

Kennebec Current

"And is there mercy for you, who showed no mercy? I dare not encourage you to hope, that any earthly power will interpose for your relief. The claims of human justice must be satisfied." — Maine Chief Justice Nathan Weston in sentencing Joseph Sager, October 23, 1834 (see page 4)

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March–April 2025

Johnson Hall Wins Statewide Preservation Award

Gardiner's Johnson Hall Opera House was a stable in its early years, and its newest award suggests that its future will be stable, too. The Water Street entertainment venue, where the upper stage has been open for a full year now since the completion of a \$9.3 million building renovation, has received an Honor Award from Maine Preservation, a statewide nonprofit organization.

The group presented the venue's award, and awards to other recipients, on March 25 at the opera house.

"The challenges of the project were myriad: the COVID-19 pandemic, two floods, workforce shortages, inflation, supply chain issues, and even the war in Ukraine, which affected steel prices," Maine Preservation said in a news release announcing the award.

The renovation is the second recent Gardiner project to receive the agency's award. The restoration of St. Ann's Churchyard, on Dresden Avenue, won the award in 2022 (*Kennebec Current*, May-June 2022).



Executive and Artistic Director Michael Miclon looks forward to more growth at Gardiner's Johnson Hall Opera House after its successful first year of full post-renovation operation.

Photo by Joseph Owen

Current FOLLOWUP

Johnson Hall Opera House, owned by the local nonprofit group Johnson Hall Inc., has hosted 25 ticketed shows on its third-floor Reehl Stage since opening the 407-seat upper theater in March 2024. Show attendees have come from 36 U.S. states and three other countries, according to Executive and Artistic Director Michael Miclon.

One of the big draws for both audiences and performers, he said, is the quality of the space's sound, adding that an acoustics company spent two days "tuning the room" with microphones and computers, testing music ranging from classical to hard rock, to determine proper placement of speakers before live performances began.

"Lyle Lovett said it was like performing in a recording studio," Miclon said, recalling the Grammy-winning singer-songwriter's appearance there on May 8, 2024, with fellow Grammy-winner Lisa Loeb. A ticket to that show cost \$180, but most events are far less expensive. The price of a movie ticket is only \$5. "We wanted to make sure we didn't outprice anybody," Miclon said, adding that in many instances, "I get acts that are on their way up or on their way down."

He said he doesn't worry about competition from other local entertainment venues, because each has unique characteristics that the others can't duplicate. "People want a variety. You don't always want to go to the same restaurant," Miclon said. "Our niche is really quality sound."

Johnson Hall in its current size dates to 1864, when Benjamin Johnson, owner of the adjacent Johnson House hotel, decided "to convert his modest livery stable, just next door, into a proper hall that would accommodate and draw audiences from up and down the Kennebec River," according to Robert Abbey and Dawn Thistle's 2015 booklet *Legacy: 150 Years of Johnson Hall*. Construction took eight months. The new structure held its grand opening on December 6. The ground floor still was a stable, but the second floor consisted of a restaurant and dressing rooms, and the events hall was on the third floor.

The building hosted a series of concerts, plays, dances, and other performances through its first quarter-century. Frederick Douglass, perhaps the best-known 19th-century advocate of abolishing slavery in America, lectured there. James G. Blaine, of Augusta, destined to be the Republican presidential nominee in 1884, addressed capacity crowds there in 1879 and 1880. The temperance movement held several rallies there in the 1860s. The hall also became a haven for roller-skating.

After carrying out a series of minor improvements over the years, Johnson closed the hall in 1888 for several months and converted the third-story hall into a full-blown opera house, replete with ornamentation. Most of the earlier activities occurred there, as well as new ones, such as Wormwood's Monkey Theater, featuring a dinner attended by suit-wearing

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Davis Grant Funds Computer for *Current*



Editor's Note
Joseph Owen

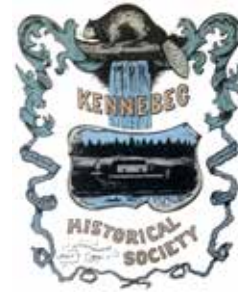
The *Kennebec Current* took another step toward maturation in January with the arrival of a \$3,499 grant from the Yarmouth-based Davis Family Foundation, established by Phyllis C. Davis and H. Halsey Davis.

The grant enabled the Kennebec Historical Society to buy a new Apple iMac desktop computer and equip it with the appropriate software needed to produce the content and layout of the bimonthly *Current* at the society's Augusta headquarters instead of in the homes of volunteers, which is largely where those tasks have been carried out since the newsletter's inception in late 1990.

The *Current* is the primary means through which the society disseminates information about local history and society activities to its members. Moving its production to the society's Henry Weld Fuller Jr. House is intended give KHS more control over its production and greater assurance of production continuity in the event that any of the current volunteer newsletter staffers – at least nine of whom are over 70 – are unable to carry out their duties.

The society also hopes to train additional volunteers to step into those roles in case that becomes necessary.

KHS has bought the computer and subscribed to and installed the software, including an InDesign layout package. It plans to train volunteers to use them and move the entire production into the Fuller House by this summer. The grant will cover the first 12 months of the software subscription; after that, the subscription is expected to add about \$1,200 to the society's annual expenses.



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

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Kennebec Current

Our 172nd 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.

Correction

“Your Kennebec Roots” column

An article in our January-February issue stated incorrectly the time when the Maine State Library would reopen in the Cultural Building in Augusta. Maine State Librarian Lori Fisher said that though the construction was slated to be completed in February, “the collections move back would start in September. We do not anticipate being fully moved in (collections and staff) until late in 2025.” No date has been set for the reopening.

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Samuel Sawyer
Sixth Maine Battery officers sit on the Maine State House portico in 1865 in Augusta.

Samuel Sawyer photo courtesy
of the Maine Historic Preservation Commission

Mixed-race Research Unveils Dark Past

A few years ago, I offered to do a friend's genealogy. She had claimed to be of American Indian descent on her father's side. Admittedly, I hear this often – too often, perhaps, as it seems people love to think they have some sort of indigenous people's blood running through their veins, adding a bit of mystery to their family tree. Still, we are good friends, and I accepted the challenge eagerly.



Rich Eastman



My friend gave me as much information as she had, including the purported link to her Amerindian ancestry with as much detail as she had remembered. Her link was through her great-grandmother Eliza Phillips, who married Michael Blair Jr. in northern Vermont about 1879, left that area for Belfast, and eventually settled in

Kennebec County. Her death certificate listed her birth in 1861 in Bristol, Vermont, and her death as 1949 in Farmington, though she spent her last days living in Chelsea, where many of her children were. Her race was listed as Indian and her occupation as basket maker. Her husband, who was from Highgate, Vermont, was listed as a horse trader in early census records, so there seemed little doubt at the time that I was researching someone of Amerindian descent.

