

Kennebec Current

"Let me say no danger and no hardship ever makes me wish to get back to that college life again." — *Joshua Chamberlain* (see story below)

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Albion Festivities Mark 200 Years of Stable Identity

During the half-century after the American Revolution, a longtime resident of one Kennebec Valley community could have told strangers truthfully at various times that he lived in Hancock, Freetown, Fairfax, or Lygonia – without ever moving.

That's because the community had each of those names in relatively rapid succession until, in 1824, it finally settled on the name it bears today – Albion.

The multiple name changes help explain why, instead of celebrating an anniversary of the town's founding or incorporation, Albion residents orient themselves to the time when the town changed its name for the last time, exactly 200 years ago, ushering in the stabilization of its identity.

As a result, Albion, Kennebec County's easternmost town, celebrated its renaming bicentennial on July 27 under a bluebird sky with hundreds of visitors in attendance. Kicked off with a Bessey School alumni breakfast, the day featured a parade led by Maine's 195th Army National Guard Band and featuring Donna Bessey, at 95 the town's oldest resident and recipient of Albion's Boston Post cane, riding in a 1929 Ford Model A Roadster. Elsewhere, historical items were on display in the Bessey Building, including the contents of the town's sesquicentennial time capsule, placed in 1974; and visitors toured the restored Wiscasset, Waterville, & Farmington narrow-gauge railroad station (see page 6) and a nearby blacksmith shop.

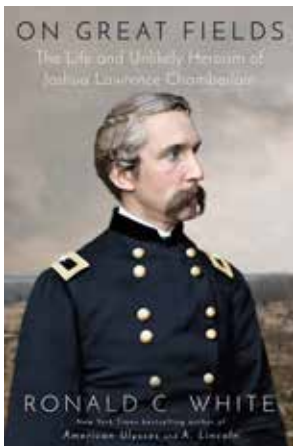


Donna Bessey, 95, Albion's oldest resident, rides as a passenger in a 1929 Ford Model A on Main Street as part of a parade celebrating the 200th anniversary of Albion's adoption of its name.

Photo by Rich Eastman

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New Chamberlain Biography Probes Civil War Hero's Origins



To most Americans, Joshua Chamberlain, if they know about him at all, is frozen in time as the Union Army colonel who commanded the 20th Maine Regiment when it repelled a Confederate attack on July 2, 1863, during the Battle of Gettysburg. They might also recall the siege of Petersburg, where he suffered extensive abdominal wounds that were believed at the time – incorrectly – to be fatal.

Mainers might associate him with those Civil War events, too, but also with his many years in Brunswick, where he graduated from Bowdoin College and later was its president; and in Brewer, where he was born and raised. Residents of the Kennebec Valley might recall further that Chamberlain lived among them for four years as governor, then returned to Augusta as commander of the state militia to keep the peace when an 1879 election scandal nearly resulted in open warfare at the Capitol building.

All of these events are undeniably major elements of the Chamberlain story, but award-winning historian Ronald C. White Jr. concluded that biographers had paid too little attention to the experiences that helped make Chamberlain (1828-1914) the man who he became, and to the many disappointments and challenges of his final decades.

As a result, White, already the author of best-selling biographies of Abraham Lincoln and Ulysses S. Grant, researched and wrote a book to fill in those gaps. The book, *On Great Fields: The Life and Unlikely Heroism of Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain*, was published by Random House in late 2023. White, a California resident, spent a few weeks in Maine in August on what was supposed to be a vacation with his wife, Cynthia; but he admitted to testing her patience by shoehorning

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Finally, This Publication Gets Its Own Home



Editor's Note
Joseph Owen

The *Kennebec Current* took another baby step toward partial autonomy last spring when its parent organization, the Kennebec Historical Society, set aside an office for it on the first floor of the society's headquarters, the Henry Weld Fuller Jr. House, in Augusta. The *Current* staff is grateful for the space.

This development comes on the heels of several others in the past three years at the *Current*, including an expansion to 16 pages, (and now, at least for this issue, 20), the addition of several new regular columns, setting up a new email account (KennebecCurrent@gmail.com), and the establishment of an invested endowment account to generate income to support the publication.

The office space is basically a shell at the moment, containing only a new desk, bound copies of all previous *Current* issues, a bulletin board, a couple of bookcases, and a few chairs. It still lacks a computer capable of assembling each issue of the *Current*, and it also has no up-to-date digital camera, printer, or other standard electronic equipment or software that would be useful in producing our publication. As a result, most of the writing, editing, photo processing, layout, and internet posting still occurs in the homes of our staff, using their own equipment. However, we hope that a few well-targeted grant applications and other fundraising efforts will help us make a fuller transition into the Fuller House in the near future, with society-owned equipment becoming available to help us inform and educate our readers.

The *Current* also is striving for more thorough coverage of historical themes in Kennebec County's 30 municipalities and planning a larger, more sophisticated version of this periodical. Twelve contributors and potential contributors gathered on July 31 at the Fuller House to discuss those proposed improvements. We hope to announce more about those improvements in 2025.



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

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Kennebec Current

Our 169th Issue

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The *Kennebec Current* encourages letters to the editor. Email letters to KennebecCurrent@gmail.com. All letters are subject to editing for taste, style, and length.

Quiet Unity Township Once Was Setting of Family's Horrors

Editors Note: Tucked into the northeast corner of Kennebec County, 10.4-square-mile Unity Township – formerly Unity Plantation – is by far the least populated of the county's 30 municipal subdivisions. The first part of this column, which appeared in the July-August edition, outlined the township's history through the 19th century. This concluding part summarizes Unity's story since then.

One person was a key figure in a series of terrible events in Unity Township in the 20th century: George W. Palmer, cannery worker and woodsman.

On November 21, 1942, Palmer returned home from several hours of hunting. Some of his older children – Frederick, 17, Albert, 15, and Avis, also listed as 15 – along with their cousin Kenneth, 22, raised an alarm when they could not find Palmer's wife, Ellen M. Palmer, and the two youngest siblings, Ross, 5, and Raymond, 18 months, according to reports in the *Waterville Morning Sentinel*. All searched behind their home and discovered the three bodies, all shot with a high-powered rifle. The weapon was not located, but it was similar in caliber to one owned by a next-door neighbor, and it had been missing. Shell casings were found near the neighbor's boundary, along with one on George Palmer himself, which he had been using as a whistle.

The state charged George Palmer with murder in connection with the deaths, contending that Palmer was in love with another woman, but that his advances had been refused because he was married. An all-male Superior Court jury acquitted him on February 27, 1943, after a five-day trial in the Kennebec County Courthouse in Augusta, and he returned to his home.

Then on June 9, 1944, Palmer pleaded not guilty to charges of rape and incest, two of them involving his 73-year-old mother and two listing his 18-year-old daughter as victims, according to reports in the *Sentinel* and Augusta's *Daily Kennebec Journal*. His mother testified that attempts to attack her had been made for about 10 years. She had heard other stories about her son, which prompted her to press charges. Palmer was convicted and sentenced to 10 years behind bars, which he served in the Maine State Prison. He moved to the northern part of the state and died in Houlton on December 5, 1973, according to his *Bangor Daily News* obituary. He is buried in Haynesville. Only his parents are named in his obituary.

George and Ellen (Stewart) Palmer had been married the day after Christmas in 1918. The next year they had a daughter, Ruth, who died when only 2 days old, from accidental suffocation, according to her death certificate on Ancestry.com.

Generally, Unity Township has attracted little attention since then. I observed some activity there on a recent visit. On Route 139 one can find a gun store, which was sold last month and became the JTW Guns-N-More Store, offering all types of weaponry and repairs of weapons. A drive down Reynolds Road brings one to Casella Organics, featuring recycling and waste management services.

Back on the main drag, there's the jewel of them all: Longroad Energy's Three Corners Solar Project, which also spreads into Clinton and Benton. Chad Allen, of that company, informed me that out of the total 926-acre footprint, 550 acres are in Unity Township. Over the course of 20 years, the company has pledged annual contributions to the three communities, not to mention the additional property taxes. Throw in the renewable clean energy, and everybody wins.

