

Kennebec Current

"I have been worrying about Russia and the United States getting into a nuclear war. Are you going to vote to have a war or not? If you aren't please tell me how you are going to help to not have a war." —Samantha Smith, peace activist (see page 10)

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March–April 2023

Augusta Methodists' Church Property for Sale after 195 Years

The congregation at Green Street United Methodist Church, the oldest church in Augusta that still is being used for its original purpose, has decided to sell its property at 13 and 15 Green Street, church leaders announced in a March 20 news release.

In discussions about whether to sell, according to the release, the congregation considered "rising costs, enduring cultural shifts around church attendance, leadership capacity and ministry initiatives." It said the Methodists will be looking for a new home to host its activities as part of the process of "right-sizing our physical space to meet the needs of our emerging ministry."

Kevin Judkins, a real estate broker with Augusta's Rizzo Mattson agency, confirmed that his agency is handling the sale of the property, where the original church was built in 1828. He said the asking price is \$985,000.

"It's listed, but it's not going to be listed on the open market – at least, not yet," Judkins said.

The church has targeted selected potential buyers with the aim of providing centralized services for Augusta's homeless population and thereby eliminating the burden on those clients of needing to travel to multiple sites in Augusta to obtain various kinds of services, Judkins said, adding that negotiations with some aid groups already have begun. He said the church would not be involved in administering the new services, instead leaving them in the hands of professionals in the field.

The Rev. Karen Munson, the church's pastor since last July and a Methodist district superintendent for six years before that, said that while the Augusta congregation nominally has about 300 members on its rolls,



The Green Street United Methodist Church congregation has decided to try to sell its property in Augusta. The Methodists hope to find another site in Augusta and are looking at several options, according to their minister, the Rev. Karen Munson. The annex called the Wesley Center stands at the left, attached to the much-renovated church, the original version of which was built in 1828.

Photo by Teddy Faugno

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Benton Group Weighs Affiliation with KHS as Chapter

Several Benton residents who want to see a historical organization in their town are considering an overture from the Kennebec Historical Society to become a semi-autonomous chapter of the society.

Four of the group's members already have joined KHS, and others in the northern Kennebec County town have expressed a willingness to do so while the society drafts the language for establishing a chapter and both sides examine the merits of the proposal.

The Benton residents said they have not accumulated any local historical materials that should be placed in an archive.

For almost a decade in the late 20th century, even old municipal records were not kept in Benton. The records, including some that date to Benton's separation from Clinton and incorporation as a separate town in 1842, once were held at the old 1842 Town House; but the state fire marshal's office condemned that building in 1965, according to a 1989 report in the *Morning Sentinel*. As a result, the town sent its older records to the Maine State Archives in 1980. The current Town Office, which includes a fireproof safe, was built later on the site where the Town House had stood, and the town retrieved its records from the state archives in 1989.

The Kennebec Historical Society, founded in 1891, includes all 30 of the county's municipalities in its sphere of interest. It seeks to include historical documents, photos, postcards, books, and other material in its archive and library, and it sponsors monthly lectures that are relevant to many of those communities. Many years ago, the society also attained state recognition as an alternate repository of municipal records.



Yearbooks Offer Glimpse into Cross Section of Past



President's Message
Jamie Logan

Recently while going through some family belongings, I found high school and college yearbooks from Deering High School and Bowdoin College. This, coupled with a random Waterville High yearbook I had stumbled across, got me thinking about the value of yearbooks. Graduation is getting near, and yearbooks will soon be distributed and signed. Some students save these yearbooks forever and some will tuck them away and never think about them again, only for them to end up in the trash or at a yard sale.

At the Kennebec Historical Society, we hope that yearbooks are recognized for the historic importance they have. They give a glimpse into the past, into the kids who became the adults we know today. They show what was important to kids of past ages, as you can see club memberships wax and wane, watch organizations come and go, and observe the styles and language choices that marked daily life. It's a particularly narrow kind of record, giving a glimpse into one school for one year, but at the same time it's broad — providing information about students and teachers who may not have ever made it into a newspaper or otherwise created a notable record of themselves.

We have an extensive yearbook collection at the historical society that includes editions from schools around Kennebec County. We're fortunate to have this collection, and welcome researchers to make use of it.

Happy spring!



Yearbooks from Kennebec County lie on a table at the Kennebec Historical Society in Augusta. In the top row, from left, are the 1987 *Pinnacle*, from Erskine Academy, a private school in China; Waterville Senior High School's 2003 edition of the *Nautilus*; and *The Periscope*, the 1922 volume published at Cony High School in Augusta. In the bottom row, from left, are Colby College's 1990 *Oracle*; the paper-bound 1934 *Oak Leaves*, from the now-defunct Oak Grove School; and the 1965 *Syllabus* from Clinton High School, which closed in 1966. Today most Clinton students attend high school classes at Lawrence High School, in Fairfield. The society's collection contains several hundred school yearbooks.

Photo by Joseph Owen

KHS Welcomes the Following New Members

Augusta Symphony Orchestra — Augusta
 June Caron — Benton
 Margaret Cook — Winthrop
 Jean Dempster — South China
 Shirley Duplessis — Benton

Debra & Robert Fischer — China
 Kevin Serier — Farmingdale
 Julie Sheridan & Christopher Devlin —
 Portland
 Kevin Stone & Amy Gagnon — Benton

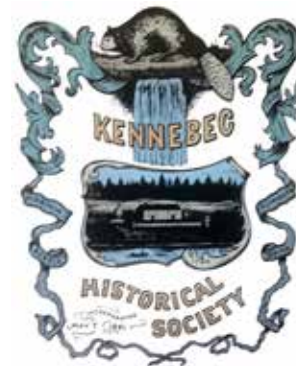
and continues to recognize ...

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

Kennebec Savings Bank
 Ganneston Construction Corporation

Sponsoring Business Members (\$500+ annual)

J.S. McCarthy Printing
 Meadow Park Development
 O'Connor GMC



*Discovering, preserving,
 and disseminating
 Kennebec County history
 since 1891*

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Total membership:
 622 on April 4
 Life members: 246

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.

Maine State Museum Acquires Sign Once Displayed at Benton Inn

During a recent visit with historically minded folks in Benton, fellow KHS board member Joe Owen and I found out about a sign going up for auction, dated 1833, from an inn in Benton Falls. The “bug” hit me, so the society bid on it, hoping at least to keep it in the county. Ultimately, we were outbid; fortunately for everyone, it went to the Maine State Museum. Bernard Fishman, the museum’s director, assured me that they were of the same mind regarding its final home, and it will be well taken care of.

