



# Kennebec Current



Discovering, preserving, and disseminating Kennebec County history since 1891

Volume 32 Issue 6

KENNEBEC HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

November–December 2022

## Members Breathe New Life into China Historical Society ...

Eleven members of the China Historical Society gathered on October 29 in China in an effort to revive their organization, which has struggled in recent years to remain active.

“We just want to keep the society up and running,” said Bob Bennett, one of the meeting’s organizers. “We’ll do whatever it takes to do that.”

Bennett, a China resident and former history teacher who also is on the Kennebec Historical Society’s board of directors, said the group’s immediate goal is increasing its membership.

“We cannot function without members,” he said. “We are looking to recruit anyone who is interested in

joining: seasonal residents, young adults, and high schoolers. Our records of past meetings indicate that there have always been strong family ties within the society, so we would like to keep that going as well.”



China’s Town House stands on the east side of Lakeview Drive (also U.S. Route 202 and Route 9), immediately north of the Town Office. Built in 1842, the Town House has no heat, only one electrical outlet, and no climate-controlled space.

Photo by Bob Bennett

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## ... While Waterville Group Aims to Revamp Its Museum

The Waterville Historical Society, shaking off nearly three years of isolation induced by the arrival of the coronavirus in early 2020, is taking steps to upgrade its museum and pick up the pace of its activity.

The group held a reception for about 60 guests December 3 in Marriner Hall, an annex at the back of the Redington Museum on Silver Street in Waterville.

“This is the first holiday party we’ve had in three and a half years,” said Julie Miller, vice president of the board of directors. Citing a concern about preventing transmission of illness, she said, “We have air purifiers in every room.”

In preparation for other gatherings, the 119-year-old society has hired Cassie Julia, of Waterville, as a part-time events coordinator. She was expected to begin her duties in December.

Other than Julia, WHS is an all-volunteer organization, according to President Jay Violette. How many volunteers are there among its nearly 200 members? “Not enough,” he said, adding that the society benefits from



Waterville Historical Society Vice President Julie Miller shows off the 19th-century kitchen December 1 at the Redington Museum in Waterville.

Photo by Rich Eastman

*Continued on page 7*

## President's Message



**I**t's hard to believe we're reaching the end of another year, the 131st since the Kennebec Historical Society was founded in 1891.

As we approach the holidays, KHS is glad to have hosted the Victorian Tea Party again this year! After two years on hiatus due to COVID-19, it surely was wonderful to have about 40 people together again at KHS headquarters for this festive celebration.

We're now in the time of year when travel – especially at night – can be treacherous. For January, February, and March, KHS programs will be held on Facebook Live rather than in person. In addition to allowing presentations to be held even in the case of inclement weather (cross your fingers for no power outages!), it also gives “snowbird” members a chance to view and participate in the programs. Due to weather and the travel required of the November presenter, we held his presentation online. Thanks to all who tuned in. It was an active group watching and asking questions, and was certainly an educational evening about Maine's shipbuilding history.

For additional announcements about programs, weather-related closures of KHS, or other events, follow our Facebook page.

While you're doing your holiday shopping, please keep KHS in mind as a source for unique gifts. Gift memberships are a wonderful option for local history buffs, and if you stop in at our headquarters at 107 Winthrop Street in Augusta, you can shop for Maine- and Kennebec County-themed books and collectibles. Members receive 10 percent off items in our gift shop, and every purchase helps support KHS and our mission to preserve local history. I'm writing this during Thanksgiving week, and I would be remiss not to offer thanks for all of your support for KHS this year, and always. May you and your families have a wonderful holiday season!

— Jamie Logan, president

*Happy Holidays*

## KHS Welcomes the Following New Members

Sally Bullard — Farmingdale

Louis Carrier — Winthrop

Lynda Chung — Augusta

Pegg & Trevor Flanagan — Yuma, Arizona

Gisela & Ava Hayes — Belleville, Illinois

John McLaughlin — West Gardiner

Keller Insurance Agency, Inc. — Augusta

Rudi Rines — Augusta

April Wood — Oakland

*and continues to recognize ...*

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

Kennebec Savings Bank

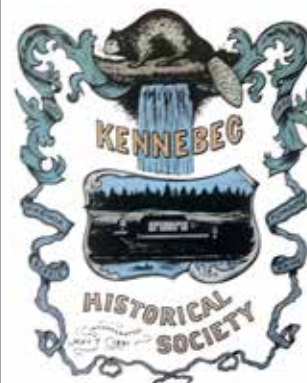
Ganneston Construction Corporation

### Sponsoring Business Members (\$500+ annual)

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#### **Membership Secretary**

Joan Lancaster

#### **Total membership:**

600 on December 6

Life members: 241

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.

## China Historical Society

*Continued from page 1*



**Bennett**

The society had more than 20 members at its peak in the 1980s, but it lost momentum after China resident Marc Johnson, who was the society's president, died in 2006.

Other problems also played a role in the organization's decline. Its meeting place, the old China Town House on Lakeview Drive, proved to be insufficient for the society's needs. The group's federal nonprofit tax status lapsed because of inactivity. Its collection of historical items has suffered from deterioration and a shortage of documentation.

The society's long-range goal – finding a site where the group can hold meetings and conduct its activities – would address some of these deficiencies.

"We are looking to move to a new location that would accommodate our needs for a climate-controlled environment for our artifacts," Bennett said. "So far, we are considering moving to the old Weeks Mills Elementary School. They have a vacancy that could accommodate the storage of our donations and a much more up-to-date electrical system. We have been discussing with the town of China to renovate this school so that we could relocate there."

