



Kennebec Current



“What occasions then so much Want and Misery? It is the Employment of Men and Women in Works, that produce neither the Necessaries nor Conveniences of Life, who, [along] with those who do nothing, consume the Necessaries raised by the Laborious.”

Letter to Benjamin Vaughan from his friend Benjamin Franklin, July 26, 1784 (see pages 8–10)

Volume 33 Issue 6

A PUBLICATION OF THE KENNEBEC HISTORICAL SOCIETY

November–December 2023

Longtime Board Member O’Donnell Becomes KHS President

Joseph M. O’Donnell, an Augusta attorney, became president of the Kennebec Historical Society on September 21. Society members elected him to that office at their annual meeting, held at Hope Baptist Church in Manchester.

O’Donnell, 79, has served on the society’s Board of Directors since 2019 and from 2001 to 2009. He has been a KHS life member since 1999.

The membership also elected all other candidates proposed by the society’s Nominating Committee. They are Kent London, of Vassalboro, executive vice president; Mark Laney, of Winthrop, treasurer; and Jamie Logan, of Augusta, secretary. The term of office for each position is two years.

O’Donnell succeeds Logan, who stepped down from the presidency after completing a two-year term. Logan replaces Stefanie Barley, of Augusta, who was elected to one of the four other board seats filled by election at the annual meeting.

Continued on page 3



Joseph O’Donnell, the newly elected president of the Kennebec Historical Society, sits in the library of his law office on November 16 in Augusta, only four blocks east of the society’s headquarters.

Photo by Joseph Owen

West Gardiner History Group’s Building Nears Completion



Sunlight permeates the interior of the West Gardiner Historical Society’s unfinished new building recently.

Photo courtesy of West Gardiner Historical Society

A longtime dream of the West Gardiner Historical Society is approaching fruition. The group’s new two-story, 60-by-40-foot headquarters on Spears Corner Road has been framed and is scheduled to be ready for partial use by December 1, according to the society’s president, Debbie Couture.

Couture said in a November 20 telephone interview that the framing work began in the first week of November. The wood-frame structure still is awaiting the installation of windows, doors and a metal roof, but her organization already can foresee major upgrades in its operations. Even in the building’s current condition, the society plans to move a 12-foot-tall carriage into it, as well as 10 to 15 large antique tools that now are housed awkwardly in the Town Office.

“It’s so exciting,” Couture said. “We have so much storage, it’s crazy.”

The town of West Gardiner financed most of the construction in accordance with multiple town meeting votes, and the society has done other fundraising to support the project. The society expects to submit a financing request to the town by mid-February to cover the cost of insulation and other interior improvements. Voters are expected to consider the request in April at town meeting.

Continued on page 5

Well-run KHS Anticipates More Improvements



President's Message
Joseph O'Donnell

Greetings. My predecessors in office have set a high hurdle for presidential performance. What I have inherited is a well-run organization that continues to collect ephemera and artifacts of Kennebec County and its shire town, Augusta. Monthly programs have varied interesting speakers and are well attended in various sites in the capital area. Many volunteers work hours each month cataloging and indexing the collection with the assistance of Executive Director Scott Wood. The society is meeting the ongoing expenses and, beyond that, is raising money funding an endowment. These things will continue.

My own involvement in KHS began many years ago when my Cony High School classmate David Dennett was president. I paid membership dues annually until I wearied of being solicited each year and decided to join as a lifetime member. Shortly after I became a life member, the Kennebec County Courthouse Bell Tower Committee invited me to join as a member along with Mary McCarthy, who then was the KHS president. As some will recall, pigeons had wreaked havoc on the tower, and it was in danger of collapse. Action was needed.

Mary and David invited me to be a member of the KHS Board of Directors and, in turn, I served as director, secretary, and vice president.

The coming two years for Kennebec Historical Society may bring profound changes for how things are done and the shape of what the society will look like for many future years. The need for more archival space is pressing and a solution appears promising. An assembly place – owned by the society – for the monthly programs appears to be on the horizon.

I look forward in working with the membership and have high hopes for an even better Kennebec Historical Society at the end of my term.

KHS Welcomes the Following New Members

Dale Potter Clark — Vassalboro
Angel Donley-Hall — Augusta
Stephanie Frost — Waterville
Suzanne Giberson — Hallowell

Joyce Grondin — Augusta
Stacey Huntington — West Gardiner
Stephen Langsdorf — Hallowell
Faye Trafton — Manchester

and continues to recognize ...

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

Kennebec Savings Bank
Ganneston Construction Corporation

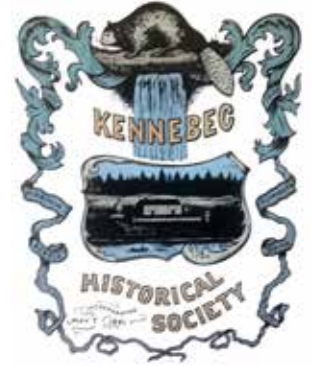
Sponsoring Business Members
(\$500+ annual)

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

Correction

Hitching post location

A photo caption accompanying a story about the repositioning of a granite hitching post at Harvey Lipman's Augusta residence cited Lipman's address incorrectly. Lipman lives at 98 Winthrop Street.



*Discovering, preserving,
and disseminating the history of
Kennebec County, Maine, since 1891*

KHS Board of Directors

- President**
Joseph O'Donnell
- Executive Vice President**
Kent London
- Treasurer**
Mark Laney
- Secretary**
Jamie Logan
- Directors**
Robert Bennett
Anne Cough
Rich Eastman
Joan Lancaster
Stephen Langsdorf
Joseph Owen
Emily Schroeder
- Executive Director**
Scott Wood
- Archivist**
Emily Schroeder
- Advisory Committee**
Thomas Johnson
Mark Johnston
John O'Connor
Earle G. Shettleworth Jr.
William Sprague Jr.
- Membership Secretary**
Joan Lancaster
- Total membership:**
598 on November 17
Life members: 251

Kennebec Current

Our 164th Issue

Staff

Joseph Owen, editor
Rich Eastman, designer
Bob Bennett, writer
Emily Schroeder, writer
Teddy Faugno, photographer
Nikko Noble, photographer
Sally Joy, adviser

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.

