

# Kennebec Current

Discovering, preserving, and disseminating Kennebec County history since 1891

Volume 31 Issue 5

KENNEBEC HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

September–October 2021

## Voting Online, Members Pick Jamie Logan as New KHS Leader



**KHS' newly elected president, Jamie Logan, is the youngest person to serve in that position in more than three decades.**

Photo by Joseph Owen

**K**ennebec Historical Society members elected Jamie Carter Logan, of Augusta, as their president September 16 during the society's annual meeting, which was held remotely for the first time via Zoom conference.

Logan, 35, a freelance writer and consultant, replaces Patsy Garside Crockett, also of Augusta, who stepped down after having served a pair of consecutive two-year terms of office.

Mark Laney, of Winthrop, was elected treasurer, succeeding Doreen Harvey, also of Winthrop. Kent London, of Vassalboro, and Stefanie Barley, of Augusta, were re-elected to their offices of executive vice president and secretary, respectively.

The meeting was held online because of the ongoing coronavirus pandemic. The virus also was the reason the society held its 2020 annual meeting outdoors at the Henry Weld Fuller Jr. House, its Winthrop Street headquarters in Augusta, with a minimal number of attendees.

The new president lives literally a stone's throw from that headquarters. She grew up in Portland, although her husband, Bill, who works as the director of compliance for the state Office of MaineCare Services, has deep family roots in Augusta. Logan has lived in Augusta for nine years. She has close friends in Readfield and favorite local haunts such as Vaughan Woods in Hallowell and Cumston Hall in Monmouth, she said, and she has come to love the area.

Logan earned a bachelor's degree in politics with a minor in philosophy and a minor in theology and religious studies at The Catholic University of America, in Washington, D.C.; then a master's degree in Maine studies at the University of Maine, in Orono.

"It's part of the reason I got involved in the society to begin with. I've got to use this degree for something," Logan said jokingly, referring to her UMaine experience.

A passion for history also runs in her family. Her late father, a business and economics professor, loved it, as does her father-in-law. It's also one of her husband's favorite pursuits.

A knowledge of history served Logan well recently when she appeared as a contestant on the "Jeopardy!" TV show for three consecutive days in May. (See the May-June issue of the *Kennebec Current*, page 6.)

*Continued on page 3*

## KHS Communication, Action Aim to Keep Members, Public Safe from Virus

**F**or the last year and a half, the Kennebec Historical Society, like the rest of the world, has had to contend with the risks and restrictions of the coronavirus.

In early October, when someone who had been at the society's headquarters tested positive for the virus, that person quickly let the society know, even though the visit to KHS had been outside of the 48-hour close-contact determination period. The society took immediate precautions, including notifying all who had been at KHS the same day as the person who tested positive, asking most KHS personnel to stay away during the week of October 10 to 16, restricting research to requests by phone and email during that period, cleaning surfaces at the headquarters, and moving several meetings to Zoom.

The person who tested positive is doing fine, and as of this writing no other positive cases connected to the society have been identified.

Thank you to all involved for quick action, good communication, and cooperation. Stay well!

## President's Message



**D**uring the past four years, the Kennebec Historical Society has been the beneficiary of Patsy Crockett's energetic and able leadership. When she approached me about possibly taking on the role of KHS president, my first concern was being able to keep up with the example she set in the role.

Kennebec County is rich in history, both of local interest and of national importance, and I have been continuously impressed by the work our largely volunteer-run organization does to preserve it and share it. There is so much to share about our county's history, and my hope is that we can continue growing the audience KHS reaches as well as diversifying the ways in which we reach them. I'm also hoping to continue Patsy's work of reaching out to historical societies within Kennebec County to find ways to collaborate and support each other's work.

As I write this, we are looking forward to returning to in-person programs with Earl Smith's October presentation about his book *Downeast Genius*. It should be an excellent presentation and it will be wonderful to have people together to enjoy a KHS event in person again. (If it has to be changed to virtual, we will let you know via email and on our Facebook page.) Thanks to the Program Committee members for all they do to make sure KHS is bringing presentations to the community – even while they had to be online.

Thank you to everyone who has worked so hard to support KHS make the organization what it is today, whether through sharing your time and talents as a volunteer, through donations, or even by showing up at programs and events! Since becoming involved around 2016, I've so much enjoyed learning about Kennebec County history and sharing it through the work of the Publicity Committee and KHS' social media outreach. I look forward to working with all of you in this new role to discover, preserve, and share the history of Kennebec County.

— *Jamie Logan, president*

## Society Cancels Victorian Tea for Second Straight Year

**T**he Kennebec Historical Society has cancelled their Victorian Tea Party for the second consecutive year due to COVID-19.

Before the pandemic, the society hosted an old-fashioned Victorian tea party at its headquarters in Augusta in lieu of the free December in-person lecture. KHS held the event on the first Sunday in December, and members brought assorted sweet treats for all to enjoy.