The inn in question, the Travellers Inn, was opened in 1833, as the sign says, by G.W. (George Washington) Reed. His father, David, began the hospitality business as a boarding house after enlarging it considerably from a 1790s home, tacking on a large, two-and-a-half-story building with a striking entrance. It still stands on today’s Falls Road, formerly a post road to Bangor.

Also sold with the sign were two framed articles about the inn, so my research began with those: “Tales of a Wayside Inn,” *Portland Sunday Times*, May 25, 1902; and “Travellers Home, Always Owned in Reed Family a Century Ago, Entertained Passers Thru Benton,” *Lewiston Journal* magazine section, September 27, 1941.

The building was noted for some unique features, such as a bar/tap room with a discreet entrance to an upstairs chamber. The main parlor showcased walls with Benton’s first wallpaper, put up in 1814. The design in small squares featured a woman under a tree with a malnourished dog and a child nearby; unfortunately, the scale of the woman and the tree was totally unrealistic. Owners could also boast about the first clock in town, a floor model in the dining room behind the bar room. The first floor had several sleeping rooms as well as the kitchen. The second floor displayed flexibility amazing for its time, with doors that folded so the large area could go from meeting space to individual rooms. The Reed establishment served as a training place for militia, preachers passing through, travelling shows, and even balls.

The 1981 application for the National Register of Historic Places describes the building as “a large and well-preserved post-colonial and Federal hostelry” constructed of post and beam, a cross-gable roof, and a fieldstone foundation. It clearly was built to last. Travellers Inn closed in the mid-1850s, following the arrival of rail service connecting Augusta, Waterville and Bangor.

So, you might ask, who were the Reeds? David Reed (1775-1843) and his wife, Elizabeth (1779-1852), came from Topsham in October 1814, voyaging by water, with their 10 children. We know little of him, but the *Illustrated History of Kennebec County* (Kingsbury and Deyo, 1892) noted that David took the community’s spiritual welfare seriously, as he held a quarter-interest in the church he built with two others before 1829 on the east side of the Seabasticook, overlooking the falls.

G.W. Reed came into this world on July 2, 1806. He and his wife, Mary, brought up nine children at the inn. Two of them were the last to live there. Merritt Seward Reed died in 1927. His sister Lucy T. was a highly respected teacher and in 1871 went to Virginia and North Carolina to teach freed former slaves. She returned to Benton to care for her mother and remained until her demise in 1931.

Most of the family members are buried in Tozier Mills Cemetery in town. Their most visible legacy is the fine home that still graces Benton Falls, now privately owned.

My thanks to Portland Public Library; Bernard Fishman; Angela Goebel-Bain, of the Maine State Museum; Kirk Mohny and Michael Goebel-Bain, of the Maine Historic Preservation Commission; and Thomaston Place Auction Galleries for their information and support.

Until next time.



The Collections Box
Emily Schroeder



Photo courtesy of Thomaston Place Auction Galleries

Methodists' Church Property for Sale

Continued from page 1

many of those people have moved permanently to other parts of the country. Average attendance at a Sunday church service is 35 to 40, she said.

“It just doesn’t have the capacity to care for that building anymore,” she said about the congregation in a telephone interview.

The decision to sell was an outgrowth of a more general review of the church’s ministries after the coronavirus pandemic temporarily shut down many in-person church activities. Many congregation members have moved away from the neighborhood, Munson said, and the current church building affords too little parking to accommodate those who attend services and other activities.

“Green Street’s been blessed over the years with some very generous benefactors,” Munson said, but she noted that those people’s financial gifts are designated to support the church’s programs, not upkeep of the building.

The need to move is not considered an emergency.

“They’re not in a rush to leave the building. They’re financially viable and the leadership is viable through the end of 2025,” Munson said.

Church leaders are looking at six potential sites for relocation, all in Augusta. Munson said nobody has raised the subject of whether, if the congregation moves, it would change its name.

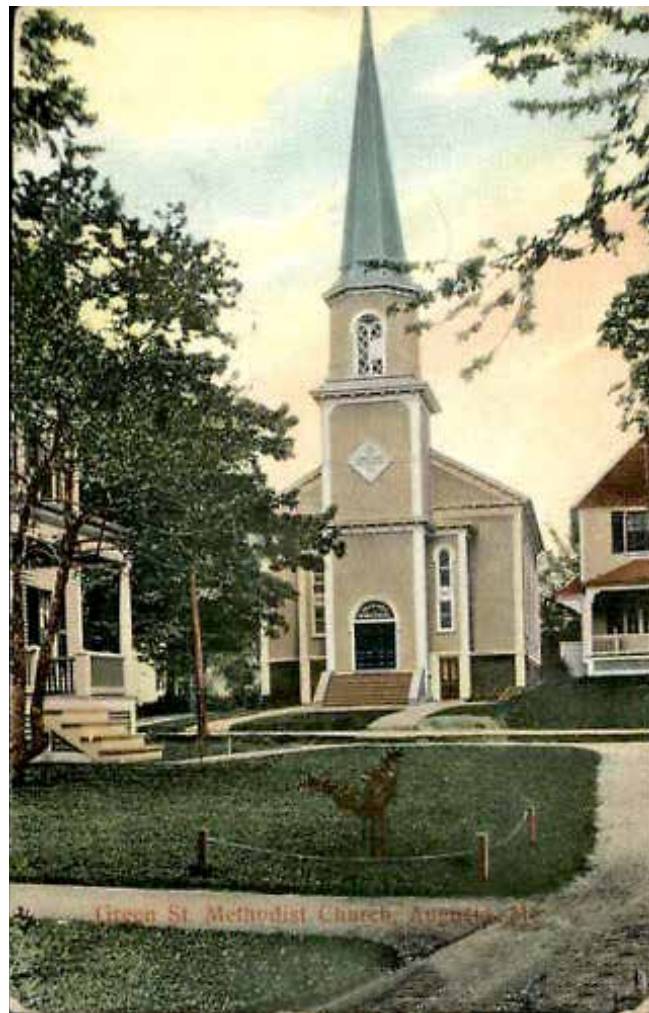
“The thing they think about most is what’s going to happen to the organ,” she said, noting that the church has an active music ministry, exemplified by a bell choir performance that occurred at the April 2 service.

The Methodist presence in central Maine originated in the late 18th century. The first Methodist circuit rider in Maine, Elder Jesse Lee, of Virginia, arrived in the state in 1793, according to the locally published 1997 book *Faith Communities of Augusta, Maine, Past and Present*. In 1827, after local Methodists had been holding informal meetings in private homes for 18 years, they incorporated the Wesleyan Methodist Society in Augusta under state laws and voted to build a church building. The new Green Street church was dedicated on November 27, 1828.