Unity Township – located immediately west of the town of Unity, which is in Waldo County – was classified as a plantation during much of the 19th and early 20th centuries. It devolved to township status on March 31, 1942, according to the 2013 edition of the *Annual Register of Maine*, and it has been administered by the state since then.

The 2020 U.S. Census reported 36 residents in the township, still hanging on.

I hope you've enjoyed our trip to the northeastern corner of Kennebec County. It just goes to show that history happens everywhere, all the time.

— Emily A. Schroeder, KHS archivist



The Archivist's Pen
Emily Schroeder



This electrical equipment standing on Route 139 in Unity Township is part of the Three Corners Solar Project.

Photo by Emily Schroeder

Albion's Bicentennial

Continued from page 1

The town's bicentennial committee produced a highly detailed 47-minute movie, *Our Roots and How They Spread*, which committee Chairman Bob Wallace and other committee members narrated. The video (available for viewing on YouTube by searching for "Albion Bicentennial – Our Roots and How They've Spread") presents a history of Albion and its early families. Sprinkled with interviews of many descendants of the town's first families, group chats, stories told by other longtime residents, old and modern photographs, images of maps and early documents, glimpses of the town's early cemeteries, and a tour of the WW&F train station guided by Albion Historical Society President Phil Dow, the movie ends with a breathtaking, bird's-eye-view drone flyover of Albion village and the surrounding lush countryside.

Another video, *The Incomplete History of the Names of Our Town*, only 10 minutes long, was researched, compiled and narrated by Albion resident Nancy Grudda, who outlines the succession of names cited above.

"The story is incomplete, as there is still mystery about how and why some changes came to be," Grudda said.

Before the establishment of Kennebec County in 1799, what now is Albion was part of Lincoln County and divided among three settlements – Hancock, Jones Plantation, and Winslow. The 1790 U.S. census appears to show six families living there, including that of the Rev. Francis Lovejoy, grandfather of Elijah Parish Lovejoy, an abolitionist newspaper publisher and Albion native whom a pro-slavery mob killed in 1837 in Illinois.

However, as Ruby Crosby Wiggins notes in her book *Albion on the Narrow Gauge*, the 1790 census of Hancock Town covered such a large territory that it is hard to tell which names belong to today's Albion and which to surrounding towns. She maintains that such names as Belial (Bela) Burrill, Samuel Davis, Jonah Crosby Jr., Nathan Hayward, and Thomas Fowler belong on the list of early "Albionites," based on papers and documents written by some of the early town's first settlers. Over the years, the change of county designation and multiple town name changes, repeated shifting of town boundaries, the fact that records often were lost or incomplete, and residents' tendency to move frequently proved to be great challenges to historians and genealogists trying to determine who the first families were and where they settled.

Within a few years of the 1790 census, however, there is documented evidence that Besseys, Drakes, Hanscoms, Husseys, Leonards, Philips, Robinsons, Taylors, Skillins, Webbs, Whitakers, and Wiggins had settled in what is now Albion. Several buildings, roads, brooks and streams, and landmark locations in the town still bear the names of those early families. Many current Albion residents are descended from one or more of these original settlers or from those who followed soon afterward, and a few still live and work on the old family farms and homesteads.

A document by Grudda titled "Outline of the Town of Albion" cites a series of apparently inconsistent decisions made by town residents about the multiple name changes, as well as boundary changes. The reasons for their decisions are unknown in many cases. Grudda often was unable to find a record of votes taken, since until about 1812 town meetings were held in barns and private homes, where there was no such thing as a written secret ballot, and it was likely that any written meeting records – if there were any – were simply stashed in a drawer or in a wooden box to be forgotten, or stuffed into a pocket to be taken home by whoever was presiding over the meeting, and were misplaced or burned up in a house fire.



Members of the Albion Historical Society, taking part in Albion's July 27 parade, reenact a typical living room scene from the era when President Franklin D. Roosevelt delivered his famous "fireside chats" to an at-home audience of millions.

Photos by Rich Eastman

In 1802, according to Henry D. Kingsbury and Simeon L. Deyo's *Illustrated History of Kennebec County, Maine* (1892), the territory that is now Albion was organized as Freetown Plantation. On March 9, 1804, after three hearings before the Massachusetts legislature, it was incorporated as Fairfax, the 152nd town in what was then the District of Maine, a part of Massachusetts.

In 1820, 21 Fairfax inhabitants signed a petition to change the name to Lygonia (sometimes spelled "Ligon" or "Lagonia"). However, on January 31, voters nullified that effort at town meeting. Then in February 1821, regardless of a town vote against it, a petition to rename the town Lygonia mysteriously went forward with the newly established Maine



The color guard moves along Main Street during Albion's July 27 parade.

Legislature's concurrence. The name was changed to Lygonia, the original name of one of the early proprietary provinces in the pre-colonial Province of Maine. The entire province had been granted to Sir Fernando Gorges in 1630 by the Plymouth Council for New England. Gorges had named the province for his mother, Cicely (Lygon) Gorges. In 1820, "Lygonia" was on the short list of names for the territory that would become the state Maine, but after considerable debate and by compromise it became known as "the State of Maine," leaving the name "Lygonia" up for grabs.

Within three years of the town's name change, residents of Lygonia were looking for a new name for their town. On February 25, 1824, it changed again, this time to Albion. The Kingsbury-Deyo book and Wiggin concur that voters accepted it on April 5, 1824, but neither those writers nor other historians can offer any clue as to why the name "Albion" was chosen. Some think that it was because Albion is sometimes used poetically and generally to refer the island of Great Britain. Others suggest the change might have been intended to honor Maine's then-governor, Albion Parris.

However, those ideas are only speculation. Until some long-forgotten diary, letter, or other pertinent documentation is found, the mystery will remain.

– by Barbara Warren

Comfort is an Old Barn Steeped in Nostalgia

In *Comfort is an Old Barn*, readers are treated to Amy Calder's musings on life in her native Skowhegan and in Waterville, where she has lived and worked for many years, through a "curated collection of columns" that she originally wrote for the *Morning Sentinel* daily newspaper.

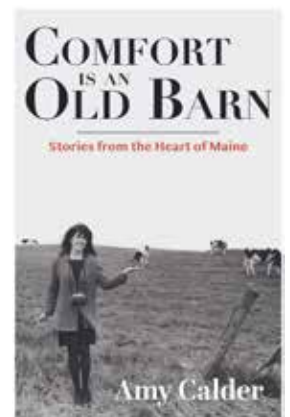
Nostalgic but not saccharine, the stories include memories of childhood, including Christmas joy, family and community connections, and the simple but glorious pleasures of romping around the Maine outdoors with friends. These are stories many will be able to relate to and smile at the memory of, even those who grew up in the decades after Calder did but still had the requisite Maine childhood experience of exploring the woods and hidden areas of towns. Her mother features prominently in several of the columns, and without giving away too much, she sounds like an impressive person.

Beyond Calder's childhood reflections, she also writes of several notable characters from Waterville. She brings their stories forward while also showing how people in the community have been affected by knowing, or even just waving to, those individuals.

At 208 pages and written in essay style, *Comfort is an Old Barn* is a quick read. Given the format, it can also be perused in chunks, perhaps a column or two at a time, when the readers needs a nostalgic moment.

The book is available for purchase on Amazon and through Yarmouth-based Islandport Press. A quick search of the online catalogue shows that Lithgow Public Library in Augusta, C.M. Bailey Library in Winthrop, and the Waterville Public Library all have copies available to borrow.

– by Jamie Logan



Albion Station Burnishes Memory of Long-vanished Railway



Albion Historical Society President Phil Dow, who has worked with others for a half-century to restore the Albion train depot, shows some of the antiques housed at the depot.

