glenn, and thank you for all your hard work.

Taking another important step forward, KHS employed Coffin Engineering to draft drawings of a proposed addition to the society's headquarters, which would fit nicely on land that is currently owned by KHS. The expansion would be placed on the footprint of the original carriage house that was part of KHS' beautiful Fuller home at 107 Winthrop Street. The plans for the much-needed expansion of our archive space were approved by the Augusta Planning Board. Thank you to all members of the committee who worked for so many months to make this plan come together. I enjoyed serving as co-chairwoman with Kent London. KHS contracted with Gary Friedman & Associates to conduct a feasibility study of fundraising for the project. While the consultant's report has prompted KHS to reconsider the scale of its expansion, the information gained through that process will be valuable in planning whatever form the expansion ultimately takes. At the August 2021 Board of Directors meeting, the board voted to send the expansion project back to the expansion committee to review all possible ideas to expand space for the archives.

Also, during the past four years, KHS has re-engaged with historical societies elsewhere in the county. The Chelsea Historical Society has placed its records in the KHS archive for preservation. I took part in the ceremony to celebrate the 250th birthday of the town of Vassalboro, a wonderful historic town. KHS held a wine-tasting event that included an auction, piano music, and a tribute to longtime supporter John Bridge. We held an event to honor the Cony High School 1978 championship basketball team. A wonderful time with players, family, coaches, and the game's original radio announcer, this event was organized by a committee led by Glenn Adams. We also held our annual Victorian Tea, and had many teacups donated for use at future events. We had wonderful Christmas decorations, delicious food, and piano music by KHS member Marie Tesch.

KHS established the W. Scott Hill Service Award in 2019, and the first recipient was Ernie Plummer. Ernie was not only the archivist but also served in most positions on the Board of Directors and was the glue that held the society together. Ernie and his wife, Joan, moved out of state to be nearer to family. We thank both for all they have done for KHS.

The Publicity Committee has held annual fundraising tennis tournaments. The third annual tournament was held August 14 under the leadership of Billy Noble. The committee also organized a fundraising trivia night. Adapting to the new reality imposed by the coronavirus, the society ended live monthly programs in February 2020 and began hosting monthly online lectures. Using the online format, starting in July 2020 with a lecture by Glenn Adams, offered the added benefit of being able to record them so viewers visiting the KHS Facebook page could watch the programs whenever they want. These online programs are all recorded by Jamie Logan, chairwoman of the Publicity Committee.



### **KHS Board of Directors**

#### **President**

Patsy Garside Crockett

#### **Executive Vice President**

Kent London

#### **Treasurer**

Doreen Harvey

#### **Secretary**

Stefanie Barley

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Anne Cough

Donna Doore

Rich Eastman

Joan Lancaster

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Jan Michaud

Billy Noble

Joseph O'Donnell

Joseph Owen

Emily Schroeder

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Scott Wood

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John O'Connor

Earle G. Shettleworth Jr.

William Sprague Jr.

#### **Newsletter Staff**

Rich Eastman/editor

Sally Joy/adviser

#### **Membership Secretary**

Joan Lancaster

#### **Total membership:**

800 on August 20

Life members: 218

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.

*Continued on page 3*

## KHS Annual Meeting – September 16

The society's annual business meeting and election of directors will begin at 6 p.m. on September 16 at the South Parish Congregational Church, located at 9 Church Street in Augusta and followed at 6:30 p.m. by the society's monthly program, "Artifacts Found Along Benedict Arnold's Trail," presented by Kenny Wing. For the safety of all involved, current Maine CDC guidelines will be followed. For details about the meeting, contact the executive director, Scott Wood, at 622-7718 or drop by the historical society's headquarters located at 107 Winthrop Street in Augusta.

### 2021 Election of Society Directors

**Returning Directors:** Rich Eastman, Augusta • Jan Michaud, Augusta  
Donna Doore, Augusta (replacement appointed August 12)

**The nominating committee presents the following slate of officers:**  
(All terms are two years, unless otherwise noted)

President: Jamie Logan, Augusta

Vice President: Kent London, North Vassalboro

Treasurer: Mark Laney, Winthrop

Secretary: Stefanie Barley, Augusta

**The nominating committee presents the following slate of directors:**

Joan Lancaster, Hallowell • John Lawrence, Gardiner • Joseph Owen, Augusta • Emily Schroeder, South China

**At the October KHS Board of Directors meeting, the following names will be presented  
as at-large members for appointment (All terms are one year):**

Amelia Clukey, Augusta • Anne Cough, Gardiner • Billy Noble, Sidney • Joseph O'Donnell, Monmouth

## President's Message

*Continued from page 2*

Because of COVID-19, KHS closed its doors to the public to keep our membership safe and follow the guidelines provided by the CDC. During this down time, our executive director, Scott Wood set up a new archival database for our computer system. This new database is much more user-friendly and has helped our archivist, Emily Schroeder, and the interns who work on the collection. KHS hired a federally funded part-time staff member, Nikki Nolton. Because of COVID rules, a number of our board members have been using Zoom to attend meetings. At one meeting, it was necessary to meet in person to vote and we held the meeting in the driveway in a snowstorm. I think that shows the dedication of our wonderful KHS board members.