The Town House, built in 1842, has no heat, only one electrical outlet, and no climate-controlled space, he said. The Weeks Mills Elementary School building offers heat and WiFi service but no indoor plumbing. As a result, Bennett said, the society is looking for places to hold meetings temporarily during colder months.

"We are considering meeting at the South China Public Library and the Albert Church Library," he said.

In recent years, two major bat infestations have damaged many of the group's artifacts, which are stored at the Town House. The society has hired a professional cleaning service to deal with that. The lack of documentation still awaits a solution, however. "We don't know who donated each item, where they came from, or when it was donated," Bennett said.

At a meeting on December 3, the society elected the following new officers: President Scott McCormac, Vice President Tim Hatch, Secretary Emily Schroeder (who also is the Kennebec Historical Society's archivist), and Treasurer Joann Austin. The group also discussed further the task of reinstating the society's 501(c)(3) tax-exempt status under U.S. Internal Revenue Service rules. The most recent renewal of the tax exemption occurred in 2009.

Janice Clowes, the Vassalboro Historical Society president, also is involved in the China group's revival.

"I'm excited to get things started. China is important to me as well," said Clowes, who attended Erskine Academy in South China, resulting in many long-lasting ties with the China community. She said she encourages her peers to join the society or volunteer to help get China's group back on its feet.

Clowes said she and Bennett are members of the Central Maine Heritage Council, which has representation from 12 other area historical societies. At that group's meetings, they find inspiration from other historical societies' members, who offer advice about restoring China's.

For Bennett, it's all part of what it takes to set things right.

"I cannot emphasize enough the importance of preserving history," he said.



The arrow on this 1856 map of Kennebec County shows where the China Town House was located 14 years after it was built. The Town House still stands at its original location.

KHS collection

## Scrapbooks, Yearbooks, Other Gems Arrive at KHS

We thought it was time we told you about some of our latest acquisitions, purchases, and gifts from thoughtful folks. Also, we're always on the lookout for Kennebec County items of interest on eBay or at auctions.

There have been a number of book sales this year at KHS, and occasionally we've found books for our library. Please remember that these items and everything in our collections are available for use whenever we are open!

The society has received many town reports, the most recent issues from Hallowell and Litchfield. Area yearbooks are always popular, too, and we'll squeeze them in somehow. Our latest donations include the 1954, 1955, and 1956, editions of Gardiner High School's *Quill*, and the 1984 Gardiner Area High School's *Quill*.

We're definitely overly blessed with postcards, but we're especially happy to see more unusual images and real-photo postcards. After all, a picture is worth a thousand words. One eBay discovery shows the Watson Tourist Home on Bangor Street in Augusta around 1950.

Periodicals published in Augusta turn up in walls and under floorboards, besides more conventional places. Friends have sent us copies of *Comfort* (1922), the *Illustrated Family Herald* (1878), and the *Illustrated Family Monthly* (1879).

Another sizeable gift was a bound collection of the *Gospel Banner* newspaper (1835-1837).

Scrapbooks are a perennial favorite. They reveal so much about the compiler: interests, events, milestones, and what (or who) was valuable to them. Longtime members will recall Patricia "Tuckie" Marvin; we now have three of her scrapbooks. Another donor brought two scrapbooks to us, all about Benedict Arnold.

Keeping genealogy in mind, how about a copy of *Golden Memories*, covering the Gardiner, Richards and Vaughn families; a 1920 issue of *Sprague's Journal of Maine History*; *The Douglas Genealogy*; *Marriages of St. Augustine* (Augusta); and *St. Augustine Cemetery* (1883-1993)?

Images to note include Cony High School's 1949 class trip from Augusta to Washington, D.C.; a stereoview of Augusta by Henry Bailey (1870s); the 1956 eighth grade of Farrington School, with all students identified by name; two chromolithographs published by True and Co. in 1880; a composite of members of the Maine Senate, 1913-14; and, certainly not least, a portrait of Harriet Williams Fuller that matches that of her husband, Benjamin Apthorp Gould Fuller, which is in our Fuller Parlor. We plan to identify the artist and restore the frames in the near future.

Other interesting items include a 1952 Central Maine Power Co. comic book, *Electric Power*; Odd Fellows ephemera from the 1880s; and war ration and S&H green stamp books.



A portrait of Harriet Williams Fuller, wife of Benjamin A.G. Fuller, was donated by a Fuller descendant and hangs in the Fuller parlor.

From the KHS collection

A collection that would make a great transcription project is a box of letters written by Donald Grant, of Gardiner, to his mother and his daughter while he serving in the Army from 1942 to 1944.

We hope this account has piqued your interest, and that you'll get in touch soon to examine some materials in person. In the meantime, have a wonderful holiday season!



The Collections Box  
Emily Schroeder

— Emily A. Schroeder, KHS archivist and  
Collections Committee co-chair



## Olde Federal Building May Be Redeveloped into Luxury Apartments

*Reprinted with permission from the November 11 edition of the Kennebec Journal*



After years on the market, the Olde Federal Building at the corner of Water and Winthrop streets in Augusta may change hands and be redeveloped into luxury apartments. A public hearing on the proposal was scheduled for December 13.

Photo by Joe Phelan

The Olde Federal Building, a downtown Augusta architectural icon, could be redeveloped by new owners under a proposal that is expected to go before the city's Planning Board on December 13 for the second time.