Photos by Rich Eastman

for the construction of their depots, and the WW&F was no exception. Save for a couple of its stations, the main line from Wiscasset to Albion – 43 miles, more or less – featured buildings roughly 20 feet wide by 30 feet long. They had low-pitched roofs that overhung the walls by about 5 feet to protect their platforms, as well as the people and products awaiting the trains, from precipitation. Early in the line’s history, when it was known as the Wiscasset and Quebec, its buildings were decorated a two-tone mix of a “mustardish” yellow over reddish-brown paint scheme. In later years, as is visible in Albion today, the colors changed to two shades of green, light and dark.

Albion was the inland terminus of the WW&F. The track was in place as of October 8, 1895. The town boasted a number of industries at different times, including potato houses, a Portland Canning Co. corn shop, a large sawmill, a grist mill, and a tannery. There were also several large stores in town. All of these businesses received and shipped goods via the rail line. As an end point, the railroad also maintained fueling facilities, a single-stall engine house, a turntable for reversing the locomotives, and section crew housing for track maintenance. This meant that the station’s agent was a busy person, and many other employees were needed in town. Ultimately, all of this activity led to a major renovation of the depot.

Around 1906, the station, which had been constructed in 1895 by Albion’s Kidder and Gilman Co., received a second story. As recounted in volume 3 of *Narrow Gauge in the Sheepscott Valley*, by Gary Kohler and Chris McChesney, “[T]he structure was raised by lifting the roof and peak sections of the end walls as one unit. New studs were sistered in and new walls and sheathing were applied to the new office and waiting room. Along with the raised roof came the need for some stairs, so a stairwell was tacked onto the south end of the station.” This addition provided living space for railroad employees, and in some cases their families as well. It was also the only WW&F depot to have an upper level. It is an integral part of the station today in a somewhat restored condition.

After the railroad’s demise in 1933, the station was used to some extent to house local families, but it gradually fell into disrepair. By the 1970s the original wood foundation had deteriorated to the extent that the building was leaning at least 18 inches off plumb. There was a genuine fear that the building would collapse. Fortunately, local residents came to the rescue.

Two longtime railroad enthusiasts, Carl Buitta and Phil Dow, began to coordinate efforts to bring in volunteers, find

Nearly a century ago, railroads were a prime form of transportation here in Maine, as they were around the world. In many towns, the local station or depot literally was the point of contact with the rest of civilization. Then in the early to mid-20th century, as rail travel began to lose importance, partly because of the advent of better roads and the automobile, rail facilities also went into decline.

Some of those structures remain, however, and a few actually have been restored to a condition at least somewhat reminiscent of their prime. A great example of this preservation is the former Wiscasset, Waterville and Farmington Railway depot in Albion. Last year at the station, the Albion Historical Society hosted a remembrance of the WW&F, which died as the result of a train wreck in Whitefield on June 15, 1933.

Many railroads maintained a certain style



Visitors circulate through the depot property June 27 during Albion’s bicentennial celebration.

resources, and publicize the need to bring the depot back to some form of structural integrity. For the next several decades, the volunteers worked to recreate the depot and its surroundings. Parts of the old WW&F right of way were reclaimed. Sections of track were re-laid to allow visitors to get a sense of the yard's layout. Remnants of a couple of old pieces of equipment were brought to the site and worked on. The station's platform was rebuilt in place to allow easier access to the interior. The upper level of the station was re-furnished with vintage furniture and fittings to show how its residents lived.

Much of the work was done by members of the WW&F Railway Museum in Alna. Other locals and many volunteers from out of state were active as well. Although there were incidents involving vandalism and the theft of materials, the project volunteers prevailed and Albion's depot was saved.

The preservation efforts are not over, either. At the 2023 Windsor Fair and again this year, Dow and Albion Historical Society member Bob Wallace worked with Windsor Historical Society members to host a display celebrating the history of the WW&F. The exhibit featured documents and photographs highlighting the railroad's history as well as the station's restoration. It attracted more than 600 visitors. This is intended to be a yearly event at the fair.

The restoration work has preserved a piece of local history that reflects events and a form of transportation of which few Kennebec County residents have knowledge or recall. The Albion depot project portrays a long-vanished lifestyle well, and it could inspire other restoration efforts.

— by Bob Bennett 



Bob Bennett, the author of the Albion train station story and a longtime aficionado of all things railroad, is the owner of a model railroad display that he set up many years ago in his basement in South China. As these photos show, the layout includes several kinds of buildings and figures representing the people who live in them. It seems fitting to mention his project here because one of the buildings is an appropriately scaled model of the Albion station.

Photos by Teddy Faugno



November Statewide Ballot Features Two History-related Questions

Maine ballots for the November 5 election will include two referendum questions with historical overtones.

Question 3, referring to An Act to Authorize a General Fund Bond Issue to Restore Historic Community Buildings, asks voters: “Do you favor a \$10,000,000 bond issue to restore historic buildings owned by governmental and nonprofit organizations, with funds being issued contingent on a 25% local match requirement from either private or nonprofit sources?”

A bill proposing this idea issue originally called for a \$25 million bond issue, but it was reduced, according to the Maine Morning Star news website. The Maine Historic Preservation Program would administer the grant process if voters adopt the measure.

Question 5, citing An Act to Restore the Former State of Maine Flag, asks: “Do you favor making the former state flag, replaced as the official flag of the State in 1909 and commonly known as the Pine Tree Flag, the official flag of the state?”

Maine Secretary of State Shenna Bellows sponsored a design contest to come up with a final version of the proposed flag, varieties of which have popped up all over Maine in recent years. Gardiner resident Adam Lemire submitted the winning design, Bellows' office announced on August 5. He said he based it on an Eastern white pine he saw while walking in Viles Arboretum in Augusta with his 3-year-old son, according to the secretary of state's website. The tree on the flag has 16 branches, representing Maine's 16 counties.



The state flag contest's winning entry

Image courtesy of Maine Department of Secretary of State

Old Halloween Day Parade Entry Commemorates 1937 Train Crash

“Please use the front door,” says a tongue-in-cheek label under an ominous black-and-white photograph, which shows a railroad box car jammed into the back wall of a stone building. Some children stand in the foreground, mugging for the camera.

Hallowell’s Hubbard Free Library, figuring enough time has passed for the shock to have worn off since a train actually did burst into its Second Street building on November 10, 1937, is using its website to sell tote bags, shirts, and coffee mugs bearing the crash image and the accompanying witticism.

Awareness of the crash was elevated further on July 10 this year, when library workers deployed a scale model of the library building, complete with a train hanging out of the back wall, for use in the city’s annual Old Halloween Day parade.

The 1937 crash yielded some dramatic photos, but it did not linger in the community memory.

“Although damage to the library was considerable, no one was injured, and conductor (Tom) Lunin said that ‘it could have been much worse,’” the *Daily Kennebec Journal* reported the next morning.

The accident occurred in the evening when a 100-car southbound train was passing through the center of Hallowell on its way from Bangor to Boston. The newspaper report said an iron pipe fell from the engine and became jammed in a switch. The third, fourth, and fifth cars came off the tracks. The third car slammed into the back of the library, sending “a shower of granite blocks and masonry into the interior” and demolishing display cases that housed artifacts of Hallowell’s early history. The other two boxcars rolled over; one hit a house across Central Street, causing some damage there.

The wreckage blocked the Central Street grade crossing until emergency workers could clear the three errant boxcars away about 3 a.m. the next day, allowing rail traffic to resume. Carpenters boarded up the gaping hole in the library until repairs could be carried out. The library remained generally closed after that for three weeks, then reopened on a three-days-per-week schedule.

Today’s library officials consider themselves lucky that the boxcar took out mostly only the Gothic-style stained-glass window, leaving most of the surrounding wall intact.



Hubbard Free Library in Hallowell was damaged when three freight cars from a southbound train left the tracks and punched out the Gothic window on the west side of the granite building. Clearly the sight of the railroad car partially in the library building fascinated several Hallowell children.