Donations to the annual Moira H. Fuller Fund and the Charles Nash Fund have been consistently greater than they were in earlier years, and the society has succeeded in attracting more money in grants than prior years.

The *Kennebec Current* newsletter became a color production in 2020, and news has become so plentiful that the current issue consists of a record 12 pages.

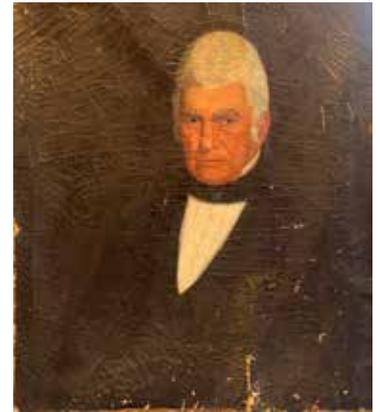
I have truly enjoyed serving as president of the board of KHS; however, in the upcoming month, I need to spend more time on my job as a Kennebec County commissioner. We have a number of folks retiring from our county. We also will be appropriating the funds from the American Rescue Plan's Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery Fund. These are the funds the federal government sent to the counties to dispense to the cities, towns, and organizations most in need of relief from the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. So with regret about having to leave as president, I look forward to serving as an ex-officio member of KHS and will always enjoy the many memories of my time as your president. Thank you to all who have helped me on this journey. I'm now pleased to turn the leadership of KHS over to the new president of the board, Jamie Logan, and the new treasurer, Mark Laney. I look forward to seeing the exciting future they will help unfold for this society.

— Patsy Garside Crockett, president

## Help Sought to Identify the Subject of Donated Painting

Earlier this year, the Kennebec Historical Society received a donation of a painting from Tyrell Haynes, of Norwalk, Connecticut. Haynes purchased the painting at a local tag sale roughly 20 years ago. When he asked the seller about the history of the painting or who the gentleman might be, the seller stated that she knew nothing about the subject and could only relay that she had bought the painting at a farm auction in the early '60s in the Augusta area.

The society is seeking the help of our members and friends to identify the gentleman shown in the painting. Perhaps he was the original owner of that Augusta-area farm, or perhaps he was a local official or member of the clergy. Perhaps you recognize him from similar paintings or history books. We're hoping that someone may recognize the painting and that you will let us know. If you think you know, please email the editor of this newsletter at [kennhis1891@gmail.com](mailto:kennhis1891@gmail.com), or call (207) 622-7718.




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## KHS Welcomes the Following New Members

Robert Calamia — Augusta

Jay Dresser — Augusta

Gordon Geasland — Conshohocken, Pennsylvania

Mary Holly Johnson — Middletown, Rhode Island

Mark Laney — Winthrop

Delia Wilson Lumsford — Gardiner

Roland Rhoades — Gorham

*and continues to recognize ...*

### Sustaining Business Members

(\$1,000+ annual)

G & E Roofing

Kennebec Savings Bank

Meadow Park Development

### Sponsoring Business Members

(\$500+ annual)

J. S. McCarthy Printing

O'Connor GMC

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## ✧ In Memoriam ✧

**Grace Kenney**, 107, of Augusta, a former longtime Kennebec Historical Society member, died August 16. She was a retired teacher who taught in several Augusta schools, as well as schools elsewhere in Maine and in Vermont. Her survivors include two children, eight grandchildren, eleven great-grandchildren, and eight great-great-grandchildren.

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## Live Lectures

*Continued from page 1*

The live presentations are expected to continue monthly through December; then the society will revert to live-streamed presentations on the its Facebook page for January through March. After the most recent live lecture, which occurred in February 2020, KHS suspended its monthly gatherings because of the onset of the worldwide coronavirus pandemic. In July 2020, it conducted the first monthly live-streaming of a lecture, which was Glenn Adams' reminiscences about working as an Associated Press reporter at the Maine State House. Those live-streamed lectures continued through August 2021 and are archived on the Facebook page so viewers can watch them at any time.