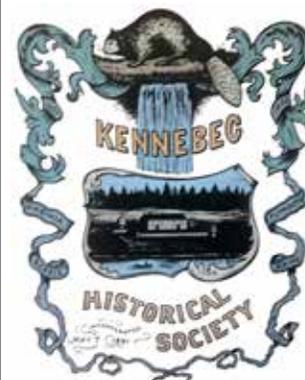
With the cancellation of the tea party, the society hopes to be able to have a Facebook Live presentation at 6:30 p.m., Wednesday, December 15. The speaker and topic will be announced later. Please check your local newspaper, the KHS Facebook page, or the KHS website, <http://www.kennebechistorical.org/>, for more information.

## Out of the Catacombs

**O**ne of the pleasures of volunteering at the Kennebec Historical Society is the unanticipated thrill of tripping over some fun facts or photos.

This 1932 photo of the old Cony High School complex surfaced recently. Please send in your comments and memories. We'll add notes to our records.

— *Cynthia Thompson, volunteer*



### **KHS Board of Directors**

#### **President**

Jamie Logan

#### **Executive Vice President**

Kent London

#### **Treasurer**

Mark Laney

#### **Secretary**

Stefanie Barley

#### **Directors**

Amelia Clukey

Anne Cough

Donna Doore

Rich Eastman

Joan Lancaster

John Lawrence

Billy Noble

Joseph O'Donnell

Joseph Owen

Emily Schroeder

#### **Executive Director**

Scott Wood

#### **Advisory Committee**

Thomas Johnson

Mark Johnston

John O'Connor

Earle G. Shettleworth Jr.

William Sprague Jr.

#### **Newsletter Staff**

Rich Eastman/editor

Sally Joy/adviser

#### **Membership Secretary**

Joan Lancaster

#### **Total membership:**

793 on October 15

Life members: 215

The Kennebec Current encourages letters to the editor.

Email letters to

[kennhis1891@gmail.com](mailto:kennhis1891@gmail.com).

All letters are subject to editing for taste, style, and length.

## Jamie Logan and Mark Laney Elected

*Continued from page 1*

Logan began doing research at the society around 2012. She became the administrator of its Facebook page in 2016 and launched an Instagram account for the society. She also has led the society's ad hoc Publicity Committee for a few years. When the coronavirus prompted the society to suspend its in-person monthly historical lectures in 2020, Logan began coordinating online versions of them, and they have continued for more than a year.

Now she has become the society's youngest president in more than three decades.

"It was very much a compliment to be asked," she said, adding that observing the 81-year-old Crockett's energy and "obvious commitment to driving the society forward" was an inspiration to her.

Logan said that as president, she wants to find ways to integrate the society with the community more, increase membership, improve KHS' social media presence, and raise the public's awareness of the research opportunities available at the society's headquarters.

Laney, 58, of Winthrop, was elected treasurer at the September 16 meeting. He is a chiropractor who has practiced in Augusta, his native city, since 1988. He opened his own clinic in 1990.

He has two sons, Cameron and Shaun.

A Gardiner Area High School alumnus, Laney obtained his Doctor of Chiropractic degree in 1987 from Cleveland Chiropractic College, in Kansas City, Missouri. His professional experience includes having served for the past four years on the board of the Maine Chiropractic Association. He also is a member of the Augusta Country Club, where he has served on the club's Green Committee for the past five years; and he helped write and edit the Maine State Golf Association's centennial book, *The Game is Here to Stay*, in 2017. His other interests include tennis, reading, cinema, gardening, and travel.

Although Laney joined the Kennebec Historical Society only this year, he said he already knows some of the other board members, and he has been doing historical research at KHS on and off over the last four or five years.

In light of the ongoing coronavirus pandemic, the first KHS board meeting Logan and Laney attended, which took place October 14, was held remotely via Zoom conference.



KHS Treasurer Mark Laney, of Winthrop, also serves on the board of the Maine Chiropractic Association.

Photo by Joseph Owen

— by Joseph Owen

## Kimball Returns for Second Stint as KHS Intern



**T**homas College graduate Audrey Kimball, apparently unfazed by the challenges of cataloging a dizzying array of postcards in 2020 during a paid 150-hour Kennebec Historical Society internship, has returned for another shot at taming the beast that is the society's archive.

This year Kimball is cataloging scrapbooks and genealogy publications. Her current internship is for 100 hours, funded by a \$1,500 grant from the Portland-based Margaret Burnham Charitable Trust.

"I love working here. I really love being surrounded by history," said Kimball, a St. Albans native who lives in Winslow.

She said her work during her first encounter with KHS caused her to become psychologically invested in the collection. "I know that I wanted to come back and make a little bit more of a dent than I did last summer," she said.

Kimball also is working on a Master of Fine Arts degree in fine arts and writing, which she hopes to complete in 2024.

## The Collections Box

“Several years ago, a good friend told me that history is like a jigsaw puzzle and time has scattered the pieces. It is the goal of the Kennebec Historical Society to look for the pieces and find their proper places in the puzzle of the history of Kennebec County.”