KHS Hosts Cony High School Students

On November 13, the Kennebec Historical Society hosted about 25 students and two teachers from Cony High School who came to tour the Henry Weld Fuller Jr. House – the society’s Augusta headquarters – and learn about how KHS preserves items in its collection.


Tim Clifford, an English teacher at Cony, also is teaching a University of Maine at Augusta dual-enrollment class for seniors. Recently those students began semester-long research projects on topics related to Maine history. Clifford expressed an interest in learning more about the society’s collection and, in particular, what primary source documents the society might hold in its collection.

To fill the bus that brought the students to the Fuller House, Clifford asked Robert Lippert, a social studies teacher who teaches an advanced placement U.S. history class at Cony, to join the excursion.

Students were divided into two groups. One was treated to a PowerPoint presentation about the nature of the KHS collection by the society’s archivist, Emily Schroeder. Executive Director Scott Wood gave the other group a tour and talked about the history of the society. Thirty minutes later the two groups switched places, and after about an hour they returned to the high school.

“It was great to have students come in to learn about what KHS has for research materials,” said Wood, who coordinated the visit. He added, “History books explain what happened, but letters, diaries and scrapbooks of those who experienced history firsthand give researchers a real feel for the times and paint a more vibrant picture.”

The society hopes to host more Cony students in the future and that this type of outreach continues to grow with other high schools in Kennebec County.

“The kids had a great time, and I definitely think it made them appreciate local history more,” Clifford said. 



Eyslin Frecker, a senior at Cony High School, talks with KHS Archivist Emily Schroeder about the society's collection of Augusta Mental Health Institute materials.

Photo by Scott Wood

O'Donnell Elected


Continued from page 1

London, the incumbent executive vice president, has served in that office since 2018. Laney has been treasurer since 2021. Joseph Owen, of Augusta, and Emily Schroeder, of South China, were re-elected to board seats; and Stephen Langsdorf, of Hallowell, was elected for the first time.

O'Donnell grew up in Augusta and graduated from Cony High School. He holds a Bachelor of Arts degree from the College of the Holy Cross, in Worcester, Massachusetts, having spent his junior year abroad at the Institut de Science Politique in Paris. He did postgraduate study in European history at Clark University, also in Worcester; then, after serving with the Army Security Agency in South Korea as a Korean linguist, he earned a doctor of law degree in 1975 from Northeastern Law School in Boston.

Admitted to practice in the federal and state courts in Maine, he worked with Norman C. Bourget in the firm of Bourget & O'Donnell, then joined in partnership with Ernest L. Goodspeed and Stephen O'Donnell at Goodspeed & O'Donnell. He is a member of the Maine State Bar Association, the Kennebec Bar Association, and the National Association of Consumer Bankruptcy Attorneys. His practice specializes in people seeking debt relief, probate issues, real estate law, and family law.

O'Donnell lives in Monmouth, where he also was elected earlier this year to the five-member Monmouth Select Board.

He was married 44 years to the late Joan “Jet” Price (1946-2019). He has two adult sons, John and Jacob, who live in New York state. 

Augusta's Storied Britt House Lives on Only in Documents

Longtime Augusta residents will undoubtedly remember hearing about — if not seeing — the Britt House, perched on the edge of the Kennebec River and known mainly for being the second-oldest wood-framed building in town, its age exceeded only by that of Fort Western. Built in 1780 of logs by a Revolutionary War veteran named Britt, the house was covered with clapboards by the 20th century, and perhaps earlier.

A Britt House resident during the 1920s and early '30s was Margaret Bowden Carter. She recalled what life was like in the rustic home when reporter Betty Adams interviewed her for the *Kennebec Journal* in 2002. She recalled that the house had open rafters and handmade square nails, a dirt floor basement, two rough upstairs rooms, one closet without a door, and, of course, no indoor plumbing. Drinking water was three-quarters of a mile away, and uphill. One could get to it by using a tunnel under the railroad tracks, pictured on one of our postcards.

The house was just beyond Capitol Park, heading toward Hallowell, at the site where the Greater Augusta Utility District's wastewater treatment plant stands today. The access road was between Grand and



The Collections Box
Emily Schroeder

Wabon streets, and has had various names: Britt Road, Britts Gully Road, Oakwood Street (on the 1938 Augusta street map), and most recently, Jackson Avenue.

Interestingly, a Google map search shows Britts Shoal in the Kennebec, south of that spot and just before the Hallowell Cemetery.

The Britt House was also right above One Mile Rock (or Mile Rock) on the riverbank. The rock was given that name because of its location one mile north of “the Hook” (downtown Hallowell) and one mile south of “the Fort” (Fort Western, in what now is Augusta).

So who arrived in Augusta —

before it was truly Augusta — and decided to locate on this picturesque spot? Several published sources identify him as John Britt (1754-1832). An Ancestry.com search produced a handwritten 1818 pension application for his service in the Revolutionary War, attested to by Nathan Weston, of Augusta, who then was chief justice of the District of Maine's 2nd Circuit Court. In that document, Britt states that he was born in London, England, and ultimately served in the Continental Army's 4th Maryland Regiment during the American Revolution.

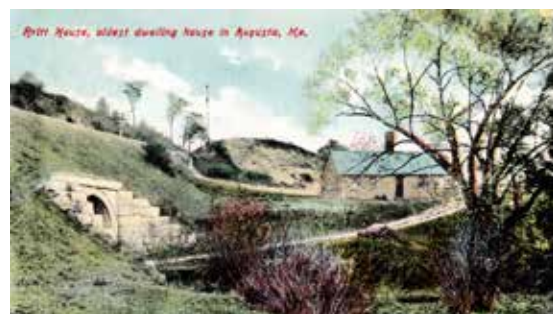
Local legend has long identified the builder of the Britt House as a Hessian soldier, one of many who came from Germany to help the British fight in America; but the evidence appears to contradict that theory. John's father was born in London as well, and he married Mary Dibble in the southeastern English county of Surrey on December 16, 1739. The family appears to have no connection to Germany.