Tracking Phillips' ancestry was not hard, but it revealed many clues about her origins that I had not encountered before. The Vermont census records had listed her race as both "I" (indicating Indian) and "M" (indicating Mulatto). I found her father, Pierre Phillips, in northern Vermont; his census records listed him as Mulatto. He also appeared in many early Vermont newspapers, having had trouble with the law for public drinking, fighting, and stealing. His father, Antoine Phillips, appeared just as often and was equally in trouble with the law. The earliest census record for the elder Phillips revealed that he was listed as "B," or black.

I contacted my friend and advised her that if she wanted to know for sure, she should purchase the DNA test that Ancestry was offering. Sure enough, her DNA results came back as 5% West African and no American Indian descent at all. This huge turn of events raised questions. Why did the Phillips and Blair family come to Maine, and why did they refer to themselves as Indians? The answers came once I learned about Henry F. Perkins, a professor of zoology at the University of Vermont, and his eugenics survey as an adjunct to his heredity course. Its mission was threefold: eugenics research, public education about its findings, and support for social legislation that would reduce the apparent growing population of Vermont's "social problem group." Most notorious of these reforms was Vermont's 1931 eugenic sterilization law, "A Law for Human Betterment by Voluntary Sterilization."

Given the trouble that had befallen the Phillipses and others, the family had been targeted as people who needed to be sterilized or otherwise "managed" in order to remove the social problem from Vermont's responsibilities as caretakers for the poor. These occasions of "bad heredity" were sought after, not only in Vermont, but across state borders into Maine and New Hampshire. I came into possession of a typed letter submitted in 1926 by a person titled "In charge of Field Research" in Vermont and addressed to the State Department of Public Welfare in Augusta. This researcher was trying to locate a Phillips family that had left Vermont and moved to the Belfast area.

"These people in the past were known as "gypsies" but in all probability they are part French, part Indian and part Negro (largely negro)," the researcher wrote. "As far as I know they have never been registered as colored. There was a certain Pete Phillips who was known as 'One-eyed Pete, King of the Gypsies'. He is said to have had about eighteen children." The letter goes on to identify a few of the Phillips family members by name that this researcher had been tasked with finding, no doubt to coerce them to return to Vermont and potentially further the eugenics ideology.

It is unknown whether the Maine welfare office ever responded. My hope is that they filed this letter without pursuing the family.

QUERIES:

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.

PHILBRICK/PHILBROOK – Seeking to verify the birth of Mary/Molly/Polly Philbrick, born July 15, 1778 (according to Avon town records). She married the Rev. Samuel Williams, of Readfield, on October 21, 1800, in Readfield, with Polly being from Mount Vernon. They settled in Avon and went west. Polly is thought to have been a daughter of Titus Philbrick, originally from Rye, New Hampshire, and with his brothers, settled in Washington Plantation, later Mount Vernon. Any help is greatly appreciated. Contact Susan Super at susan.super@yahoo.com



Beyond the Trap Door: The Deaths of Phebe and Joseph Sager

The year 1835 started off with an event in Augusta not to be forgotten by those who witnessed it: the hanging of Joseph J. Sager at the corner of Winthrop and State streets near where the county jail was located at the time. The Kennebec Historical Society possesses the gallows trap door reportedly used on January 2 of that year for the execution. The Maine Historical Society borrowed it recently for its yearlong exhibit on true crime in Maine.

Here we present a summary of what led up to such a tragic end to two lives.



The Archivist's Pen
Emily Schroeder

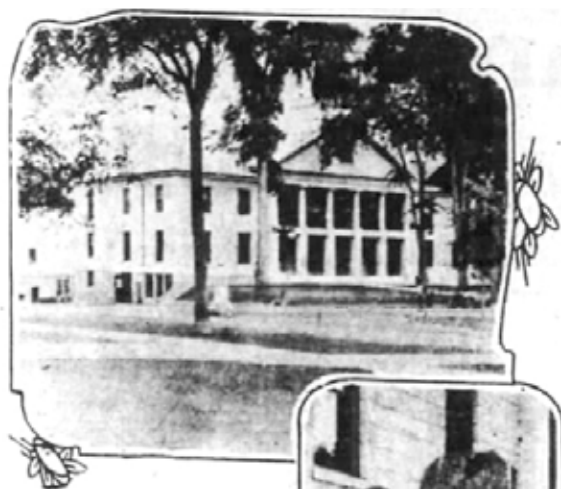
Joseph and Phebe Sager lived in Gardiner, on Water Street in a yellow house on the site of the Milliken Block, currently occupied by the Stillwater Restaurant. He had a harness shop, and she was a milliner. They had a boarder, Ann Rafter. The marriage was not a happy one, by all accounts. Phebe Sager was frequently ill and in poor humor. Joseph Sager did not always stay at home. On the morning of October 5, 1834, Mrs. Sager was particularly low. Mr. Sager was in the habit of giving his wife a concoction of raw egg, sugar, and wine; she refused to eat the breakfast that Rafter had prepared, saying she was too sick. She was indeed; she vomited violently and repeatedly. Dr. David Neal was summoned and gave her an emetic (ipecac today). The efforts to rid Mrs. Sager of her distress were in vain, for she died soon thereafter, in the middle of the afternoon. Joseph was taken to jail the next day, as the circumstances aroused great suspicion of his guilt. A white powder was found in a cream pitcher, the cream being added to tea. There was also some sediment in the bottom of the tumbler, which Joseph had given to Phebe, of a likewise questionable nature. The powder was later identified as arsenic. More on that in a bit.

Thankfully, a transcript of Joseph Sager's trial exists, set in type by Luther Severance, co-founder and publisher of the *Kennebec Journal*, though that connection is not made in print. Harvard University has digitized a copy.

The proceedings began on October 23, with the following persons taking part: Judges Nathan Weston and Albion K. Parris; Maine Attorney General Nathan Clifford and Kennebec County Attorney J.W. Bradbury, counsel for the government; and Peleg

Sprague, Frederick Allen, and George W. Bachelder, counsel for the prisoner. Jury selection proceeded apace with 38 men interviewed from area towns. Most were eliminated when cited for bias, having a set opinion of guilt or innocence and/or objecting to the death penalty. The resulting panel consisted of Frederick Aborn, Oliver Bean, Anson Barton, Cyrus Guild, Levi Greely, Isaac Lapham, Jacob Main, Benjamin F. Melvin, Sanford Pullen, William Perkins, Alonzo Wood, and John Woodcock. Bean was appointed foreman.

