

Kennebec Current

"You can look at this one woman's life and see how she impacted her family tree."
— Novelist Ariel Lawhon, speaking about 18th-century midwife Martha Ballard (see page 3)

Volume 34 Issue 1

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January–February 2024

Flood Jeopardizes Winslow-based Genealogy Group's Collection

The wind and rain that swept through Maine in mid-December hit Kennebec County especially hard. In Winslow, one victim of the storm and its accompanying flooding was the Taconnett Falls Genealogical Library.

Located on Lithgow Street along the Kennebec River, the basement of the library filled with floodwater. Board members reported the water nearly reached the ceiling, leaving destruction behind in the form of sodden, muddy, and broken furniture, donated items for their annual yard sale, and town registers. Some of the registers lost dated to the late 19th century. A large collection of old planting and canning books was lost, as were several boxes of older glassware.

In good news, Mary Boulette, of Waterville, librarian and secretary of the Maine Genealogical Society's Taconnet Falls Chapter, which runs the library, said the vast majority of research materials and documents belonging to the society are housed on the first floor and were undamaged. Bob Chenard, of Waterville,



Floodwater from the swollen Kennebec River surrounds buildings in late December on Lithgow Street in Winslow. The Taconnett Falls Genealogical Library's brick building, partly screened by trees in this aerial photo, can be seen just below the Winslow Congregational Church.

Photo by Adam Tudela

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Benefactor Proposes to Build Facility in Augusta for KHS

Robert G. Fuller Jr., a philanthropist and retired lawyer whose financial support has benefited the Kennebec Historical Society and many other Kennebec County institutions, is planning the construction of a 12,500-square-foot building in Augusta that could house nearly all of the society's current activities.

The building would be located on the northeast corner of State and Winthrop streets, on property where the YMCA stood throughout most of the 20th century.

Schematic designs prepared by Canal 5 Studio, a Portland architectural firm, depict a one-story structure with a climate-controlled basement large enough to accommodate the society's entire archive. The ground level would contain a lecture hall, an exhibition room, and a reading room for researchers.

Fuller, a former Winthrop resident who now lives in Potomac, Maryland, announced the project December 6 at Le Club Calumet in Augusta. He mentioned it near the conclusion of a KHS-sponsored lecture about a new book on his collateral ancestor Melville Fuller (1833-1910), an Augusta native who served as chief justice of the U.S. Supreme Court from 1888 until his death. The event drew more than 100 attendees, including Augusta Mayor Mark O'Brien and several other current and former local and state officials. Fuller explained that KHS has outgrown its current headquarters and needs a place to host lectures. He added that the society also is desperately seeking additional climate-controlled archive space for its collection.

The project still has several hurdles to overcome before reaching fruition. Plans drawn up by the building architect,



This vacant lot at the northeast corner of State and Winthrop streets in Augusta, seen from the Kennebec County Courthouse across the street, would be the location of a new Kennebec Historical Society building that longtime society benefactor Robert G. Fuller Jr. is planning.

Photo by Rich Eastman

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We're Maxed Out, but Why Not Add 3 Columns?



Editor's Note
Joseph Owen

The general feeling at a *Kennebec Current* staff meeting in December was that the publication desperately needs more talented volunteers to carry out its tasks.


At the same time, the gathering concluded that the *Current* also needs new features. As a result, starting with this issue, we are adding three locally produced columns:

- “Current Bookshelf” (see page 3), a column about the publication of new books – or republication of old ones – about the history, people, and communities of Kennebec County.
- “Current Updates” (page 6), providing more details about topics on which we have reported in the recent past.
- “Your Kennebec Roots” (page 7), a clearinghouse for queries and responses about local family research.

We welcome your suggestions about topics that could be explored in those columns, and we're still looking for those volunteers.

In the past four years, we have upgraded the design of the *Current*, converted to color photography, increased the size to 16 pages, resurrected the “Around Kennebec County” event listings, and introduced the “History Through a Keyhole” mystery photo feature.

We also convinced the Kennebec Historical Society's Board of Directors in 2022 to establish an account in the society's endowment that can help cover the cost of printing and mailing the *Current*. Thanks to dozens of donors, that account's balance is now more than \$13,200.

We hope you will find the changes introduced in this issue to be interesting and useful, and we look forward to your comments. 

KHS Welcomes the Following New Members

Ava Gross — Gardiner

Dana Murch — Belfast

Michael Jennings — East Winthrop

Pat Natzic — Auburn

David Russell and Susan McDermott —
Oakland

and continues to recognize ...

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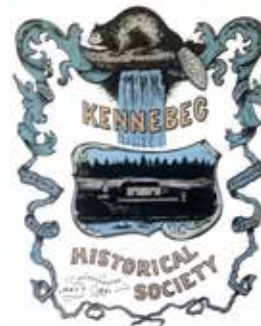
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Correction

Tennis tournament venue

The Kennebec Historical Society's fifth annual Kennebec Classic, held July 29, 2023, took place at only one location – the North Street Playground tennis courts in Waterville. An article in the November-December issue of the *Kennebec Current* reported incorrectly that an additional site also was used.



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

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Kennebec Current

Our 165th Issue

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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.

New Novel Breathes Life into Famed Midwife Martha Ballard

Current BOOKSHELF



As Ariel Lawhon sat in a waiting room in 2008, a devotional book caught her eye. Flipping through the book, her attention was captured by an entry about Martha Ballard, a midwife in the late 18th and early 19th centuries.

Ballard (1734-1812) lived and worked in what was then part of Hallowell, Massachusetts, and is now Augusta, Maine. At the time Lawhon was reading about Ballard, nearly two decades had passed since the midwife had emerged as a historical figure with the publication of Laurel Thatcher Ulrich's Pulitzer Prize-winning book, *A Midwife's Tale: The Life of Martha Ballard, 1785-1812, Based on Her Diary*. However, this was the first Lawhon had heard of Ballard, and the historical fiction author could sense a story waiting to be written.

In late 2023, this spark of inspiration emerged as a full-length novel, *The Frozen River*. Set in late 1789 and early 1790, Lawhon's book traces Ballard and her work as the community faces a murder mystery, a rape trial, and the ups and downs of daily life. Readers also learn about the Ballard family; those who enjoy a bit of romance with their history may find the marriage of Martha and Ephraim of particular interest.

The murder mystery at the center of the plot is fictional, though the victim is based on a real person. The trial of Joseph North really happened, and Ballard really was called as a witness.



Ariel Lawhon, author

Lawhon relied on her hard copy of Ballard's diary alongside *A Midwife's Tale* to build out much of the story and Martha's daily work.

"Ulrich was the biggest help. She provided the 30,000-foot (view) of what the overall society looked like. Martha's diary was the daily-ness of her life," Lawhon said in a telephone interview.

Other books provided details about plants Ballard would have used for healing, while *Taverns and Drinking in Early America* helped shape the environment of the tavern where many of the book's conversations take place. Lawhon even cooked recipes from Ian Knauer's cookbook *The Farm* to understand better the rustic meals Ballard and her daughters would have prepared.