In 1790, according to Ancestry.com, Britt's daughter Elizabeth was born in Shelburne, Nova Scotia. About four years later another daughter arrived, in the same place. It is possible, though odd, that Catherine Britt stayed in Nova Scotia to have two children before coming (or returning)



The Britt House, built in 1780, is shown here in this real-photo postcard from the 1920s.

From the KHS collection



A postcard illustrates the location of the Britt House, being just east of the railroad tracks and north of the Kennedy Brook overpass.

From the KHS collection

to Maine. Also interesting to note is that the next four children were born in Litchfield. John Britt was in Augusta according to the 1810 Census, and he was back in Litchfield at the time of his death in 1832.

The Britt offspring with the closest ties to Augusta were John (1778-1855), Jacob (1780-1861), Nancy (1795-1891), and Martha “Polly” Britt (1796-1830). We can verify that their mother, Catherine Hemmium Britt (1755-1830), along with Jacob and Polly, are buried in the Cony Cemetery. Unfortunately, John does not appear in any county burial listings. (We’d like to assume that he’s with his wife, naturally.)

Jacob married Martha “Patty” Abbott on September 16, 1806, in Litchfield. They went on to have six children, all born in Augusta. Their first-born, Jacob Britt Jr. (1807-1891), carried on the tradition: Son John Henry was also born in Augusta.

My point in this accounting is that all these people were undoubtedly familiar with the house, even if they had not lived there. One of the most noteworthy was Nancy Britt Tibbetts Kennedy, daughter of the first John. Ancestry.com gives her birth year as 1795 in Litchfield. The Kennebec Historical Society has an advertising card in its collection that features a photograph of her, claiming she is 118 years old. The card states that she owed her longevity to herbs and their medicinal properties, much like the product being offered. She was a hard worker and good cook, living off the land. Her first marriage was to William Tibbetts, of Litchfield, on August 15, 1817, in Hallowell; he died at sea. She then married William Robert Kennedy. They lived for a time at the Britt House. They had two children, William R. and Sarah J. Anderson, with whom she was staying at the time of her death, which occurred on December 19, 1891. That would’ve made her 94 or 95. The *Daily Kennebec Journal* of December 23, 1891, said she “was the last surviving member of the family of John Britt, a well known character in local history and tradition.” She left many descendants, however, so the newspaper’s description is false.

The Britt House met its own fate by fire, on July 9, 1935. The *Journal* reported the next day that “tramps who were seen running down the railroad tracks” evidently had set the dilapidated structure ablaze.

Yours in history,

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



An image of Nancy Britt Tibbetts Kennedy, daughter of the first John Britt, is used to make a sales pitch for a medicinal product in the late 19th century, giving her age – probably falsely – as 118.

From the KHS collection



West Gardiner History Group



The West Gardiner Historical Society’s new headquarters, shown here on Spears Corner Road with the Margaret Peacock Memorial Garden in the foreground, is nearly complete.

Photo courtesy of West Gardiner Historical Society

Continued from page 1

The society has established a small garden patch in front of its new building. The garden is named in honor of Margaret Peacock (1947-2019), a longtime town resident who taught kindergarten in the local school district for 20 years and was a driving force in several local organizations, including the West Gardiner Garden Club. Other shrubbery on the property commemorates other town residents who have died.

The group already has enough money on hand – more than \$27,000 – to cover the cost of establishing a climate-controlled archive on the building’s first floor.

Couture said the society hopes to host a dedication in the spring of 2024, award a contract for the interior work by June, finish off the building by the end of year, and prepare it for playing a major role in the celebration of West Gardiner’s 175th anniversary in 2025.



— by Joseph Owen

Pearl Harbor Casualty Finally Returns to Maine for Burial

In his *Letters to Friends*, the Roman politician Cicero wrote: “There is nothing that can so richly reward you or so rebound to your glory, nor in the whole range of human activities is there one more splendid and excellent, than service to the commonwealth.”

This sentiment handed down to us from ancient times sums up my mood on May 24 as, while reading the morning newspaper, I sat in stunned silence. An innocuous obituary announced the death of U.S. Navy Ensign Stanley Willis Allen, age 25, who died while on board the USS *Oklahoma* when it was sunk in the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941. His burial with full military honors was held July 18 at the Maine Veterans Memorial Cemetery on Mount Vernon Road in Augusta.

The story behind all this is remarkable.

Allen was a young man from Bethel who spent a year at West Point before graduating from Bowdoin College graduate in 1939. He joined the Navy and was assigned to flight training. He became qualified to fly the newly introduced Curtis Seagull, an aircraft designed to be launched by catapult off the stern of battleships to observe at close range the fall of shot being fired from the ships’ 16-inch guns. In June 1941, Allen was assigned to the USS *Oklahoma*, an aging battleship scheduled for decommissioning when the North Carolina- and South Dakota-class designs became operational in early 1942.

Not 15 minutes after the first torpedo struck, the *Oklahoma* turned three-quarters of the way over on its side, only a portion of its hull remaining above the water, supported on its superstructure on the harbor floor.

When the ship capsized, only 35 of the 429 men who died were identified immediately. The other 394, including the remains of Allen, were interred in the Punch Bowl National Memorial Cemetery on the Hawaiian island of Oahu, where their memorials stated that they were “known but to God.”

In 2015, ahead of the 75th anniversary remembrance of the Pearl Harbor attack, the Defense Department POW/MIA Accounting Agency began a project involving extensive research to identify those buried as unknowns from the *Oklahoma* and reunite them with their families. Through mitochondrial DNA and autosomal DNA analysis, Allen’s remains were linked to Beverly Prosser Gelwick, a woman in Harpswell. Gelwick, Allen’s niece, was just 8 years old when the Pearl Harbor attack occurred. After 82 years and with the memory of her uncle now quite dim, the unexpected visit of a Navy officer at her door earlier this year astounded her.