Doctors testified first. Each spoke individually about his postmortem, and without the other doctors present. Dr. Amos Nourse stated that Phebe Sager's bowels were inflamed and he found some white powder on some parts of the stomach, but he did not preserve them. He did not know Mrs. Sager or her medical history. He remarked that there was no evidence of poisoning from her external appearance. He did not examine her heart, viscera, or brain. Interestingly, gall stones were found after Nourse left the room; the person who found them was not identified or called to testify. A Dr. Jewett was next; he concurred with Nourse, and he also noted he had found no appearance of corrosion, ulceration, or abrasion. He took the stomach contents, vomit and the milk-tea mixture to Brunswick to be tested by a Professor Cleaveland, the last being saved at Dr. Neal's request. Jewett added that Joseph Sager had taken two papers containing white powder to Jewett for testing the previous April or May, which he performed. He was looking for a garlic smell when the powder was applied to



Square in Augusta on which gallows were erected, showing the county court house.



The trap of the gallows on which Sager was hung. Orville Coleman, who found it in the cellar, is holding it.

These images from the *Portland Press Herald*, published on June 30, 1929, show, at top, the Augusta town square where Joseph Sager was hanged; and at lower right, Orville Coleman standing next to the gallows trap door, currently in possession of the Kennebec Historical Society.

From the KHS collection

a hot shovel, which would indicate metallic arsenic. He also tasted them, but got no taste. He either threw the papers away or gave them back; he could not remember which.

Mrs. Sager had asked Jewett for help about a week before her death. The powders in her stomach and the contents were tested for arsenic, but no evidence of it was found there. Neal was with Mrs. Sager, as previously stated, and thought that she had been poisoned. He stated that the inflammation of her stomach caused her death. Dr. D.H. Mirick agreed with the others, though there was some discussion about the various symptoms of poisoning, and how not all of them had to be present to indicate it.

The most definitive testimony came from Professor Cleaveland, who used four tests on each of the three vials that had been brought to him. “I found arsenic enough in the tea and milk to destroy forty lives if equally divided,” he said, according to the transcript of the 1834 trial.

Other witnesses appeared for the prosecution, including one of Mrs. Sager’s sons, who said that there was hostility between the couple. Clearly the most damning testimony was Rafter’s. Joseph Sager gives his own version of October 5 in his journal, and the two differ, as one might expect. Rafter never mentions that Mr. Sager put sugar in the wine mixture. She said she noticed white powder on and in the milk pitcher and showed it to Mrs. Sager, and both thought it ought to be given to the dog to see what the result was. Joseph Sager pretended to give it to the pup,

but did not, according to both accounts. Rafter also testified that she herself drank a little of the tea and felt somewhat ill afterward, but no one else did. That conflicts with Joseph Sager’s written account, in which he said his wife had some and it immediately made her ill; he found white specks in the saucer. He also states in his writings that another person was present in the kitchen, held some papers, and was close to the milk. The person is not named and is represented in the journal by two blank lines. The footnote of the transcription says: “The name which was written out by Sager, is here suppressed for reasons which must be obvious to everyone.” (Unfortunately, it’s not obvious to today’s researcher.) The versions even differ regarding what Joseph Sager was given for breakfast: Rafter said potato and butter, but he did not eat; he said fish and egg, which he did eat. Both agreed that he spent a notable amount of time cleaning his boots that morning.

At the trial, several witnesses were called for the defendant, with varying remarks. Most said Mrs. Sager’s health was bad, with two women saying they thought she had been improving of late. None made any difference in the outcome. The jury was ready with a verdict by Monday morning, the 27th, a mere four days after the procedure began.

The journal in which Mr. Sager records his thoughts is noteworthy, starting with what happened on October 5, continuing with a list of jurors with their towns, and bemoaning the fact that there should have been more from Gardiner. The bulk of the writing reveals an extraordinary intellect and fervent belief in God, asking for forgiveness for his many sins of youth, but not for the murder he was accused of. He professed his innocence to the last. Many ministers visited him, and the Rev. Benjamin Tappan appeared to be a champion of sorts. He was to read a statement from Sager at his hanging, but there is no record of this happening.

Questions remain. What really was wrong with Phebe Sager? Did she have an ulcer? The last several years of her life were very unhealthy ones. Rafter also testified that Joseph Sager had shown her a trunk and some white powder from it; why was that not sought out? Was there more on the premises? Mrs. Sager had become violently ill before drinking the tea and milk. Did Rafter play a role in her death? Was Mrs. Sager sufficiently depressed to kill herself? (She frequently blamed her sick spells on her husband.) Did she have any enemies? Was there another woman, or women? And finally, did Mr. Sager really kill his wife?

Phebe Sager, her daughter Dorcas Jane from her second marriage, and her second husband, John Gardiner, are buried in St. Ann’s Cemetery next to Christ Church in Gardiner. Her gravestone is in pieces, perhaps a fitting symbol for her fractured life. We don’t know exactly where Joseph Sager is; legend has it that he’s buried on an island in Winthrop. The tribute on the cover of his journal is fitting: “He being dead, yet speaketh.”

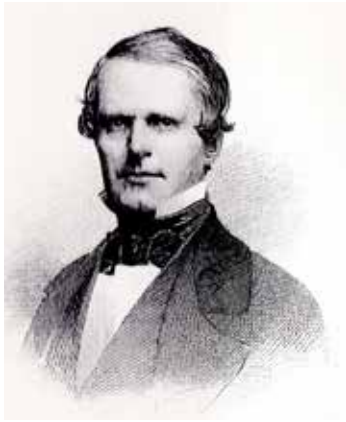
So long for now.



Movers working for the Maine Historical Society borrow the gallows trap door for a yearlong exhibit titled “Notorious: Maine Crime in the Public Eye, 1690–1940,” which opened on March 14 in Portland.

Photo by Scott Wood

Augusta Was Incubator of First Truly American Literary Character



This illustration of the Rev. Sylvester Judd appears in the 1854 edition of the biography *Life and Character of the Rev. Sylvester Judd*.

KHS collection

A freshly minted minister stepped off the steam *Huntress* in 1840 in Augusta after a twelve-hour sea voyage from Boston, entering what had been a rough-hewn frontier village only two generations earlier but now had become a boomtown.

That minister, the Rev. Sylvester Judd, arrived to occupy the pulpit in the local Unitarian church; and although he made his mark there, he was destined to have a much greater influence on the development of American literature, thanks partly to the interconnected nature of Augusta's business and social elite.