With the pandemic seemingly in decline in June, the society's Publicity Committee, consisting of Chairwoman Jamie Logan and members Billy Noble and Rich Eastman, recommended a return to live lectures for April through December and live-streaming for January through March, both to allow "snowbirds" to watch from wherever they live and to reduce the number of programs that would have to be cancelled because of bad weather.

As this newsletter goes to press in late August, the pandemic's Delta variant is flexing its muscles in Maine, and the society may need to reconsider adjusting its schedule again to conform with U.S. Centers for Disease Control guidelines. Prospective attendees are advised to consult the society's website for up-to-date details about lecture schedules or to call KHS headquarters at 622-7718.

## Off the Shelf

### Death and Burial at Kennebec Historical Society: Exhuming the Evidence

**H**ello and happy summer! This newsletter story could be called “On the Road” instead of “Off the Shelf.” On July 24, KHS co-hosted a summer program with the Maine Old Cemetery Association, held at South Parish Congregational Church in Augusta.

MOCA President Jessica Couture introduced KHS Executive Director Scott Wood and we were off and running. Wood gave an excellent overview and history of our society, adding his signature sense of humor with jokes that elicited groans from the audience of more than 70 folks. Though his was a hard act to follow, I forged ahead. My theme revolved around resources in our collection, which cover who died, when they passed, and where they were buried.

Every time I write one of these articles, or, in this case, do a presentation, I marvel at what we have to offer and how much there is to learn from the experience. As members, you probably know we subscribe to Ancestry.com, and we own 19th-century Augusta-area newspapers, church records, family collections, and town histories. We also have some 20th- and 21st-century obituaries from the capital area in our vertical files. We are tremendously fortunate to have a substantial collection amassed by Charles E. Nash, author of *The History of Augusta*, published six decades after Nash’s death in 1904. This collection includes his handwritten manuscript and accompanying notes, plus additional materials: area cemetery transcriptions, his listings of the deceased (necrology), and personal correspondence.

Our archive also contains some of the records from the Trouant and Bates funeral home, and Knowlton and Hewins, based in Augusta. (The latter firm now includes the Roberts family.) My column covered the latter in our November–December 2019 newsletter, so I’ll just talk about Trouant and Bates.



**Kate Gaudet (holding bag) tells the group about markers in the five cemeteries on the north side of Winthrop Street in Augusta.**

Courtesy of Cheryl Willis Patten

used in the hanging of convicted murderer Joseph J. Sager on January 2, 1835, in Augusta. There’s nothing like actual artifacts to bring life to death.

Our July adventure was capped off by a delicious lunch; an additional presentation by Glenn Roberts, GIS coordinator for the State of Maine Veteran Cemetery system; and tours of the church sanctuary and the cemeteries at the top of Winthrop Street.

In sum, everyone had a good time and learned something new. We made friends and re-acquainted ourselves with those we hadn’t seen in a while. We (of KHS) realized we need more opportunities to reach out at such gatherings to inform others who we are and what we do. If you know of any possible opportunities, live or online, please let us know about it.

Thanks so much. Until next time.



**Emily Schroeder, KHS archivist, gives information July 24 in Augusta about the society’s records related to Augusta deaths.**

Photo by Scott Wood

Avery O. Truant and Harvey E. Bates established their business at the end of 1893 on Water Street in Augusta, starting with wallpaper, awnings and window shades, paints, varnishes, and rug cleaning. They added coffins and caskets, which led to undertaking. Beside their business records from the 1920s and ’30s, we have their “Register of Funerals,” dated 1918–1936. This includes many details: home address, date of death, cause of death, and specifics of the services provided. Entries often include the cemetery location.

My presentation concluded with a reminder that older town reports can be quite helpful, especially since larger towns and cities had superintendents of burials, and, along with town clerks, were allowed sufficient space in these reports to give useful details of each person’s demise.

The parting image was a photo of the gallows trap door

— Emily A. Schroeder, KHS archivist

# Amid Virus Woes, Augusta to Honor Healer Martha Ballard



Committee Chairman Larry Fleury stands in front of the proposed site at Augusta’s Mill Park where the Martha Ballard memorial would be located.

Photo by Joseph Owen

Will the slowly retiring COVID-19 pandemic be remembered for anything positive aside from the heroic efforts of health professionals and beleaguered policymakers? Will the arts and humanities contribute something lasting to the ways we think about this experience in the future? Will anything besides the fatuous and often false memes crowding social-media platforms be all that remains to put our collective experiences in perspective relative to the human ideal of community and service to others in a crisis like this one?