Ensign Stanley Willis Allen



Rear Admiral Michael Brown presents the colors to members of the Gelwick family, relatives of Ensign Stanley Allen, on July 18.

Kennebec Journal photo by Ashley Allen, reproduced with permission

According to Gelwick's relatives, the officer is assigned to Bath Iron Works, not far from Gelwick's home. He first tried to visit Gelwick one day after work, dressed in his regular work clothes; but she shooed him away, thinking he was a door-to-door salesman. So he returned to his office, changed into his formal Navy dress uniform, and went to see her again. He told her that he represented the president and the Navy secretary, and he delivered the news about her uncle.

On July 18, Ensign Allen's body was transferred to a hearse from a funeral home in Brunswick, with local and state police forming a motorcade to the veterans cemetery in Augusta. Representing the President, Rear Admiral Michael Brown officiated at the funeral, recounting the Pearl Harbor attack and the loss of the *Oklahoma*. He described the extraordinary efforts made by the Navy to put names to these unknown heroes and provide proper closure to their families. As a token, he gave representatives of the Gelwick family – Gelwick herself was too frail to attend – spent shells from the 21-gun salute fired during the ceremony and his own personal challenge coin.

The day's event made an above-the-fold headline in every newspaper in the state. The story was the opening subject on both the 6 o'clock and 11 o'clock television newscasts.

Here in Augusta, several Bowdoin alumni, delegating themselves honorary members of the class of 1939, gathered to witness Stanley Allen laid to rest. After the ceremony, my wife, Lissa, and I hosted a reception featuring lemonade and cookies at 98 Winthrop Street, with the front door left open to friends and neighbors and a large 48-star U.S. flag hanging from our house. Members of the Gelwick family attended as honored guests. Many of us, as the sons and daughters of World War II veterans, talked about the day and its significance.

We witnessed a real piece of Maine history pass by on this day.

Ensign Stanley Willis Allen, killed in action on December 7, 1941, was finally was laid to rest in Maine soil.

– by Harvey Lipman

Kennebec Classic Tennis Tournament Tops Record Again

Thirty-seven players turned out to participate July 29 in the Kennebec Historical Society's fifth annual Kennebec Classic tennis tournament in Waterville, 10 more than the then-record number who took part in the event in 2022 in Augusta.



Jackson Frons of New York serves up an ace in his doubles win.

Photo by Rich Eastman

The crowd of players was so large that the tournament, originally scheduled to be held only at the North Street Playground tennis courts, expanded to take over courts at nearby Colby College as well, according to tournament founder and organizer Billy Noble, of Gardiner.

Jason Tardif, of Waterville, defeated Ryan Chasse, of Portland,

8-6, capturing the men's singles crown for the second year in a row. Haylie Peacock, of West Gardiner, the current No. 1 player on the Gardiner Area High School girls' tennis team, defeated Ellie Hodgkin, 6-4 and 6-2, in a contest that the players had requested to be settled by the best two sets out of three. Hodgkin, the former No. 1 player at Erskine Academy in South China, now attends Clark University in Worcester, Massachusetts.

In the open doubles draw, Jackson Frons and Chris Nordenson defeated last year's champions, father-son combination Jason Tardif and Logan Tardif, 8-5.

The tournament raised \$650 in entry fees and \$525 in sponsorships, and the society spent \$591 to host it, leaving KHS with a net income of \$584 from the event.

Noble said the tournament's growth has prompted consideration of expanding its schedule to two days in 2024.



Tournament founder and organizer Billy Noble explains the rules prior to the tournament on July 29.

Photo by Rich Eastman

Vaughan Homestead Was a Cornerstone of Learning, Philanthropy

Editors Note: This essay is excerpted from Untold History, an upcoming book about Bowdoin College. The essay's author, Allen Wells, thanks Caroline Moseley, Kat Stefko, and John Cross at the college and Kate Tremblay, executive director of the Vaughan Woods & Historic Homestead, for their assistance.

“A life well lived” is an expression often heard at funerals and memorial services. Few individuals in Maine during the first half of the 19th century could lay a greater claim to that felicitous turn of phrase than Benjamin Vaughan. A late Enlightenment-era polymath who was well-versed in medicine, chemistry, geology, meteorology, botany, astronomy, Newtonian physics, and agronomy, the longtime Hallowell resident was an eminent interlocutor of his day, regularly corresponding with the likes of Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, Jeremy Bentham, and Joseph Priestley. Few, in fact, did more than this transplanted Briton to facilitate Anglo-American collaborations in the sciences.¹



This is a portrait of Dr. Benjamin Vaughan by an unknown artist from circa 1800. Vaughan was a commissioner in the negotiations between Britain and the United States at the drafting of the Treaty of Paris in 1783.

From the book *Old Hallowell on the Kennebec*, by Emma Huntington Nason

By all accounts, Benjamin and his wife, Sarah, gave selflessly of themselves, bettering the community they lived in, materially enhancing the lives and livelihoods of neighboring farmers, shippers and merchants, and assisting and advising colleges and secondary schools throughout New England, including Bowdoin and Harvard.

Forty-six years old when he and his family moved to Maine in 1797, Benjamin Vaughan spent his last 38 years transforming a remote hamlet on a great bend of the Kennebec, known locally as The Hook, into “as polished and intellectual a circle of society as could be found in the state.”² One contemporary spoke for many: “The pride of Hallowell is the venerable and wealthy Mr. Vaughan. ...” The couple “are shrouded in humility, meekness and philanthropy; their large fortune is principally devoted to the benefit of mankind; relieving the poor, enlightening the ignorant, and promoting the public good.”³

Altruism has many fathers, however. Such public-spiritedness would not have been possible without access to a vast family fortune predicated on sugar and slaves. Samuel Vaughan & Son, a multigenerational family business spanning four continents, owned four sizable plantations in Jamaica, with more than 500 slaves – four times as many slaves as George Washington had. In addition to sugarcane, the Vaughans cultivated coffee and reared livestock on their properties in St. James parish on the north coast of the island near Montego Bay.⁴ At the time of the Samuel Vaughan Senior’s death in 1802, their Jamaican holdings were assessed at 166,000 British pounds. Within a span of 50 years, the Vaughans had vaulted themselves into the upper echelon of sugar producers, at a time when Jamaica was considered the crown jewel of Britain’s global empire.⁵

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, this section draws on Craig Murray’s fine-grained account of Vaughan’s life and times. *Benjamin Vaughan (1751-1835): The Life of an Anglo-American Individual* (New York: Arno, 1982). At its incorporation in 1771, Hallowell included Augusta. The communities were split into two towns in 1797, the year when Benjamin and Sarah Vaughan arrived. Emma Nason, *Old Hallowell on the Kennebec* (Bowie, Maryland: Heritage Books, 1989 [1909]), 25.