When Maine became a state in 1820, Fort Western, the primitive British frontier outpost at head tide on the Kennebec River, had grown from a small cluster of wooden dwellings into a burgeoning community. The valley's population was growing rapidly.

In Augusta, the law firm of James Bridge and his younger partner, Reuel Williams, represented the original, ill-defined property rights then held by successors to the Kennebec Proprietors, a group of Boston absentee landowners, their supposed holdings 13 miles wide on each side of the river from Merrymeeting Bay to the Taconic Falls (now Waterville). Litigating disputed titles earned lucrative fees. By 1820, Bridge and Williams were two of the most affluent and influential men in the new state.

Bridge retired early, while Williams continued in a more active role within the community. He built a mansion on the bluff above Fort Western, including an octagonal

library, the walls covered by panels imported from France depicting the South Sea voyages of Captain James Cook. Their wealth, and that of others, brought cultural energy to the area.

The rise in literacy produced an energy that questioned the older order. New spiritual ideas were more attractive than the old verities of colonial Puritanism. Arguments over the path to salvation created evangelical debate within Protestantism. Liberal ideas questioned the authority of scripture, the idea that human spiritual fulfillment could be found only within the wisdom of the New Testament. In Augusta, Williams led a group of prominent men in organizing a Unitarian society, the East Parish Christ Church. The new church did not enjoy solid growth, however. While Williams' daughter Jane Elizabeth became an ardent follower, some of her siblings, and even Williams himself, occasionally, attended the new Episcopal St. Mark's church, which was organized at the same time.

In the first 15 years, temporary Unitarian ministers came and went until Judd, an eager 27-year-old Harvard Divinity School graduate, ascended to the pulpit for the first time on July 26, 1840, addressing a congregation that often included Williams – then a U.S. senator – and Gov. John Fairfield, according to Richard D. Hathaway's 1981 book *Sylvester Judd's New England*. Less than a year later, making his commitment to his congregation and community permanent, Judd married Reuel Williams' daughter Jane Elizabeth.

Sylvester and Jane Elizabeth Judd's brick home – now the west end of a commercial strip development, half-hidden behind a CVS drugstore – stands just across Cony Circle from what once was the Williams front lawn.

Born in Westhampton, Massachusetts, Sylvester Judd was raised with strong roots in Calvinistic Puritanism. First in his class at Hopkins Academy in Hadley, Massachusetts, Judd was caught up in a religious revival that swept through the area that year. Upon graduation, the valedictorian entered Yale University, intending to become a Congregational minister. This conservative grip of Calvinism loosened, however, when Judd was exposed to wider understandings of theology. In his final year at Yale, the Phi Beta Kappa graduate forsook Congregationalism and transferred to Harvard to study Unitarianism.

Judd entered Harvard in September 1837. The Phi Beta Kappa Society held its autumn event just a week later across campus at First Parish Church. There, Judd sat rapt as essayist, philosopher, and fellow minister Ralph Waldo Emerson delivered his now-famous essay "The American Scholar," developing his notion of "transcendentalism" for the first time.

Emerson proclaimed that it was time to let go of the lingering affectations of Colonial culture and develop a new, unique form of American intellectualism, inspiration drawn through the study of our natural world, not religious text or traditional views. These ideas overturned Judd's thinking. He befriended Emerson, spending vacations with him in Concord, Massachusetts, where he met other like-minded intellectuals – in particular, an older and, at the time, unknown author named Nathaniel Hawthorne. In later days, Emerson described Judd as a person of "distinct American culture identity."

Beyond his divinity studies, the associations Judd made in Concord with Emerson and others took hold. Even before leaving Cambridge, Judd formulated an idea for a novel, the story line based upon how a character, like the old order itself, responds to the demands of contemporary American life.

Though influenced deeply by the Concord literary circle, Judd was not a transcendentalist, but rather a complicated personality with a high sense of moral values. Though Unitarian, Judd paradoxically still believed in the centrality of Christ in religion. When he ascended the East Parish Christ Church pulpit in Augusta, his stern orthopraxy – a focus on correct behavior, as opposed to orthodoxy, adherence to a set of beliefs – was immediately apparent. When his wife’s cousin, Army Capt. Seth Williams, returned as a hero from the Mexican War, Judd, a pacifist, refused to receive him as a visitor unless he wore civilian clothes. When his father-in-law, Reuel Williams, hosted President James K. Polk as an overnight guest in his house, Judd, in protest of the president’s national policies, refused to walk across the lawn separating his house from the Williams mansion to extend a welcome.

In 1845, Judd published one of the first literary pieces of American fiction, a book titled *Margaret*. The literary form today is called a bildungsroman: the growth and education of a character from an innocent childhood into a mature person. This genre character was so unique at that time in literature that, upon review, literary critic and poet James Russell Lowell called Judd’s novel “the most emphatically American book ever written.”

Exploring a new, darker side to human character, *Margaret* preceded, and perhaps inspired, more-famous works such as *The Scarlet Letter* (1850), by Hawthorne, and *Moby Dick* (1851), by Herman Melville. The story centers around a young girl, Margaret Hart, growing up in a New England village; and her spiritual education as she escapes poverty, overcomes temptation, and fashions her own social, rather than domestic, power. During the journey of her character, Judd exposes the reader to a surprising range of knowledge, from an understanding of botany to the social effects of alcoholism.

Judd and Hawthorne enjoyed a close acquaintance. Judd knew Hawthorne through his visits with Emerson in Concord, but also through family and social connections in Augusta. James Bridge and Reuel Williams were not only joined together as law partners, but their children intermarried – James Bridge Jr. to Sarah Williams, a sister of Judd’s wife. Horatio Bridge was James’ brother. He had attended Bowdoin College, graduating in the class of 1825 with his best friend, Hawthorne.

Unlike Judd, who found professional and literary success almost immediately after college, Hawthorne was often unemployed, struggling to establish his writing career. When producing short stories under a pseudonym for a penny a page failed to earn Hawthorne a living, Horatio Bridge convinced him in 1837 to collect the pieces into book form, as described in James R. Mellow’s 1980 biography *Nathaniel Hawthorne in His Times*. Bridge underwrote the expense behind Hawthorne’s back and had the collection published as *Twice Told Tales*. Hawthorne finally had published something under his own name. Later that year, Hawthorne visited the Augusta area as a guest of the Bridge family, a trip documented in his *American Note-books*. He toured the Oaklands, the Gardiner family’s castle home, then under construction. Horatio Bridge hired a guide, and the three went canoeing and fishing up Seven Mile Stream. Hawthorne described the mix of cultures, the wealthy descendants of Colonial days offering a contrast with the Irish and French-Canadian working class.