The Goldman Group, a real estate investment, redevelopment and management group based in Boston, has submitted a conditional-use application to the Augusta Planning Board for the adaptive reuse of the landmark building into luxury apartments with a wide range of amenities and retail space.

The building at 295 Water St., currently listed for sale for \$2.65 million, has not changed hands. The Goldman Group and seller Vickery-Downing Associates, with an office in Yarmouth, both declined to comment for this story.

"This speaks to the arrival of regional investment," Keith Luke, economic development director for the city of Augusta, said. "We're seeing investors radiate out from markets like Boston and central Massachusetts and Portsmouth (New Hampshire) and Portland. These are exactly the type of properties that represent a return opportunity for investment that they can't find in other places right now, because they've all been renovated."

The building, made from gray granite and built over 3 1/2 years, is considered one of the state's finest surviving examples of Romanesque Revival architecture that was popularized by H.H. Richardson, a prominent late-19th-century architect based in the Boston area. It was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1974.

"There's no other building in central Maine that looks like it," said Michael Hall, executive director of the Augusta Downtown Alliance. "Culturally and architecturally, it's very significant."

The building first served as a federal office building and courthouse and still houses a U.S. Postal Service office. It was sold by the federal government to a private owner after the new, larger Edmund S. Muskie Federal Building on Western Avenue was built in 1966. While it's mostly empty now, it leases office space to a number of nonprofit groups, including the Augusta Downtown Alliance, and has some retail space.

As outlined in the application, the developers are proposing to convert about half of the building into 30 luxury residential units — three studios, 16 one-bedrooms, nine two-bedrooms, and two three-bedrooms. The existing U.S. Postal Service office would remain and two other spaces would be set aside for a small grocery store and a second street-front retail space.

Developers also plan to include a fitness center, a grand lobby, mail room, storage lockers, bicycle storage, a pet grooming station and a 3,450-square-foot rooftop deck and bar overlooking the Kennebec River with a pergola, hot tub and firepit would be available to tenants during the day and available to be rented out by a retail tenant in the evening.

The application states that developers intend to preserve the historic character and the living units are expected to be renovated to modern, upscale standards. Because the building's lower floors are in the flood plain, they would not be converted into living space. Hall said redeveloping the building would be significant in several ways, including increasing the residential populations of the historic downtown that can support the businesses that have moved into street-level retail spaces. "The population down here is basically starving for a place they could go and pick up groceries," he said. "Anything we can get that adds to the neighborhood atmosphere is a great thing."

Currently, the number of renovated downtown apartments is about 80; this project would bring that number to more than 100. Luke said the vacancy rate in the city's historic downtown is zero, so demand for apartments like those proposed remains strong.

The Goldman Group has experience in renovating buildings, Luke said. Most have been in Massachusetts, with additional projects in Rhode Island and Florida. This would be the first Maine project for the vertically integrated real estate company.



— by Jessica Lowell

## Fayette Voters Reject \$500,000 for Starling Hall Renovations

*Reprinted from the December 2 edition of the Kennebec Journal*

**S**tarling Hall's future as a community center is uncertain after Fayette residents rejected efforts to match a \$500,000 federal grant by bonding the same amount in order to renovate the nearly 150-year-old building. (See *Kennebec Current*, September-October 2022, page 8-9; and January-February 2021, page 7) Town officials and a local nonprofit that has been raising money for the project must now determine whether to continue seeking funding or consider selling the property.

In November's election, 341 residents supported a referendum question concerning the funding, while 427 were opposed, meaning the town is no longer eligible for the \$500,000 grant.

"I don't know where we go from here," said Joe Young, president of Friends of Starling Hall, the nonprofit that has led fundraising efforts to turn the town-owned building into a community center. With voters' rejection of the referendum, grant organizations will now be less likely to help, Young said.

"It's a whole million bucks that we were looking at," he said. "And for a small town like this and a small group like ours, our options are pretty limited. It's not every day that you have a chance to get \$500,000 with another half a million dollar investment." The group plans to meet early next year to figure out its next steps.

Those who support funding Starling Hall, which is the state's oldest Grange building, cite the building's historical relevance and its potential as a hub for community events and gatherings. Historically, Grange buildings were used by farmers to discuss cooperative activities. According to Fayette selectman Jon Beekman, Starling Hall, located at 2769 Main St., is the state's oldest Grange building but not the oldest Grange, as many farmers met in local homes and stores.

Fayette residents against the funding question were concerned that the dollar amount was too high, and that the money could be spent on other issues such as roads. Earlier this year, Fayette resident Brent St. Clair began circulating a petition to limit the amount of money the town can spend on the building to \$5,000 annually. Any spending beyond that would require residents' approval. "People are hurting," he said, "and you don't know they are until you start going to see them and talk to them. I met a lot of people when I was getting the petition signed, and it was really humbling."

And while some are just opposed to spending extra money, Young, of Friends of Starling Hall, said some residents would "love nothing better than for that place to burn down," or at least to see the town sell it.

Town Manager Mark Robinson said he and selectmen have also heard suggestions from residents that they should sell the building; however, no such decisions have been made. If officials did decide to sell the building, Robinson said that decision would ultimately need to be approved by residents at a Town Meeting.