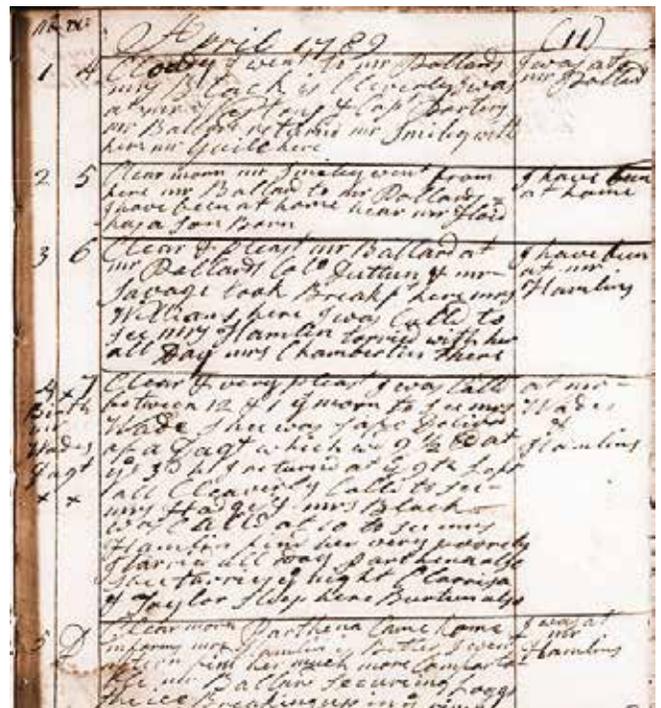
Perhaps in the midst of the events surrounding the current health crisis a reminder of the already famous life work of midwife, healer, and mortician Martha Moore Ballard is appropriate and the idea of a memorial to her life will be timely. Larry Fleury, co-chairman of the recently formed Martha Ballard Committee, certainly hopes so.

However, before introducing Fleury’s story and outlining the budding efforts of his other committee members, it might be helpful to remind some readers of who Martha Ballard was with a wonderfully concise and informative excerpt from *The Maine of Ballard: A Self Guided Tour*, a Maine Humanities Council brochure written by Charles Fischman.

“Martha Ballard moved from Oxford, Massachusetts to Hallowell in 1777, at the height of the Revolutionary War with England. She and her husband Ephraim farmed leased land, an arrangement typical of the era. Starting in 1778, they lived on a farm owned by John Jones in an area near the confluence of the Bond Brook and Kennebec River. On April 21, 1791, they moved to a farm owned by Samuel Howard near what would become the Hallowell/Augusta town line. This put Martha Ballard in a central location during the most productive years of her midwife practice. From the end of 1799 to her death in 1812, she lived on her son Jonathan’s farm north of the town’s center, at the fork between the roads leading to Belgrade and Sidney. In her practice as a mid-wife, but also in her daily activities, Martha Ballard traveled the length and breadth of today’s Hallowell and Augusta, in all seasons, attending births, caring for the ill, exchanging goods, and sharing news, fellowship, and misfortune.”

“Misfortune” of the kind that epidemic diseases bring have been a part of the American experience going back to the first settlements of Europeans on this continent. Here in New England, smallpox, typhus, and influenza destroyed native tribes to such an extent that 80 percent of Maine’s Wabanaki people perished. During the Revolutionary War, a smallpox epidemic nearly curbed the struggle for independence as distressing numbers of Colonial soldiers became sick and died. Accounts of those times tell us that an enlightened Gen. George Washington insisted on inoculating his soldiers nearly 15 years before Englishman Edward Jenner discovered a proper vaccine for smallpox.

In 1769 Martha Ballard helplessly watched three of her own children die from diphtheria; and after she moved to Hallowell, her diary entries from June to September 1787 famously understate her strenuous efforts to save, console, and bury her neighbors from “canker rash” – or “strep,” as it is more commonly known today.



Entries from Martha Ballard’s diary describe her activities in April 1789.

From the Harvard collection

Continued on page 7

## 2021 Moira Fuller Fund Goal Reaches Halfway Point



KHS President Patsy Crockett meets with Maine State Credit Union Vice President of Deposit Services Cindy Barnes following MSCU's donation to the 2021 Moira H. Fuller Annual Fund.

Photo by Scott Wood

**T**he Kennebec Historical Society's annual fund drive for general operating costs has nearly half of the necessary funds needed to reach its 2021 budget goal.