What is notable here is that two Augusta families, Williams and Bridge, connected with one another through business and in marriage, had become by this time patrons of two of the most notable early authors of truly American fiction.

In 1853, tragedy struck. Preparing intensely for a lecture in Boston, Judd fell ill, lingered for a few weeks, and succumbed to some unknown ailment at age 39. The novel *Margaret* was his only attempt at fiction. The book was a sensation at the time with contemporary readers. He was mourned by the Concord literary community, in particular by Hawthorne.

Margaret is largely forgotten today. It is hard to understand a person such as Judd and what “American” was supposed to mean then, given that the Civil War’s arrival just eight years after Judd’s death years changed the perspective of our national experience. This is probably the greatest reason for his work being forgotten.

Until Augusta’s Memorial Bridge inundated the neighborhood with tollbooths, roads, and automobiles, Judd was remembered locally more for his prominent brick home than his book. Now this reminder of his life in Augusta is forgotten.

In 1992, the Unitarian Church in Augusta merged with the Universalist Congregation on Winthrop Street, naming the Judd Parish House next door in homage to Judd.

Yet the various literary themes that Judd first dared to explore live on. They become the staple subject matter of 19th-century American literature. Hawthorne, Melville, and Mark Twain all strove to develop a literary genre that is truly “American.” In this respect, Hester Prynne, Ishmael, and even Huckleberry Finn are all grown from the same seed as Judd’s main character, Margaret Hart. With due respect to those authors, Sylvester Judd was first. This his greatest legacy of all.



The former home of the Rev. Sylvester Judd stands a stone’s throw east of the east end of Memorial Bridge in Augusta.

Photo by Rich Eastman

Photographer Sawyer Left Legacy Before Heading West — Twice



Officers of the Nineteenth Maine Regiment assemble for a portrait in 1865 at the Maine State House in Augusta.

Samuel Sawyer photos courtesy of the Maine Historic Preservation Commission

When Samuel W. Sawyer was in the twilight of his career in the Oklahoma Territory, he was engaged in banking, lumber, and coal. In early adulthood, however, he was a prolific photographer who left a weighty visual record of central Maine and other parts of the state. He might have stayed in that line of work if not of the intervention of two catastrophic fires.

Nothing is known of Sawyer's origins except that he was born in Maine on February 20, 1830, and may have obtained his photographic training in Boston. He first appeared in the press when the *Oxford Democrat* issue of June 23, 1854, observed that S.W. and P.M. Sawyer were in South Paris "to take your picture if you will call on them." By 1858 Samuel Sawyer had opened a studio in Winthrop. There he displayed photographs of Winthrop residents, including the Rev. Daniel Thurston, an 80-year-old Congregational minister.

In 1860 Sawyer and his wife moved to Bangor, where they initially shared a studio with William H. Dole. An accomplished artist, Mrs. Sawyer offered to colorize her husband's albumen portraits by overpainting them in oils, watercolors, or pastels. As in Winthrop, much of Sawyer's work consisted of portraits, and his patrons for large-format photographs included U.S. Vice President Hannibal Hamlin, of Bangor.

Samuel Sawyer's most popular form of portraiture was the carte de visite, a small image mounted on a 4½-inch-by-2½-inch card. Describing Sawyer's CDVs, the *Bangor Daily Evening Times* for April 5, 1862, stated, "The size of these pictures, adapting them to conveyance by letter, and for reception in albums, and their comparative cheapness, make them sought after by everyone." Among those who sat for their CDV with Sawyer were former Gov. William G. Crosby, of Belfast; U.S. Rep. James G. Blaine, of Augusta; the Rev. John Bapst, of Bangor; Revolutionary War veteran William Hutchins, of Penobscot; and Native American Molly Molasses. During the Civil War years of 1861 to 1865, Sawyer made CDVs of many Maine soldiers, including more than 40 that are in public and private collections.

By the mid-1860s, Sawyer offered tintype portraits in the same size as paper CDVs. Apparently, his tintypes were popular with working men, for three of them depict river drivers. Two of those tintypes are owned by the Maine Historical Society and one by the Smithsonian American Art Collection. Their spiked boots define their occupation.

From 1864 to 1869, Sawyer advertised examples of his landscape photography. In the *Bangor Whig & Courier* of June 10, 1864, he announced his "large collection of photographic views of public buildings and private residences of Bangor."

This included views of 11 prominent buildings and 31 homes. Sawyer produced these images as CDVs and larger-format photographs. They were described by the *Kennebec Journal* in Augusta on June 24, 1864: “This is a new element of delight to families who are thereby enabled not only to furnish to distant members of the family and their many dear friends, life-like pictures of themselves, but of the houses they occupy.”

By 1866 Samuel Sawyer’s outdoor photography included stereo views. In addition to views of Bangor homes, churches, business blocks, and street scenes, he offered a series titled “Views of the Ruins in Portland, Maine.” Numbering at least 28 scenes of the devastated city, these views were made within days of the Great Fire of July 4, 1866. On July 16, 1866, Sawyer placed the following advertisement in the *Bangor Daily Whig & Courier*:

Photographs of the Burnt District of Portland. S.W. Sawyer has just returned from Portland where he has been making stereoscopic pictures of the ruins. From these pictures anyone can get very good ideas of the enormous destruction made by the terrible conflagration.

In 1868 Sawyer and his wife opened a branch studio in Lewiston under the name of the Androscoggin Photograph Company. During this short-lived enterprise, they produced stereo views of Lewiston under the name of the company.

Samuel W. Sawyer’s major achievement in outdoor photography was his series of Maine regimental photographs taken at the end of the Civil War. During the spring and summer of 1865, regiments arrived in Augusta for members to muster out and return home. Sawyer was there to take group photographs of officers and enlisted men as souvenirs of their service in the war. These 8-inch-by-10-inch mounted albumen prints cost a dollar each. In most of his group pictures, Sawyer photographed the soldiers lined up against the rear wall of the State House. Many of the men were still in uniform, but some had already changed into their civilian clothes. The officers of the Sixth Maine Battery were shown seated on the State House portico, and the line officers of the Thirty-First Maine Regiment posed in front of the Custom House in Bangor. Sawyer made at least 12 of these regimental photographs.

During his stay in Augusta, he also photographed the Car America, an elaborate float that was paraded through the streets of the city on July 4, 1865, in celebration of the war’s end. In addition, he produced a composite photograph of individual pictures of the 159 members of the Maine House of Representatives that he sold for five dollars.