The congregation numbered 136 people in the church’s earliest surviving record of such a count, made around 1830, according to James North’s 1870 *History of Augusta*. By 1837, the number had increased to 173.

The church building was enlarged in three phases in 1848, 1856, and 1868, mostly to accommodate growth, with the last of these efforts providing the signature conical white steeple that crowns the structure today and is visible from many vantage points around the city. The Methodists also built a “neat and commodious” and “comfortably furnished” parsonage on the property in 1847, North wrote. (*Faith Communities* says that happened in 1846.) Over the next half-century, either the standards of comfort grew more ambitious or the parsonage deteriorated, or both, because a new parsonage was erected in place of the original one in 1895.

That second parsonage, later called “the parish house,” was removed in the early 21st century, around the time the congregation completed construction of the Wesley Center, a multi-story annex that stands on the site today, attached to the west side of the church building.



This early 20th-century post card illustrates how Green Street’s Methodist church looked at that time.

From the KHS collection

Belgrade Man's Short Letter Turns into Star-Studded Project

David Leigh has conducted an unusual project for the past 50 years involving his high school students and *Time* and *Newsweek* magazines. Leigh and his students have written letters to prominent people who are depicted on the magazines' covers, asking for their autographs on the magazines on which they appear. The collection has grown a total of 1,100 signed magazine covers. A former high school principal who retired in 2003, Leigh has conducted this project at five high schools in Maine: Forest Hills High School, Machias Memorial High School, Mt. Blue High School, and currently Messalonskee High School, in Oakland, where he teaches.

"I was inspired to start this project after a colleague of mine from undergrad introduced me to his own signed magazine cover project," Leigh said. "When he introduced me to his project in the 1950s, he had accumulated 100 signed covers of the magazines, the most notable being former President of Egypt Gamal Abdel Nasser's signature. I wanted to introduce this project to my students to show how we can stay in contact with these higher figures around the world."

Leigh said his students were ecstatic about it.

"They would get very excited whenever they saw the mail truck pull into the school parking lot, eager to see if they had received any responses," he said. The students spent their time in study hall writing letters to each cover-featured celebrity. He recalls running into a student he had from over 30 years ago who still spoke as eagerly about the project as he had done in high school.

Leigh's collection includes signatures from 23 countries on three continents. He holds 13 signed copies from Maine residents, including former U.S. senators; best-selling author Stephen King; Vietnam veteran and U.S. Navy Lieutenant Mark Gartley, along with a letter from Gartley addressed to one of Leigh's students; and then-U.S. Rep. William Cohen, who later served as a U.S. senator and as defense secretary for U.S. president Bill Clinton.

"Over the past 50 years, about 60 percent of the celebrities who we wrote to have responded," Leigh said. "I have found that those who work in entertainment and sports are the hardest to hear back from. That's why I chose to use *Time* and *Newsweek* magazine. There is a good cross section of celebrities to choose from."

Within this project and collection he has accumulated, Leigh has created an educational and competitive game called "History Match Game." In addition to writing to the famous figures, his students conducted research on them to further their education and contribute to the creation of the game. The game's goal is to match each signed magazine cover to a celebrity description created by Leigh's students.

"People love playing the game, and it's been a great way to display my students' hard work and the collection of covers I have accumulated," Leigh says. Leigh has taken his game from local schools in Kennebec County to as far away



David Leigh holds two autographed *Time* magazine covers from his five-decade collection on April 2 at his home in Belgrade. The 1974 cover on the left shows U.S. Reps. Charles Wiggins, of California, upper left; Robert McClory, lower left; and William Cohen, of Maine, lower right, all Republicans. Cohen signed the cover. At right, a 1972 cover showing four images of President Richard Nixon in China bears Nixon's signature. The Republican president resigned two years later amid the Watergate scandal after Cohen, McClory, and Wiggins said they would vote to impeach him.

Photo by Nikko Noble

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UMA Students to Help with Renovation of Oakland’s Memorial Hall

Reprinted with permission from the March 21 edition of the Morning Sentinel.

A handful of architecture students from the University of Maine at Augusta are helping Oakland officials institute a plan to bring the historic Memorial Hall in compliance with state and federal codes.

Michelle Fontaine, secretary of the Oakland Area Historical Society, said the town recently repaired the building’s rotting wood foundation and its leaking roof. The next major hurdle, she said, is getting exterior stones repointed using “historically accurate mortar” and bringing the building into compliance with the federal Americans with Disabilities Act.

Town Manager Ella Bowman said the deteriorating condition of Memorial Hall was causing one problem after another.

“The fire marshal’s report, back a couple years ago, (found that) it was just so out of compliance,” Bowman said. “The occupancy level had to be cut back to 49 people.”

Memorial Hall was built in the 1870s and is one of four buildings in Maine to serve as Civil War memorials. It was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1977.

It’s an example of Italian-Gothic architecture that Fontaine said is “very unusual” for a small rural community.

Memorial Hall, which is on Church Street, has had a range of purposes since the 1800s. It has been a bank, a post office, and a town hall. It’s also been home to community gatherings and performances, such as weddings and musicals. For the last 40 years, the building has not been widely available for public use and is primarily used as a dance studio.

To brainstorm ways to bring the building up to code, earlier this year Bowman reached out to professors at the University of Maine at Augusta. UMA’s architecture program offers the only professional architecture degree in Maine, and since 2007 the program has run a community design studio, deploying its students to municipalities across Maine to volunteer design ideas for renovation projects.

Patrick Hansford, who joined UMA this year as an assistant professor of architecture, runs the program.

He said that when he was in architecture school in Ohio 40 years ago, the focus was on new construction. But a survey of architectural firms found that 70% of their work now is coming from addition, renovation, alteration and preservation projects, he said.

Teaching his students about how to rehabilitate and reuse old buildings, he said, will better prepare them to launch their careers, and in Oakland there’s an opportunity to do that close to home.

“(Students) have to understand and have experience in ways to be of service within our community and be aware of how the profession serves within the community,” Hansford said.

He said 10 UMA students will be in Oakland in early April to begin a four-week project focusing on how to make Memorial Hall ADA-compliant and up to code while preserving its historic design elements.

The students, who are volunteering their time, will consider how to make a handicap ramp in front of the building “blend in” to the existing architecture, Hansford said. They’ll also consider how to install an indoor elevator in the same spirit.



A renovation project expected to cost as much as \$5 million is intended to breathe new life into historic Memorial Hall in Oakland, a 1870s structure, which is one of four Civil War memorial buildings in Maine.