The Moira H. Fuller Annual Fund has collected roughly \$35,000 of its \$70,000 goal, thanks to the generosity of donors. The society's development committee, responsible for raising the money needed for operating costs, hopes to reach its goal by the end of September but will accept donations and pledges through December.

KHS assists members of the public who use its resources to research family histories and local events of the past through its extensive database and collection that includes documents, scrapbooks, yearbooks, diaries, postcards, photos, and more.

In order to maintain climate controls to preserve its collection and keep its Augusta headquarters building open, maintained, and operating with its one full-time staff member, the society needs to meet its annual budget goals.

KHS appreciates the generosity of donors particularly following all the challenges presented by the coronavirus pandemic. Hopefully members and those who recognize these valuable services can pull KHS over the top in the weeks ahead.

For more information about how to donate, contact executive director Scott Wood by email at [kennhis1891@gmail.com](mailto:kennhis1891@gmail.com), or by phone at (207) 622-7718.

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## Martha Ballard

*Continued from page 6*

Fleury lives on the same Bond Brook that figured so prominently in Ballard's life. It's a short, easy walk from his home, across a large granite arch bridge built by Martha's grandson, Ephraim, to Augusta's Mill Park, a beautifully reclaimed public space where the Edwards Manufacturing Co. mill was located before its removal. Steep bankings slant to the brook's edge, where the rising and falling tides in the Kennebec River, several hundred feet away, determine its depth. A plaque, part of the city's self-guided Museum in the Streets tour, is labeled "Martha Ballard's Neighborhood – Bond Brook." It's Fleury's neighborhood, too.

Fleury said that during his midwinter isolation from COVID-19, he was often reminded by scenes outside his window that Ballard certainly must have passed nearby on her many trips up and down the Kennebec River, by canoe, to visit her patients. His personal interest in Ballard's life, and the story told compellingly in Laura Thatcher Ulrich's 1991 Pulitzer Prize-winning book *A Midwife's Tale: The Life of Martha Ballard Based on Her Diary, 1785-1812*, gave him the idea of erecting an appropriate memorial to her life.

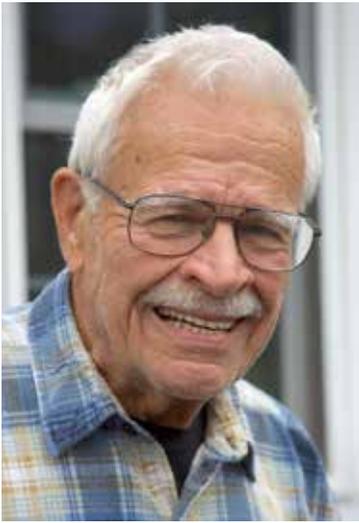
Fleury approached Augusta Mayor David Rollins to seek permission to form a committee to explore the possibility of erecting a memorial to Ballard. Rollins assented and a committee was formed consisting, to date, of Augusta Downtown Alliance President and City Council member Heather Pouliot, Co-chairwoman Anna Blodgett, Co-chairman Fleury, City Council and Downtown Alliance member Courtney Allen, Stephen Arbour, marketing member Connie Hanson, Augusta Parks and Recreation Director Earl Kingsbury, Rachel Marriam, Joseph Owen, and sisters Glee and Ruth Ballard, who are related to Martha Ballard. Emphasizing that while this project is still in its early stages, Fleury said he is hopeful that with generous private support from physicians, health service providers, local businesses, community service clubs, and other interested parties, the installation of a sculpture and an accompanying plaque will be in place within 18 months.

"We will take our time and be sure it is done right," Fleury said.

Pending council approval, the planned memorial will be in Mill Park, near Bond Brook, and close to the Museum in the Streets plaque.

— by Cameron Brown

## Randolph Historian Prepares to Pass Torch – But to Whom?



**Randolph's official town historian, Dick Harriman, will be stepping down from his post.**

Photo by Joseph Owen

**C**ardboard boxes lined a workbench and the space underneath it in July in Dick Harriman's basement in Randolph. Harriman, 87, was doing some housecleaning, and as the town's official historian, he had accumulated an impressive hoard of memorabilia.

Some of it — photos, antique postcards, newspaper clippings, photocopied sheet music, and other paper ephemera — was destined for the Kennebec Historical Society, of which Harriman is a longtime member. Other items were reserved for family members and historical groups elsewhere in central Maine.

Harriman and his wife, Judy, a Wisconsin native, are preparing to sell their house on Kinderhook Street, where they have lived in the warmer months for the past 22 years. They spend the rest of the year at their home in Pinellas Park, Florida.