The Car America parade float stands behind the Maine State House in Augusta on July 4, 1865. The float was a creation bedecked with flowers, patriotic emblems, and flags; and it carried young women representing every state in the Union, according to the text of a historical marker in Augusta. It was drawn by 10 horses attended to by African-Americans, many of whom were former slaves. Howard Hill, now owned by the Kennebec Land Trust, appears in the background. The buildings behind the parade participants stand roughly where Sewall Street passes by today.

From 1860 to 1870, the Sawyers prospered in Bangor, where they lived in a fashionable neighborhood near West Broadway. On March 18, 1870, a fire destroyed his studio, resulting in a \$10,000 loss of property that was insured for \$3,300. This unfortunate event prompted the Sawyers to leave Bangor for Chicago, where Samuel Sawyer acquired the business of the noted photographer John Carbutt. Sawyer assumed charge of Carbutt’s Chicago studio in August 1870, only to lose everything in the Great Fire of October 8-10, 1871. In the wake of the fire, he became a lumber dealer, supplying timber from Maine to rebuild his newly adopted Midwestern city.



Mary Pelagie Nicola, known as Molly Molasses, was a member of the Penobscot Nation in Old Town, circa 1865.



Capt. William Hutchings, of Penobscot, age 101 in 1865, was one of the last surviving soldiers of the American Revolution.




Mrs. Sawyer, wife of Samuel W. Sawyer, who worked with him in his photographic studio in Bangor, is shown about 1865.

Samuel Sawyer photos courtesy of the Maine Historic Preservation Commission

Photographer Samuel Sawyer

Continued from page 9

In 1892 Samuel W. Sawyer moved to El Reno in what then was the Oklahoma Territory. There he established a lumber and coal business and engaged in banking. When he died on July 20, 1905, at the age of 75, the *El Reno Democrat* eulogized him as “always a staunch friend of El Reno, and in death the town loses one of the most earnest workers for its welfare.”

Whether in Bangor, Chicago, or El Reno, Samuel W. Sawyer was an enterprising individual. When he went west, the *Chicago Daily Tribune* for September 3, 1870, welcomed him as possessing “the highest of credentials as a practical photographer, having ranked in the East as a pioneer in the profession, as well as among the first and most successful.” For Maine, he left a rich and varied legacy of the people and places of the 1860s. 

The author, Hallowell resident Earle G. Shettleworth Jr., is Maine’s state historian and the former director of the Maine Historic Preservation Commission.

KHS Welcomes the Following New Members

Linda Albert — Freeport
John Clark and Mary King — Farmingdale
Brian Clement and Pia DiTerlizzi — Pittston
Tara Wicks DeAngelis — Readfield

Ed and Sophia Democracy — Augusta
Steve and Sandra Gould — Fayette
Lisa Haberzettl — Augusta
Patrice Reynolds — Monmouth

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O'Connor GMC

Johnson Hall Award

Continued from page 1

monkeys served by monkey waiters, after which the monkeys rode around the stage on dogs.

A series of disasters beset Johnson Hall in the early 20th century, starting with Benjamin Johnson's death in 1903. His wife, Henrietta, took over the enterprise; but a Christmas fire in 1904, having begun when the temperature was minus 20 degrees Fahrenheit, gutted the building. It was rebuilt, then rebuilt again after another fire in 1922. Both blazes also wrecked first-floor businesses in the space that once had been the site of the long-vanished stable. Henrietta Johnson repaired the building again, but a scarlet fever epidemic shuttered the opera house for a while in 1924, another fire wreaked destruction there in 1932, and then Kennebec River flooding swamped the first-floor store – as well as the rest of Water Street – in 1936.



Theatergoers await the Whitefield-made nature film *A Peace of Forest* on November 23, 2024, at the Johnson Hall Opera House. It was the first feature-length movie at the Gardiner theater since the final showing of *The Creature from the Black Lagoon* in the 1950s.

Photo by Joseph Owen

The flood of 1987 led them to focus on a preliminary goal – a teaching studio theater on the ground floor. Workers excavated below ground level to attain the required height, and steel trusses were installed to support the third-floor theater. The 110-seat Studio Theater at Johnson Hall opened in 1991, ushering in years of dance, comedy, music, movies, and live theater.

Johnson Hall hired Miclon – an ex-protégé of the Reehls – in 2013. Then the board of directors set a daunting goal: full rehabilitation of the third-floor theater, now named the Reehl Stage in honor of the couple who helped to rescue it. The board launched a capital campaign in 2017, and Kennebec Savings Bank jump-started the effort with a \$100,000 gift.

“Even though it was a long effort, it didn’t feel long,” Miclon said, adding that he has given hundreds of tours of the facility.

The work consisted of two phases: upgrading the building’s exterior, with Ganneston Construction acting as the general contractor; and then reconstruction of all three floors of the interior (*Kennebec Current*, March-April 2022).

In the first phase, Masonry Preservation Associates repointed the brick walls and Jacob’s Glass restored 21 historic windows. Archetype Architects led the design team for the second phase, and Hanson Historic Consulting was the preservation consultant. That involved completely rebuilding all three floors, including ripping out and replacing part of the upper theater’s damaged floor, which revealed ample traces of the fires that had raged through the building over the years.

Johnson Hall Inc. had estimated that the entire project would cost \$4.1 million, but the coronavirus pandemic, inflation, and the war in Ukraine all conspired to more than double the total. Fortunately, the organization received about \$2.6 million worth of federal and state tax credits to help fund the project.

“I will say that I feel great that we got our project done before the current time,” Miclon said, citing the effect of inflation and the shrinking availability of federal grants. He estimated that the same work might cost \$15 million today.

The nonprofit’s annual operating budget is about \$500,000, which includes the cost of paying performers and providing salaries to the four paid employees. Miclon said he anticipates that will grow to \$900,000 or \$1 million within two years as the group expands its mission by adding live-streaming for paying customers who want to watch sold-out shows remotely, for conference participants, and for out-of-town relatives who want to see events such as children’s dance recitals.

Miclon also looks forward to establishing a Gardiner film festival.

“I think that’s definitely an angle that we’re going to pursue in a year or so,” he said.



— by Joseph Owen

Watering Troughs Honor Winthrop Dentist

If another civil war comes and one of its results is the destruction of all automobiles, trains, and planes and the banning of new ones, the town of Winthrop will be ready for a return to horses.