Photo by Rich Abrahamson



Oakland Town Manager Ella Bowman stands in a doorway last August at Memorial Hall. A renovation effort is underway to breathe new life into one of the oldest and most unusual structures in central Maine. The town is collaborating with architecture students at the University of Maine at Augusta on improvements that are needed to meet state and federal code requirements

Photo by Michael G. Seamans

At the end of the four weeks, students will present five design ideas to the town on how to address code issues.

Bowman said the students' involvement will demonstrate to funding sources there is educational value in preserving the building.

"This is a project that's been neglected for forever, and it's time that we step up and start putting the love back into that building," Bowman said.

The project is expected to take another two to three years and will probably cost about \$5 million. She hopes state and federal grant money will cover much of that sum, with private donations and local fundraising making up the rest.

"The goal is to do this project without increasing property taxes in the town of Oakland," Bowman said.

Fontaine said she will include visual illustrations provided by the UMA students as part of grant proposals to U.S. Sens. Angus King and Susan Collins. The grant is to the tune of \$300,000 for phase one of the project, which will occur early next year.



— by Zara Norman

Star-Studded Project



Eight autographed *Time* and *Newsweek* magazine covers from David Leigh's collection lie on a table at his home. The top row depicts, from left, singer, writer, and historian Margaret Truman, President Harry Truman's daughter; Pittsburgh Steelers quarterback Terry Bradshaw; Dr. Jonas Salk, developer of one of the world's first successful polio vaccines; and a shocked 14-year-old runaway, Mary Ann Vecchio, screaming in reaction to the Ohio National Guard's fatal shooting of student Jeffrey Miller on May 4, 1970, at Kent State University in Kent, Ohio. The image of Vecchio, taken by photojournalism student John Filo, won a Pulitzer Prize. At bottom, from left, are prospective candidates for the 1960 Democratic presidential nomination, including California Gov. Edmund G. "Pat" Brown, in the cover's lower right corner, who signed it; singer-songwriter James Taylor; National Football League Commissioner Roger Goodell; and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

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as Taiwan, where he traveled to visit his son who served as the chairman of the English Department at Kaohsiung American School. Leigh plans to take his game in November to the Colombo International School in Sri Lanka, where his son currently teaches.

Leigh enjoys creating fun categories for History Match Game. Some include last names that are words found in the dictionary, such as New York Yankees slugger Mickey Mantle or people with New England connections, such as mid-20th-century Boston Red Sox star Ted Williams and Cohen.

Leigh's students still write letters today searching for signatures, but they have had a harder time because of many celebrities' wariness about the possibility that their autographs could be sold or auctioned off online.

Today the collection lies in a bombproof safe in Leigh's home, but he said he is considering donating it to the Maine State Library, where the public can learn more about the longtime project.



— by Meghan Stagnone

Augusta's Iconic Old Post Office, Now for Sale, Has Storied Past

The historic former post office building located at 295 Water Street in Augusta, also known as the Olde Federal Building, has been listed for sale since last year. Built in 1890 and having undergone two major expansions to provide a total of 41,212 square feet, this ornate building has built a name for itself in Augusta, even making it onto the National Register of Historic Places in 1974.

The Boston-based Goldman Group has obtained permission from the Augusta Planning Board to redevelop the property with a mix of upper-story residential apartments and commercial spaces on the first floor. Construction is expected to begin late this year. (See *Kennebec Current*, November-December 2022.)

The Kennebec Historical Society houses a large collection of history about the old post office, including Charles E. Nash's *Official Local Postal Guide*, which was published in February 1891. Inside this pamphlet is a section written by Walter D. Stinson titled "The History of Postal Affairs in Augusta."

Stinson, an active KHS member in the 1890s, cites the very beginning of postal services in Augusta. This occurred in 1794 when Timothy Pickering, the U.S. postmaster general, called for a post office to be established in Augusta, which was part of neighboring Hallowell until 1797.


James Burton, the new postmaster, conducted postal business in a large two-story Water Street building on the east side of Water Street between today's Oak and Bridge streets. That building also was Burton's home and the place where he conducted business. He served until 1806, when Samuel Titcomb was appointed.

The post office moved uphill to the courthouse property on State Street sometime before 1830, Stinson wrote, then back to Water Street in 1851. The Great Fire of 1865 destroyed most of downtown Augusta, including the building housing the post office. After that, it occupied part of a new Water Street bank building, but it suffered from chronic overcrowding because Augusta's flourishing magazine industry was causing explosive growth in the amount of second-class mail sent from the city.

Postmaster Joseph H. Manley supervised the construction of the building at 295 Water Street, which began in 1889 and was completed in 1890. The iconic design of the building was created by Mifflin E. Bell, exemplifying the Romanesque Revival style of architecture. Manley was appointed custodian of the public building. At the time, "custodian" had a different meaning than it does today: it referred to the officer who reports to the treasury department and acts as its agent. The approximate cost of the original building was \$225,000, the equivalent of about \$7.4 million in 2023.

The new post office soon proved to be inadequate to absorb its ever-increasing amount of mail. By the time Manley stepped down in 1892 and Stinson took his place, Augusta was dispatching the nation's 11th-greatest amount of second-class mail, surpassing the totals of many far-larger cities. As a result, the building's north wing was added in 1910-1911. A three-story south wing was completed in 1941. The three phases of construction are shown above in images from the Kennebec Historical Society's large postcard collection.

The building has been sold a number of times. Its most recent sale was completed on November 4, 1993, to Vickery Downing Associates Inc., according to the city of Augusta's online property database. The sale price was \$222,000. The city's current assessment of its valuation for determining property taxes is about \$1.3 million. Vickery Downing is now trying to sell the building, which, according to a recent *MaineBiz* magazine report, is listed for \$2.65 million.

Although the building has not functioned as Augusta's primary post office since the 1960s, it still contains a small U.S. Postal Service branch office that is open Monday through Saturday. Over the years, the building has been the home of a variety of other services such as salons, a bank branch, the office of the *Capital Weekly* newspaper, and a restaurant. 

— by Meghan Stagnone



These postcard images show the original Augusta post office, above; its first expansion, top right; and its second expansion, right.

From the KHS collection



Waterville Newsroom of 1970s Sowed Seeds of Weinstein Probe

The ink was hardly dry on Rebecca Littleton's degree from Colby College when she landed a job in 1974 in the newsroom of the *Central Maine Morning Sentinel* in Waterville.

Managing editor Bob Drake needed to fill the position of state editor vacated by Terri Gannett Hopkins. It was not an easy job to fill – having to manage dozens of correspondents in towns from Sidney to Jackman and Jay to Belfast.