— Bruce Kirkham, former Collections Committee chairman

We'd like to tell you about some of the interesting items we've acquired recently for the society's collections. We're grateful to our members (and others) for thinking of us before discarding something with a connection to Kennebec County. Another fantastic source is eBay.

We continue to gather postcards of the area. The RPPCs (real-photo postcards) are of most value; as the saying goes, “A picture is worth a thousand words.” Among the latest: the Methodist Episcopal Church in North Augusta, about 1910; a cyanotype of Water Street in Hallowell; Commonwealth Shoe in Gardiner; Coburn Classical Institute in Waterville; a view of Church Street in Oakland; the railroad station in North Belgrade; and Waterville City Hall. There's even a postcard of the Anna Held Cottage in Belgrade. (Does anyone know who Anna Held was?)

Other intriguing items: Four bottles from the time when Augusta was bottling, including two Old Scotch ginger ale bottles and two from the Glenwood Springs Water Company; a booklet of biographical sketches of Maine legislators in 1945; an advertising card featuring Alden A. Heath, of Hallowell (sound familiar to anyone?); a few promotional items from the Oxien Company of Augusta; and a scroll listing the members of Capt. George Carr's infantry unit, dated May 1824. Carr is buried in Hallowell. Also added have been numerous issues of the *New England Historical and Genealogical Register*, *American Ancestors*, and *Maine Historical Society Quarterly*.

Discovered on eBay was a photograph of a baby with an issue of the *Kennebec Journal* used as a background. It even appears as though the paper was cut and placed over the baby. You've got to see this to believe it.

Last but far from least, in this report are two substantial collections:



1) Capt. Henry F. Hill papers. The Hill family was based in Manchester and Capt. Hill was a member of the 7th Maine Infantry during the Civil War. Included are a number of letters to his family and friends, two Alexander Gardner photos, and an extraordinary recruiting poster for the 7th Maine. (See image at left.)

2) Materials compiled by the now-disbanded Heritage Center at Mill Park in Augusta. They include numerous photos of the Edwards Mill, workers, and the 1989 fire; newspaper articles; tools used at the cotton mill, a paper mill and a shoe shop; photos and articles about the 1936 flood; a bedspread made at the Edwards Mill; records of the organization; and even a model of the building they wanted to preserve. Recorded interviews of workers — 84 in all, done over 12 years — are expected in the near future.

We are honored to be entrusted with these materials from Kennebec County's past. Our committee would love to have more members to share the excitement we experience. We meet the first Thursday of each month at 2 p.m., except for January and February. Please get in touch soon if you're interested.

— Emily A. Schroeder, for the Collections Committee

## KHS Welcomes the Following New Members

Scott McCormac — South China  
Dave & Maureen Parker — Pittston  
Bradley Sawyer — Augusta

Michelle Shores — Waterville  
Margaret Terrill — Augusta  
Krysta & Brent West — Readfield

*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

## Restoration Proceeds Slowly but Surely at Benton Falls Church

The Benton Falls Congregational Church has been tipping its cap, so to speak, to passers-by for more than three years. That is to say, the steeple is off the bell tower, perched instead on the ground. Its bell is nearby, resting on a raised pad and surrounded by a protective enclosure.

The steeple was removed in May 2018 as part of an ongoing effort to revive the deteriorating Falls Road building, which houses a worship community that is older than the town of Benton itself.

Upgrades were expected to cost \$376,000, but an increase in the cost of lumber has driven the price tag higher, according to Dawnela Sheehan, the church treasurer, who is chairwoman of the restoration committee. That amount was a tall order for a building that typically draws 20 to 30 people to its services.

The congregation hosts church suppers to pay its minister and cover utility bills, made easier to bear by the fact that the uninsulated, plumbing-free building is closed during January and February. It was clear from the start, however, that the restoration project is of a far greater magnitude.

“I took matters into my own hands, and then I got some help,” Sheehan said of her efforts in a recent interview at the church, gathered with fellow committee members Dwight and Kay Gagnon and neighbor Barbara Warren, who has assembled a lot of historical information about the building.



Barbara Warren, left, and Dawnela Sheehan are members of the renovation committee at Benton Falls Congregational Church.

Foundation, to cover that first phase of upgrades. Since then, it has removed the steeple, replaced the roof, leveled and straightened the granite work, and replaced trusses. The total spent so far on the project is nearly \$90,000.

Now the steeple is in the yard and the belfry, once framed by eight columns, is dismantled. The group hopes to auction off the deteriorated columns to help raise money for new ones. However, the bell – the last one cast in the Paul Revere Bell Foundry, in Canton, Massachusetts – has not been silent. Church members rang it last year on Veterans Day to honor local veterans, and they do so at other times just to show that it works. The company that removed the steeple submitted a bid for repairing the belfry, but it's unclear when that might happen. “COVID kind of shut us down, like it did everyone else,” Warren said.

When the restoration is done, the committee hopes to turn its attention to the next-door parish house, where it plans to add a kitchen and a year-round bathroom. In the meantime, the committee members are working to get the church listed on the National Register of Historic Places and to launch other fundraising efforts.