History Through
a Keyhole #17

Many of Winthrop's garages could be converted into stables. The town's fields seem to offer multiple opportunities for grazing. And last but not least, several granite watering troughs still are scattered around the town, relics of a local man's late-19th-century tribute to his father.

It's easy to overlook the troughs, some of which are tucked away inconspicuously on private property, while others stand next to busy roads or intersections where drivers are paying more attention to traffic, as they should be, than to objects decorating the roadsides.

One of the easier ones to find is on a tiny triangle of land marking the intersection of Old Village and Case roads in East Winthrop. Another is in a Main Street parking lot immediately east of the Winthrop History and Heritage Center in downtown Winthrop.

They are among a dozen that author, tax-reform advocate, and former Union Army officer Charles Bowdoin Fillebrown, a Winthrop native who spent most of his life and career elsewhere, commissioned to honor his father, Dr. James Bowdoin Fillebrown (1809-1886).

In the younger Fillebrown's 1910 book, *Genealogy of the Fillebrown Family with Biographical Sketches*, he wrote about his father, "He had an ingenious hand and mind, and was in turn sailor, farmer, blacksmith, carpenter and dentist." In his seafaring days, James Fillebrown took part in seven voyages, including runs to the Mediterranean and South America. His wife, Almira (Butler) Fillebrown, was among the first temperance campaigners in Maine and served many years as president of the Women's Christian Temperance Union of Winthrop.

Dr. Fillebrown set up a dental clinic in downtown Winthrop in 1848, operating it for three decades, with an interruption during the Civil War, when he volunteered in Army hospitals in Washington, D.C., while in his mid-50s, according to his son's book. In 1877, he joined another son, Thomas, at the latter's dental clinic in Portland. Thomas Fillebrown later became a professor of dental surgery at Harvard Dental School, according to a summary of his career published in a 1908 article in the


Robert Pelletier, of Winthrop, indicates the Fillebrown watering trough that stands outside Homestead Realty on the northwest corner of the intersection of Western Avenue and Charles Street in Winthrop. The trough faces Western Avenue. Pelletier was a real estate agent at Homestead before his retirement.

Photo by Joseph Owen

Boston Medical and Surgical Journal (a forerunner of the *New England Journal of Medicine*), which credited him with having "perfected the details for the operation of cleft palate. ..."

His brother Charles arranged for the production and placement of the watering troughs in the late 1890s. Some of them, including one standing outside Homestead Realty on Western Avenue, bear this inscription: "Presented to the town in memory of Dr. J.B. Fillebrown 1897." Others are dated 1896.

Winthrop Maine Historical Society member Robert Pelletier, who has been researching the troughs' history for many years, said they have been moved often, even though each weighs about a ton. The one at the Case Road intersection probably is the only one still in its original location, he said. Pelletier has pinned down the current locations of nine of the troughs, but three are still missing.

He added that the troughs are among about 100 memorials to various local people scattered around Winthrop. He looks forward to compiling more information about them to help remind his fellow Winthrop residents of their heritage. 



Answer to Keyhole #17

Q: What is this?

A: A horse-watering trough

Q: Where is it?

A: A half-mile east of the Main Street turnoff on U.S. Route 202 in Winthrop

Q: What's historic about it?

A: The trough is one of a dozen that were placed at various locations in Winthrop to honor Dr. James B. Fillebrown (1809-1886), a local dentist.

— by Joseph Owen

History Through a Keyhole — Puzzle 18

The only person who submitted an answer to our Puzzle 17 photo is the person who knows more about the subject than anyone else on the planet – Robert Pelletier, the man interviewed for the preceding story.

We didn't have the common sense to tell him in advance that because he would a likely source for information about the story, we would disqualify him from answering the quiz. But we got busy with other tasks, Pelletier sent in his answer, and nobody else did. So what's an overworked, unpaid newsletter staff to do?

For his correct response, Pelletier wins a year's free membership in the Kennebec Historical Society, and he can rest assured that the next 10 or 20 puzzle questions will be about topics far removed from his sphere of expertise.

Our next brain-befogging bout of historical miscellany is depicted in the photo at right. 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 its historic significance 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 May-June issue of the *Kennebec Current*. Answers are due by April 30. Good luck.



Eminent Mainers Chock Full of Bite-size Bios

If you're even just a casual student of Maine history or a regular at book sales, you've likely come across the shiny silver volume titled *Eminent Mainers*, compiled by the late researcher Arthur Douglas Stover (1947-2009), of Alna. It's a valuable, though not incredibly detailed, resource. If you've never taken the time to peruse it and fill up your brain with fun facts about Maine, find yourself a copy and flip through it. You never know what might catch your attention and spark inspiration for further research. Read on to learn about the research rabbit hole I plan to fall into, thanks to the book.



The "succinct biographies" are organized alphabetically, but you can also find them sorted by topic/achievement and birthplace. My preference for reading it is a little more scattershot – flip through the pages and see what fun information jumps out. In my most recent foray, a few Kennebec County less-than-known notables who jumped out were these:

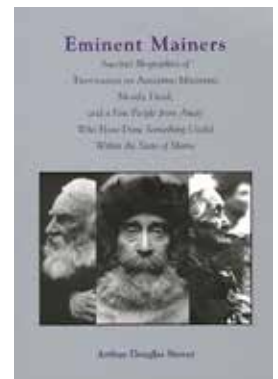
- George Bernard Grant, of Farmingdale, was integral to the development of the mechanical calculator. His invention Grant's Difference Engine was exhibited at the 1876 Philadelphia Exposition. To find out how large the device was (spoiler: bigger than today's calculators), you'll have to look it up in the book.
- Charles Lamson, of Augusta, invented kites and planes to help with meteorological observation. His Lamson Kite was used by the Wright Brothers as they worked on their own aerial inventions.
- Albert Marble, of Vassalboro, was the founding president of the National Education Association, among other educational administrative achievements in New York City and Wisconsin.

And here's the one for the history mystery lovers.

- Samuel Conant, of Waterville, was managing editor of *Harper's Weekly* for 16 years, from 1869 to 1885, "when he mysteriously disappeared." No more is said on that matter in the book.

The book was published in 1997. Certainly a few more eminent Mainers could be added to the volume now. Whether used as a starting point for serious research, or on a whim to pass some time with historical trivia, it's a worthy add to the Maine history lover's library.

The book is available at the Maine State Library as well as Lithgow Public Library in Augusta.