"It has created a divisive atmosphere in a town that typically is unified in their support of projects that are beneficial," Beekman said of the issue. In an outcome indicative of that division, voters in November approved spending \$8,000 of town funds on a security system for Starling Hall despite rejecting the funding to turn the building into a usable community center. St. Clair said he wouldn't want to see the building torn down or sold, but that he and other residents are primarily concerned about the financial impact associated with renovations.

"They don't want to spend the money," he said. "That's the bottom line. Everybody I talked to, they all said they have nothing against the hall; they just don't want to see their taxes go up. That's a lot of money that we could spend somewhere else."

In 2015, Friends of Starling Hall estimated it would cost roughly \$600,000 to renovate the building. Planned renovations include adding a sprinkler system, a second entry point and an elevator to ensure accessibility to the second floor. Seven years later, Young said the total cost is now likely higher than \$600,000, and that \$1 million would have gone a long way.

And while the Hall's future as a community center is now uncertain, the building itself isn't going anywhere any time soon. Robinson, who preferred to remain neutral on the issue, said the town will continue to maintain the building as they are legally required to do with all municipally owned properties.



Efforts to renovate Fayette's Starling Hall, the state's oldest Grange building, into a community center have hit a roadblock after voters rejected bonding \$500,000 to unlock a federal grant of the same value.

Photo by Joe Phelan

## Waterville Group Revamps Museum

*Continued from page 1*

about 15 people who help keep it running – plus a mascot, Violette’s border collie, Riley, whose job apparently is chasing down any stray rubber ball that might be out of place.

The society suspended its lecture series when the pandemic began, but it hopes to offer lectures again in January or February, Miller said. As in the past, the public can attend them in person or watch them online, either live or recorded. Nine lectures are archived on the society’s website at <https://www.watervillehistoricalsociety.org/media>.

The society also is overhauling the Redington Museum. Longtime live-in docents Bryan and Bonny Finnemore moved out of the building recently, affording a chance to rethink the use of the entire building.

During the three-year suspension of public access, the society has completed energy-efficient upgrades to the heating and ventilation systems, improved handicapped accessibility and parking lot pavement, installed new shutters and storm windows, upgraded its computer infrastructure, and purchased curatorial supplies, according to Violette.

The society also has a small library and a collection of genealogical material pertaining to Waterville families. Four years ago, it installed a 49-inch touch-screen computer in the side-entrance lobby, where patrons can look up basic information about those families.



Violette



**The apothecary at the Redington Museum in Waterville is stocked with antique pharmacy supplies and equipment donated by the LaVerdiere company, which once operated a chain of drugstores.**

Photo by Rich Eastman

collections at Colby College. The society is trying to find records about what the collections items are and who donated them, and all of those records would have been generated in the pre-computer era.

Miller, a retired educator, said she expects that the exhibits will be redesigned to reduce the quantity of items and increase the quality of the presentation, especially to make them more relevant and interesting to children.

“If we want new members and people to show interest, we’re going to have to do something for youth,” she said.

One museum feature that draws the interest of visitors of all ages is the apothecary, which is attached to the south side of the annex. Filled with antiques and pharmacy items donated in 1976 by Reginald LaVerdiere and LaVerdiere Enterprises, which once operated a statewide drugstore chain in Maine, it is designed to resemble a late-19th-century drugstore. It even has an antique phone booth stashed in the back corner.

Another item – a Lombard log hauler – is available for inspection anytime. It’s outdoors, at the back of the museum’s parking lot. The museum also is the home of the Central Maine Garden Club, which maintains gardens and other plantings on the site that are native to Maine.

The society hopes to raise \$250,000 for the museum changes, as well as additional landscaping of its grounds. Miller said when they are complete, she hopes visiting school groups still will be allowed to pick up various sturdy displayed collection items to examine them closely.

“We’re not a place that says, ‘Don’t touch! Don’t touch!’ Miller said. “We may have to become that, but I hope not.” 🐾

— by Joseph Owen

## Filmmaker Produces Documentary as “Love Letter” to Hallowell



**F**or Hallowell-based film producer Chris Walters, what’s old is part of what’s new.

Walters made extensive use recently of antique images of his hometown in making “Postcard from Hallowell Maine,” a 14-minute-and-48-second documentary about the city.

Walters said he made the film at the request of former Hallowell City Council member Phil Lindley and Dawn Gallagher, a local lawyer and former member of the Regional School Unit 2 board of directors, who thought it might be a good addition to the city’s annual Old Hallowell Day event in July.

“It turned into something more,” said Walters, adding that he considers the film to be his “love letter” to the city, where he spent his early childhood before moving to Florida, and where he also lives today.

**At left, Carol Pomerleau and her husband, Roger, who was one of the people interviewed on camera for “Postcard from Hallowell, Maine,” talk with filmmaker Chris Walters, second from right, and Alan Dillingham on Water Street in Hallowell.**

Photos courtesy of Chris Walters





The film's director and editor is Dave Benner, a 1994 Hall-Dale High School graduate. It consists of a series of interviews with Hallowell residents interlaced with images of Old Hallowell Day celebrations, tributes to late former Mayor Barry Timson (1944-2007), and aerial images of the city. The residents who appear on camera are Warren Benner (father of David Benner), Chris Cart, Bill Haley, Roger Pomerleau, Leah Sampson, Sam Shain, Justin Underwood, Chris Vallee, Mark Walker, and Charlotte Warren. The aerial footage was procured by borrowing a drone from a friend in the real estate business.

Walters said his Hallowell-based independent film production company shot the film in the midst of the coronavirus pandemic in 2021 and edited it last winter. It essentially was a side project he developed while working on a feature-length documentary, "Artfully United," which is in post-production.