They hope their plans to freshen up the building, including putting the bell back in the bell tower, will result in a ringing endorsement from local donors.



The cost of lumber for renovating the Benton Falls Congregational Church building, shown with its steeple and bell perched nearby, has increased dramatically, delaying the work needed to complete the job.

Photos by Joseph Owen

The church association was founded in 1826 by Asher Hines, Johnson Lunt, David Reed, and Hobart Richardson. The building, always owned by the Congregationalists, was used by other denominations as well. It also served as a municipal meeting house when the area was part of Clinton, Sheehan said. Benton, initially called Sebesticook, was established as a separate town in 1842. The town was renamed in 1850 to honor Missouri's U.S. Sen. Thomas Hart Benton.

By the beginning of this century, the church building was in disrepair. The committee obtained a \$4,000 grant in 2105 to assess the damage, then hired Preservation Timber Framing, of Berwick, to jack the building up, level and straighten it, replace a sill and rotten clapboards, and repair stringers under the floor.

“We had quite a lot of settling as well,” Sheehan said. The committee raised \$27,500, including a Belvedere grant from the Maine Community

— by Joseph Owen

## Bruce Kirkham, KHS Stalwart for Two Decades, Dies in Texas



**Kennebec Historical Society Collections Committee Chairman E. Bruce Kirkham and Suzanne Hosch, of Black Mountain, North Carolina, show off the society's newly acquired Augusta Cadet Band bass drum in October 2017 at the society's Augusta headquarters. Kirkham, who performed a variety of tasks at KHS during his two-decade association with the society, including serving more than five years as vice president, died September 25 in Texas.**

File photo by Joseph Owen

then began a three-decade career as an English professor at Ball State University, in Muncie, Indiana, teaching 18th- and 19th-century American literature.

He became an expert on Harriet Beecher Stowe, the writer who produced the groundbreaking anti-slavery novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin* while living in Brunswick. He wrote several articles and books about Stowe, including *The Building of Uncle Tom's Cabin*, which was published in 1977. According to a biographical summary on Ball State's website, Kirkham also founded The Friends of the Alexander M. Bracken Library, an association dedicated to fostering the growth of the university's main library.

Kirkham retired in 2000 and moved with his wife to Blaine Avenue in Augusta, where he established The Melancholy Lobster, an antiquarian book search and appraisal service. He also became involved with the Kennebec Historical Society, quickly becoming a key member.

"He was knowledgeable about a lot of things that were important to an archive. His knowledge of books was outstanding," said Ernie Plummer, a two-time former KHS president and longtime archivist who worked closely with Kirkham for many years.

Plummer also emphasized that Kirkham wasn't all about business.

"He daily came in with a joke. It was a pattern he did forever," Plummer said, adding later, "He was just a really important person to the society for almost 20 years."

**B**ruce Kirkham, a retired professor of English who found a second act as the Kennebec Historical Society's longtime librarian and as a KHS board member, died September 25 in a hospital in Frisco, Texas.

Kirkham succumbed to complications from a fall and other ailments, according to his wife, Kathy, who is a former KHS treasurer and longtime volunteer. The Kirkhams had moved last year from Augusta to Aubrey, Texas, to be closer to one of their three children.

In 2020, in recognition of his many contributions, KHS made Kirkham the second recipient of its W. Scott Hill Service Award, which is named after Winfield Scott Hill (1839-1923), the society's first president and one of its founders.

Kirkham's services to KHS were numerous. He reorganized the library to conform with the Dewey Decimal System, chaired the Collections Committee for many years, aggressively sought historical items for the society, led efforts to transcribe its many handwritten letters, wrote columns for the *Kennebec Current*, coordinated many sales of used books to raise money for the society, and built a database to organize some of the loose material in the KHS archive. He also was vice president from 2013 to 2018, and a Board of Directors member for several years before and after that.

Nonetheless, he remained modest about his efforts to help the society.

"The most rewarding thing is what it's done for me," he told an interviewer in early 2020.

A native of White Plains, New York, Kirkham had a long association with Maine. His family bought a coastal cottage in 1950 in Phippsburg, and it eventually became Bruce and Kathy Kirkham's summer retreat.

After earning bachelor's and master's degrees from Lehigh University, in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, Bruce Kirkham obtained a doctorate in 1968 from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill,

*Continued on page 7*

## ✧ In Memoriam ✧

**Edward Coffin**, 89, of Augusta, a longtime Kennebec Historical Society member and supporter, died September 19 at home. Coffin was a Freeport native, a U.S. Army veteran, and a graduate of the University of Maine who earned a degree in civil engineering. After many years of working for the Maine Department of Transportation, in 1973 he founded his own company, Coffin Engineering & Surveying – the firm that recently did preparatory designs for a proposed expansion of the KHS headquarters building in Augusta. He also was a longtime small-school basketball writer, coach, and referee; a charter member of the Capitol Area Recreation Association and the Kennebec Valley Sports Hall of Fame; a two-term member of the Augusta City Council; and a published author on historical and genealogical topics. His survivors include his wife, May Ross Coffin; five children; four stepchildren; and many grandchildren and stepgrandchildren.