A Tennessee resident, Lawhon never was able to visit the area where the book is set. COVID-19 scuttled her plans to travel to the Augusta area in 2020. So she relied heavily on Ulrich's book, and she spent ample time with the diary herself, reading it over the course of three years.

In her diary, Ballard doesn't delve into feelings or long descriptions, instead noting the weather and the bare facts of her day. Lawhon is nowhere nearly as spartan in her own writing, taking the reader deep into Ballard's thoughts, an insight that emphasizes Ballard's unique role in the community. As a midwife and a healer, she is a secret keeper in many ways. Though her role as confidante and her access to some of the most private moments of people's lives help drive the plot of the book, Lawhon certainly pulled from a true part of Ballard's experience here.

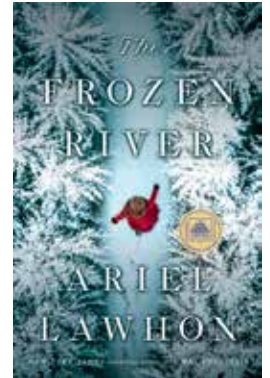
One of the most widespread secrets Ballard kept was that of children conceived out of wedlock. Lawhon cites that 4 in 10 first pregnancies involved single mothers, many of whom quickly married. "There were a lot of 9-pound 'premature' births," Lawhon said.

Yet Lawhon said she never sensed shame or judgment in her reading of the diary. When emotion is present, she said, "There's sadness. There's a lot of frustration around the North rape trial. She's heartbroken when a mother died of scarlet fever." Most of all, though, Lawhon said of Ballard, "she's really pragmatic." The pragmatism, too, comes through in *The Frozen River* as Ballard deftly handles numerous complicated situations – again, with the complicating factor of being a woman in 1789 – though we do see she's human, as Lawhon gives us glimpses of mistakes in judgment and flashes of temper.

Ballard's occupational status also sets her apart from other women during the time period. Importantly for the plot of *The Frozen River*, it means she can examine dead bodies as well as testify in court. In real life, her medical legacy carried on through the generations; famed Civil War nurse and American Red Cross founder Clara Barton (1821-1912) is Ballard's grand-niece.

"You can look at this one woman's life and see how she impacted her family tree," Lawhon said. Thankfully for historians, writers, and anyone with a passing interest in early New England life, Ballard's descendants recognized the importance of her diary and passed it down, until it was donated to the Maine State Library by her great-great-granddaughter – a doctor – in 1930.

The Frozen River is garnering national attention; in December it was chosen as *Good Morning America's* Book Club Pick. Lawhon appeared on the ABC television program to discuss the book and Ballard. After that appearance, word soon spread of the book in the Augusta area, and anecdotal reports tell of the book flying off the shelves at the local Barnes & Noble bookstore.



Book cover image courtesy of Doubleday

Turning 250 This Year, China Evolved from Many Parts

The town now known as China was formed and grew from the natural beauty which its residents and visitors still enjoy. This year marks the 250th anniversary of its founding.

China is surrounded by Winslow, Albion, Palermo, Windsor, and Vassalboro. It is made up of 31,904 acres of land, 5,056 acres of water, and 307 acres designated as bog or swamp. Larger water bodies are shared with neighbors: Branch Pond to the east, with Palermo; Three Mile Pond with Windsor, heading south; and China Lake, the heart of the town, with Vassalboro to the west. On the east, the West Branch of the Sheepscot River meanders through. The indigenous people knew China Lake well. Prior to 1773 the Kennebecs (aka Canibas) would have a seafood feast in Damariscotta and continue heading up the Sheepscot River to a spot about 2.5 miles from the lake. They portaged to its south end and paddled to Outlet Stream, which led to the Sebasticook River, then to the Kennebec.

Moses Greenleaf, in his 1829 tome, *A Survey of the State of Maine in Reference to its Geographic Features, Statistics, and Political Economy*, lists acreage granted from the Plymouth Company that eventually made up today's town. (This area was purchased from indigenous people between 1643 and 1666.) China is listed at 9,560 acres, and Harlem at 14,064. Parts of Harlem were annexed by Albion and Winslow, and China absorbed the rest.

In 1773 the Kennebec Purchasers enlisted the services of John “Black” Jones, a surveyor who previously had worked in Gardiner, and Abraham Burrell to plot the potential settlement into 200-acre lots. Jones Plantation came to be the following spring, in 1774. Settlers flocked to the large lake, and Burrell joined them. The 1790 Census recorded 39 heads of families, and a total of 244 people. People were moving beyond Twelve Mile Pond, so named as it was 12 miles from the settlement at Fort Western. Villages and other distinctive localities formed. Kennebec County was created by Massachusetts from Lincoln County in 1799, running north to Canada. There would be many reconfigurations of the county boundary up until 1907.



This reference to China appears in Japheth C. Washburn's 1824 hymnal.

From the KHS collection

Here we see the first official use of the name “China.” Japheth C. Washburn, an influential member of the Massachusetts Legislature, selected this name from a favorite hymn. The society has the hymn book he compiled in 1824, called *The Temple Harmony: Being a Collection of Sacred Music Containing a Variety of Psalm Tunes, Anthems, and Select Pieces*. Washburn came to China with his father in 1803-04 from Rochester, Massachusetts. He had six children by his first wife, Betsy, and four more by his second wife, Sarah. Those last four were born in China. Washburn had the first store in China Village, established in 1804, and he added a tavern in 1812 and a post office in 1818, both within his store.

- January 15, 1822: remainder of Harlem annexed (Many residents of both China and Harlem objected to this, but the Maine Legislature passed it anyway.)
- February 18, 1829: part set off to Vassalboro
- March 15, 1830: boundary between Palermo and China established (This was of some importance, as this also marked, in part, the line between Kennebec and Waldo counties. When looking at earlier maps, I found that this line never changed, and Branch Pond remains equally divided between China and Palermo.)
- March 13, 1839: boundary between Albion and China established

Mary Grow's thorough 1975 book *China, Maine: Bicentennial History* contains a diagram of these boundary changes. For surveyors and like-minded readers, Hill includes all the language of these resolves: lot numbers, headings and



The Archivist's Pen
Emily Schroeder

In 1796 Jones Plantation was incorporated as Harlem. Thus began a series of growth spurts. Details can be found in Henry F. Hill's *Kennebec County of Maine: Legislative Descriptions of Boundaries, with Set Offs and Acquisitions of Towns Within Said Boundaries*, compiled in 1971. The society has a manuscript and typewritten copies. Here's a summary:

- February 17, 1801: dividing line between Vassalboro and Harlem set
- February 23, 1813: parts of Winslow and Fairfax (now Albion) annexed to Harlem
- February 5, 1818: parts of Harlem, Albion and Winslow set off to form China

landmarks. In the instance of the county demarcation, I marvel that a beech tree on the north side “of a country road leading from Augusta to Belfast,” as described on page 4 of the China section of Hill’s book, was thought to be permanent enough to become part of the law.