"I'd like to do more of this kind of stuff," he said in the spacious game room of his Middle Street home, where he showed the film to a few guests in early November while Pearl, one of his two pet tortoises, scratched at the wall of her enclosure in the corner.

Last summer "Postcard from Hallowell Maine" won the quarterly Golden Nugget International Film Festival award for best documentary short film. The film's only public showing in Hallowell occurred October 19 at The Quarry Tap Room, a Hallowell bar that converted itself temporarily into a theater for the occasion.



— by Joseph Owen



Above, a movie placard promotes a showing of the "Postcard from Hallowell, Maine" documentary film. Below, attendees watch the film on October 19 at the Quarry Tap Room in Hallowell.

Photo and image courtesy of Chris Walters



## Editor Stokes Samantha Smith’s Legacy, Tells Other News Tales



A bronze statue of Samantha Reed Smith stands at the southeast corner of the Cultural Building in Augusta. Known as “Maine’s Young Ambassador of Goodwill.” She holds a dove in her extended hands, a Russian bear at her feet.

Photo by Nikko Noble

**K**ennebec Current editor Joseph Owen delivered a presentation about journalism September 30 to Messalonskee Middle School teacher April Wood’s eighth-grade classes. Owen was asked to describe his career as a journalist after Wood’s class read *Nothing but the Truth: A Documentary Novel*, by Avi.

Owen, a member of the Kennebec Historical Society’s board of directors, told stories about his 13 years of working abroad for the *Stars and Stripes* newspapers, both in Europe and in the Far East. One of the more memorable events he covered was the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. When the news broke that East German officials had opened borders to unrestricted travel to the West, Owen’s boss sent him for a week there because he was one of the few Americans on the staff who could speak German.

Before that, Owen worked six years as a reporter at the *Kennebec Journal*. He was there when it published the first article about child peace advocate Samantha Smith, of Manchester, in 1983. Smith wrote to the Soviet Union leader Yuri Andropov in November 1982, when she was 10 – only a few years younger than the students in Wood’s class. Like many at that time, Smith feared a nuclear war would erupt between the United States and the Soviet Union. She asked Andropov why their two nations could not maintain peace and what he would do to prevent a war. After she received a reply from Andropov months later, inviting her to visit the Soviet Union, the *Kennebec Journal* pounced on the news opportunity.

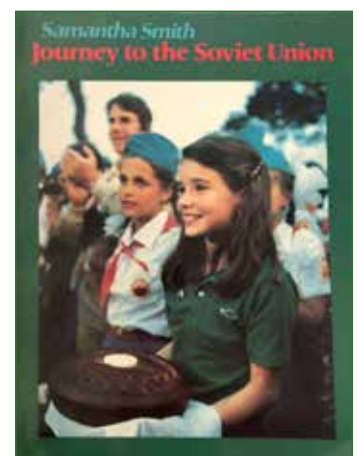
Owen’s *Kennebec Journal* coworker Jack Weible wrote the first story about Andropov’s response to Smith’s letter. Weible’s article generated

a firestorm of added coverage across the United States and then worldwide. Owen also interviewed her about her quest for gifts to take to Soviet children. In the months leading up to her departure in July, Smith went on a nationwide media tour, winning over the hearts of Americans everywhere.

Smith traveled throughout the Soviet Union for two weeks, prompting a burst of publicity there and back in America. After embarking later on a TV acting career, she died in 1985 in a plane crash in Auburn.

A statue of Smith stands in front of the Cultural Building in Augusta. Manchester Elementary School, where she was a student when she wrote her letter, has a display commemorating her in its library. With the help of her father, Arthur Smith, a University of Maine at Augusta English professor who also died in the plane crash, she wrote her 1984 autobiography, *Journey to the Soviet Union*, of which KHS has a copy.

Thirty-seven years after her death and nearly 40 years since she sent that letter to Andropov, Samantha Smith’s opening words in the book still resonate: “I dedicate this book to the children of the world. They know that peace is always possible.”



KHS Collection

— by Meghan Stagnone

## Augusta-based Catholic Women’s Group Disbands

**T**he Augusta area has lost a women’s group that first came into existence during World War II. St. Agnes Circle, the local chapter of the Daughters of Isabella, an international Roman Catholic women’s organization, disbanded in October after 77 years of charitable works and social get-togethers.

The organization still had 74 members when it reached the end of the road, but only five were age 50 or younger, and too few members were willing and able to fill the several volunteer positions that running a local chapter, or “circle,” requires, according to member and former officer Bea Dostie, of Sidney.

“Our last charter member just passed away,” Dostie said, referring to Gerine Dowling, of Augusta, who died in August. Dostie, 81, said she herself had been a member for 32 consecutive years and for another five years before that.

The purpose of the Daughters of Isabella, according to a 50-year anniversary booklet about St. Agnes Circle that was assembled in 1995, is “to unite the Catholic women of the country into a fraternal and beneficial society to work for God, for the Church, and for our own spiritual and social needs.”

In recent years, the local group held fundraisers and potluck suppers for various causes, including assisting the Augusta Food Bank, a house fire victim, and people affected by floods in northern Maine and overseas. They also visited patients at the veterans’ hospital at Togus and residents of nursing homes there and elsewhere.