² Abbott, “George B. Cheever,” 1875, scrapbook, “Dr. Benjamin Vaughan,” Abbott Memorial Collection, M001.02 Volume-Folio 31, George J. Mitchell Department of Special Collections and Archives, Bowdoin College Library (hereinafter cited as GJMDSCA, BCL).

³ Quoted in Murray, *Benjamin Vaughan*, 402-03.

⁴ Jenny Jemcott, “The Parish History of St. James,” p. 29, Parish Histories of Jamaica (blog), May 13, 2021; <https://www.pariishistoriesofjamaica.org/st-james/>. Accessed August 23, 2023.

⁵ Editor, “A Record from an Eighteenth-Century Jamaican Estate,” *Journal of Negro History* 59:2 (April 1974): 168-69. On Jamaican sugar and slavery, see Centre for the Study of the Legacies of British Slavery, <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/>; David Ryden, *West Indian Slavery and British Abolition, 1783-1807* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009); Douglass Hall, *In Miserable Slavery: Thomas Thistlewood in Jamaica* (Kingston: University of the West Indies Press, 1998); and Richard Dunn, *A Tale of Two Plantations: Slave Life in Labor in Jamaica and Virginia* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2014).

The centerpiece of Benjamin and Sarah Vaughan's white clapboard, palatial home and thousand-acre homestead in Hallowell, was an astonishing personal library that "lined nearly all the rooms."⁶ Estimated at 10,000 to 12,000 volumes, it was for its time second in size only to Harvard's library. This collection was not meant just to impress; Benjamin jotted "... down his marginal notes with a pencil as he read ... making himself master of the subject before him."⁷ To cultivate a culture of learning in Hallowell, the Vaughans opened their library up to friends and townspeople alike. To cite but one example: Trained as a physician, Benjamin Vaughan practiced "among the very poor ... nor in any case did he take a fee: his sole object to alleviate distress." He acted as a roving consultant to doctors in the area, importing the latest medical journals and texts from England and the continent for his library, which he, in turn, shared with his colleagues in the profession.⁸



A view of the Kennebec from the Vaughan Homestead.

From *The Hallowell Book*, by H. K. Baker

Among the collection's treasures was a selection of children's books, which Sarah chose from when reading aloud every Saturday afternoon to the town's youngsters, who huddled before her in "a cluster on the piazza of the spacious mansion." As the Rev. John Abbott recalled, "I can see her now questioning the children as to what they had read, and, with her slight and fragile form, nimbly ascending the library steps and selecting such a book as she thought best adapted to the capacity of the child." Abbott remembered when a Hallowell mother, whose five sons were regular attendees on Saturday afternoons, and who all went on to Bowdoin and Andover Theological Seminary, put an exclamation point on Benjamin's and Sarah's generosity: "You children will never be able to appreciate the debt of gratitude you owe the Vaughan family."⁹

Another family friend recalled that summers at the homestead featured "a continual succession of visitors ... for the celebrity of Dr. Vaughan as a scholar ... drew many from other lands to visit the Philosopher in his romantic villa on the banks of the Kennebec."¹⁰ Among the notables to pay their respects were Count Charles de Talleyrand; the future "citizen king" of France, Louis-Philippe I; John Audubon; Mary and Elizabeth Peabody; and Daniel Webster.¹¹

In an effort to better educate his neighbors, Vaughan held nightly classes in metaphysics for clergymen, "college men from Bowdoin and other town professionals. ..." ¹² He also invited Bowdoin faculty members to Hallowell, so that the townspeople might benefit from their research. In 1818, Professor Parker Cleaveland, for example, gave a series of lectures on the practical applications of chemistry at the Hallowell Lyceum before "crowded audiences."¹³

Continued on page 10

⁶ Abbott, "George B. Cheever."

⁷ John Sheppard, *Reminiscences of the Vaughan Family* (Boston: David Clapp & Son, 1865), 15-16.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 19; and Robert Gardiner, *Early Recollections of Robert Hallowell Gardiner, 1782-1864* (Hallowell, Maine: White & Horne, 1936), 124-25.

⁹ Quoted in Abbott, "George B. Cheever."

¹⁰ Sheppard, *Reminiscences of the Vaughan Family*, 16.

¹¹ The Vaughans' daughter Sarah was an excellent artist who contributed illustrations for Audubon's *Birds of America*. Nason, *Old Hallowell*, 89.

¹² Megan Marshall, *The Peabody Sisters: Three Women Who Ignited American Romanticism* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2005), 135.

¹³ *Ibid.*; and Murray, *Benjamin Hallowell*, quote, 503.

Vaughan Homestead

Continued from page 9

For Vaughan, whose share of the family's properties in the Maine backcountry amounted to 17,000 of the family's 87,000 acres, "modern agriculture became a consuming interest."¹⁴ Perched on a bluff overlooking the river, his homestead boasted carefully-attended nurseries, orchards and hothouses. After his brother John sent cuttings from several French vineyards, within ten years Vaughan was producing his own wine and had authored a lengthy manual on grape cultivation.¹⁵ Again, acquisitions on agronomy and botany from abroad to the gentleman farmer's library were shared with local growers. His persistent efforts, literally and figuratively, bore fruit, as the Kennebec Valley became the state's leading agricultural exporter.