File photo courtesy of Hubbard Free Library



Hubbard Free Library employees Cate Molloy, in foreground, and Doreen Judge, participating on July 10 in the annual Old Halloween Day parade, wheel a model of the library building on a book cart southward on Water Street in Hallowell. The train hanging from the back of the building recalls a November 10, 1937, derailment that sent a train boxcar crashing through a large stained-glass window on the west side of the library building.

Photo by Joseph Owen

The original library building, designed by local architect Thomas C. Currier to resemble an English country church, was dedicated in 1880 as the Hallowell Social Library, according to the library’s website. Hallowell native Gen. Thomas C. Hubbard, of New York City, made a donation of \$20,000 in 1893 (equal to nearly \$700,000 in 2024), which was used to fund construction of an addition. At that point, it became Hubbard Free Library. A donation from Hallowell resident Eliza Lowell in 1897 made a second addition possible.

Train service through Hallowell was suspended many years ago. The demolition of a railroad viaduct in 2017 in Richmond, on the same rail line that goes through Hallowell, reduces the chances that trains will return to the city anytime soon.

The Hubbard Free Library building has a near-twin less than an hour’s ride to the west – at the Norlands, the Livermore estate that once was the 19th-century homestead of the prosperous Washburn family. The Washburns’ private library was ensconced in a building that is still standing and greatly resembles the Hubbard building.



— by Joseph Owen

New Chamberlain Biography

Continued from page 1

book lectures in Belfast, Brunswick, and South Portland into his schedule. And when the Kennebec Historical Society learned that he was in Maine, it convinced him to add an August 14 speaking engagement at the Maine State Library in Augusta to his itinerary, drawing about 60 listeners.

Chamberlain reinvented himself many times throughout his life, White found. Born with a stutter, he learned nine languages, mastered the art of public speaking to the point that he became a professor of oratory at Bowdoin, and spent years on the postwar lecture circuit lecturing the public about the Civil War's meaning and legacy. He trained at the Bangor Theological Seminary to become a minister, but he turned down an offer to lead a Congregationalist parish in Belfast, as well as a similar offer from New Hampshire, instead taking a lecturing post at Bowdoin. A novice at politics, he served four one-year terms as governor, while the average tenure in that office by all of his predecessors was about 1.5 years.

Less well-known, Chamberlain also spent many difficult years as the public face of unsuccessful real estate developers in central Florida. He eventually returned to Maine and spent his final working years as surveyor of the port of Portland, a federal appointment that he did not want but could not afford to turn down after the failure of his business enterprises.

Earlier summaries of Chamberlain's life deal with such topics superficially or not at all. For example, Alice Rains Trulock's 1992 biography, *In the Hands of Providence: Joshua Chamberlain & the American Civil War*, devotes about three-quarters of its pages to his wartime service. Only about one-third of White's book deals with that period.

White also demonstrates that Chamberlain's allegiance to a cause or an institution didn't inhibit him from criticizing or trying to change them. He cherished his education at Bowdoin, but he nonetheless tried as the college's president to introduce controversial reforms to its curriculum. He even hinted at the possibility of admitting women there as students, but that didn't happen until a century later. Chamberlain, a brevet major general at the end of his military career, also made an enemy of Army Lt. Gen. Philip Sheridan long after the war by testifying at an 1880 court of inquiry in support of former Maj. Gen. Gouverneur Warren, whom the aggressive Sheridan, criticizing Warren's movement of his troops during the 1865 Battle of Five Forks as too slow, had removed from command.

White concludes that religious orientation, guided in part by memorization of the Presbyterian church's Westminster Confession of Faith, and a sense of duty propelled Chamberlain throughout his life. "Duty was a central masculine value of the 19th century," White told his Belfast audience, noting that Chamberlain volunteered to join the Army in 1862 even though he could have avoided service, and he returned to duty after recovering from grievous wounds even though he easily could have stayed in Maine. Those absences from home and others during his time in Augusta and especially long business ventures in New York and Florida severely tested his marriage to his wife, Fanny (Adams) Chamberlain, although it also resulted in a treasure trove of personal correspondence that illuminates both of their characters.

One such exchange of letters occurred in 1880, toward the end of the simmering political revolt in Augusta. The Democrats had manipulated statewide election results the previous year to try to give themselves and their Greenback Party allies a majority in both houses of the Legislature and to claim the governor's seat. Republicans protested at robustly attended meetings of indignation around the state, and an armed mob of Republican sympathizers surrounded the State House, threatening to seize it.

Gov. Alonzo Garcelon, a Lewiston Democrat, summoned Chamberlain as head of the state militia to get the situation under control. Working in cooperation with Augusta Mayor Charles E. Nash – who, 11 years later, would become a co-founder of the Kennebec Historical Society – Chamberlain imposed strict access limits on the State House, keeping the mob at bay until the Maine Supreme Judicial Court could determine who the election's rightful winners were.

Having received death threats, Chamberlain eventually faced the mob in front of the State House. He threw his coat open in a dramatic gesture, challenging them to shoot him and noting that he already had confronted the possibility of death many times. At that point, an old veteran in the crowd threatened to shoot the first person who laid a finger on Chamberlain. In a letter to his wife, Chamberlain described the encounter as "a second Little Round Top," a reference to the spot where his men had turned back the Confederate forces at Gettysburg.

In any event, the mob backed down. Days later, the state's high court ruled in favor of the Republicans, and the crisis subsided peacefully. White called the incident Chamberlain's finest hour.

White said he thought initially he had been writing a Civil War biography, or a 19th-century biography; but his lecture audiences disagreed. "They said, 'No, you're writing a biography of what leadership is necessary today,'" he said. 

– by Joseph Owen

White's book is for sale at Kennebec Historical Society headquarters in Augusta and at local bookstores.

Beverly Wight Smith's Plays Revive Vienna's Yesterdays



Beverly Wight Smith, photographed August 16, sits in the living room at the Mount Vernon home of her friend Ingrid Grenon, who is one of her successors as president of the Vienna Historical Society.

Photos by Joseph Owen

William Shakespeare, by most scholars' reckoning, churned out 37 works for the English stage before dying at the age of 52. At the same age, Beverly Wight Smith had not yet launched her side career as a playwright; but today, having turned 94 in August, she has written more than twice as many plays as the Bard of Avon did.

To get ideas for his tales, Shakespeare had to comb the annals of English royalty, Renaissance Italy, medieval Scotland, the world of Classical antiquity, and, notably, the part of Denmark where "something was rotten." Smith found nearly all of her inspiration in Kennebec County's smallest town – Vienna, population 578.

In fact, the plot of the most recent production of a Smith play, *Romance in Vienny*, takes place entirely in the Vienna living room of Partheny and Jasper Boody, a fictional farm couple living in the town about a century ago. The play, a revival taking the stage for the first time since 2008 and under the direction of Ellie Andrews, ran for four engagements on the last weekend in July at Vienna's cozy Union Hall.

Shakespeare's plays were full of male actors playing female roles, and sometimes even men playing women pretending to be men. Similarly, Smith's *Romance* features a female actor playing a man, and a male actor playing a man pretending to be a woman.

On the other hand, while Shakespearean plays often feature such weighty themes as King Henry V's exhortation to his troops before the Battle of Agincourt or the assassination of Julius Caesar, the liveliest incidents in *Romance* could best be described as mischievous nuisances. Adolescent Freddy Baker chases his sisters around the room with a snake he has found in the backyard. Somebody engages in a short-lived, spontaneous dance. Somebody else stands up in abrupt outrage. Countless visitors parade through the living room as though it were a bus station. Doesn't that front door have a lock on it? Of course not; it's rural Maine.

In fact, aside from visitors from Boston and occasional references to Augusta, the outside world does not intrude on the characters who populate this stage version of Vienna. They marinate in local gossip about which man's car was parked outside which woman's house all night while her husband was away on a trip. They engage in petty bickering and fumble their way through cases of mistaken identity, all while indulging in misbegotten matchmaking attempts in preparation for the annual firemen's ball. Dialogue spiced with old-fashioned turns of phrase and imaginative verb conjugations bind all the shenanigans together.