Becky Littleton cut her journalistic teeth in the weeks and months that followed – massaging news copy, assigning stories and photos, and making it all understandable for the reader.

For a young woman just out of a top-tier small liberal arts college in a small town in Maine, Littleton demonstrated a remarkable ability to prioritize stories and recognize that the important stories needed more attention.

Some stories were worthy of the split page (local section cover), while others belonged on page 1. Once in a while a story would be deemed significant enough to share with the *Sentinel's* sister papers – the *Kennebec Journal*, in Augusta; and the *Portland Press Herald*, the *Evening Express*, and the *Maine Sunday Telegram*, in Portland – all owned and published by the Guy Gannett Publishing Company in those days.



Morning Sentinel reporter Amy Calder, left, and *New York Times* editor Rebecca Corbett, a former *Sentinel* employee, meet October 19, 2019, at a Maine Press Association conference in Portland.

Photo by Philip Norvish



Journalists work in the *Central Maine Morning Sentinel* newsroom in Waterville in 1977, the last year when Rebecca Littleton, now Rebecca Corbett, was employed there. This view predates the 1981 remodeling of the 25 Silver Street building, which was razed in 1997, when the *Sentinel* moved to 31 Front Street. From left are reporters Philip Norvish, Glenn Turner, and Elliott Potter (standing), photographer Dick Maxwell (also standing), managing editor Bob Drake, and city editor Ken Morton. Littleton's desk is out of view, on the far left side of the room.

Central Maine Morning Sentinel file photo by Lynn Mosher

Littleton was talented when she started at the *Sentinel*. By the time of her departure three years later, she had the vital experience needed to become a top-notch editor. She sensed big news and developed an ability to make a story as strong and accurate as possible.

She left the *Sentinel* in 1977, married Waterville native and *Sentinel* correspondent Christopher Corbett and eventually moved to Baltimore, Maryland. Chris Corbett got a job at *The Associated Press* and Rebecca Corbett climbed the management ladder at *The Baltimore Sun*.

Later, Rebecca Corbett moved on to *The New York Times*, where she became the leader of a team of investigative reporters, a position she still holds.

The semi-documentary 2022 movie “She Said” is a gripping tale of the work of Rebecca Corbett's team. It is based on a book of the same name by *Times* reporters Megan Twohey and Jodi Kantor, whose investigative efforts helped bring about the downfall of movie mogul Harvey Weinstein, a co-founder of Miramax Films. Weinstein was convicted in 2020 in New York of criminal sexual assault and rape, for which he was sentenced to 23 years in prison. He also was convicted in 2022 in Los Angeles of three more sex charges and was sentenced to an additional 16 years.

It wouldn't have happened without the bulldog tenacity of the *Sentinel's* Becky Littleton.



— by Philip Norvish

Editor's note: Norvish, of Waterville, is a retired former reporter and editor who worked for the Morning Sentinel and the Kennebec Journal. He is married to Sentinel reporter and columnist Amy Calder.

1980s Peace Activist Samantha Smith Subject of New Book

The author of a biography scheduled for release June 1 hopes to reinvigorate public awareness of Samantha Smith, the Manchester schoolgirl who charmed the world during her July 1983 tour of the Soviet Union.

Lena Nelson's book, *America's Youngest Ambassador: The Cold War Story of Samantha Smith's Lasting Message of Peace*, is the product of 17 years of research, Nelson said in emailed answers to questions about it.

Asked why she did it, Nelson responded, "Well, initially, when I started the www.SamanthaSmith.info website in Samantha's memory in 2005, I had no intention of writing a book. I only wanted to correct the injustice of Samantha's story being virtually forgotten. ... My hope was that someone else would come along and use the archive I created on the website to write a book about her."

Given the degree of fame that Samantha briefly achieved, it's hard to imagine why such a book was not written earlier.

While a 10-year-old student at Manchester Elementary School during some of the frostiest years of the Cold War, Samantha wrote a letter in November 1982 to newly appointed Soviet leader Yuri Andropov, expressing concern about the prospect of nuclear war and urging him to work for peace instead. He responded with an invitation to Samantha and her parents, Arthur and Jane Smith, to visit the Soviet Union. That set off a firestorm of news coverage and television interviews of Samantha.

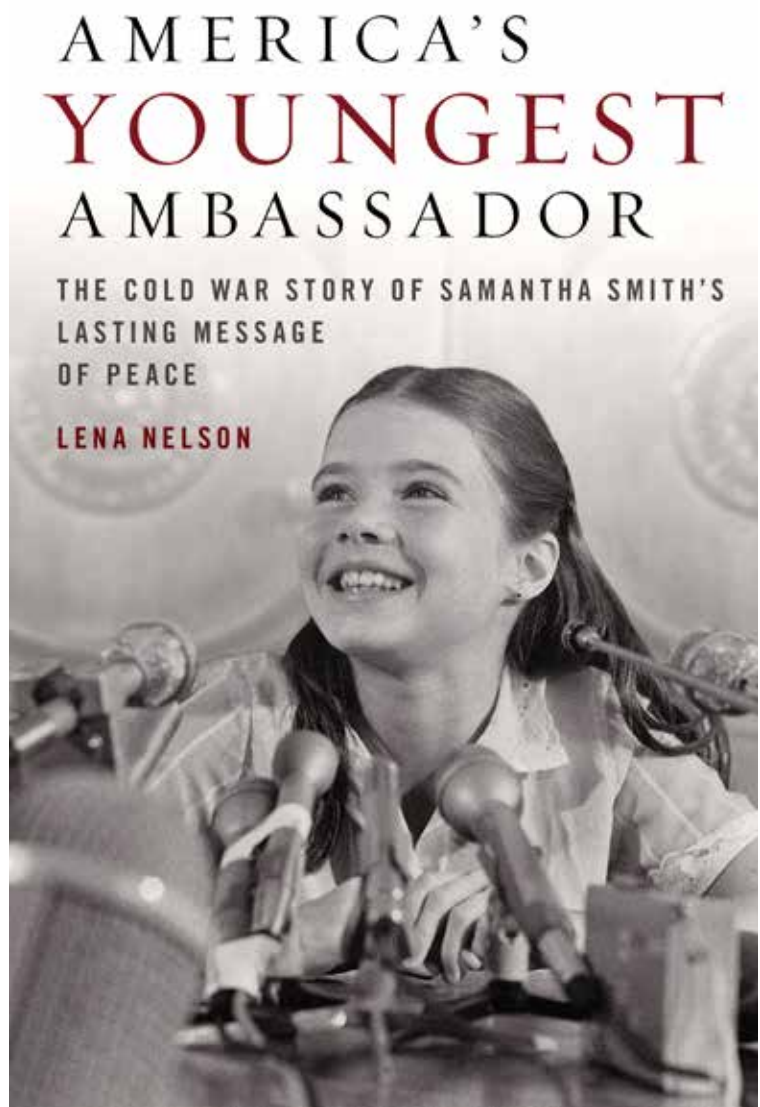
The Smiths made the two-week trip to the Soviet Union the following July. Images of Samantha getting to know Soviet children at summer camp and taking part in other activities circulated worldwide. The trip led to more interviews, Samantha's peace-activism trip to Japan, and, eventually, acting roles on various television series. The whirlwind came to a stop in 1985, however, when Samantha and her father died in a plane crash in Auburn while returning home to Manchester from London. She was 13.