This 1945 photo shows the first slate of St. Agnes Circle officers. First row, from left: Kathryn Larkin, Mary Johnson, Dorothy Gates, Elizabeth Hickey, Kathryn Collins, and Mary Smith. Second row: Christine Howell, Mary Shirley, Jacqueline Gates, Dorothy Cyr, Elizabeth Barnes, and Louise Wilcox. Third row: Ursula Cony, Barbara Miller, Ann Riley, Gertrude Shumway, Jane Sproul, and Dorothy Brennan.

of Spain (1451-1504), patroness of explorer Christopher Columbus.

During St. Agnes Circle’s first two months, 106 women signed up as charter members. The membership roster grew to more than 300 by the early 1950s, although it shrank and grew again cyclically throughout most of its existence. It also changed its regular meeting site periodically.

What didn’t change was the reason for gathering, as long as the members were able to do so.

“Our motto is ‘unity, friendship, and charity,’” Dostie said. “We’re a group of ladies that practice that.”



Members of the Daughters of Isabella’s St. Agnes Circle take part in a parade celebrating the 1947 sesquicentennial of Augusta’s establishment as a separate municipality. In front are Constance Pelletier, left, and Muriel Pepin. M. Therese Leclair Bennett is sitting on the chair at left. On the far side of the parade float are Gerine Dowling, left, and an unidentified member.

Photos from the St. Agnes Circle 50th anniversary booklet, part of the KHS collection

Referring to the vacancies among the local circle’s volunteer positions, Dostie said, “I find that the new generation is just not into that kind of commitment.”

Although the Daughters of Isabella is a women’s organization, the 1995 booklet attributes the St. Agnes Circle’s founding to a man – the Rev. Thomas J. O’Dowd, pastor of St. Mary of the Assumption Church in Augusta. He had been pastor in Orono, site of an active Daughters of Isabella group, before his transfer in 1941 to Augusta. Calling a meeting of St. Mary’s women on January 21, 1945, at the parish hall, he recommended the formation of such a group in Augusta.

The women who started the Augusta circle chose the name “St. Agnes” because the day they met was the feast day of St. Agnes. According to the Catholic Online website, Agnes was executed on January 21, A.D. 304, in Rome as a martyr to her Christian faith at the age of 12 or 13, although there are contradictory descriptions of how and why that death occurred. The Isabella whom the parent organization’s name honors is Queen Isabella

## Hallowell Cemetery Home of Monument to City's Civil War Dead



**Answer to Keyhole #3**

**Q: What is this?**

**A: A Civil War shield and dual cannons on a monument**

**Q: Where is it?**

**A: Hallowell Cemetery**

**Q: What's historic about it?**

**A: The carving is just a small piece of the memorial to Hallowell's fallen soldiers in the Civil War.**

**H**allowell's Civil War monument is easy to overlook, even though it is 30 feet tall and only steps away from the north end of Water Street and just a few hundred feet north of Bolley's Famous Franks.

The eight-sided spire resembles many other monuments in Hallowell Cemetery, and most drivers who pass by it on their way to or from Augusta, especially at rush hour, probably would be too busy paying attention to traffic to notice the landmark even if it stood alone.

However, a glance at this lofty tribute to the 45 men from the city who died in the war is worthwhile, even if "Our Country's Martyrs" and "The Patriot Dead," as the engraving describes them, are strangers to today's visitors. The number of names alone is a testament to the ocean of grief that the war forced Americans to endure.

Hallowell's population in 1860 was 2,435, according to the U.S. Census – only 135 fewer people than those who resided in the city in 2020. That means the war killed nearly 2 percent of the city's population. Add to that the number of wounded and the number of family members who lost their chief breadwinner, and the scope of the tragedy becomes more evident.

Alexander C. Currier, of Hallowell, and William Hogan, of Bath, designed the monument. W.G. Cunningham cut the stone, which was obtained from a quarry in Hallowell. The monument's cost was \$3,000 – the equivalent of about \$65,700 today. The city of Hallowell paid \$2,500 of that amount, and the rest came from private donations.

The work was completed in the fall of 1868, but the monument's placement was scheduled for the following year to allow for ground preparation during relatively dry weather.

The city dedicated the monument on July 27, 1869, more than four years after the war's end. The event started with a procession from downtown to the cemetery, consisting of the Hallowell Cornet Band, the Gardiner Band, the Tiger and Torrent fire engines, city officials, relatives of the dead soldiers and sailors, members of the Grand Army of the Republic from Post 6 in Gardiner, other Civil War veterans, temperance organizations, and whoever else wanted to join the solemn parade.

"Business was universally suspended," the Kennebec Journal reported, "and the citizens en masse participated, thus signaling their reverence for those whose deeds and example the monument is designed to commemorate for all the coming generations."

At the monument, Brevet Brig. Gen. Thomas Hubbard, a 30-year-old Hallowell native and son of former Gov. John Hubbard, gave the dedication speech – an oration so long that, reprinted in full, it took up four columns of tiny type on the Kennebec Journal's front page. The weather started out dry when he began speaking, but rain was falling by the end of it.

Hubbard, who commanded the 30th Maine Infantry at the end of the war, advised his listeners not to be mournful



History Through  
a Keyhole #3



Hallowell's Civil War monument reflects the glow of sunset recently alongside the north end of Water Street.

Photo by Rich Eastman

about the fact that the war had cut short the lives of the men whose names appear on the monument.

“Which one of us, whether he dies today or lives to the fullest age, will have done a better work or be longer or more gratefully remembered? Which one of them, if he were living today, could claim for you more love and honor that you now bestow?” Hubbard asked, employing florid turns of phrase that exemplified the public speaking style of that era.