Smith probably would regard any comparison of her work with Shakespeare's as unwarranted hyperbole; and to be fair, her reputation as a playwright generally is confined to her native Vienna and next-door Mount Vernon, where she has lived for decades. But she never has sought fame and fortune. Instead, she hopes that her plays, which rely heavily on stories her older relatives told her, will help preserve the memory of what early 20th century life was like in Vienna, where her roots go back several generations.

"My family had lived there on the properties since the 1790s, but the house was built in 1899, where I was born and grew up," Smith said. That deep connection imbued her with a fascination with local lore. "I always liked to hear about the old-timers talk about the things in bygone days," she said.

Smith's first staged play, *Emma's Ad*, was performed in March 1983



A gathering of friends at the Boody home in Vienna produces a torrent of neighborhood gossip in the July 25 performance of Beverly Wight Smith's revived play *Romance in Vienny* at Union Hall in Vienna. The actors, from left, are Smith, of Mount Vernon; Shelley Duchesne, a part-time resident of Fayette; Annette Smith, of Mount Vernon; and Sarah Jancarik, of Fayette.



Jim Wright, of Fayette, leads the audience in a singalong July 25 before the debut performance of Beverly Wight Smith's revived 2008 play *Romance in Vienny* at Union Hall in Vienna.

at the Odd Fellows Hall in Mount Vernon, featuring a cast that included Smith and three of her four children. It was about a young woman who placed a poorly worded advertisement in a local newspaper about buying a horse. Her relatives misunderstood it to mean that she was trying to buy a man.

Smith's later comedy *Taking in Boarders*, produced in cooperation with the Readfield Historical Society, was written to help celebrate the 200th anniversary of that town's founding and

was performed at Kents Hill School. Performances of Smith's plays have continued as an annual tradition, usually in July or August in Vienna, except for the period of 2020 through 2022, when the coronavirus pandemic prompted the cancellation of such gatherings.

The plays support local preservation efforts. Almost every building of public consequence in the Vienna stands on Route 41 or within sight of it, and the *Romance* performances this year raised money to help restore one of them: the Waite House, the childhood home of board-game entrepreneur Milton Bradley. The early plays helped to fund the mid-1980s restoration of Union Hall. The fundraising is a side hustle, however.

"We also feel it's our duty to provide our community with stories about our history," said Ingrid Grenon, a writer who collaborates with Smith and is the current Vienna Historical Society president.

The plays have helped bind the community and its surroundings together.

"Until I left, I was always in her plays," said Courtney Gilman, who grew up in Mount Vernon but now lives in Germany, and who attended Smith's recent book-signing event at the Shaw Library in Mount Vernon. "I did it all throughout school and college."

No one-trick pony, Smith engages in many other pursuits, including acting. She has played at least one role – and sometimes more – in all of her plays.

She has written two books about the area, the most recent of which, *Strolling Down Memory Lane: Stories of the Mt. Vernon-Vienna Area*, was released this summer. Smith wrote about half of the chapters. The other half came from other local people, including Grenon.

Smith's first book, *Turning Back*, is mostly an updated collection of local-history newspaper columns she wrote in the mid-20th century. "I used to send stories to the *Lewiston Evening Journal Magazine*. That's where most of those were published," she said. Now, far from resting on her laurels, she is working on a third book, which will consist of more local stories like those in *Memory Lane*.

As for next year's play, Smith said she doesn't know yet what that will be. In the past, she usually wrote a new play or two every year, but now the director has a big inventory of them from which to choose. Whatever the decision is, Smith hopes to be a part of it.

"I like comedy, and enjoy getting together for our play practices," she said. "It's something I look forward to."



– by Joseph Owen



Beverly Wight Smith, right signs a copy of her new book, *Strolling Down Memory Lane: Stories of the Mount Vernon-Vienna Area*, on August 10 at the Shaw Library in Mount Vernon.

Flood-battered Winslow Genealogical Group Weighs Moving

Anyone who has tried to research their family knows that genealogy sections in local libraries can have limited resources. Two exceptions to this rule are the Maine State Library, in Augusta, and the Taconnett Falls Chapter of the Maine Genealogical Society, at 10 Lithgow Street in Winslow.



Located in the old Winslow Public Library building, the Taconnett Falls collection boasts one of the largest local repositories of local vital records and family histories, as well as genealogical material from all over Maine, elsewhere in New England, and Quebec. According to the society's website, there are more than 400 linear feet of shelf space holding research materials such as town histories, records, and reports from all over Maine, as well as diaries, old photo collections, yearbooks, vital records, quarterlies, and journals that have been purchased or donated to the collection. There is also a fairly extensive collection of Franco-American files such as Drouin records and vital records from Beauce, Dorchester, and Frontenac counties – prime sources of migration to Maine.

The society has fallen on hard times, however, being forced to deal with flood damage (*Kennebec Current*, January-February and July-August 2024) that left the basement covered in mold, damaged yard sale items stored there, and left the boiler and public rest rooms unusable. Though the basement has been cleaned, the smell and mustiness permeate the building, seemingly making it unsuitable for the collection and for public access. I attended an August 18 society meeting at the old library, led by society Treasurer Laton Edwards, where a discussion of the possibility of moving continued in earnest. Though moving would be potentially expensive, the society's website states, "Our purpose is to provide a suitable location for the collection, preservation, and use of our genealogical materials." Though nothing concrete was decided at the meeting, the opinion of nearly all members present seemed to be that the collection should be moved as soon as feasible to safer storage with an eye toward finding a new home. They said they consider protection of this valuable collection to be paramount.

Society Secretary and Librarian Mary Boulette is encouraging anyone who might be able to help to contact her at (207) 859-0477. One great way to help would be to join the society as a member. Annual dues are \$10 for regular membership, \$20 for sustaining, \$30 for supporting, and \$50 for sponsoring. Additional contributions may be made to either the general fund, the fuel fund, or the book fund. Checks should be made payable to Taconnett Falls Chapter, 10 Lithgow Street, Winslow, ME 04901.

SMALL: Seeking to verify and document what I know about Ambrose H. Small, born about 1814 in Clinton, died September 29, 1892, in Scarborough and buried in Augusta. He married Experience Wentworth, who was born October 20, 1811, in Rome and died April 2, 1900, in Augusta. They lived in Augusta and had eight children, one being my great-grandfather William B. Small (1846-1896). Ambrose Small's parents were Jonathan Small and Huldah Brann, both possibly from Clinton. Any information is greatly appreciated. Contact William C. Small at wsmall@verizon.net.

TUCKER/SCOTT: Seeking information, materials, or suggestions about other repositories, that might have information on an Augusta resident named Dolly (Scott) Tucker. I am currently researching a Black neighborhood in Fredericksburg, Virginia, that emerged in the 1930s and still exists today. She was enslaved in Fredericksburg but later lived in Augusta from the 1880s to the 1920s and was married to Isaac M. Tucker, who, based on his obituary, had been brought to Gardiner by the Tucker family during the Civil War to work in furniture making. Please contact Krysten R. Moon at kmoon@umw.edu.



Rich Eastman



Treasurer Laton Edwards and Secretary and Librarian Mary Boulette, seated at top right by the fireplace, conduct an August 18 meeting of the Taconnett Falls Chapter of the Maine Genealogical Society in Winslow. The chapter's library has been closed to the public since a flood infiltrated the building last December, and members are considering moving the collection to another location.

Photo by Rich Eastman



State Library Gets Trove of Autographed Magazines

The Maine State Library has received the first batch of autographed magazines that Belgrade educator David Leigh and his students collected for more than half a century (*Kennebec Current*, March-April 2023).

**Current
FOLLOWUP**

Leigh, who worked as a teacher and principal in five Maine high schools, turned over about 145 different copies of *Time* and *Newsweek* magazines to the library on February 21. Each magazine bears the autograph of a person or persons depicted on

the magazine's cover. Leigh and his students had sent the magazines to the cover subjects, requesting the autographs. Leigh also gave a presentation about the project that day at the library in Augusta, where the audience included many of his former students.