**David T. Flanagan**, 74, of Manchester, twice a key leader at Central Maine Power during some of its most challenging problems and projects, died in October. Flanagan, who grew up in Bangor, Hampden, and Portland, was a graduate of Harvard University and Boston College Law School. He became a partner in the Pierce Atwood law firm in Portland. He and his wife, Kaye, were major boosters of the Augusta-based Children’s Center, and he supported many other local and statewide organizations as well. He also was a Kennebec Historical Society member, having joined initially in 2005.

**Elizabeth M. “Betty” Hanley**, 95, a Kennebec Historical Society life member and longtime former Winthrop resident, died September 23 in Farmingdale. Hanley, an Augusta native and Cony High School and Westbrook Junior College graduate, worked as a medical secretary and later as a stockbroker’s office manager. She served on Augusta Country Club committees, organized class reunions, and coordinated a hot meals program at St. Francis Xavier Church in Winthrop. Her survivors include four sons, eight grandchildren, and 16 great-grandchildren.

**E. Bruce Kirkham**, 83, a Kennebec Historical Society life member and former KHS vice president and librarian, of Aubrey, Texas, and formerly of Augusta, died in September 25 in Frisco, Texas. (See story on page 6.)

**Joan Hanley Lane**, 87, of Augusta and previously of Manchester, died October 6 at Maine General Medical Center. A Brockton, Massachusetts, native, she grew up in nearby North Easton and graduated from the University of Maine and the Harvard-Radcliffe Graduate Program in Business Administration. Lane was the executive director of the Augusta chapter of the American Red Cross for many years, and she was a longtime Kennebec Historical Society member and volunteer. Her survivors include three children and three grandchildren.

**Daniel W. Pomerleau**, 75, of Augusta, a Kennebec Historical Society life member and former KHS Executive Committee member, died October 4 at home. He was a 1966 graduate of Cony High School in Augusta and a former Augusta City Council member, retail sales manager, and proprietor of the Kennebec Row Antiques shop in Hallowell. Pomerleau is survived by partner Al Longstaff Jr. and two sisters.

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## Bruce Kirkham

*Continued from page 6*

Kirkham also was a former member of the boards of Old Fort Western and the Friends of the Maine State Library.

Retiring from their retirement, in effect, the Kirkhams moved in mid-2020 to a newly built home in Texas, where, surrounded by strangers, they endured the hardship of a widescale, long-lasting power grid failure caused by a severe winter snowstorm. Ironically, Kirkham had cited a need to give up shoveling snow as one of his reasons for moving out of Maine.

In September, when the irreversibility of the decline in his health became apparent, his sons gathered at his hospital bedside. According to Kathy Kirkham, on the day of his death, they read the first chapter of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* to him, played music for him on their cellphones, and sang hymns that he knew from Sunday gatherings of coastal neighbors in Maine.

Kirkham’s survivors include his wife, three children, seven grandchildren, and one newly arrived great-grandchild whom he had an opportunity to hold.

A memorial service is expected to occur in the summer of 2022 in Phippsburg.

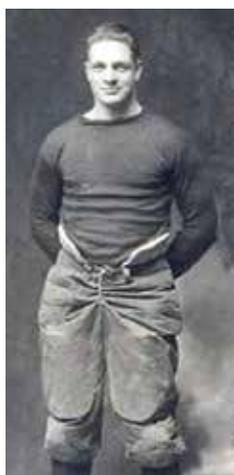
— by Joseph Owen

## Winthrop Outing in 1970s Seals Fate of Frosty VW Microbus

**W**hen I was a young, some 50 years back, we kids would sit on someone's front stoop and vie to be first to shout out the make and model of every car that passed. It was a Rural Free Delivery (RFD) route, but the traffic was regular enough that it was a favorite pastime. "Ford Galaxie! Oldsmobile Cutlass! Chevrolet Chevelle wagon! Cadillac Coupe de Ville! Buick Skylark!" we'd yell, feeling so smart. Sometimes we could pick out the year and the colorway, but that was usually a neighbor's car we knew quite well. If we saw a Volkswagen Beetle, we'd yell "Punch Buggy!" and punch our friends as hard as we could in the arm, which always ended up in a rough-and-tumble squabble and chase around the yard before we settled back down.

My husband is particularly fond of Volkswagens. The sound of the old air-cooled, rear-mounted VW engine, he says, is partially due to the two small muffler tips that simultaneously puff out exhaust. He describes it as a sound that to him is "an unmistakably pleasant, nearly zen, subtle repetitive chirp that is somewhat hypnotizing." When he was 15, he bought himself a used dark blue 1973 Super Beetle for \$600 in Gardiner, with money that he saved from his paper route and from waiting on tables at the old Featherbed Inn in Mount Vernon. This was the "Bug" with the curved windshield and big round taillights that was new for that model year. He says it achieved 64 horsepower, the most powerful classic Beetle engine built.