Years later, a librarian painted a vivid picture of well-kept gardens and evidence of Benjamin's and his English gardener's green thumbs: ¹⁶

Dr. Vaughan was one of the pioneers of New England in the improvement of fruits and cereals. He imported choice seeds, which he was ever ready to impart to his neighbors. He had a large garden of several acres tastily laid out, with broad paths and numerous alleys, whose borders were adorned with flowers or shaded with currant bushes, fruit trees and shrubbery. The whole was under the care of an English gardener. Every kind of culinary vegetable was raised abundantly.



This portrait of Sarah Hallowell Vaughan, also by an unknown artist, is from circa 1800.

From the book *Old Hallowell on the Kennebec*, by Emma Huntinton Nason

The couple's community-building efforts did not go unnoticed. Although the town had only 1,300 inhabitants in 1800, it punched intellectually well above its modest size, boasting a distinguished coterie of jurists, attorneys, educators, artists, musicians and pastors.¹⁷ By the 1820s, Hallowell had 71 stores, a theater, a musical society, a secondary school, three bookstores, two print shops, and two weekly newspapers.¹⁸

And when this "American version of the English landed gentry" was not assisting farmers, his quarries were providing granite for the Augusta State House. When he was not proposing improvements to enhance navigation on the river by setting buoys out to mark channels, he recommended hiring a harbor master for the town, promoted the construction of a bridge across the Kennebec that would link Hallowell with the eastern towns in the valley, and oversaw repairs to local dams, mills and roads.¹⁹ As town historian Emma Nason recounted, by the first decades of the 19th century Hallowell was the most vibrant entrepot in the valley: ²⁰

Its large warehouses were filled with the merchandise of its wealthy traders. Its wharves were lined with packets waiting to ship their loads of barley, oats, and corn to Boston and other ports. Its numerous trading vessels plied constantly between Hallowell and the West Indies, carrying out the exports of the Kennebec.

Finally, Vaughan was a product of the Enlightenment, an intellectual who placed a premium on the application of scientific methods to solve societal problems. He and his heirs would bequeath a significant portion of his personal library, scientific equipment, and art collections to Bowdoin College.

Allen Wells is the Roger Howell Jr. Professor of History, Emeritus, at Bowdoin College in Brunswick.

¹⁴ Murray, *Benjamin Hallowell*, 384.

¹⁵ Vaughan came by his passion honestly. His father was a celebrated horticulturalist, designing topiary gardens and shrubberies for George Washington's Mount Vernon estate and two "public pleasure parks" in Philadelphia in the 1780s – one at Gray's Ferry tavern on the Schuylkill River, and another at the State House Yard. Andrea Wulf, *Founding Gardeners: The Revolutionary Generation, Nature, and the Shaping of the American Nation* (New York: Knopf, 2011), 24, 69, 76.

¹⁶ Sheppard, *Reminiscences of the Vaughan Family*, 14. Cf. Gardiner, for a less flattering portrait. *Early Recollections*, 124-25.

¹⁷ Abbott, "George B. Cheever."

¹⁸ Vaughan to Appleton, November 12, 1811, Jesse Appleton Collection, M005, Volume-Folio 1, GJMDMSCA, BCL; and Nason, *Old Hallowell*, 69.

¹⁹ Sheppard, *Reminiscences of the Vaughan Family*, 14.

²⁰ Nason, *Old Hallowell*, 67.

A Husband's Tribute to Vivian Dennett

Editor's note: This essay was published in the Kennebec Historical Society's annual report for 2023. The author, David Dennett, is a retired former junior high school history teacher who was the society's president from 1997 to 2001.

The late Vivian Vautier Dennett loved history. From an early age she took an interest in antiques, something she enjoyed for her entire life. She was born March 12, 1944, the daughter of John and Regina Vautier. She first lived in an old home on lower Capitol Street in Augusta across from Capitol Park. She later moved a short distance to Wade Street, off Sewall Street across from the Maine State Garage. There she lived for many years along with sisters Mary Lou and Jeanne, brother John, and a neighborhood of many kids.

She loved growing up in those two historic neighborhoods, attending Nash School, followed by Lincoln School, Lou Buker Junior High, and Cony High School, where she graduated in the class of 1962. Often Vivian reminisced about all the good friends and the good times that she had growing up in Augusta. She absolutely loved her own history there and all that it did to establish her lifelong pursuit of anything related to Augusta – especially postcards, which became her favorite.

Two years after her Cony graduation, Vivian married me at St. Mary's Church on Western Avenue, with a reception held in the ballroom of the historic Augusta House hotel, located on State Street. At that time, Vivian was employed at Central Maine Power Company, her first full-time job just after high school graduation. Later in her life, she earned her associate degree in liberal studies from the University of Maine in Augusta. She continued her studies at UMA for a total of three and a half years, intending to enter the teaching profession, and completed all but her student teaching. However, CMP convinced her to remain with the company, and she subsequently had a long, successful career in its accounting department, from 1962 until retirement in 2001, minus some time off that she spent at home with her young children, Karen and John.

Vivian loved historic homes. She lived for 25 years in two wonderful old historic homes – at 46 Quimby Street and later 56 Quimby Street, her beloved Frederick Jordan House, where she enjoyed hosting open-house tours. She loved collecting antiques and collectibles. In fact, at one time she even sold some of her antiques in a then-existing Hallowell antique shop located in the current Liberal Cup restaurant building, known as Wilson Hall. She called her small business Historically Yours, and quite enjoyed her involvement there. However, as mentioned earlier, her collecting focus became old postcards purchased in antique shops from all over New England, especially those that related to the history of Augusta, and later historic Cobbosseecontee Lake. She even enjoyed collecting and researching CMP history for company presentations. But her primary historical focus for many years was the city she loved, Augusta.

I will never forget the day during the mid-1980s when Vivian asked me about using our Augusta postcards for a lecture she was planning for Jeff Zimmerman's adult education history class at Cony. I photographed many postcards and had slides made. Vivian did the research, put together a short historical program, and made her presentation, which the adult students seemed to enjoy. She called it simply "An Informal Visual History of Augusta." Using this format, she added hundreds of slides of old postcards and photos over subsequent years. The rest is history – her history. Vivian also lectured annually for the Kennebec Leadership Institute and, along with me, continued the Augusta history presentations for more than 25 years.