The gift to the library stemmed from Leigh's time as a teacher and principal at Forest Hills High School in Jackman. He said the magazines had been kept in a drawer at the school for 45 years after his departure.

Leigh said an attendee at the February 21 lecture, David Hunt, of the Maine State Museum, surprised him that day by giving him another group of autographed magazines that Leigh and students had gathered for Mattanawcook Academy, in Lincoln, and that had been "unaccountably missing for 41 years." Hunt submitted them "right in the middle of the Jackman program," he said in a July 16 interview, adding that he planned to confer with current Mattanawcook officials about what should be done with the magazines.

Over several decades, Leigh and his students accumulated about 1,100 signed magazines, more than half of them coming from his long stint at Messalonskee High School in Oakland. He said he expects many of the others also will end up at the state library eventually, available to the public as research tools.

Alison Maxell, the library's director of public and outreach services, research, and innovation, said on July 17 that the Jackman batch of magazines are in a box in her office, and one of her staff members will be drafting a plan for how to use them effectively.



David Leigh holds two autographed news magazines in 2023 at his home in Belgrade.

File photo by Nikko Noble

Re-creation of Pilgrim Trading Post Moving Ahead in Augusta

The city of Augusta hopes to claim access to federal funding by the end of the year that would finance the construction of a replica of the trading post that Massachusetts Pilgrims established in 1628 on the east bank of the Kennebec River.

The project (*Kennebec Current*, March-April 2022) is under the direction of the neighboring, city-owned Old Fort Western museum, but the Augusta Downtown Alliance is arranging the funding, according to Linda Novak, the fort's director and curator. In an August 1 interview, she said the only obstacle standing in the way of the funding is completion of an environmental survey, which she expects to occur in the next few months.

After clearing that hurdle, organizers plan to buy construction timber from a Canadian supplier and let it dry for nearly two years so that the resulting building won't warp, she said. The fort hopes to begin construction about 2026 and to have the trading post open in time for a 400th anniversary observance in 2028.

The original post, in business for most of the 17th century, stood on the property of what is now First Church of Christ, Scientist, on Williams Street in Augusta. The new one would stand in nearly the same location.

**Letter
TO THE
Editor**

Roots Column Highlighted Useful Source

I enjoyed Rich Eastman's article on the Drouin Collection in the recent KHS newsletter (*Kennebec Current*, July-August 2024). I used these records extensively in researching my husband's French Canadian ancestry. His grandfather Olivier Lajoie lived on Washington Street Extension in Augusta and worked all his life at the Edwards

Mill, as did many of his children. He also owned the gravel quarry.

We visited KHS several times and the staff was very helpful to us.

Andrea Lajoie, Menlo Park, California

Museum Depicts Litchfield's Agricultural, Social History

After Litchfield held its town meetings at Daniel Nickerson's house from 1795 to 1813, then in the North Litchfield Baptist Meeting House from 1813 to 1840, and in the Free Baptist Meeting House in 1841, a new town hall was erected for town meetings for the then-hefty price of \$400. From 1842 to 1973, town meetings were held in that building.



History Through
a Keyhole #14

Litchfield residents voted in 1974 to form a historical society, which focused on refurbishing the old town hall as a museum in time for Litchfield's Founder's Day in 1975, and the nation's 200th birthday in 1976.

After the national bicentennial, the building stood vacant for four years until a then-16-year-old sophomore from Oak Hill High School in Wales approached the Litchfield Historical Society with a proposal. That student, Earl Lamoreau Jr., had received \$800 in federal money through a Title 4-C grant under the direction of the school's Project Discovery. With a few hundred dollars of his own and outside donations, Lamoreau proposed to design a historical display within the old town hall. He partitioned off the open, one-room hall into eight areas, each representing a facet of 19th-century life.



The Litchfield Town Hall Museum building was the home of Daniel Nickerson in the late 18th and early 19th centuries.

Photos by Rich Eastman

an Edison phonograph, a Victorian couch and an assortment of early wall hangings. After the parlor, one steps into the mill artifact section, where items from mills that once stood along the town's Potter and Purgatory streams are stored.

The next area is devoted to a collection of early medical equipment found in town, such as a spring-loaded instrument that contains many sharp blades, used for blood-letting. There is also a working hand-cranked generator with electrodes for "nervous disorders," somewhat akin to early electric shock therapy. The collection contains a ledger book belonging to a prominent Litchfield physician, Dr. Cyrus Kendrick, who never charged more than \$1.75.

In the next room, visitors see a re-creation of one of the town's former one-room schoolhouses, with tiny desks, a teacher's desk, maps, and a white dress worn by a teacher, plus a photograph on the wall of the teacher wearing that dress. At the end, one enters the general store, filled with early grocery items, cans, bottles, a crank-operated cash register, and a post office.

Outside the building and facing the road is a chunk of Sodalite rock, a silica-undersaturated igneous rock found primarily in Litchfield, flanked by two



Answer to Keyhole #14

Q: What is this?

A: Sodalite rock and granite grindstones in front of the Litchfield Town Hall Museum

Q: Where is it?

A: Hallowell Road, Litchfield

Q: What's historic about it?

A: The museum was set up within the single large room that hosted Litchfield town meetings for 132 years.

Entering the main door, visitors step into Litchfield's past, starting with a display of old barn boards and a sign that says "McCormick." Inside the roughly 10-foot-square space is a collection of unusual woodworking tools. Nearly everything, including drill presses and bench vices, is hand-operated and made entirely of wood. The next room contains early tools found in a Litchfield barn that dates to about 1800. These include hay scythes, hay saws, ice harvesting equipment, and antique lumber.

Next to the barn tools room, visitors come into the rural Maine parlor, which houses a pump organ, a spinning wheel,




Litchfield Historical Society president Chris Stenberg guides visitors through the parlor room at the Town Hall Museum.

grindstones that were transported from the Pottertown Grist Mill in the section of town called the Plains.

Litchfield Historical Society President Chris Stenberg credits Lamoreau, a self-described “old Litchfield farm boy who happens to like nuclear physics,” for his hard work and diligence at giving the town a place to hold on to its past. “It was a rare gift to have had such a young man with an eye for history come along and create this wonderful museum,” Stenberg said, adding that the museum isn’t as active as it once was but opens occasionally for students or an open house. Lamoreau, now a professor of physics and engineering at Southern Maine Community College, continues to maintain the collection and is active in the society, which holds an open house once a month.

For information about the open house events, call Stenberg at (207) 268-5036. Though the Town Hall Museum is the home of the historical society, members meet on the third Monday of each month at 7 p.m. at the Hiram Shorey Research Center, located in the basement of the Town Office. The society also presents exhibits at the Litchfield Fair, to be held this year on September 6, 7, and 8 at the Litchfield Fairgrounds.

— By Rich Eastman 


History Through a Keyhole — Puzzle 15

This is the time of year when the crickets in our backyards slowly die off with the approach of colder weather. Maybe that’s a good trend, because we heard nothing but crickets when we asked readers to identify the Litchfield stones depicted in our July-August issue. There were no guesses, and therefore no winners.

Hoping to recover quickly from the resulting bout of unbridled melancholy, we offer the photo at right, which shows that, among other things, early 19th-century architects were really big fans of really big fans. This site is easily visible from a public road in Kennebec County. Readers who can identify it are asked to contact the *Current* and tell us 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 KennebecCurrent@gmail.com or by postal mail to Kennebec Historical Society, Attn: Kennebec Current, 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 November-December issue of the *Kennebec Current*. Answers are due by October 31. Good luck. 

Augusta Board OKs Extension of KHS Expansion Plan

The Augusta Planning Board voted unanimously July 7 to grant the Kennebec Historical Society a second two-year extension of its approval of a plan to expand the society’s headquarters, the Henry Weld Fuller Jr. House, located at 107 Winthrop Street.

The board originally gave the plan a green light on July 14, 2020 (*Kennebec Current*, July-August 2020), then renewed its approval for two years in July 2022.