Amid these changes, Bradstreet Wiggins drew up new plans of Harlem. One was the gore – a small, usually triangular strip of land between other surveyed parcels – which one can note on the right of Jones’ plan, extending on the east side with Palermo down to the Windsor line. The second was completed in 1814, of the entire town at that point. These plans are available through the Kennebec County Registry of Deeds.

China has four villages, all of which came into being early on. The insets with China’s map in Chace’s 1856 Kennebec County map show them quite clearly. They did have some common features. Each of them contained a source of water power and a confluence of roads and businesses, especially manufacturing. One could find stores, mills, hotels, taverns, and fraternal organizations.

China Village, at the lake’s north end, was a busy place by the 1830s. It had shoemakers, blacksmiths, hatters, and tailors. There were those who manufactured shingles, cabinets, chairs, and coffins; several brickyards were there as well. Alfred Marshall’s hotel was in business from 1827 to the 1850s and was continuously known as an inn or hotel until 1946. Washburn edited and published *The Orb*, a Democratic newspaper, from December 1833 to November 1836. The China Bank was in the village for a brief time, 1853-55. The Masons had a lodge beginning in 1823. By World War I, you could also find the Eastern Star, the Grand Army of the Republic, Patrons of Husbandry, the Women’s Christian Temperance Union, Modern Woodmen of America, and the China Lake Improvement Association. The last of these still exists, though a bit farther south.

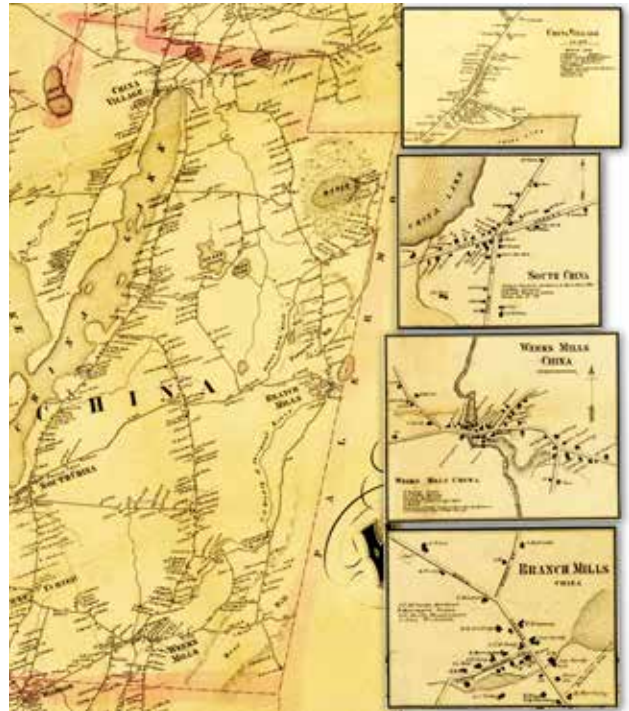
South China village had the first Patrons of Husbandry in the town, along with several general stores, a carriage maker, a blacksmith, a tavern, a hotel, and even a bowling alley. Canton Bank was there from 1855 to 1856, the GAR in 1884, and the Ancient Order of United Workmen arrived the next year.

Weeks Mills relied on the West Branch of the Sheepscot for its power. By 1807 it had a grist mill and sawmill, a blacksmith, a cobbler, a tannery, and a carriage shop. The Masons and the WCTU were there too. When the railroad came through in 1894, a hotel was available for traveling salesmen. Weeks Mills had its own brass band in the 1890s too. The village was named for Abner Weeks. Being curious about the fact that he was identified as a major, I checked Ancestry.com and found he had guarded the shore of his hometown, Falmouth, Massachusetts, from July 20 to Sept. 28, 1781 (*Massachusetts Soldiers and Sailors of the Revolutionary War*, Vol. 16, p. 789), hardly enough time to earn the rank of major. It seems his designation was granted out of respect for accomplishments in the village.

Branch Mills also used the West Branch of the Sheepscot, and it had three mill dams. The mills were fulling, carding, sawmill, shingle, lath and grist. There was a tannery, a coffin shop, and another branch of the Patrons of Husbandry.

The amount of activity in town was amazing. Mail was going from Vassalboro to China prior to 1810. Harlem postal service began in 1810 and was renamed South China by 1828. There were postal routes from Augusta to Bangor by 1812, and Augusta to Palermo in 1816. Weeks Mills had a post office by 1838. This was all supported by a busy stagecoach route, evidenced by the many stops depicted on Isaac Abbot’s 1832 plan of the stage route. A copy of this may be seen at the society.

Regrettably, I have only scratched the surface of China’s evolution. Many, many people were involved and worked hard to create this town out of a virtual wilderness. Details can be discovered in Henry D. Kingsbury’s *Illustrated History of Kennebec County, Maine* and, of course, in Grow’s magnificent book. If you find yourself curious about an aspect of China’s story, please get in touch, and we can learn together. I live about a mile south of South China Village and always want to know more about my adopted town. Until next time!



This map of China and inset maps of its villages are part of an 1856 wall map of Kennebec County.

From the KHS collection

Current FOLLOWUP

Group plans to aid homeless in former church

Advocates for the homeless have proposed to buy the former Green Street United Methodist Church building in Augusta and convert it into an overnight shelter for 40 people and 16 long-term residential units, according to a November 11 report in the *Kennebec Journal*.

The church congregation announced last March that it had decided to sell the property, which had housed the Methodist congregation since 1828 (*Kennebec Current*, March-April 2023).

The report said the group did not have money to start the project, but that it hopes to raise the amount necessary through donations and grants. The congregation has asked \$985,000 for the property, which includes 17,000 square feet of building space.

“The proposed facility would provide at least two meals a day and connections to services meant to help people leave homelessness behind,” the *Journal* report said.

Windsor ex-storekeeper dies at 100

Elin Hussey, 100, the former longtime owner of Hussey’s General Store in Windsor (*Kennebec Current*, July-August 2023), died December 9 at home in Windsor, according to his *Kennebec Journal* obituary.

Hussey was born in 1923, the same year in which his parents, Harlan and Mildred Hussey, opened the family store. He was a graduate of Erskine Academy and Colby College and served in the U.S. Navy during World War II. He spent the colder months in Hawaii for several decades, including last winter. Among his many pastimes, he did a lot of research about the history of his hometown, including compiling a roster of all Windsor residents who had served in the military in World War II.

His wife, Shirley Hussey, died in 2012. His survivors include three children, three grandchildren, and two great-grandchildren.

Broadcaster Roberts dies on Cape Cod

Don Roberts, the longtime “voice of the Cony Rams,” died November 12 in South Yarmouth, Massachusetts. He was 89.