During the 1990s, Vivian became more actively involved in Kennebec Historical Society activities, served on its Executive Committee, and was vice president of the organization from 1997 to 1999. This certainly was a highlight of her historic endeavors, but she also served as a trustee of Old Fort Western and loved all that was happening at the fort. Vivian was one of the organizers of the many popular KHS historic house tours held in the Augusta area, as well as a couple around nearby Cobbosseecontee Lake, and she was always proud of the success of those tours and the money they raised for KHS.

Vivian loved her family, her kids, her grandkids, and her great-grandkids. She loved to travel, including a special 2001 trip to Colorado, Utah, Arizona, Nevada, and California, and a wonderful three-week trip in 2006 to Scotland and England. She enjoyed many vacations at Ocean Park, Camp Ellis, and Old Orchard Beach over the years, as well as at least 15 Columbus Day weekend trips to Cape Cod, many spent at an historic old inn, the Old Sea Pines; and she and I also wintered many years in St. Petersburg, Florida, on Isla del Sol. Through all these times away, she continued searching for the next treasure, especially an Augusta treasure, something to share with others who have a love of history.

Vivian lived a good life. She loved and she certainly was loved. She loved her family and her friends and had many special interests that kept her active. She was respected and will be remembered for many good reasons; but most important, that love of family, history, the Kennebec Historical Society, and her hometown, Augusta. And yes, Vivian is definitely missed by family and friends!



Vivian Dennett

North Vassalboro Dam Work Empowers Alewives’ Resurgence

Two recently rebuilt mid-19th-century North Vassalboro dams have blended the aesthetics that people want with the architecture that fish need.



History Through a Keyhole #9

The Mill Stream Dam — also known as the Ladd Dam — underwent its upgrade in 2019, and work on the Box Mill Dam, just a few hundred yards downstream, was done in 2020. Each project included the construction of a fish ladder that enables alewives, long stymied by several dams on northward-flowing Outlet Stream, to migrate upstream to China Lake to spawn. Removal of other dams and construction of another fish ladder on the stream already had occurred by

then. The work, resulting from a partnership of state and private agencies, fulfilled the goals of the China Lake Alewife Restoration Initiative.



Water from Outlet Stream rushes through the fish ladder at the Box Mill Dam in North Vassalboro.

Photo by Rich Eastman

Answer to Keyhole #9

Q: What is this?

A: The Box Mill Dam

Q: Where is it?

A: On the north side of Oak Grove Road in North Vassalboro

Q: What’s historic about it?

A: Built around 1850, it provided power to a box mill that stood on the west side of Outlet Stream. A fish ladder built below the dam, like one built just upstream at the Mill Stream Dam, enables fish to pass between the Sebasticook River and China Lake.



The Box Mill Dam, located on the north side of Oak Grove Road, is shown in the mystery photo published in the September-October of the *Kennebec Current*, and again at the top right on this page. It is on the property where Old Mill Place, the former American Woolen mill, stands on the west side of Main Street (Route 32).

Ray Breton bought the mill building in 2010. Breton, 67, who has lived in Vassalboro since the age of 11, also owns the neighboring dams and their fish ladders. He said he insisted on dam and fish ladder design features that included no harsh, reflective elements because wedding parties and other groups sometimes rent part of the mill building, and they often use the Box Mill Dam’s 10-foot cascade and its fish ladder as a backdrop for photographs.



Ray Breton

The Box Mill Dam provided water power to a box mill that once stood beside it. The woolen mill drew power from the Mill Stream Dam. Today neither dam is used as a source of water power.

Alewives are valuable as bait fish, and they also unwittingly provide cover for salmon by attracting birds of prey. Their numbers declined after the dams went up around 1850, but the work along Mill Stream is helping to reverse that damage.



— by Joseph Owen


History Through a Keyhole - Puzzle 10

Nobody submitted an answer to identify the gushing waterfall depicted in our last issue. That was enough to turn on our own personal waterworks — oh, the pain that such callous rejection inflicts! — but it wasn't enough weeping to convince us to stop trying to stump our readers.

The photo at right, showing a face that probably won't be popping up anytime soon on ABC-TV's *The Bachelor*, is the next clue. It 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 December 31. Good luck. 




* In Memoriam *

Frances (Maher) Reinstein, 84, of Woolwich, a former Kennebec Historical Society member and frequent volunteer, died October 13 at her home, which her family has owned for more than a half-century. A Hallowell High School and Colby College graduate, she taught English at Gardiner Area High School from 1963 to 1999. Her activity with KHS occurred in the early 2000s around the time her sister, the late Mary McCarthy, was on the KHS board of directors and later served as president (2003-04). She had two sons, three grandchildren, and seven great-grandchildren, and another sister.

Society to Host Victorian Tea at Its Headquarters

The Kennebec Historical Society will host a Victorian tea party at its headquarters, which is at the Henry Weld Fuller Jr. House, 107 Winthrop Street in Augusta. Please come and join us as we celebrate the holiday season from 2 to 4 p.m. Sunday, December 3. The Victorian tea is a return to the "olden days," as many know the society held this event for a number of years in the past.

A variety of goodies will be available to sample, including cookies, snacks, coffee – and, of course, tea! Come and enjoy the festive decorations and musical selections played by members of the Augusta Symphony Orchestra. Anyone interested in decorating, serving, or bringing some tasty treats is asked to contact Executive Director Scott Wood, either by email at kennhis1891@gmail.com or by phone at 622-7718.

The event is open to the public. 



Guests enjoy the traditional KHS Victorian Tea in this photo from 2019. The research room was decorated and Christmas cookies served at the dining table.

Photo by Scott Wood

Around Kennebec County

CHINA

The **China Historical Society** plans a get-together of members and their guests from 3 to 5 p.m. December 9 at the home of Joan Ferrone, on Fire Road 48 in South China. Attendees will conduct a meeting, a cookie swap, and a show-and-tell of historical items pertaining to holidays of the past.