In addition to parting with their Maine house, Harriman is stepping down as Randolph's historian.

"I put a lot of time in on it," he said of the post, for which the town has paid him only a nominal amount over the last decade to offset the cost of materials and occasional travel expenses. "I made numerous trips to the state library, looking things up," he said.

His duties include presenting historical displays at the annual town meeting and making copies of historical items for people who want them. He also has assembled binders of historical information about the town that are available to the public at the Town Office.

Harriman was born across the river in Gardiner but grew up in Randolph in a riverfront house owned by his grandfather, right next to one of the town's massive Kennebec River icehouses. The icehouses are long gone, but the family home is still there, occupied by a car repair business.

In early adulthood, Harriman lived in Gardiner, Farmingdale, Windsor, and Augusta during the 13 years when he worked for Central Maine Power Co. Then in 1968 he moved his family to Florida, where he eventually worked in a Tampa-area power company's engineering department for 25 years, much of it as a supervisor.

Harriman visited relatives in Maine sporadically during his working years, but he renewed his central Maine connection more deeply in retirement. After he and his wife moved into their Kinderhook Street home in 1999, he became active in historical societies in Windsor and Pittston and worked as a volunteer during those towns' annual fairs. In Pittston, he converted an old barn into a museum housing milking machines, butter churns, old strap-on ice skates, ice-fishing traps, antique tools, and other artifacts of days gone by. In Windsor, he volunteers in a Windsor Museum farm machinery barn and his wife sells ceramics she makes to help support the fair. In Randolph, Harriman also took on the task of mowing a 0.4-mile walking trail along an old rail bed from Water Street to Windsor Street.

He said he doesn't know yet who will succeed him as town historian, or whether anyone will. As much as history fans might consider such a post essential, most communities don't even have an official historian. Even in towns that do have one, it's usually an informal arrangement, according to Maine State Historian Earle Shettleworth, who added that "there's no sort of state law or any kind of uniform process" regulating the appointment of municipal historians.

Kennebec County harbors other exceptions to that pattern. One is Sam Webber, city historian in Hallowell since 1992. Webber, the first person to hold that post, said the city defines his duties as writing a summary of activity for the city's annual report, advising the Planning Board when someone wants to make a change to a historic building, and supporting the City Council and city manager. They also include answering questions from the public.

"A lot of what I do is genealogy," Webber said, adding that such research is prompted by the many emails he receives. He also helps people research historic homes they have bought in Hallowell.

For that work, Webber, a long-retired teacher, receives the princely sum of zero dollars, as befits a labor of love.

In Winthrop, unpaid Town Historian David Cook, who held the post for 33 years, has a less formal arrangement. He said he has no official duties.

"People call me up on the phone and ask me stuff," the retired former high school and college history teacher said, describing his assignment as historian. "I give talks every once in a while to whoever wants to listen to me."

*Continued on page 9*

## 14 Players Help KHS Net \$643 at Kennebec Classic Tennis Tourney

**R**ob Disch, of Waterville, and Inga Zimba, of Waterville, won the men's singles and women's singles championships, respectively, in the 2021 Kennebec Classic tennis tournament, which the Kennebec Historical Society held August 14 and 15 at the North Street tennis courts in Waterville.

Owen Evans and Teddy Faugno, both of Waterville, won the doubles competition.

The tourney was halted temporarily after the doubles competition when the rapid onset of severe weather forced the players and crowd to scatter for shelter. Subsequently, it was agreed to finish the tournament on the next day, August 15.

The event, the third of its kind, attracted 14 players. McKee Law, of Augusta, and Quality Copy, Hallowell, sponsored the event again, as they had done the past two years. Maine Instrument Flight, of Augusta, became a sponsor for the first time.

KHS board member Billy Noble and Publicity Committee Chairwoman Jamie Logan organized the Kennebec Classic, a society fundraising event. Logan, Rich Eastman, and Scott Wood helped set up the event, which raised \$643 after expenses were paid. Noble said the society probably will host another tournament in 2022.



**Women's singles winner Inga Zimba serves to Mya Vincent in a preliminary match.**

Photo by Rich Eastman

**At left, men's singles runner-up, Toru Matsubayashi, and winner Rob Disch.**

Photo by Billy Noble

**At center, women's singles winner Inga Zimba.**

Photo by Billy Noble

**Owen Evans, left, and Teddy Faugno, winners of the doubles competition.**

Photo by Rich Eastman

## Randolph Historian Dick Harriman

*Continued from page 8*

The circumstances of his appointment were equally low-key. He said Town Councilor Judy Stebbins called him one day and asked what he thought about Winthrop establishing a town historian's position. "She said, 'Last night the Town Council voted you to be it,'" added Cook, an author of two published books on local history.