Roberts, who did play-by-play radio reports of Augusta’s Cony High School football and basketball games for many years, won the Maine Sportscaster of the Year award in 1962, according to his *Kennebec Journal* obituary. He also was inducted into the Maine Sports Hall of Fame in 2017.

One highlight of his career was calling the Rams’ victory in the 1978 New England Championship basketball game. Eleven of the 14 living team members gathered in 2018 at the Kennebec Historical Society to commemorate the 40th anniversary of that championship game (*Kennebec Current*, March-April 2018). Roberts joined them and reenacted his broadcast of the game’s final seconds.

He also served on the Augusta City Council, wrote a newspaper column, and helped establish a local radio station, WABK. His survivors include his wife, Gabrielle; two daughters; and a grandson.

🌿 In Memoriam 🌿

Margaret Beedy, 89, an Augusta native and former Kennebec Historical Society member, died October 21 at a hospice facility in Rockport. She worked 22 years for Central Maine Power, from which she retired in 1991. Her survivors include a daughter.

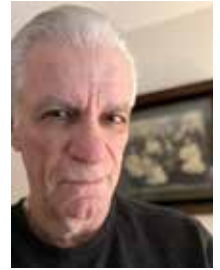
Kathleen Kirkham, 84, of Aubrey, Texas, a former Kennebec Historical Society treasurer and active KHS volunteer, died in December in Dallas, Texas. Kirkham, a native of Sharon, Connecticut, was the society’s treasurer from 2013 to 2017 and managed the society’s retail sales. She also helped her husband, Bruce, a longtime KHS vice president and archivist, conduct the society’s fundraising book sales for many years. She had been a KHS life member since 2007 and a member since 2001, shortly after the Kirkhams moved to Maine from Muncie, Indiana, and began their two decades of retirement in Augusta.



KHS Introduces Genealogy Column



Welcome, fellow genealogists, society members, and historians of Kennebec County. As the editor's note on page 2 of this issue reports, we are restoring a long-requested feature to the *Kennebec Current* that we hope will draw your support for future issues.



Rich Eastman

Each publication of "Your Kennebec Roots" will inform those interested in Kennebec County families about research opportunities in the region, local and state institutions where material may be found, and, of course, the vast genealogical resources within the society's headquarters building at 107 Winthrop Street in Augusta. Whether you're a novice researcher or a seasoned veteran of family research, we can help you on your journey. Because of staffing limitations, we are unable to do the searching for you; but if you come into the building during research hours, we can get you started. If you don't have access to a computer, we can get you signed into one that has access to many online genealogy sites, including Ancestry.com.

The society is open for research 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Tuesday through Thursday or by appointment. Appointments are highly encouraged. Either way, call first at (207) 622-7718 and speak to Scott Wood or Emily Schroeder.

We also will be seeking your genealogy queries about some of those difficult "walls" you may have run into, or questions regarding personal stories of your ancestors that others in the KHS membership might be able to help answer. If you have any queries to submit, please keep them relevant to Kennebec County and as brief as possible. Submit them with your name and the method by which you wish to be contacted. We will publish your queries in upcoming issues. Feel free to submit as many queries as you wish. Total queries for any one issue will be limited to space available, and leftover queries will run in a future issue.

You may submit your queries by mail to Your Kennebec Roots, c/o Kennebec Historical Society, P.O. Box 5582, Augusta, ME 04332-5582; or email them to Rich Eastman at reastman1952@gmail.com.

HERRICK/TRIPP: Carroll Herrick, was born October 24, 1900, in Augusta. He had lived in New Bedford and Fairhaven, Massachusetts, and married Elsie Tripp. Both are buried with her parents in Maple Grove Cemetery in Westport, Massachusetts. He died in March 1968. They had a daughter, my cousin, Diane Herrick, born in 1929. I've been trying to find her for years. I would appreciate any clues. Email me, Emily Schroeder, at buffywg@yahoo.com



Groups Weigh Arnold March Events as Revolution Milestone Nears

Now that the new year has turned the page, the country will begin to see more and more activities related to the 250th anniversary of the Revolutionary War. Some of these events have already been commemorated. The 250-year observances of the Boston Massacre (1770) and the Boston Tea Party (1773) drew solid crowds and demonstrated that love of history still resounds.

Late next year, some of this attention will shift to the central Kennebec Valley. In the late summer and early fall of 1775, and in the wake of events in Lexington and Concord, another group of patriots was making a move. While local patriot leader Reuben Colburn worked to organize supplies and build a small fleet of boats, Col. Benedict Arnold plotted part of an expedition to bring Canada into the patriot side of the struggle. The epic march to Quebec through the Maine wilderness and the failed effort to take that fortified British-held settlement in battle would make Arnold and his men legends.

Here in our part of the Pine Tree state, both Old Fort Western and the Arnold Expedition Historical Society are in preliminary stages of marking this early story in the war. According to Linda Novak, director of Old Fort Western, one of the plans is to recreate the "great feast" that was held at the fort before Arnold's forces departed upriver. The fort was a main staging area for the expedition in 1775.

The AEHS website (arnoldsmarch.org) mentions that it has formed a 250th anniversary committee for planning. One of the activities it is pondering is working with communities along the march route to establish educational tools, including replica bateaux, that could be gifted to those towns to further study this important part of the War for Independence. The group also hopes to work in conjunction with the state to develop ways to mark this story, and it is developing plans for at least a partial reenactment of the march. In 1975, for the nation's bicentennial, it organized a similar event.

Nearly two years out, these and other groups are exploring many ideas to help remember the sacrifice this hardy group of soldiers made in 1775.



– by Mike Bell

Currier Left His Mark as Hallowell's Renaissance Man



Alexander C. Currier

From the KHS collection

Alexander C. Currier is best remembered for his design of the Hubbard Free Library in Hallowell. This distinctive High Victorian Gothic granite building is Maine's first purpose-built library. Constructed in three stages between 1878 and 1897, it is a Kennebec Valley landmark.

Alexander Curtis Currier was born in Readfield on April 16, 1831, the son of Samuel and Eunice Jane Mace Currier. A New Hampshire native, Samuel Currier settled in Readfield, where he farmed, operated a tavern, and manufactured shoes. When his son was 8, the family moved to Hallowell, where his father bought a 100-acre farm to raise horses and cattle. In 1842 Samuel Currier opened the Steamboat Hotel, which included a livery stable, on Water Street. The hotel served as the ticketing agency for a steamship line between Hallowell and Boston.