READFIELD

The **Readfield Historical Society** and the **Readfield Union Meeting House** are co-hosting “Christmas Through the Ages,” a December 9 walking tour through several Readfield homes, the Community Library, and the Meeting House. Each location will feature a costumed guide who will talk about a specific historical era and how Christmas was celebrated then, and each location will have period-appropriate decorations. Tickets cost \$15. To make reservations, call (412) 779-4368 or send email to readfieldhistorical@gmail.com.

VASSALBORO

The **Vassalboro Historical Society** has made much of

its archival material and photography available online for researchers, according to an article in the weekly *Town Line* newspaper. The items can be seen by consulting the society's website at vassalborohistoricalsociety.org. The society plans to continue expanding its online offerings.

WINTHROP

The **Winthrop Maine Historical Society** plans to participate on December 2 in the town of Winthrop's annual holiday parade, in which it will enter a float replicating some of the features used on Winthrop's bicentennial float in 1971. Santa Claus will be present that day at the Winthrop History and Heritage Center, at 107 Main Street. Float construction will take place November 30 at the center.

The society will host its third annual cookie walk, scheduled for 10 a.m. to 7 p.m. December 15 and 10 a.m., to 3 p.m. December 16 at the Winthrop History and Heritage Center. Proceeds from the event will be used to help support the center. Call the society at 395-5199 for details.



In Augusta, work continues on the 99 Western Avenue project. Top photos show a building that housed the University of Maine at Augusta in its 1960s Maine infancy, being torn down by Lajoie Bros. on July 18. Bottom left, the foundation is laid for the new housing project on September 10. Bottom right, the main building and elevator shaft are seen on November 13. The project is scheduled for completion in 2024.

Photos by Rich Eastman

Upcoming Programs

December: U.S. Chief Justice Melville Weston Fuller: Native of Augusta, Citizen of the World

Born in Augusta just a stone's throw from the Kennebec County Courthouse, Melville Weston Fuller (1833-1910) sprang from two prominent legal families and became, as U.S. Supreme Court chief justice, the most eminent jurist Maine has produced.

Yet he is little known today, and what he is remembered for – his now-controversial vote to uphold a defendant's conviction under a Louisiana segregation law in *Plessy v. Ferguson* – is unrepresentative of his judging and his attitudes toward the law and politics, according to author Douglas Rooks, author of a new biography about Fuller.

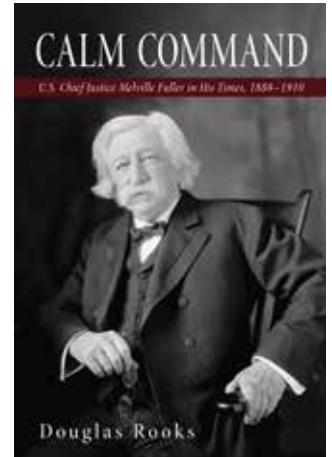
The career of Fuller, who served longer than all but two other U.S. chief justices, contains many surprises, some of which would put him firmly in today's progressive legal camp, according to Rooks, a journalist who writes a political column for the *Kennebec Journal* and the *Morning Sentinel*. Fuller's tenure on the court, from 1888 to 1910, marked momentous shifts in the national life, punctuated by the growth of huge corporations, labor strife, an imperialistic war, and the Fuller court's expansion of the federal judiciary's scope and influence.



Douglas Rooks

The KHS presentation by Rooks will feature excerpts from two chapters in *Calm Command: U.S. Chief Justice Melville Fuller in His Times* — his upbringing and early life in Augusta; and his work in European arbitration, with decisions crucial to the peaceful settlement of international disputes. Daniel Wathen, retired chief justice of the Maine Supreme Judicial Court, will provide an introduction.

The presentation is free to the public — donations are gladly accepted — and will take place at 6:30 p.m. Wednesday, December 6, at Le Club Calumet, located at 334 West River Road in Augusta. For details, call Scott Wood, executive director, at 622-7718.



Cover image courtesy of the author

January: Electric Railways Serving Augusta and Kennebec County, 1890s-1930s

The Kennebec Historical Society's online lecture for January is a lecture about the electric railway companies that served Augusta, along with photos of some of the trolley cars that provided public transportation in the capital city from the 1890s until service ended in 1932. There will also be photos of various destinations that passengers were attracted to in the Augusta area.

Beginning in 1902, and for nearly 20 years, 1 million to 2 million passengers or more were transported by trolley cars each year just in the Augusta, Winthrop, and Gardiner areas. During that time, trolleys were the principal means of local transportation to shopping, work, school, visiting family, and entertainment. Augusta was an important connection from Waterville in the north to Lewiston and beyond in the south. In 1917, 15.5 million passengers rode trolley cars on the Lewiston, Augusta & Waterville Street Railway.

The lecturer, Phil Morse, a Saco resident whose Maine roots go back to 1635, has been a member of the Seashore Trolley Museum in Kennebunkport for 33 years. A former museum trustee, president/CEO, and executive director, he currently is sponsoring the restoration of the *Narcissus*, a Portland-Lewiston Interurban car that is on the National Register of Historic Places. For Maine's statehood bicentennial, Morse, through his blog, released a short history of each electric railway that ever operated in Maine.

The presentation can be watched on Facebook Live at 6:30 p.m. Wednesday, January 17. 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.



From the KHS collection

Kennebec Historical Society, Inc.
PO Box 5582
Augusta, ME 04332-5582
Return 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) – \$25 ___ Family (annual) – \$40 ___ Senior (60+) (annual) – \$20 ___

Senior Family (annual) – \$30 ___ Student (full-time) (annual) – \$20 ___

Life (1 person) – \$250 ___ Life Family (2 people) – \$375 ___

Business (annual, fewer than 25 employees) – \$100 ___ Corporate (annual, 25 employees or more) – \$150 ___

Nonprofit group (annual) – \$50 ___ Donation (optional): \$ _____

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

Telephone: (207) 622-7718

Web site: www.kennebechistorical.org