In contrast, and regardless of his favoritism, he tells another tale from his youth not as positive toward the VW. As a young boy, together with his parents and older sister, he lived in the old Governor Hubbard House on Monk's Hill in Readfield. That house burned some years back, so it is no longer there to see; but it used to sit on Route 17 (Readfield Road) on the right coming from U.S. Route 202 (Western Avenue) in Manchester. He got up to lots of hijinks there – good stories for another day. On one particularly freezing cold mid-December Saturday morning, the whole family piled into their white 1970 VW Microbus. Now, Volkswagens are notorious for poor heating of the interior cabin, and a microbus has even more interior space than a Bug. Anyway, as they pattered along, keep in mind the kids were bundled to the nines those cool fur-lined, hooded dark green parkas that were the rage in those days, along with the usual other layers and appendage accessories. The plan was to head into downtown "Winthropolis" (Winthrop) and go to Wilson's.



**George Francis  
"Squanto" Wilson.**

Courtesy of Dennis Orr

Wilson's was founded in 1915 by George Francis "Squanto" Wilson (1889-1967) as what might then have been classified as a "five-and-dime" and now would be called a "dollar store." George A. Smith, who for years wrote columns for the Kennebec Journal and the Morning Sentinel, also worked for many years at Wilson's as a boy, his dad being a part-owner. Smith called George Wilson his "namesake" in a June 2016 article he wrote titled "The days of the five-and-dime."

Wilson was a professional baseball player for a total of six games with the Detroit Tigers and the Boston Red Sox. He also was a teacher and principal at Winthrop High School for 10 years. Regardless of his nickname, there has been no indication he was suggesting Native American ancestry. Winthrop had the original Wilson's store, which grew into a chain that served Livermore Falls, Norway, Lincoln, Ellsworth, and, more locally, Hallowell and Gardiner. A 1971 sales flyer cover featured "Women's & Childrens' Orlon Cable Knee Highs for fifty-six cents, Ladies' 1st Quality Panty Hose for thirty-eight cents, and twenty-five percent off Winter Dress Jackets for all the family!"

Wilson's in Winthrop closed over three decades ago, and the building was torn down. The building to the right, which used to house Winthrop Market, was lifted off its foundation and moved some 150 feet back to become Sully's Tavern, among other things, making space for a handy parking lot. In the old days, Wilson's was right on the sidewalk and parking was diagonal and "nose in" right on the street.

So my husband's family's VW bus nosed into its spot, and his parents said: "OK, you kids wait in the VW and we're gonna just go in and get a few things." This was a weird development. Why were they staying outside?



**A postcard shows Wilson's after the blizzard of February 18-19, 1952, in Winthrop.**

Postcard from KHS Collection

*Continued on page 9*

# Letters TO THE Editor

I came to the historical society hoping to find a bit more information about my great-great-grandfather Sgt. Andrew H. Doyle, whose record at the Togus Soldiers' Home simply noted that he was found dead April 8, 1884, on Hallowell Road alongside the property. I hoped there might be a newspaper article about this event with additional information.

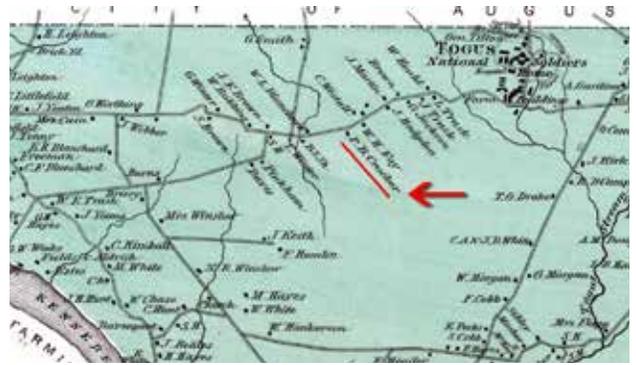
Having walked the property first, I found it unusual that he would not have taken a left turn, to walk on flatter ground rather than taking a right onto Hallowell Road, where there is a bit of a rise. Doyle had twice been shot in the left ankle, first at the Battle of Seccessionville and again at Gettysburg, so walking must have been painful. Where was he headed? To visit the grave of a friend at the West Cemetery?

At the historical society, I looked through the *Daily Kennebec Journal* and was thrilled to find the entry that I was hoping for. On April 10, 1884, it was reported that "Alexander" H. Doyle, an inmate of the Soldiers' Home, had been found the previous day behind Peleg Crocker's barn in Chelsea, about a mile and a quarter from the home. (There was a local sculptor named Alexander Doyle, which I think is where the confusion with his first name came from.) We rang for assistance and you were able to provide a map that indeed showed a house for P.B. Crocker on Hallowell Road. We referred back to the newspapers and you helped us find a weather report for the day of Sgt. Doyle's death, which showed the possibility of snow on that April day had been predicted. Had he gone to the Crocker barn to seek shelter?