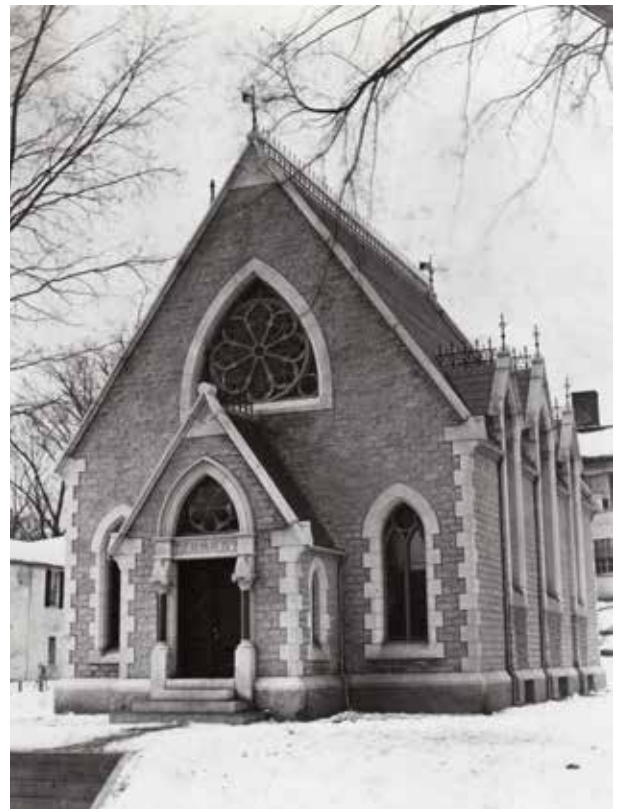
Largely self-educated, Alexander Currier inherited his father's entrepreneurial spirit. At the age of 20 in 1851, he edited and published *The Northern Light*, a Hallowell literary newspaper. After six months, he sold his interest in the paper to his partners for \$1,000 and repaid his father the money he had borrowed to help start the business.

Alexander Currier next tried the law, studying in 1852 with Hallowell attorney A.G. Stinchfield. When that did not suit him, he turned to ship carving. From 1853 to 1856, he worked with carvers Allen Drew in Hallowell, Richard Mace Jr. in Richmond, Charles A.L. Sampson in Bath, and William Southworth and Emery Jones in Newcastle. From 1857 to 1859, he partnered with Mace to make carvings for vessels in Washington County and New Brunswick. Based in Eastport, the firm of Mace and Currier served shipyards in Dennysville, Eastport, Lubec, Pembroke, and Perry in Maine; and Chamcook and Grand Manan in New Brunswick.

While ship carving remained Currier's principal occupation through 1865, he undertook a project related to the Civil War. In 1862 he invented and patented a revolving shot-proof dome for use on naval vessels and land fortifications. In skillfully drafted presentation drawings, Currier illustrated a device that resembled a circular monitor on a gunboat. To promote the shot-proof dome for military use, he spent May and June of 1862 in Washington, D.C., meeting with Army and Navy officials. The following year the Maine Legislature endorsed his invention, and he sought an appointment in the U.S. Navy to develop the project.

When these efforts failed, Currier accepted employment as a draftsman for the Southwark Foundry and Machine Company in Philadelphia. Established by Samuel Vaughan Merrick, of Hallowell, in 1836, the foundry was one of America's leading plants for manufacturing heavy machinery. Currier gained valuable drafting and managerial experience working for Southwark in 1863 and 1864.

In 1864 Alexander Currier returned to Hallowell to resume his trade as a ship carver. Over the next two years, he worked with Hallowell carver Allen Drew and for shipbuilders T.J. Southard & Son in Richmond. From 1866 to 1869, Currier operated a monument works in Hallowell. In 1869 he joined with William Hogan of Bath to create Hallowell's Civil War monument. While Hogan planned the obelisk of Hallowell granite, Currier designed the shield on its base. This impressive tribute to those Hallowell men who participated in the war graces the entrance to the local cemetery.

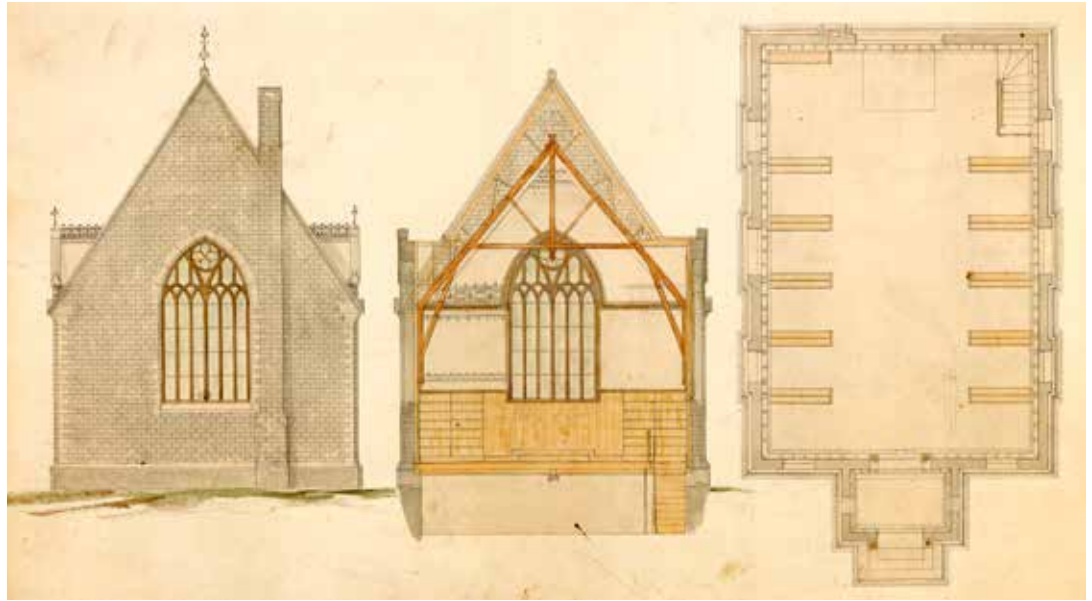


This image of the Hubbard Free Library was taken shortly after the building opened in 1880.

From the KHS collection

Drawing upon his experience at the Southwark Foundry, Alexander Currier served as superintendent of the Ames Manufacturing Company in Chicopee, Massachusetts, from 1870 to 1872. This company was a major manufacturer of armaments, tools, and cutlery as well as an iron and bronze foundry. Currier's stay in Chicopee was brief, for a new opportunity in Maine brought him back to Hallowell.

In 1872 Joseph R. Bodwell offered Currier the position of architect of the Hallowell Granite



One of Currier's design sketches of the Hubbard Free Library in Hallowell.

Courtesy of the Hubbard Free Library

Company. For the next 20 years, Currier worked as the in-house architect to interpret the architectural drawings sent to the company in connection with orders to cut and carve granite. In this capacity, he directed the preparation of granite for such important structures as the New York State Capitol in Albany and the Tribune Building in New York City. He also drew plans for monuments, mausoleums, and buildings made of Hallowell granite.

During his two decades with the Hallowell Granite Company, Currier served as the architect for several notable projects. In 1878 he designed the first section of the Hubbard Free Library, then known as the Hallowell Social Library. Using local granite donated by Bodwell, the building was constructed in the High Victorian Gothic style. When dedicated on March 9, 1880, it became Maine's first purpose-built library. The library building was recorded in 1971 in the Historic American Buildings Survey.