– by Jamie Logan

Around Kennebec County

READFIELD

The **Readfield Historical Society** has completed its campaign to raise money to pay for a professional repainting of its three-story headquarters building on Route 17 in East Readfield, according to the society's president, Bob Harris. The society is hoping to have the work done this summer, and it would include scraping and repainting the antique shutters, hinges, hardware, and exterior trim boards. The society has received more than \$27,000 in donations for the project. "We had to get a painter who was certified to work with lead-based paint," Harris said, explaining why the job will be so expensive. While organizing that project, the society also is trying to deal with dry rot that will necessitate replacing part of its ground floor, which was installed little more than a decade ago.

SIDNEY

Kennebec Current editor Joseph Owen will speak at 2 p.m. April 8 to the **Sidney Historical Society** about his book *This Day in Maine*, a compendium of short articles about events and people in Maine history, including at least one story for every day of the calendar year. The society meets at the Sidney Grange Hall, located at 2986 Middle Road.

WATERVILLE

Nick Champagne, superintendent of the Kennebec Sanitary Treatment District

in Waterville, plans to deliver an illustrated lecture April 5 for the **Waterville Historical Society**, describing the earthwork amassed to create the facility, the challenges of the Kennebec River flooding, how the facility keeps the river clean, and what the district does today. The event is scheduled for 2:30 p.m. at the **Redington Museum**, located at 62 Silver Street in Waterville. Doors open at 2 p.m.

On May 3, the society will participate in Jane's Walk, a global festival whose activities in Maine are organized through Maine Preservation (see <https://www.maine-preservation.org/janes-walk-me>). The **Waterville Historical Society** walk; "Past Passage: A Penny Payable Path," is just one of the many events happening in Maine throughout the day. The time of the event has yet to be confirmed. Call (207) 872-9439 for details.

On May 10 at 2 p.m., the society will lead a field trip across the street from its Silver Street headquarters to tour the Universalist Unitarian Church, learning about the architecture and history of the structure, built in 1832.

Steve Thompson will give a presentation at 6:30 p.m. May 22 at the **Redington Museum** about Nelson, Waterville's famous racehorse. He will also speak about Nelson's owner, Charles Horace Nelson, and Waterville's three trotting parks. Doors open at 6 p.m.



Spectators socialize November 11, 2024, in front of the Redington Museum on Silver Street in Waterville, after the dedication of a tablet honoring Asa Redington. Redington, who lived there, was a Revolutionary War veteran. The museum is the headquarters of the Waterville Historical Society.

Photo by Joseph Owen

✿ In Memoriam ✿

May Ross Coffin, of Augusta, died March 4. She and her late husband Edward Coffin were longtime life members and supporters of the Kennebec Historical Society. She was an Eagle Lake native and a graduate of Cony High School and attendee of Gates Business College. She was the first woman to become assistant secretary of the Maine Senate, where she worked for 32 years. She also was active in many local civic and professional organizations, especially the YMCA, where she held the presidency of the board of directors and many other positions. Her survivors include four children, five stepchildren, 12 grandchildren, and several stepgrandchildren and great-grandchildren.

Pauline (Sproul) Marceau, 92, an Augusta native, a Livermore Falls resident for nearly three-quarters of her life, and a Kennebec Historical Society member for several years, died January 19 in Farmington. She was a 1950 graduate of Cony High School in Augusta. Her survivors include five children, 16 grandchildren, two stepgrandchildren, and many great-grandchildren.

Maryann Carr Tiemann, 70, of Augusta, an 18-year Kennebec Historical Society member, died February 5, 2025. She graduated from Augusta's Cony High School in 1973 and the University of Maine, at Orono, in 1977. After living in Nashville and in Greece, she returned to Maine and worked for several years at UNUM in Portland. She was active for more than 25 years in the Daughters of the American Revolution. Her survivors include her father, a brother, two sisters, a sister-in-law, and many nieces, nephews, and cousins.

Upcoming Programs

April: “The Death of Charlie Northey and Trial of Alice Cooper”

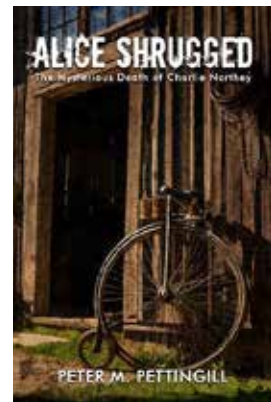
Rumors of an adulterous relationship between Mrs. Alice Cooper and her husband’s former apprentice Charlie Northey flourished in the Maine village of South Windsor during the spring and summer of 1905. Then on a summer-like Tuesday afternoon in October, the 21-one-year-old Northey was found mortally wounded in the Coopers’ dining room with a revolver by his side while a hysterical Mrs. Cooper was witnessed on her front lawn, alleging that Northey had shot himself.

Cooper, a 33-year-old mother of three, admitted to Kennebec County officials that she had purchased the revolver to protect herself from Northey but contended that he had wrested it from her and turned it on himself. She was subsequently indicted for murder, resulting in a trial that lasted 42 days and made headlines from Bangor to Key West and Boston to San Francisco. Those events form the basis of Peter M. Pettingill’s 2024 historical novel *Alice Shrugged: The Mysterious Death of Charlie Northey*.

In his April 16 presentation to the Kennebec Historical Society, Pettingill will present his research on the period, the Kennebec County characters involved, and the dynamics at work concerning the press and the politics that drove to trial a case that many at the time considered politically motivated.

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

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



Cover image courtesy of the author

May: “Amazing Stories: Tales from the Annals of a Maine Family”



Sgt. Simeon Cobb Murch, Castine, 1862

Courtesy of the Castine Historical Society

Belfast genealogist and author Dana Murch, the Kennebec Historical Society’s guest lecturer for May, plans to tell some amazing stories he has discovered while researching the history of the Murch family of Maine, including stories of cod, fornication, capture by Indians, the Battle of Quebec, squatters and Spanish gold, ferries, block making, the Civil War, ice harvesting, baseball, the Antarctic, and “a little old lady who never cries anymore.”

Murch was born in Caribou and grew up in Clinton. He retired in 2011 after a career as the dams and hydropower regulatory specialist at the Maine Department of Environmental Protection and has been happily doing genealogy ever since then. He is a 13th-generation Mainer and multiple Mayflower descendant and has published books on his maternal and paternal ancestries. He is currently researching and writing the definitive history and genealogy of the entire Murch family of Maine.

The society’s May presentation is free to the public (donations are gladly accepted) and is scheduled for 6:30 p.m. Wednesday, May 21, at the Augusta City Center, located at 16 Cony Street in Augusta. For details, call Scott Wood, executive director, at 622-7718.



Baseball card of Simmy Murch, infielder for the St. Louis Cardinals and Brooklyn Superbas.

Dana Murch collection

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