Nelson, a native of Arkhangelsk, Russia, holds degrees in international studies and linguistics, and lives with her family in Southern California. She said she began compiling a scrapbook about Samantha soon after the plane crash, when she was 10 years old. Her home city established a partner-city relationship with Portland a few years after that, and her school hosted the city's first delegation of American students.

As an adult in the United States, Nelson set up the Samantha Smith website in 2005. Many people who have read the site contributed their own news clippings and other material related to Samantha. During a 2013 trip to Maine, Samantha's mother, Jane, told Nelson that the site already contained enough material to write a book and encouraged her to do it.

"I didn't take her too seriously at first as I had never written a book before, but two years later, in 2015, I decided to give it a shot and enrolled in the Writers' Program at UCLA to start working on it," Nelson said. "In 2017, my manuscript was nominated for the Allegra Johnson Prize in memoir."

Her other record sources included the Maine State Museum, the Maine State Library, the Ronald Reagan Presidential



Book cover courtesy of the author



Lena Nelson

Library, the Russian State Archive of Contemporary History, and the Smith family's own files. In addition to talking extensively with Samantha's mother, Nelson also interviewed or exchanged messages with Samantha's American friends Lynn D'Avanzo and Anne Lambert; her Soviet friend from Camp Artek, Natasha Kashirina; her camp counselor Olga Sakhatova; American and Russian reporters who followed her in the Soviet Union; a Russian diplomat who served as Samantha's interpreter; actor Robert Wagner, who starred with Samantha in the short-lived TV series *Lime Street*; Arnold Shapiro, who produced a TV special in which Samantha interviewed 1984 U.S. presidential candidates; and former Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev.

The interpreter, Nelson recalled, "spoke highly of Samantha's stamina during the trip, and her natural poise and ability to connect with people, which she thought was an example for diplomats to follow."

Nelson said she found something unexpected when she looked into the files of Reagan, who was president when Samantha and Andropov exchanged letters.

"I knew that ... the Reagan White House didn't make any public comments about Samantha's letter or her trip at the time, but during my research at the Ronald Reagan Presidential Library I learned that some members of President Reagan's staff were concerned about the media attention Samantha's trip received. They even explored a proposal [to] 'combat some of the news coverage on Samantha Smith.'"

Nelson said trying to make Samantha's peace message relevant to today's tension between the Soviet Union's successor superpower, Russia, and the United States is a difficult task.

"Over the years since the end of the Cold War, I feel, we lost our way and that early focus on cooperation and understanding that Samantha's story embodied," she said. "The propaganda machine is very powerful in Russia these days and the level of hatred for the 'collective West' is very high. In the West, we need to be careful not to equate all the Russians with the Russian government.

"Could someone like Samantha save us today? I don't know, but I do hope that we can take some advice from her story – to continue to question the status quo, to think that common people can make a difference – by asking questions and sharing their concerns about their future and the future of our children."

Nelson's biography of Samantha, published by Down East Books, is available for pre-order online now at <http://downeastbooks.com/books/9781684750207>. Nelson said all proceeds from the sale of the book will be used to support the operation of the Samantha Smith website.

— by Joseph Owen 

Around Kennebec County

HALLOWELL

The **Historic Hallowell Committee** is presenting on April 22 a lecture titled "Hallowell in Pictures" about the Eastern Illustrated Publishing Company and its photo postcards of Hallowell. Speaker Kevin Johnson, photo archivist at the Penobscot Marine Museum, will describe how the Belfast company's archive of more than 35,000 glass-plate and film barely escaped destruction. The free event, sponsored by the committee, the library, and Row House Inc., is scheduled for 2 p.m. at Hubbard Free Library, 115 Second Street.

"Granite City in the Movies," a compilation of home movies and other videos recorded in Hallowell, some in color and some in black and white, over the last six decades that was the subject of a **Historic Hallowell Committee** presentation in March, has been posted online and is available for viewing at <https://vimeo.com/809551280>.

WINSLOW

The **Taconnett Falls Chapter, Maine Genealogical Society**, will be open for its first meeting of the season April 16 at the Taconnett Genealogical Library, at 10 Lithgow Street in Winslow. The doors open at 1 p.m. and the meeting begins at 2 p.m.

WINTHROP

The **Winthrop Maine Historical Society** is sponsoring a free presentation by members acting and costumed as five of the town's original settlers April 13 at the society's 107 Main Street headquarters, the Winthrop History and Heritage Center. The presentation, scheduled for 6 to 7 p.m., portrays everyday life in the town during the first 50 years after its incorporation in 1771. The society is making the presentation in collaboration with Winthrop High School teacher Kristin Said's social studies class. For details about the speaker series or the society, call (207) 395-5199 or email winthropmainehistorical@gmail.com.

Winthrop's Talleyrand Plaque Steeped in Historical Fog



Answer to Keyhole #5

Q: What is this?

A: A plaque claiming that French diplomat Talleyrand stopped at a home in Winthrop during the American Revolution

Q: Where is it?

A: At the northeast corner of the intersection of Metcalf and Bearce roads in Winthrop

Q: What's historic about it?

A: It commemorates the 1794 visit to Maine of one of the most powerful political figures in France's history.

Napoleon Bonaparte, and reigns of two more Bourbon kings after the monarchy was restored.

“[Revolutionary leader Count of] Mirabeau ... noted that ‘[Talleyrand] would exchange his soul for a pile of dung, and he would be right to do so,’” historian J.F. Bernard wrote in his 1973 biography of Talleyrand, “Even his own parents thought him ‘fit for nothing.’ Yet in his lifetime he helped create and then came to control a world undreamed of before his birth. He charmed Bonaparte and transformed him into a new Charlemagne, and then led him to Waterloo and sent him to die in exile on St. Helena. Kings and princes he made and unmade with equal facility. ... Scorning hypocrisy and admiring virtue, he cultivated every vice of his own time and some of a later age. A patriot and champion of the people, he betrayed his country and pulled down its regimes whenever it suited his own designs.”