In 1882 the Hallowell library caught the attention of former Gov. Israel Washburn Jr., who wrote to his brother Elihu that the building would be a suitable model for a Washburn library at Norlands, the family estate in Livermore. With his family's support, Israel Washburn secured the services of the Hallowell Granite Company and its architect to replicate Hallowell's library in Livermore. The Washburn Library was constructed in 1883 and dedicated in 1885.

Other projects by Currier included designs for a granite lumberman's monument in 1885 and the Portland Soldiers and Sailors Monument in 1886, both unbuilt. He supervised the construction of a Canadian cotton mill in 1873 and planned the remodeling of the Universalist Church in Hallowell – on the southeast corner of Second and Central streets – in 1886; and Hallowell High School in 1890. These two local designs reflected popular architectural styles of the period – Queen Anne for the church and Romanesque Revival for the school. Both buildings still exist, but they have been altered greatly since Currier's time.

Toward the end of his life, Currier acquired the Charles Dummer House on Second Street in Hallowell. He remodeled that handsome Federal-style residence by adding compatible Colonial Revival features. There he spent his last days with his wife, Louisa, and his son, Alger, a successful artist. Alger Currier eventually would inherit the property. Today the house no longer exists.

Alexander Currier died in Hallowell on April 14, 1892, two days before his 61st birthday. In a letter of recommendation written to Secretary of the Navy Gideon Wells on May 27, 1863, Congressman James G. Blaine captured the essence of Currier's life: "Mr. Currier has the ability, the integrity, and the experience to enable him to fill the position most creditably."

The author, Hallowell resident Earle G. Shettleworth Jr., is Maine's state historian and the former director of the Maine Historic Preservation Commission. He is a member of the Hubbard Free Library Board of Trustees.

Taconnett Library Flood

Continued from page 1

the society's vice president, confirmed that, saying, "The first floor is pretty well protected."

However, concern remains about the lingering effects of flooding and moisture, such as the possibility of mold and mildew affecting first-floor holdings, or potentially destructive damage to the building as a whole.

The responsibility for basement cleanup so far has fallen largely to the board members, all of whom are in their 70s and 80s. In late December, these volunteers were joined by four young men from the Church of Latter-Day Saints in Skowhegan who had learned of the society's situation via Facebook. Barbara Warren, of Benton, a member of both the Kennebec Historical Society and Taconnett boards, noted that their help was instrumental in getting larger items out of the basement and into dumpsters. The group has filled two medium-sized dumpsters with debris, but the cleanup and repair from the flooding still have a long way to go.


In early January, KHS posted a message on a statewide Listserv, notifying other cultural and historical organizations about the Taconnett society's need for information about available resources or funding for mitigation.

Among the problems that volunteers are trying to address is the damaged boiler. "The smell from the fuel oil fumes from the flooded boiler was almost unbearable," said Warren, who has helped with the cleanup efforts.

The library remains without heat. It also remains without electricity, and there is no certain timeline for repairs or reopening. The town of Winslow owns the building, and the Taconnett Falls Genealogical Society leases it from the town. Board members didn't have an assessment of the cost of damage to the building, but they said the items in the basement were worth at least a few thousand dollars. The society is insured for the contents of the first floor.

"We have quite a remarkable collection of things that other people don't have. We have a lot of private collections and family histories," Boulette said. According to the group's website, that adds up to 360 linear feet of genealogical books and records.

Though the society members are used to having their eyes on the past, they're shifting that focus in the wake of the flood. According to Boulette, the main question now is, "What's our next move and what does the future look like staying there?"

For more information about the Taconnett Falls Genealogical Library, visit: <https://maineroots.org/chapters/taconnett-falls-genealogical-society> or find the group on Facebook by searching for "Taconnett Falls Genealogical Society." 

— by Jamie Logan



Yard sale goods and other items lie in a jumbled heap in December after floodwater receded in the basement of the Taconnett Falls Genealogical Library in Winslow.

Photo by Fred Clark

Samantha Smith Memorabilia Become Part of Traveling Exhibition

Nearly four decades after her death, Manchester's famed child peace advocate Samantha Smith has become a major element of a Cold War museum exhibition that is touring the planet.

The Maine State Museum has contributed several Smith-related items to the exhibition, "The Berlin Wall: A World Divided," which held its debut in November at Fundación Canal, an underground cultural center in Madrid, Spain, according to the museum's website.

As a 10-year old in 1982, Smith wrote to Soviet leader Yuri Andropov, appealing for peace. Andropov invited her and her parents to tour the Soviet Union. The museum's collection includes objects and photographs related to that visit.

A Spanish company, Musealia, worked with the Berlin Wall Foundation (www.stiftung-berliner-mauer.de/en) to create the exhibition. The museum has lent the organizers several Smith-related items – including her Artek camp uniform, Andropov's gift of a Fedokino lacquer box, and photographs – to become part of 300 artifacts that represent the Cold War before and after the Berlin Wall's fall in 1989.

Smith died in a 1985 plane crash in Auburn that also killed her father, Arthur Smith.

From Madrid, "The Berlin Wall: A World Divided" is scheduled to travel to 14 other cities around the world. 

— by Joseph Owen

Robert Fuller Honored with Two Awards



Robert Fuller, at left, is joined by author Douglas Rooks as Fuller accepts Le Club Calumet's 2022 Outstanding Citizen award.

Photo by Joseph Owen

The Kennebec Historical Society and Le Club Calumet each presented awards on December 6 to philanthropist Robert G. Fuller Jr., a former Winthrop resident who now lives in Maryland. The awards were presented before the society's monthly program, "U.S. Chief Justice Melville Weston Fuller: Native of Augusta, Citizen of the World," a talk given by author Douglas Rooks at Le Club Calumet in front of an audience of about 110 people.

The society gave its award in recognition of Fuller's contributions to preserving local Kennebec County history. Rooks recited the inscription on the plaque and handed it to Fuller on the society's behalf.

The second honor, Le Club Calumet's 2022 Outstanding Citizen Award, was presented by a past club president, Lisa Newell. Another past president, Patrick Boucher; club member Gerard LaPierre; and current President Mike Bechard joined her for the presentation.

Fuller graduated from Princeton University and the University of Pennsylvania Law School. He was admitted to the Maine Bar in 1964 and later practiced law in the U.S. District Court.

"Bob is a philanthropist and has had a long history of contributing to numerous causes in Augusta," Newell said. "These have included, but are not limited to, MaineGeneral Medical Center, Kennebec Valley YMCA, Lithgow Public Library, Old Fort Western, and Kennebec Historical Society."

She continued, "In 2021 Bob provided a sizeable donation to the Cony (High School) athletic field, now called the 'Fuller Athletic Field.' In Bob's own words to the news media, 'I believe that when a high school has continuing history of athletic success, it fosters a sense of community pride. It rubs off. When this pride is evident, it becomes easier to attract people who'll add value – doctors, teachers, artists, entrepreneurs – and who'll choose to stay around.'"