I never thought I'd put this all together, but I believe that additional research I did last night reveals the true nature of his excursion. Peleg B. Crocker was on the 1880 census with his wife, Kate, in Chelsea — but his name was crossed off as a duplicate. That was because he was at the Kennebec County Jail, serving a sentence for "rum selling." Following that lead, I found that he and his wife were in the news a number of times for their rum selling activities, including a mention of them providing their wares to men from the Soldiers' Home. Peleg Crocker was a veteran himself who had lost a leg at the second Battle of Bull Run. He had spent time at Togus (and was thrown out at one point for disobeying orders). It would seem his wife joined him in Maine (they were from New York) and set up shop. They were a very colorful couple. As he wasn't allowed burial at Togus, he was buried at Riverside Cemetery in Chelsea.

I found a nice article about a group that was making sure these men also got recognition with flags for their service. One of the lead photos is the grave of Peleg and Kate Crocker. <https://www.centralmaine.com/2013/05/24/chelseavolunteers-honor-forgotten-civil-war-veterans-graves-with-flags/> So a wonderful day at the Kennebec Historical Society!

*Ann Cooney Trombley, West Gardiner*



An 1879 map of Chelsea showing location of the Peleg B. Crocker property where Sgt. Andrew Doyle was found in 1884.

Photo supplied by Ann Trombley

## Winthrop Outing

*Continued from page 8*

Did I mention it was cold? Yeah, it was really cold, and the VW bus didn't hold any residual heat from the brief 20-minute drive. The kids' breath came out in frosty puffs, and their feet were stomping to keep some feeling in the aching toes as the minutes ticked on. When they rubbed little round holes with a jacket sleeve to clear the frost from the bus windows, they could see the fog on the storefront display windows expressing the warmth, oh so close, just inside those doors. The glow of the "Hot Roasted Nuts" machine teased with its yellow hue from within, and then they resorted to alternate ways to warm their hands: rubbing them together, sitting on them, and blowing on them, to no avail.

When Mom and Dad finally came out with their bags of stuff, they were rather horrified to find their two young children quite that color blue. Apparently, the rest of the weekend the kids were pampered with lots of hot chocolate and pretty much anything they wanted to try to make up for that misery.

As you may have guessed, his parents were buying Christmas presents, and those ironically included warmer winter boots. Of course, they had to be secretive; but as much as that VW bus was loved in the warmer times, it went up for sale that very next spring. And yet, my husband still likes to hear the friendly rattle-chug of that particular kind of engine.

— by Kari Mullen-McLaughlin

## 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. Said Nelson, "I am reminded of the many articles in the Antiquarian Notebook about local veterans who served in wars from the Revolution to World War I – too many to describe in one article, so this is Part One."*

Many early local settlers were Revolutionary War veterans. Anthony Douin wrote an article titled "Remember the Revolution," published July 9, 1998, about two of them: Daniel Cony and Thomas Sewall. Both saw action with the local militia troops.

Cony was studying medicine when the Lexington alarm sounded in April 1775. As an officer in the militia company in Tewksbury, Massachusetts, he immediately responded and joined the Massachusetts militia to besiege British Gen. Thomas Gage's army in Boston. Later, in 1777, Cony led a relief company with U.S. Maj. Gen Horatio Gates at Saratoga and was present at British Gen. John Burgoyne's surrender.

Sewall came to the Fort Western settlement in 1775 in what is now Augusta and opened the first tannery in the Kennebec Valley. In 1779 the British landed several regiments at Bagaduce, now Castine. Capt. Daniel Savage's militia company, including Sewall, was called out. The expedition proved a disaster for the Americans; Sewall was captured and later released. The town of Hallowell paid him \$450 for his troubles in 1780.

Capt. Nathan Weston first came to the Kennebec area in 1766 and later built a store, a potash factory, and a landing from which he ran a sloop in the coasting business. In the Revolutionary War, he, like Cony, served at the Battles of Saratoga.

Both Cony and Sewall are buried in Cony Cemetery. Other Revolutionary War veterans buried there are Stephen Tobey, Solomon Cummings, and Abraham Page. In 1916, Koussinoc Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution marked the graves of Hannah Hodges Hunt and Lydia Rollins, calling them "Real Daughters of the American Revolution" because their fathers were Revolutionary War veterans.

During the War of 1812, Samuel Cony, a nephew of Daniel Cony, served with the U.S. Navy. He was a gunner on the ship *Enterprise* during a battle with the British ship *Boxer* in September 1813 off the Maine coast. Later he was captured while serving on board the *USS Rattlesnake* and sent to Dartmoor Prison in England, where he was released in 1815.

Several local men served as volunteers in the Mexican War. At the opening battle in Palo Alto, 2nd Lt. Seth Williams — who would rise to the rank of brevet major general in the Civil War — was cited for bravery. In February 1847, Edward Fletcher, of Augusta, became one of the early local casualties when he was killed in the Battle of Buena Vista. Nathan Weston Jr. was a paymaster who was injured in a fall from a horse.