Perhaps Americans should be relieved that such a character sought temporary refuge in the United States only when, in the midst of France's 10-year revolutionary period, Talleyrand was uncharacteristically out of favor. He spent his exile on a variety of business enterprises, including real estate speculation, which brought him to Maine and other parts of the Northeast.

“He was particularly struck by the great disparity between the relative sophistication of the centers of commerce and the primitive character of society in the hinterlands,” Bernard wrote.

Bernard makes no mention of Winthrop, however. For that, the key source is Everett S. Stackpole, who in his 1925 *History of Winthrop, Maine, with Genealogical Notes* cites what he calls “positive and direct evidence” that Talleyrand, while traveling in the summer of 1794 from Hallowell to Portland, stopped for breakfast with Col. Nathaniel Fairbanks near the Winthrop site where the small monument now stands.

Stackpole attributed this information to Andrew W. Tinkham, of Monmouth, adding, “unlike some story tellers his credibility was unquestioned.” Inconveniently for any reader who might have wanted to test that claim, Tinkham also was dead by the time Stackpole's book appeared in print. Stackpole said Tinkham got the story from Joel Fairbanks, nephew

“Talleyrand was a guest of Nathaniel Fairbanks in his house near this spot during the Revolutionary War,” proclaims a plaque affixed to a rectangular stone about two miles east of downtown Winthrop.

Who was Talleyrand? Why was he in Winthrop?

The fact that the first question needs to be answered reveals the extent to which this once-towering French diplomat has receded into the shadows of history.

The man the plaque identifies as only “Talleyrand,” as though he needed additional names no more than Michelangelo did, was Charles-Maurice de Talleyrand-Périgord (1754-1838). A clergyman, statesman, and aristocrat, he managed to keep his controversial, high-profile career afloat through the reign of King Louis XVI, the French Revolution, the first French Empire under



History Through
a Keyhole #5



A Daughters of the American Revolution plaque commemorating the French diplomat Charles-Maurice de Talleyrand-Périgord is mounted on a stone at the intersection of Metcalf and Bearce roads in Winthrop.

Photo by Nikko Noble

of Col. Fairbanks, and that the younger Fairbanks' account is "clear, decisive and conclusive." He also mentions that the nephew was born in 1792, making him about 2 years old when the breakfast with Talleyrand took place, and that the nephew learned of it from his grandparents telling friends and neighbors about it, not by witnessing it himself.

The Patience Stanley Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution placed the Talleyrand plaque in 1917, according to the plaque's inscription.



David Cook

David Cook, a retired former high school history teacher who has been Winthrop's town historian since 1988, said about five people have asked him about the Talleyrand plaque in all that time, and usually because they have found Talleyrand's name in the Stackpole book. Cook said he has found no primary-source documentation about Talleyrand's visit to the town, so he would have advised the DAR to be more cautious in its description.


"Today there's a different standard — or should be, anyway — when you're assigning a [historical] value to a piece of land," he said.

In placing the plaque, the DAR chapter also misrepresented a key detail. The American Revolution began in 1775 with the battles of Lexington and Concord. The fighting ended in 1781 with the Americans' victory in the Battle of Yorktown, and the British and the United States signed the peace treaty in 1783 in Paris. By the time of Talleyrand's trip in 1794, all those events were more than a decade in the past, 13 of the rebellious colonies had ratified the U.S. Constitution and become states, and Vermont and Kentucky had been admitted to the Union as states as well. So it's a mistake, if not outright deception, to say that Talleyrand was in Winthrop during the Revolutionary War, unless the DAR was referring to the French Revolution.

The only other authoritative source Cook found that mentions Talleyrand's trip through central Maine is Louis C. Hatch's 1919 book *Maine: A History*. That book puts the Frenchman in Hallowell at the home of Benjamin Vaughan — a dwelling that still stands, overlooking the Kennebec River.

"The names of Talleyrand, Louis Philippe, Marshal Ney and many others are given as enjoying his hospitality," Hatch wrote about Vaughan, shrouding his sources in anonymity by using the passive voice.

From all that, one might safely conclude that the Talleyrand-in-Winthrop story is stranded somewhere between reality and the cherry-tree myth that parson Mason Weems fabricated about George Washington: neither proved nor disproved, but provocative enough to prod some people to learn more about the calculating, manipulative French king-maker who swept through Maine in the late eighteenth century.

— by Joseph Owen 

History Through a Keyhole - Puzzle 6

The good news is that finally, after a half-year drought of responses, a reader submitted a guess about the item depicted in the January-February issue of the *Kennebec Current*. Unfortunately, it was wrong, and the person who submitted it failed to offer us a box of date squares from Slaters Bakery, David Mallett concert tickets, a Crustacean Elation lobster roll from Augusta's Red Barn restaurant, or any other kind of plump bribe that might prompt us to change our minds.

So anyway, here's the next clue. The image at the right is part of a structure that is easily visible from a public road in Kennebec County. 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 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 May 31. Good luck.



New Navy Ship Takes Name of Maine’s Capital City

On December 17, 2022, a new Independence-class-variant littoral combat ship was christened at an Alabama shipyard and given the name USS *Augusta*. The Navy expects to commission the ship into service this fall on the Maine coast, likely in Portland.

Maine, including Augusta, was well-represented at the christening. Leigh Saufley, dean of the University of Maine School of Law, is the ship’s sponsor. She had the honor of performing the ceremonial bottle break over the *Augusta’s* bow. Augusta Mayor Mark O’Brien gave remarks, which largely focused on the history of the ship’s namesake city.

“All this is to say that Maine and its capital city of Augusta [have] a history steeped in shipbuilding and the military and a continuing connection with the United States Navy,” O’Brien said.

Mayor O’Brien also took part in a tradition called mast stepping, the modern version of which is placing tokens in a silver box that gets attached to the ship. He placed a lapel pin from the city, along with challenge coins from the Augusta Police Department, into the box.

The *Kennebec Journal* reported in February that the ship’s skipper, Cmdr. Christopher Polnaszek, visited Augusta then and spoke with the City Council. He also visited Lithgow Public Library and the Augusta Civic Center.

This USS *Augusta* is the second Navy vessel to be named after Augusta, Maine.

In 1984, a nuclear-powered submarine was launched with the name USS *Augusta*. Commissioned in 1985, it was decommissioned in 2008. A cursory glance through the *Kennebec Journal* archives brings up several articles about the previous USS *Augusta*, some of which are clearly reflective of its launching’s time in history.