Newell spoke about Fuller's endowment of a scholarship fund that is administered by Le Club Calumet Education Foundation, whose mission is to help Augusta-area high school seniors pursue their postsecondary education.

After the two presentations, Rooks spoke about his new book, *Calm Command: U.S. Chief Justice Melville Fuller in His Times, 1888-1910*. Robert Fuller is a collateral descendant of Melville Fuller.



– by Scott Wood

Proposed New KHS Facility

Continued from page 1

the landscape architect, and the engineer must undergo a review by the Augusta Planning Board. The KHS Board of Directors wrote a letter in June 2023 for Fuller to present eventually to the Planning Board, saying that the KHS board supports the concept and urges the city to approve it; but the society's board has not weighed in yet on the latest version of the proposal, which has continued to evolve.

Financing is a major challenge. When Fuller's plan first coalesced around the notion that he would commission and fund the building and then give it to KHS, Fuller expected to cover the cost completely. Inflation in construction costs has boosted the project's price tag significantly, however, so he now plans to seek contributions from other sources to make up the difference.

The KHS board became interested when Fuller told them that the project also includes an endowment that he would contribute to cover the building's operating expenses. Each year KHS seeks donations to its Moira H. Fuller Annual Fund, which supplies the society with most of the revenue necessary to support the current headquarters' operating costs. The board recognized the impossibility of burdening its fundraising volunteers with the additional task of raising money for the proposed building, so it found Fuller's proposal attractive. Details of the endowment part of Fuller's plan have not been finalized. The board expects to consult periodically with the building architect and Fuller about the State Street project's progress.

The society has not determined yet what the future of its current 107 Winthrop Street headquarters, the Henry Weld Fuller Jr. House, would be if the State Street project were to become a reality. KHS bought that 13-room house in 2007, moved into it in 2008, made several major upgrades to it, and paid off its mortgage on the building in 2012.



– by Joseph Owen

Sister's Gesture Honors 19th-century Augusta Mayor

The fearsome face shown in the November–December issue of the *Kennebec Current* is part of the design of a watering trough donated to the city of Augusta in memory of Daniel A. Cony, a local businessman and one-term mayor.



History Through
a Keyhole #10

Cony died July 23, 1892, at age 55 after suffering from heart disease, according to a *Daily Kennebec Journal* newspaper report of his death.

Five years later, his brother-in-law Joseph Homan Manley told the city government of a wish of his late wife, Susan Hannah (Cony) Manley, to see the trough erected in honor of her brother. It would replace an old wooden trough that occupied a spot on the northeast corner of Cony and Stone streets, on the south side of the current Cony Flatiron Building.

City officials granted permission to Manley to install the trough under city supervision.



A horse-watering trough commemorating Daniel A. Cony stands on the north side of the Cony Flatiron apartment building on Cony Street in Augusta, just east of where the street intersects with Cony Circle.

Photo by Rich Eastman

He served several elective terms in Augusta city government and a single one-year term as mayor, winning election to that post in 1875. He also was on the boards of Kennebec Light & Heat and the Augusta Water Co.

In the later winter and spring of 1892, Cony became “very ill with acute heart trouble,” the *Journal* reported, but he rallied with the arrival of summer. Then he died unexpectedly at his Myrtle Street home, leaving his wife, Mary (Jones) Cony, and daughter Elizabeth and son Bowdoin, both teenagers, as survivors.

The watering trough was useful to the public for its first few decades, but then the arrival of automobiles in the early 20th century rendered it essentially obsolete.

Answer to Keyhole #10

Q: What is this?

A: The Daniel A. Cony watering trough

Q: Where is it?

A: Beside the Cony Flatiron Building in Augusta

Q: What's historic about it?

A: It commemorates former Augusta mayor, banker, and businessman Daniel A. Cony (1837-1892).



The trough was moved years later to the north side of the building, which once was the home of Augusta's Cony High School, and it remains there today.

Daniel A. Cony's trough has stood for more than a century and a quarter next to the Flatiron Building, but he played no role in the founding of the school. Instead, its primary benefactor was his great-great-uncle, also named Daniel Cony, who was a Revolutionary War veteran, medical doctor, judge, and legislator. The younger Cony was the son of Samuel Cony (1811-1870), a lawyer and longtime Augusta resident who was Maine's governor during the latter half of the Civil War.

Daniel Albert Cony worked in his youth as a bookkeeper and clerk for what eventually became the Augusta Lumber Company. He later worked at a grocery business, Chisam, Robinson & Co., which stood at the intersection of Cony and Bangor streets, within eyesight of the watering trough's current location. Cony eventually took over the business with his brother Fred, and it became Daniel A. Cony & Co. He also became president of First National Bank, taking over that position from his father, who had held it until his death. Cony was in the granary business as well. He owned three farms at the time of his death.

History Through a Keyhole — Puzzle 11

Readers apparently thought the ghoulish face shown in our last clue was too hostile to merit a response. They stayed away in droves, submitting no guesses whatsoever. Even so, we continue to flout a bit of folklore wisdom that often is misattributed to Albert Einstein: “Insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results.”

The photo at right, showing a wooden structure, is the latest 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 the historic significance of the property 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 March–April issue of the *Kennebec Current*. Answers are due by February 29. Good luck.



KHS’ Fuller, Nash Campaigns Achieve 2nd-largest Totals in 2023

The Kennebec Historical Society’s 16th Moira H. Fuller Annual Fund campaign drew \$81,656 in donations in 2023, the second-biggest total ever.

The only year in which donors provided more money in response to the campaign was 2022, when longtime KHS supporter Robert G. Fuller Jr. matched most individual donors’ campaign gifts, dollar for dollar. The society collected \$89,696 for the campaign that year.

The annual fund was named in 2008 after Fuller’s wife at the request of the late Augusta philanthropist Elsie Viles, who also supported the society financially.

The total number of donations to the 2023 Fuller campaign was 157.

Proceeds from the Fuller Fund campaign, conducted annually since 2008, are used to finance day-to-day expenses at the society’s headquarters at 107 Winthrop Street in Augusta, including payroll, heat, utilities, bookkeeping, groundskeeping, printing, postage, and office supplies. In 2023, donations to the campaign represented most of the society’s income.

Also, the 16th annual Charles Nash Fund fall campaign, which helps pay for acquiring and preserving historical items for the society’s collection, received a total of \$5,315, the second-largest annual total for that fund. The only year in which KHS received more for the Nash fund was 2021, when it reached a \$6,610.

The total number of donations to the 2023 Nash campaign was 72, eight more it received in 2022.

The Nash fund is named for Charles E. Nash, a publisher, historian, and Augusta mayor who was among the Kennebec Historical Society’s founders.

Finally, the society ended its first full year of soliciting donations to an endowment account that is intended to support the production and mailing of the *Kennebec Current*. Thirty-four donors provided a total of \$8,630 for that purpose. In 2022, when the endowment account was established, the society received a single \$3,500 gift as the first donation.