In Hubbard’s case, coping with loss was no theoretical exercise. His own brother, John, was killed in 1863 during the siege of Confederate fortifications at Port Hudson, Louisiana, in which Union forces permanently divided the Confederacy by seizing control of the Mississippi River. His name is one of the 45 on the monument.

The brother’s death cast a pall over the final years of the former governor, who died five months before the Civil War monument’s dedication. Gov. Hubbard’s gravestone is in the same cemetery. It is an obelisk that is about the same height as that of the Civil War monument.



This watercolor, entitled “Hydrangeas and Dead Souls,” by Hallowell artist Stephen H. Plumer, depicts the Civil War monument in Hallowell Cemetery.

Courtesy of KHS member Deborah Caldwell



— by Joseph Owen

## History Through a Keyhole - Puzzle 4

Once again, nobody submitted guesses about which monument was depicted in the September-October issue of the *Kennebec Current*. Unfazed by the thundering silence, we are trying again.

The image at the right is part of a building that stands near the main road of a village in Kennebec County. It is plainly visible from the street. Readers who can identify it are asked to contact the *Current* and tell the editor three things: what the object is, where it is, and what its historic significance is.



Answers may be sent by email to [kennhis1891@gmail.com](mailto:kennhis1891@gmail.com) or by postal mail to Kennebec Historical Society, P.O. Box 5582, Augusta, ME 04332.

The winner, to be selected randomly from all correct answers submitted, will be awarded a year’s membership in KHS for the respondent or a friend or relative. If nobody meets that threshold, the editor reserves the right to make the award to a respondent who provides a partial correct answer.

The full answer and more information about the subject will be provided in the next issue of the *Kennebec Current*. Answers are due by January 31, 2023. Good luck.

## KHS Endowment Includes Options for Donor-designated Gifts

The Kennebec Historical Society invested \$119,010 on August 18 in its new Kennebec Savings Bank endowment fund, the first installment of what society officials hope will grow to become a much larger amount.

The endowment fund, intended to generate income to support society activities, consists of two types of donations: board-designated and donor-designated. The board-designated endowment consists of gifts or society earnings that the KHS board places in the endowment with no restrictions on the use of the principal. For example, if a donor gives money to KHS without specifying that it is for the endowment, the board could put the money in the board-designated endowment. The advantage to KHS is that the society can use the dividend income but also could retrieve the principal if the board deems it necessary.

Donor-designated endowment gifts are more restrictive. The society is allowed to spend only the investment dividends and other income from them, not the principal. KHS now has three-donor designated endowment categories: general unrestricted, newsletter, and interns.

Donors also have an opportunity to be remembered in perpetuity for support of KHS through a named endowment. Named endowments can be created with a minimum donation of \$10,000 in one's own name or in remembrance of someone else. The gifts allow donors to leave a personalized legacy of support for KHS and the study of Kennebec County history. Named endowments are a type of donor-designated endowment, and therefore the society is allowed to use only the dividends and other income, not the principal.

KHS developed its endowment plan in late 2021 with guidance from life member Michael Seitzinger, who has helped several Kennebec County nonprofit organizations establish their own endowments. The KHS Board of Directors voted unanimously on February 10 this year to establish the endowment through the bank and approved an endowment policy on April 14. The policy calls for the formation of an investment committee to make investment recommendations and to report to the board about the status of investments and disbursements of income.

The KHS Finance Committee – consisting of KHS Treasurer Mark Laney, the committee chairman; former KHS Treasurer Doreen Harvey; and one vacancy yet to be filled – is taking on the responsibility of also acting as the investment committee.

For more information on contributing to the society's endowment fund or on starting a named endowment, call Scott Wood, KHS executive director, at 622-7718.

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### \* In Memoriam \*

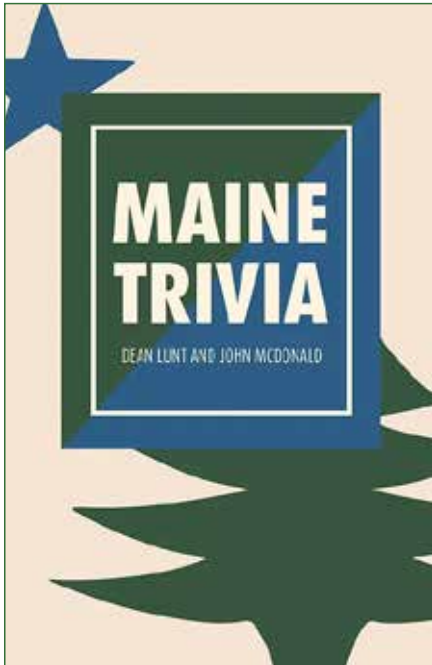
**Harmon Harvey**, 90, a former three-term Hallowell mayor, died November 24 in Hallowell. A Dover-Foxcroft native and Kennebec Historical Society life member since 2008, he held a bachelor's degree in business administration from the University of Maine, in Orono; and a graduate degree in social work from Boston College. He retired in 1992 as deputy director of the Bureau of Social Services, Maine Department of Human Services. He held many municipal and nonprofit board positions, including the presidency of Hubbard Free Library and of the Augusta Regional Church Housing Corporation board. Harvey helped Hallowell acquire the 750-acre Jamie's Pond Wildlife Preserve, was on the Cohen Community Center's building committee, and participated in replacing 250 trees destroyed in a 1998 ice storm. His survivors include his wife, Jane, also a KHS member; six children; six grandchildren, and four great-grandchildren.