Midshipman James Madison Ladd was another local man to die early in the war. He contracted a fever while on duty during naval operations off Vera Cruz and died at a naval hospital in Norfolk, Virginia, on November 26, 1847. Jonathan Ballard, the great-grandson of midwife and diarist Martha Ballard, also saw action in this war.

The New England regiment of the Ninth U.S. Infantry included Capt. Charles Simmons and Pvt. Thomas Rankins, of Augusta. Cpl. Thomas O. Davis received a crippling wound and was discharged for disability.

The attack on Fort Sumter aroused the citizens of Kennebec County. On April 18, 1861, the Pacific Fire Engine Company, led by the Augusta Band, began marching around the city, pausing to hear patriotic comments from Gov. Israel Washburn Jr., former U. S. Senator James W. Bradbury, Judge Richard D. Rice, and U. S. Sen. Lot Morrill. On April 22, a public meeting was held at Winthrop Hall, with former U. S. Sen. Reuel Williams presiding and more comments by leading Augusta citizens. The Legislature met that day and authorized the raising of 10,000 volunteers for three years, organized into 10 regiments. And thus began Kennebec County's participation in the Civil War.



**Augusta's Cony Cemetery is the final resting place of many of the city's Revolutionary War soldiers.**

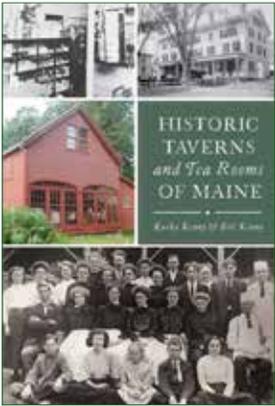
Photo by Rich Eastman

(to be continued in Part Two in the January-February 2022 issue)

— Sally Furber Nelson, KHS contributing editor

## Upcoming Programs

### November: “Historic Taverns and Tea Rooms of Maine”



Cover courtesy of Bill Kenny

Holding an integral place in Maine communities, early taverns and tea rooms were centers of commerce and political and social life. From famed Revolutionary War incidents to Civil War generals, stagecoaches and the story of rum, the history of early Maine’s taverns is captivating. The tea rooms of the early 1900s were just as interesting and important. They played a large role in the national tea movement, the temperance and suffragette movements, and the promotion of women’s independence; and they also symbolized Maine’s culture and sophistication. Join local authors Kathy and Bill Kenny as they unveil the stories, characters, and history of these establishments over the past four centuries.

Kathy Kenny is a retired librarian whose deep love of books, history, and antique quilts has led her to a second career as a quilt historian, educator, and lecturer. Her extensive vintage antique quilt collection allows her to enhance the different periods of America’s history for her audiences and give them a closer, more hands-on approach to learning about various events in our nation’s history, such as the story of tea and tea rooms during the years of the women’s suffrage movement.

Bill Kenny, a former career U.S. Air Force logistics war planner, joint special operations commander, intelligence officer, and Persian Gulf War veteran, and retired adjunct university professor, has always had a keen interest in history, especially Maine history. This is his second book; his first book, released by The History Press in June 2020, is titled *A History of Maine Railroads*.

The presentation is free to the public (donations are gladly accepted). At this time, the presentation is scheduled to take place at 6:30 p.m. Wednesday, November 10, at Hope Baptist Church, located at 726 Western Avenue in Manchester. If COVID-19 cases continue to increase, the presentation will be held on Facebook Live. If you have any questions about the program, please call Scott Wood, executive director, at 622-7718.

### KHS Book Sales Net Over \$1,700, With One More to Go

Two recent book sales that KHS held, one in August and one at the end of September, raised a total of \$1,759.50. The last time the society held a book sale was in 2019, and the total amount raised then was a meager \$441. In 2020, KHS did not hold a book sale due to the coronavirus pandemic.

The society was hopeful that 2021 book sales would generate at least \$500. However, according to the society’s executive director, Scott Wood, several factors contributed to the increased amount. First, due to the pandemic, most other organizations were not accepting book donations, but Wood said, “KHS accepted them and tucked them away, knowing that one day we would be able to re-sell them.” Second, instead of holding the book sale on a single day, the society held it on multiple days and even offered a “members only” day. The society also added a table of specially priced books — those that were out of print, rare, or otherwise more valuable than the regular books. Finally, book prices were increased. Hardcover books cost \$2 each and softcover books were sold at \$1 apiece.

Following the success of the first two sales, KHS will hold one final sale of the year from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. Friday, October 29. Many of the remaining books are in “like new” condition and include a wide assortment of fiction, biographies, sports, history, travel, cookbooks, children’s books, and much more.

This will be the last opportunity to find some wonderful books, and shoppers will enjoy slashed pricing as all books will cost \$1. At 2 p.m., shoppers will be able to buy a bag full of books for \$5. If you have any questions, please call Wood at the society, (207) 622-7718.



KHS assistant Nikki Nolton and Executive Director Scott Wood arrange the sales table while Tracy Weber browses books August 20 at the society’s Winthrop Street headquarters in Augusta.

Photo by Joseph Owen

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