Receipts for all three funds in 2023 total \$95, 601, about \$2,400 less than the overall 2022 total.



Around Kennebec County

VASSALBORO

The **Vassalboro Historical Society** is hosting a historical objects show-and-tell session from 3 to 5 p.m. January 21 at the society's museum at 327 Main Street (Route 32) in East Vassalboro.

WATERVILLE

The **Waterville Historical Society** ended two-and-a-half years of isolation and upgrading October 13 by reopening its Redington Museum to the public. The museum is open Saturdays from 2 to 6 p.m. It is located at 62 Silver Street in Waterville. Admission costs \$5 for visitors 18 and over. Children under 18 are admitted free when accompanying an adult. Part of the museum's second floor still is undergoing renovation, but it is expected to be finished later this year.

WINSLOW

The **Taconnett Falls Genealogical Library** on Lithgow Street, which usually closes for the colder months and reopens in late

March or early April, faces uncertainty about its 2024 schedule because of severe flooding on the Kennebec River (see story on page 1) that filled the basement of the town-owned building in which the library is located. Members have cleared out the basement and removed the water, but the building now has no heat, no power, and no running water, according to Fred Clark, president of the Taconnett Falls Chapter of the Maine Genealogical Society, which runs the library. The group still is working to solve those problems.

WINTHROP

The **Winthrop Maine Historical Society** is selling See's Candies as a fundraiser to help support the society's day-to-day operations and to help pay off the mortgage on its headquarters building, according to Jen Phillips, the group's events coordinator. Buyers can purchase the candy online through the society's Facebook page or at its Winthrop History and Heritage Center, which is at 107 Main Street. The center is open 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Thursdays and 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Saturdays.

LaVerdiere Takes KHS Board Seat



The Kennebec Historical Society appointed Josh LaVerdiere, 35, of China, to a board seat in late 2023. LaVerdiere, a lifelong Kennebec Valley resident, is a real estate broker for Sprague and Curtis Real Estate in Augusta. He has been selling real estate for more than a decade and is a recent graduate of the Kennebec Leadership Institute, the state's oldest leadership program.

Outside of his full-time career, LaVerdiere and his wife, Hannah, operate a small farm in China, where they raise cattle, sheep, chickens, geese, and bees. Their two small children are active with school, sports, and outdoor activities.

LaVerdiere said he has been interested in both local and world history for as long as he can remember. He leads the society's Building and Grounds Committee.



Annual Winter Book Sale to Return This February

The Kennebec Historical Society has a significant number of books left over from last year's book sale, so to make room for incoming 2024 donations, KHS is clearing out its inventory of used books and DVDs, many of which are in pristine, like-new condition.

The indoor book sale will take place at the society's headquarters throughout the month of February during its open hours Tuesday through Thursday from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m.

Shoppers looking for winter reading material or early holiday gifts are asked to come in the front door of the society's headquarters, the Henry Weld Fuller Jr. House, and browse through an organized maze of used books. There will be tables of books in almost every room on the first floor. All books and DVDs cost only \$1. All proceeds will help cover the society's operating costs. During the final days of the sale, no reasonable offer will be refused and extraordinary deals will be available.

If you have questions about the book sale, please call Executive Director Scott Wood at (207) 622-7718.



Upcoming Programs

February: “Through the Eyes of Maine”

The book *Through the Eyes of Maine* is a work 166 years in the making.

In the northernmost corner of what was fast becoming a fractured nation, diarist Hilton W. True, of Gardiner, began keeping a journal in 1857. When civil strife began to divide our nation in late 1859, he recorded it. In his entry of December 2, he noted the execution of John Brown, the most polarizing figure of the Antebellum Era. Following this cataclysmic event, civil war became inevitable.

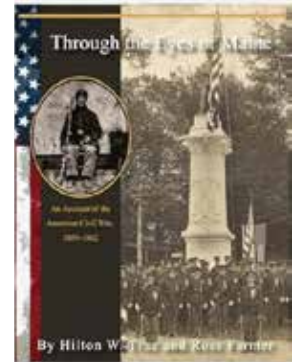
Beginning with the Confederate attack on Fort Sumter, True wrote about the events that helped define the first 18 months of the American Civil War, concluding with an account of the Battle of Antietam, in which his family suffered a deep personal loss.

Discovered in 2018 by historian Ross Farmer, the Kennebec Historical Society’s online lecturer for February, this account features details on key battles and important figures who helped shape the most contentious period in our nation’s history. Farmer, based on True’s recollections, offers a 21st-century discernment of this primary source.

The illustrated book offers a summary of events that led to disunion and war between the states. Throughout the journal, familiar names such as Abraham Lincoln and Robert E. Lee, along with lesser-known figures such as Galusha Grow and Alexander Shaler, flow together with accounts of battles. It also delves into topics such as transportation, communication, music, patriotic fervor, national symbols, the press, and the meaning of life and death. *Through the Eyes of Maine* concludes with an overview of Maine’s contributions to the cause of Union and a biographical sketch of True.

Farmer is a history teacher in the Belle Vernon Area School District near Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. The book, his first published work, is available on Amazon.com in paperback and hardback editions.

Farmer’s presentation about his book can be watched on Facebook Live at 6:30 p.m. on February 21. 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.



March: “Maine’s Most Endangered Historic Places”

When Maine Preservation released its annual list of 10 of the state’s Most Endangered Historic Places last October, the organization included a well-known Kennebec County landmark on it – the Colburn House State Historic Site, located in Pittston.

The state-owned site was the home of early colonist Maj. Reuben Colburn, who in 1775 coordinated the construction of the bateaux that carried Col. Benedict Arnold and his men up the Kennebec River so they could attack the British at Quebec during the first year of the American Revolution.

The Kennebec Historical Society’s speaker for March, Brad Miller, preservation manager at the Yarmouth-based nonprofit, plans to explain in a PowerPoint lecture how Maine Preservation compiles its list, which he described as a way “to boost local efforts and focus positive media attention with an aim to preserve threatened places throughout the state.”

The 2023 list also includes historic farmhouses, outbuildings, and a cemetery on state-owned Swan Island, located in the Kennebec River between Richmond and Dresden. Regular ferry service to the island ended last year.

Miller holds a bachelor’s degree in history from Gettysburg college in Pennsylvania and a master’s degree in public history from Middle Tennessee State University. Before arriving recently at Maine Preservation, he worked five years for Indiana Landmarks, the country’s largest statewide, historic preservation nonprofit organization. Earlier, he worked with the Somerville, Massachusetts, Historic Preservation Commission and the Tennessee Civil War National Heritage Area.

Miller’s lecture is scheduled for 6:30 p.m. March 13 – the second Wednesday of the month, instead of the usual third Wednesday – on Facebook Live. 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.



The Reuben Colburn House in Pittston
Photo courtesy of Maine Preservation

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

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