In Belgrade, Nancy Mairs bucks at least one trend among municipal historians: The town provides her with an annual stipend. Having occupied her post for 20 years, Mairs, who is involved in the Belgrade Historical Society, produces an annual report. She said she became interested in history because her parents were antique collectors. A child can't avoid learning about history "if you grow up with parents who are cognizant, if not interested" in historical details.

In Randolph, Harriman found himself drenched in such history, even while living in Maine's smallest town when measured by area (2.23 square miles). The town once was home to three icehouses, monuments to an industry that became extinct with the advent of refrigerators. It also had a sawmill and two shoe factories, and it was the western terminus of the Kennebec Central Railroad, which linked the nearby veterans' home at Togus to the Kennebec River. Today, all those elements have faded away, and the town is essentially a residential community that also has some retail businesses, mostly near the river.

Asked why he took on the town historian's post, Harriman offered a plainspoken explanation.

"I find it interesting to find out about things," he said. "You know, it's like reading an interesting book."

— by Joseph Owen

## Thoughts on the *Antiquarian Notebook*

### Antiquarian Notebook

*Editor's note: In 1997, KHS member and local historian Anthony Douin began writing a historical column for the Capital Weekly newspaper that ran for 12 years. Life member and Kennebec Current contributor Sally Furber Nelson has catalogued those articles.*

In its first 100 years, Augusta faced many disasters, including floods, fires, and even murders. Many of these disasters were documented by Anthony Douin in the *Antiquarian Notebook*.

Benjamin A.G. Fuller described in detail the Great Freshet of 1839 in a letter to his sister Louisa Sophia Smith, according to Douin. He wrote that the Kennebec Dam, recently completed in 1837, was damaged and that the riverside banks of Cushnoc Heights lost 7 acres. The flood destroyed several houses; mills and stores were washed away. His letter includes a hand-drawn map of the scene.

Fires were a major problem during Augusta's early days. Knowing this, a group of early settlers organized the Augusta Fire Club in 1799, shortly after the community's separation from Hallowell. Each member had to procure two leather buckets that were to hang in a conspicuous place in the home where they could be easily fetched at the sound of the alarm bell. The fire bell, donated by Judge James Bridge, and his law partner, Reuel Williams, hung in the South Parish Church. Any member who failed to show up at a fire without a good excuse was immediately expelled from the club. The first fire engine, named the Washingtonian, was purchased in 1800. In 1839, there was a complete reorganization of the firefighting company called the Deluge Company, which soon purchased another fire engine.

The Deluge Company was severely tested in 1850 when a fire broke out at the Maine Insane Hospital at 3 a.m. December 4, 1850. Despite the bravery of the hospital staff, 27 patients and one attendant were killed. The fire department was ill prepared; the fire engine was undergoing repairs and unavailable. The arsenal engine was called as well as the Hallowell fire engine; however, high wind, freezing weather, and a lack of water hampered the fight.

After the disastrous fire at the hospital, the city bought two new fire engines known as the Atlantic and the Pacific. These new engines arrived on the steamer Ocean on May 17, 1851. Made of mahogany, the twin engines were each 7 feet, 10 inches long and 2 feet, 8 inches wide, mounted with brass. They cost the city \$1,200 each. They were housed in a new engine house on Bridge Street, called "one of the best and most modern engine houses in the state."

These new fire engines responded to one of the most destructive fires in Augusta's history on Sunday, September 17, 1865. Known as the Water Street Fire, or the Great Fire, the conflagration caused total devastation from Bridge Street to Market Square. Engine companies from Gardiner, Hallowell, Pittston, the arsenal, and the Maine Insane Hospital assisted; however, the raging fire destroyed two-thirds of the business district and several houses. One of the businesses that was destroyed by the fire belonged to Thomas Chadbourne Noble; his son Frank was one of the founders of Kennebec Historical Society. George W. Jones of China later confessed that he had started the fire. He was found guilty and sent to state prison, where he died of consumption in 1868.

The Purinton murders shocked the entire Augusta community in 1806. Martha Ballard, a neighbor of Capt. James Purinton on Belgrade Road, wrote about the slaughter of the Purinton family in her famous diary on July 9, 1806. The oldest son, James, escaped and ran to a nearby house. Neighbors, including Martha's son Ephraim Jr., ran to the Purinton house, where they found the bodies of Capt. Purinton; his wife, Betsey; and six children. One of the daughters, age 15, was found alive. A coroner's jury later found Capt. Purinton guilty of murder and suicide.