Headlines about the submarine include:

- January 1984: “USS *Augusta* set afloat as [then-U.S. Sen. William] Cohen warns of new Soviet threat”
- A January 1985 editorial: “Source of pride – and protest, too”
- Also from January 1985: “The *Augusta*: smooth, sleek, new and deadly.”

The papers also revealed the submarine was the theme for Augusta’s 1984 Great Kennebec River Whatever Race.

The Kennebec Historical Society has contributed to preserving the history of the USS *Augusta* submarine. The society’s archive contains various ephemera and items related to its 1985 commissioning, including an invitation to the event, the event program, a commemorative bumper sticker, commemorative matchbooks, and even napkins from the commissioning and the launch.

— by Jamie Logan



Photo courtesy of Austal USA

✧ In Memoriam ✧

Vivian Dennett, 79, a Kennebec Historical Society life member and volunteer who was the society’s vice president twice in the 1990s, died March 18 in Augusta after a long struggle with Alzheimer’s disease. An Augusta native, 1962 Cony High School graduate, and holder of a University of Maine at Augusta associate degree in liberal studies, she worked 30 years for Central Maine Power Co, retiring in 2001 from her position as a Plant Accounting Department senior business analyst and supervisor. She and her husband, KHS life member and former President David Dennett, lectured extensively about Augusta history for about 25 years with the use of projected postcard images. They also organized KHS tours of historic houses in the Augusta area, including one on Cobbossecontee Lake, where they lived for several years. Vivian Dennett was an Old Fort Western board member and was active in many other local civic organizations. Her survivors include two children; 10 grandchildren and stepgrandchildren; and seven great-grandchildren.

Arline Johnson, 93, a former KHS donor and volunteer, died March 12 in St. Joseph, Michigan. She and first husband Phillip Foster started a family in Augusta, then moved to Kalamazoo, Michigan, in the 1970s. She volunteered extensively in her community, then worked as the Kalamazoo city manager’s administrative assistant. In retirement, she undertook many volunteer tasks into her 90s and traveled to help people who lacked proper housing and nutrition. She moved to Port Clyde in 2003 and married longtime KHS life member William “Treby” Johnson, with whom she hosted a reception for KHS Capital Campaign donors at the society’s headquarters in the summer of 2009. After her husband died later that year, she returned to Michigan. Her survivors include three children, seven grandchildren, and four great-grandchildren.

Upcoming Programs

April: “Disaster at Bar Harbor Ferry”

Reflecting on an era when the only means of travel to the new, glamorous, and growing resort of Bar Harbor was through a small, isolated, rural-yet-elegant point of land on the mainland in the small town of Hancock, Mac Smith’s book *Disaster at Bar Harbor Ferry* tells the true story of what was, at the time, Maine’s deadliest disaster.

The heartbreaking tale starts with the arrival of a train overcrowded with passengers anxious to be among the first to cross the bay. Their rush toward a ferry with too few seats turned a casual summer Sunday outing into a scene of chaos, tragedy, death, and heroism, occurring as quickly as the break of a wooden gangplank. *Disaster at Bar Harbor Ferry* tells not only the complete story of the people and the events of that day, but of a time and way of life long gone by and nearly forgotten.

A Navy veteran of the 1991 Persian Gulf War and former reporter for *The Bar Harbor Times*, Smith, the Kennebec Historical Society’s lecturer for April, lives in Stockton Springs in the village of Sandy Point. He is also the author of *Mainers on the Titanic*, *Peyton Place Comes Home to Maine*, *Maine’s Hail to the Chief*, and *Siege at the State House*.

The society’s April presentation is free to the public (donations are gladly accepted) and is scheduled for 6:30 p.m. Wednesday, April 19, at Augusta City Center, located at 16 Cony Street in Augusta. Those who have questions about the program may call Scott Wood, executive director, at 622-7718.

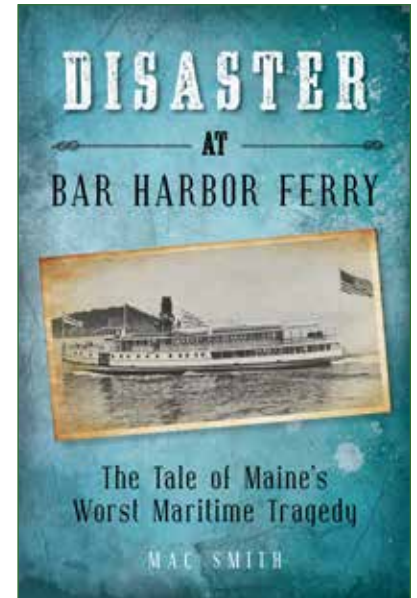


Photo courtesy of the author

May: “Long-ago Summer Cottages on Little Chebeague Island”



Little Chebeague Cottages are seen on the west side of Cottage Grove.

Photo courtesy of Maine Historical Society

Little Chebeague Island is located in Casco Bay near Portland and is immediately adjacent to its larger namesake, Chebeague Island. In the 19th century, Little Chebeague was the site of various farms, a vibrant summer colony centered around a massive Victorian hotel (which burned to the ground in 1893), and occupation by the U.S. Navy during World War II. The Navy’s arrival necessitated the eviction of the residents of the 11 summer cottages and other outbuildings in 1942. The once-elegant cottages have been uninhabited and left to deteriorate. Eighty-one years later, they are mostly gone, with a few recognizable features evident in the ruins of several of them.

The island is accessible at low tide from Chebeague Island. Visitors can walk across a connecting sand bar easily. After several visits to Little Chebeague, part-time Chebeague resident Lock Kiermaier, the Kennebec Historical Society’s speaker for May, became fascinated with the cottage ruins and set out to develop a slideshow that depicts the cottages as they originally looked and how they deteriorated over the years to their present condition. The slideshow also delves into the history of the cottages’ residents and features collected anecdotes and stories of what life was like there.

Kiermaier, a former KHS board member, has lived in Maine since 1975 and has been an Augusta resident since 2003. After retiring from his professional career as a legislative analyst at the Maine State Legislature in 2007, Lock has involved himself in a variety of projects and interests, most of which involve history, old houses, and islands. Most recently, Lock has spent half of every week living on Chebeague Island with his wife, Marty Trower. That experience led him to his latest project: compiling the Little Chebeague Island cottages slideshow.

The live presentation is free to the public (donations are gladly accepted) and is scheduled for 6:30 p.m. Wednesday, May 17, at Augusta City Center, located at 16 Cony Street in Augusta. People who have questions about the program may call Scott Wood, executive director, at 622-7718.

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

E-mail address: kennhis1891@gmail.com

Telephone: (207) 622-7718

Web site: www.kennebechistorical.org