A society representative told the board that two major obstacles had prevented the start of construction. Those are the difficulty of assembling an adequate fundraising team and the society’s involvement with a major donor’s proposal to build another structure elsewhere in the city for KHS – a project that ultimately was canceled.

A society committee began developing the Winthrop Street plan more than six years ago (*Kennebec Current*, July-August 2018), and KHS raised enough money to pay for the expansion’s initial engineering work. The plan calls for a three-story, 6,900-square-foot annex standing on a 2,300-square-foot building footprint on the north side of the Fuller House. The annex would include an elevator. The plan also calls for a four-space parking lot where a lawn now covers much of the property on the North Chestnut Street side.

The society bought the property in 2007 from the American Baptist Churches of Maine and moved into it in 2008 after 13 months of renovation work.

Kennebec Classic Tournament Enjoys Many Kinds of Growth

The Kennebec Historical Society's ever-expanding Kennebec Classic tennis tournament passed a few more milestones on August 3, drawing a record 50 participants, benefiting from more sponsor support than ever, and dividing play between two locations for the first time.

Jason Tardif, of Waterville, who is the Waterville Senior High School boys' tennis coach, won the open singles championship. Together with his son Logan Tardiff, he also won the open doubles contest. Theodore Stoup, of Old Town, captured the "B" singles championship, and twins Trevor and Colby Tardif – also sons of Jason Tardif – won the "B" doubles crown.

The "B" group players have a skill-level rating of 3.5 or less, according to tournament organizer Billy Noble. Players with higher ratings are not allowed to play in that group, but "B" level players are allowed to compete in the high-skill group.

The number of players in the sixth annual tournament far exceeded the record-setting total of 37 who took a swat at the ball in 2023, and it was the first time the event drew multiple players from other parts of Maine. "I was expecting around 40 people, and I had to order more shirts," Noble said, referring to the souvenir T-shirts given to all participants.

The Kennebec Classic raised \$591 in entry fees and \$800 in sponsorships, for a total income of \$1,391, according to KHS Executive Director Scott Wood. Expenses for T-shirts, tennis balls and trophies totaled \$821.74, leaving the society a net income of \$569.26. The event's business sponsors were McKee Morgan, L.L.C., P.A. (formerly McKee Law); Quality Copy, Inc.; Oakes & Parkhurst Glass; A1 Seamless Gutters; Shaw & Son Outdoor Maintenance, L.L.C.; and Dead River Company.

The tournament had been scheduled to take place solely at the North Street Recreation Area's outdoor tennis courts in Waterville, but when the weather forecast turned bleak, Champions Fitness Club in Waterville and the Kennebec Valley Tennis Association in Augusta made their indoor courts available as backup sites, and the tournament took place at both of those venues. Devin Lachapelle, of Norridgewock, helped coordinate the Waterville portion of the event; and Julie Bunker, of Augusta, did the same in that city, Noble said.



Travis Rogers, right, returns a shot to Billy Noble on August 3 during the Kennebec Classic tennis tournament at the A-Copi Tennis & Sports Center in Augusta. The tournament, now in its sixth year, is held to benefit the Kennebec Historical Society.

Photo by Joseph Owen

KHS Welcomes the Following New Members

Curtis Knight — Sidney
 Tim O'Brien — Nashville, Tennessee
 Kathleen O'Brien — Nashville, Tennessee

Marc Pomerleau — Sidney
 Deb Sewall — Hallowell
 Syd Sewall — Hallowell

and continues to recognize ...



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🌿 In Memoriam 🌿

Cynthia (Fuller) Hogan, 91, of Seal Beach, California, an Augusta native who lived most of her life in the Golden State, died April 6 in hospice care in Midway City, California. She worked as an x-ray technician in early adulthood, then helped her late husband with his business investment firm. A Kennebec Historical Society member for several years, she was a genealogy enthusiast who enjoyed staying in touch with her friends in Maine. Her survivors include two children, two grandchildren, and a great-grandchild.

Judith C. Wathen, 84, a longtime Augusta resident and a Kennebec Historical Society member since 2001, died July 24 at Woodlands Senior Living of Hallowell. A native of Easton and graduate of Easton High School, she also attended Ricker College in Houlton. She co-founded a day care center at Penney Memorial United Baptist Church in Augusta, and she helped the church acquire nearby property for parking and office space. Her survivors include her husband of 64 years, former Maine Chief Justice Daniel E. Wathen, of Augusta; two children; and four grandchildren.

Around Kennebec County

HALLOWELL

The **Vaughan Woods & Historic Homestead** is hosting a historic preservation forum September 14 at the homestead, located at 2 Litchfield Road in Hallowell. Advance registration is required. Tickets cost \$40 each for the general public and \$10 for students. The event, scheduled for 9 a.m. to 3 p.m., features a keynote address by John Leeke, a nationally known preservation trades specialist; a presentation by the homestead's Property Manager Dan Mitchell and Executive Director Kate Tremblay about documenting and caring for historic landscapes; and demonstrations and exhibits designed to promote discussions related to preservation of collections, buildings, and grounds. Coffee and refreshments will be provided, and lunch will be served at midday. For details and registration, consult the society's website at vaughnhomestead.org. Questions may be directed to homestead officials at (207) 622-9831 or info@vaughnhomestead.org.

The antique weathervane that adorned Hallowell's former fire station for many decades will be available for ground-level viewing September 14 at the annual meeting of the **Hallowell Citizens Initiative Committee**. Researcher Jane Radcliffe will describe the weathervane's origin, how it was stolen from atop the station's 40-foot hose-drying tower, and how the city later retrieved it. The free event is scheduled for 1 to 3 p.m. in Hallowell City Hall's auditorium.

MONMOUTH

The **Monmouth Museum** is conducting a limited quilt raffle for which only 100 tickets will be sold at \$5 each. Tickets are available at the museum gift shop, located at 748 Main Street in Monmouth. Residents Nadine Longley and Colin Lindley made the queen-size quilt and donated it to the museum. The winning ticket will be drawn September 28 during the town's Applefest '24 celebration. Proceeds will benefit the nonprofit museum.

VASSALBORO

David Theriault is scheduled to give a presentation on musical instruments from 3 to 5 p.m. September 15 at the **Vassalboro Historical Society**, located at 327 Main Street in East Vassalboro. Theriault will describe instruments in the society's collection and some of his own, explaining how they work. He and his wife, Linda, will perform a duet on the piano and the violin at the end of the presentation. Admission is free. For details about this and other programs, call (207) 923-2505.

The Vassalboro group also is hosting a Senior-a-TEA & History gathering from 1 to 3 p.m. Tuesday, September 17, and at the same time on the third Tuesday of October, November, and December, at the historical society. Elderly residents are encouraged to attend to look over old scrapbooks, reminisce, and tell stories, some of which might be recorded. Light refreshments will be served.

WATERVILLE

Howard Hardy and Roberta Drummond are scheduled to give a lecture on Oakland's history of tool manufacturing on September 19 at the **Waterville Historical Society's Redington Museum**. Hardy and Drummond, both members of the Oakland Area Historical Society, plan to bring some historical items to illustrate their talk, and they encourage owners of Oakland-made tools to bring theirs to the event as well. The doors open at 6 p.m. for

socializing and light refreshments, and the lecture begins at 6:30. The museum is at 62 Silver Street in Waterville. The event is free, but donations are accepted. The speakers advise attendees to watch Peter Vogt's film *Pioneer Axe* beforehand. Rich with background material that enhances the lecture, the film can be found online here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qr4VTCwEfko>

WINTHROP

The **Winthrop Maine Historical Society** is hosting Kerry Wilkins, of Winthrop, who on Thursday, September 12, will deliver the third part of a series of lectures on the history of apple cultivation in Winthrop. On Thursday, October 10, Jennifer Phillips, also of Winthrop, will speak about the history of the Winthrop Grange. Phil Morse, representing the Seashore Trolley Museum in Kennebunkport, will be the guest speaker on Thursday, November 14, on the subject of trolleys that traveled through Winthrop, taking riders to Lewiston, Augusta, and the local summer resorts. All three lectures are scheduled to begin at 6 p.m. at the Winthrop History and Heritage Center, located at 107 Main Street. For details about any of the lectures, call (207) 395-5199.