**Francis Nasser Sr.**, 95, a Kennebec Historical Society life member since 2007, died November 26 in Fall River, Massachusetts. After serving in the Navy, he worked as a supervisory electronics engineer at the Naval Underwater Systems Center in Newport, Rhode Island. He was a lifelong Fall River resident but made many trips to Maine, the home state of his late wife, Grace Nasser. He graduated from B.M.C. Durfee High School in Fall River in 1946 and earned a bachelor's degree in electrical engineering in 1952 from Bradford Durfee Technical Institute in Fall River. His survivors — five of whom are KHS members — include seven children and their spouses, 13 grandchildren, and 22 great-grandchildren.

**Delaine Nye**, 76, of Augusta, died November 25. A Kennebec Historical Society member since 2019, she was an Augusta city councilor and, later, served on the city's Planning Board. After graduation from Morse Memorial High in Brooks, she obtained her certificate as a registered nurse from Central Maine General Hospital School of Nursing in Lewiston. She had a 20-year nursing career, including a decade as nursing manager at Kennebec Valley Medical Center; then switched to real estate, mostly with Sprague and Curtis Real Estate. She was a past president of the Augusta Kiwanis Club and the Capital Area Housing Association, and she participated in many other civic groups and projects. Her survivors include two children and five grandchildren.

## Upcoming Program

### January: “Maine Trivia”



Cover photo courtesy of the author

A typical moose lives 15 to 25 years, one learns while reading the book *Maine Trivia*. The book itself, meanwhile, is 10 years old and counting; and the appearance of a second edition this fall by John McDonald and Dean Lunt suggests that it will be around a lot longer than the average moose.

*Maine Trivia* features such categories as history, politics, wildlife, sports, arts, and geography. It goes beyond mere questions and answers, providing additional details on some of the most important events, inventions, and people of the state’s history – as well as generous helpings of cheeky humor.

Lunt, founder and editor-in-chief of the Yarmouth-based Islandport Press, which published *Maine Trivia*, will talk about the book as the Kennebec Historical Society’s featured speaker for January. A former newspaper reporter and eighth-generation Frenchboro native, he established Islandport Press in 2000. He lives in Yarmouth. He also is the author of *Hauling by Hand: The Life and Times of a Maine Island*, about Long Island, the location of Frenchboro; *Here for Generations: A Story of a Maine Bank and Its City*, about Bangor Savings Bank; and *Speakin’ Maine: A Wicked Good Guide to Understanding the Language*.

McDonald, of South Portland, Lunt’s co-author and the sole author of the first edition of *Maine Trivia*, is a Maine storyteller who has performed for audiences across New England. A Rhode Island

native who spent summers at Tenants Harbor, he has written four books, including *A Moose and a Lobster Walk into a Bar*.

The program can be watched on Facebook live at 6:30 p.m. Wednesday, January 18. It also will be archived on the society’s Facebook page for those who want to watch it later. For more information, call Scott Wood, the society’s executive director, at 622-7718.



Lunt

## Membership Dues to Increase on January 1

Mindful of the increase in the cost of almost everything it buys, the Kennebec Historical Society’s Board of Directors voted last spring to impose the first across-the-board membership dues increase since 2003. The increase is scheduled to take effect January 1.

Here is a table showing the current dues and the new ones:

Dues type	Current*	Beginning January 1*
Individual	20	25
Family	30	40
Senior/student	15	20
Senior family	25	30
Life (One person)	200	250
Life family (Two people)	250	375
Business (fewer than 25 employees)	75	100
Corporate (25 or more employees)	125	150
Nonprofit group	35	50

\*paid annually, except for life and life family memberships

The KHS budget for 2022 projects an income of \$7,000 from membership dues, which is only about 6 percent of the society’s overall income.

Kennebec Historical Society, Inc.  
PO Box 5582  
Augusta, ME 04332-5582  
**Address Service Requested**

Non-Profit Org.  
U.S. Postage  
Paid  
Permit No. 198  
Augusta, ME 04330

**KENNEBEC HISTORICAL SOCIETY, INC. – Application for Membership**

Name(s): \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Town/city: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ ZIP code: \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone number: Home \_\_\_\_\_ Business \_\_\_\_\_

Email address: \_\_\_\_\_

Type: New \_\_\_ Renewal \_\_\_

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 \_\_\_

Business (annual, fewer than 25 employees) – \$ 75 \_\_\_ Corporate (annual, 25 employees or more) – \$125 \_\_\_

Nonprofit group (annual) – \$35 \_\_\_ Donation (optional): \$ \_\_\_\_\_

*These membership rates expire December 31, 2022 (see page 15 for new rates effective January 1)*

This is a gift membership, given by: \_\_\_\_\_

(Please send to Kennebec Historical Society, P.O. Box 5582, Augusta, ME 04332-5582.)

***This line and below for society use only:***

Date received: \_\_\_\_\_

Cash \_\_\_\_\_ Check #: \_\_\_\_\_

file 2.8.2

**Business hours:** 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Tuesday through Thursday or by appointment. Appointments are highly encouraged. Call first.

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

**E-mail address:** [kennhis1891@gmail.com](mailto:kennhis1891@gmail.com)

**Telephone:** (207) 622-7718

**Web site:** [www.kennebechistorical.org](http://www.kennebechistorical.org)