KHS now has a complete set of the *Antiquarian Notebook* articles, cataloged by topic and time period, with a list of names and the illustration included. If you are interested in learning more about these articles or other topics, call 622-7188 for an appointment for further research.



**This steam fire engine, used by the Augusta Fire Department, was used to fight the city's fires in 1879.**

From the KHS collection

## Upcoming Facebook Programs

### September: “Artifacts Found Along Benedict Arnold’s Trail”



Portrait of Benedict Arnold by Thomas Hart, 1776.

Photo courtesy of Wikipedia

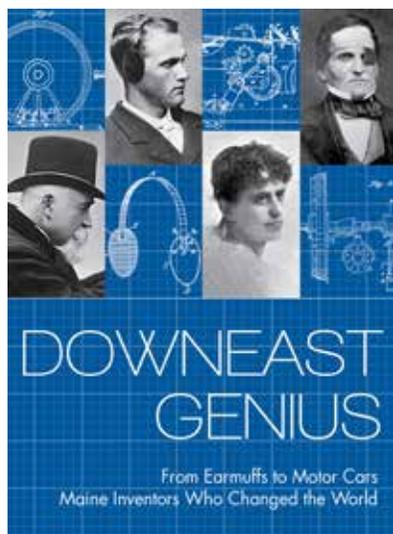
**K**enny Wing, a lifelong native of Eustis, was born right after Flagstaff Lake was created. His father, his grandfather, and his great-grandfather were born and lived in Flagstaff village. His grandfather and his parents were some of those who had to move out in 1949 to make way for Flagstaff Lake. Wing’s presentation is about Benedict Arnold and, in particular, Arnold’s 1775 expedition through Maine and why he was even here in the first place.

Wing claims his interest in Benedict Arnold comes through osmosis from his father, who became a noted expert on Arnold’s expedition through the Eustis area. Both Wings have discovered numerous sites where the expedition spent a night while on its way to Quebec City. The Wings’ Arnold Expedition artifact collection, the largest in existence, has contributed greatly to what we know about that event.

Wing, the Kennebec Historical Society’s September speaker, continues to live in Eustis and is an active board member of four historical organizations: the Flagstaff Memorial Chapel Association, the Maine Archaeological Society, the Arnold Expedition Historical Society, and the Dead River Area Historical Society. He is a co-author of *The Lost Villages of Flagstaff Lake* and has done extensive research for several authors of other books about the area.

The presentation is free to the public (donations are gladly accepted) and will take place at 6:30 p.m. Thursday, September 16. The presentation was originally scheduled for July 2020; however, it was postponed because of the COVID-19 pandemic. For the safety of all involved, KHS plans to follow current Maine CDC guidelines. The program will be preceded at 6 p.m. by the society’s annual meeting and election of officers and directors at the South Parish Congregational Church, located at 9 Church Street in Augusta. If you have any questions about the program, please call Scott Wood, executive director, at 622-7718.

### October: “Downeast Genius”



Cover photo courtesy of the author

**J**oin KHS speaker Earl Smith as he speculates on the reasons why Maine had a large number of important inventors and which inventions he thinks had the greatest impact worldwide. Smith will have a conversation with those attending the presentation and reveal some of the intriguing things he discovered in doing research for the book *Downeast Genius*.

Earl Smith is a native of Waterville. His 40-year career at Colby College ended in retirement in 2002. He continues to serve as the college historian and as a commissioner of Maine State Museum. Smith has written numerous articles and is the author of six books, including *Mayflower Hill: A History of Colby College*; *With the Help of Friends*, a history of the Colby Art Museum; and *Water Village*, a history of Waterville. His novels include *The Dam Committee*, a comic Maine murder-mystery, and its sequel, *More Dam Trouble*; and *Head of Falls*, a work of historical fiction. He has served on the Waterville City Council and the city’s Board of Education, and as a member of the Maine House of Representatives.

Signed copies of the book can be ordered from Oliver & Friends Bookshop, 87 Main Street, Belgrade Lakes, Maine. Orders can be placed by phone at (207) 707-2123 or by emailing: [Renee@oliverandfriendsbookshop.com](mailto:Renee@oliverandfriendsbookshop.com). In-store pickup and

shipping are available.

Smith’s presentation is free to the public (donations are gladly accepted). The presentation will take place at 6:30 p.m. Wednesday, October 20, at Hope Baptist Church, located at 726 Western Avenue in Manchester. If you have any questions about the program, please call Scott Wood, executive director, at 622-7718.

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