The Winthrop society also is selling 2025 calendars as a fundraiser. The calendar's black-and-white pages depict moments in Winthrop sports history from the 1940s to the 1970s and cost \$8 each. They are available at the society's Main Street Headquarters, Ace Hardware, and the Winthrop Federal Credit Union. All proceeds help fund the society's operation.



Tom Doak, a member of the Hall-Dale High School class of 1974, tosses candy to children watching the class float roll by June 20 during the annual Old Hallowell Day Parade on Water Street in Hallowell. This year Doak and his classmates are celebrating the 50th anniversary of their graduation.

Photo by Joseph Owen

Upcoming Programs

October: “Using Probate Records in Genealogy”



Kennebec County Probate Court is at 95 State Street in Augusta.

Photo by Rich Eastman

Probate records are an invaluable aid in genealogical research. Not only can they reveal otherwise unknown details about the named person such as their marital status and approximate age at time of death, but they also can yield information about surviving and previously deceased family members, including ages, literacy, name changes, and adoptions. Probate records can not only verify heirs but can also aid in tracking of real estate and family heirlooms. How to find these records is a key first step. Once located, looking beyond just wills and examining other documents, such as petitions and accounts, will allow a researcher to extract previously unknown clues and possibly open new avenues of exploration.

Richard Bridges, the Kennebec Historical Society speaker for October, hopes to offer guidance on how to make such progress. Born and raised in coastal Maine, Bridges traces his ancestral roots back to 17th-century England. He is a graduate of the University of Maine and the Catholic University of America Columbus School of Law, with over 40 years of experience in real estate and probate law. He is a member of several historical and genealogical societies, and he is a life member of KHS.

The presentation, free to the public (donations are gladly accepted), is scheduled to begin 6:30 p.m. Tuesday, October 15, at Augusta City Center, located at 16 Cony Street in Augusta. For more information, call Scott Wood, executive director, at 622-7718.

November Extra: “Silent Films in Maine, Part II”

The Kennebec Historical Society program “Silent Films in Maine” drew nearly 60 people to the Augusta City Center lecture hall, enough to prompt speaker Ed Lorusso to offer to present another pair of silent films in November.

Lorusso showed *Caught in the Rapids* and *Cupid, Registered Guide*, in August. At the next presentation, he will show *Border River* and *A Knight of the Pines*, roughly 25 minutes each. As before, Lorusso will provide commentary, then answer questions after the viewing.

From 1919 to 1921, Augusta was home to a movie production company founded by Edgar Jones and local businessmen. Jones’ goal was to make “North Woods” films. He chose the Augusta area because of the Kennebec River, surrounding lakes and forestland, and its four seasons. Jones brought in a company of actors and a film crew, who all lived together at 129 Sewall Street. Jones used locals as extras in the films. The films premiered at the Colonial Theater in Augusta.

Jones worked with local writer Holman Day to adapt many of Day’s stories for the films. In 1921 Day and local businessmen took over the company, ousting Jones. Day soon bankrupted the company.

Six of the dozens of two-reel films from this era are known to survive. Four are archived at the Library of Congress in various collections, and British Film Institute donated a pair to Northeast Historic Film in Bucksport. Digital scans of the original 35-millimeter films, with new music scores added, were screened in June 2023 at the Colonial.



Border River (1919) stars Evelyn Brent and Edgar Jones.

Lorusso has been restoring silent films since he retired. Six of his projects have been licensed by Turner Classic Movies, including *The Enchanted Cottage* (1924), which aired in late September. His projects have been screened at various theaters and silent film festivals across the country. He’s also the author of *The Silent Films of Marion Davies* and is working on a book about filmmaking in Maine during the silent era.

The Kennebec Historical Society presentation is co-sponsored by the Maine State Library free to the public (donations are gladly accepted). It is scheduled for 6:30 p.m. Wednesday, November 13, at the library’s temporary location, 242 State Street in Augusta. For details about the program, call Scott Wood, KHS executive director, at 622-7718.



Ben Hendricks Jr. and Edna May Sperl star in *The Knight of the Pines* (1920).

Images courtesy of Ed Lorusson

Additional Program

November: “The Murder of Mattie Hackett and the Trial of Elsie Raymond”



Cover courtesy of the author

On Thursday evening, August 17, 1905, the town of Readfield was shaken by the murder of 17-year-old Mattie Hackett, a student at the Maine Wesleyan Seminary & Female College at Kents Hill. Within a few days of the murder, law enforcement suspected Mrs. Elsie Raymond of the crime but was unable to secure an indictment. Six years later, a candidate for Kennebec County attorney promised that if elected, he would bring the perpetrator to justice. He was elected and the case was re-opened and reinvestigated, subsequently resulting in the indictment and trial of Raymond.

In the Kennebec Historical Society’s lecture for November, “The Murder of Mattie Hackett and the Trial of Elsie Raymond,” speaker Peter M. Pettingill will review the timeline of the murder and trial, the Kennebec County characters involved, and the dynamics at work involving the press and the politics that drove a case to trial that many at the time considered politically motivated.

Pettingill, who credits his family with having instilled in him a love of Maine genealogy and history, is an amateur genealogist and historian from New Hampshire who holds a Bachelor of Arts degree in English from the State University of New York. He retired in 2022 from a 36-year insurance career. Since then he has written three historical novels, including two that take place in Kennebec County.

The lecture, co-sponsored by the Maine State Library, is scheduled for 6:30 p.m. November 20 at the library’s temporary location, 242 State Street in Augusta. Donations are gladly accepted. For more information, call the society at (207) 622-7718.

\$3,000 Grant to Help KHS Assess Its Franco-American Collection

The Kennebec Historical Society has received a \$3,000 grant from the Maine Historical Records Advisory Board and the National Historical Publications and Record Commission to fund a professional collection and preservation assessment. The Archival Collection and Preservation Assessment grant is administered by the state board, an advisory group within the Maine State Archives, which recently notified KHS of the award.

The grant money will be used to finance a professional assessment of the society’s Mill Park Heritage Project. In September 2021, KHS received materials collected by the now-defunct Friends for a Heritage Center at Mill Park (*Kennebec Current*, January-February 2022). The Mill Park had hoped to create a French heritage center in Augusta, but that hope faded when the building they wanted to house their collection was sold.

The society received all the materials the group had collected during its 12 years of existence. Those materials included framed and unframed photos, placards, display boards, factory tools, and interviews with over 80 workers involved in Augusta’s manufacturing past along the Kennebec River. Most of those interviewed were Franco-Americans who spoke French at home. Over time, most learned to speak English as well.

Today, many of their primarily English-speaking children are merchants, lawyers, doctors, teachers and other professionals who live, work, and play in the local community. The society plans to continue the work of preserving the vibrant factory and Franco culture, which the gradual disappearance of the older generations puts at risk.

The Mill Park group’s collection has yet to be catalogued and therefore is inaccessible to researchers and the public. The collection is large and cumbersome, and preserving it and making it properly accessible requires significant planning. KHS expects to use the grant award to contract with an external archives professional or professional organization to conduct a collection preservation assessment.

“Having an archive professional guide us on best practice for preserving and promoting a collection as important as this is priceless,” said the society’s executive director, Scott Wood. “We are thrilled to receive the Maine State Archives grant and thankful for the opportunity it presents.” Once the collection has been assessed and evaluated, the society will make the effort needed to preserve the Mill Park Heritage Project properly, promoting awareness of the collection through its website, its bi-monthly newsletter, social media accounts, and future news releases.



Spinning room at the Edwards Cotton Mill, circa 1910
Image from the KHS archive



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

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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

Society's email address: kennhis1891@gmail.com

Telephone: (207) 622-7718

Website: www.kennebechistorical.org

Current email address: KennebecCurrent@gmail.com