

# Kennebec Current

"Wilderness escape" is not a phrase typically associated with Augusta, Maine's capital city of strip malls and dysfunctional roadways, but turn-of-the-20th-century Augustans didn't have to travel far to recharge their batteries." — Virginia M. Wright, on Howard Hill, *Down East* magazine (see below)

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## Howard Hill Advocates Striving for Barrier-free Upgrades



A ridge in Howard Hill Historic Park affords an eastward view of the Maine State House complex in Augusta, seen here in 2020.

File photo by Joseph Owen

1898 on Western Avenue where the main Shaw's Plaza parking lot is today, was moved in 1965 to Parkwood Drive. The remaining 6 acres, in Hallowell, are the Effie L. Berry Conservation Area, which the city of Hallowell owns.

In Gannett's era, Howard Hill sported a two-story treehouse he called "The Bird's Nest" (see photo on page 2), a Norwegian-style chalet, and other amenities that exist now only in archived photos and scrapbooks. The park now has no buildings in it, and it is expected to remain that way.

"We typically don't create structures on our property," said Janet Sawyer, a land trust board member and former president.

An existing main trail crosses the park roughly from north to south. A spur heading east off that trail leads to an overlook affording a view of the State House complex and other prominent Augusta sites. A similar overlook lies at the end of another trail a bit farther north.

The project calls for the first trail to be moved, both to make it easier for people in wheelchairs and others with disabilities to use and to make the trails more interesting. The new trails would not be open to electric bicycles, however.

"There really isn't another universally accessible trail like this anywhere," Seitzinger said, referring to central Maine.

The plan also includes the erection of an information kiosk where maps and a list of project donors would be posted, two picnic tables, and a pit toilet, he said.

Augusta and Hallowell city officials have written letters in support of the project, as have state legislators who represent the two communities. The city of Augusta has agreed to be responsible for police patrols, cleaning the toilet, securing the site after hours, and making sure trash doesn't accumulate.

The cities of Augusta and Hallowell and the Kennebec Land Trust are working to raise \$1.5 million to make Howard Hill Historic Park more accessible to the public, especially visitors with mobility problems.

Augusta residents already have voted to commit \$300,000 to the project for construction of a parking lot on the Ganneston Drive end of the property. Mike Seitzinger, a former land trust board member and advocate for the project, said the trust expects the parking lot will be built in the spring of 2026.

Also, the land trust has submitted applications for two large grants that would be used to help fund the project. The group also anticipates a fundraising campaign that would solicit donations from residents of the two cities.

The Kennebec Land Trust has a conservation easement on the park to prevent it from being developed (*Kennebec Current*, January–February 2019). Most of it – 164 acres – belongs to the city of Augusta. That parcel comprises the bulk of what once was the estate of William H. Gannett, a business entrepreneur who published *Comfort*, a monthly magazine that was headquartered in Augusta but had a nationwide circulation. For about seven decades, Gannett's descendants owned the newspaper chain that included the *Kennebec Journal*, in Augusta; and the Waterville-based *Morning Sentinel*. The Gannett home, which had stood since



Janet Sawyer



Mike Seitzinger

— by Joseph Owen

## Two-year Presidency Ending with Gratitude



President's Message  
**Joseph O'Donnell**

**A**s my term as president of the Kennebec Historical Society comes to a close, I want to take a moment to reflect on the past few years and to thank each of you for your commitment to preserving and sharing the rich history of Kennebec County.

One of the milestones I am especially proud of is the establishment of the society's endowment fund. This important step will provide long-term support for the KHS mission, ensuring that future generations will benefit from the stories, artifacts and research entrusted to KHS care.

My greatest achievement may well have been to stay out of the way of the editors of the *Kennebec Current*, who have consistently published this outstanding magazine; and out of the way of the program director, Anne Cough, who has recruited speakers for the well-attended monthly lectures.

Thanks to the careful stewardship of the board and the generosity of the membership and friends, the society's finances are stable. Stability, however, is not the same as security. To thrive in the years ahead, the society must broaden the base of support. We rely on the enthusiasm and generosity of many – not just a few – to sustain the work of preserving Kennebec County's history and making it accessible to all.

As I hand over leadership, I do so with gratitude and confidence in the executive director, Scott Wood; the dedicated archivist, Emily Schroeder; volunteers; staff; and members who make this society strong. I encourage each of you to continue your support, to invite others to join, and to take pride in the role we all share as stewards of the past.

It has been an honor to serve as your president. Thank you for the trust you placed in me, and for your ongoing commitment to the Kennebec Historical Society. I look forward with appreciation to continuing in a role as director and past president ex officio.



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

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## **Kennebec Current**

Our 175th 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.

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"The Bird's Nest," a treehouse that stood on the William H. Gannett property in Augusta now known as the Howard Hill Historical Park, hangs precariously over a ridge on the east side of the property in this early 20th-century photo.

Photo courtesy of the Kennebec Land Trust

The "Your Kennebec Roots" column is absent from this issue because of a shortage of space.



## Albion Depot Duplicated in Miniature

**R**ecently, I wrote about the history of the Wiscasset, Waterville, and Farmington Railroad station in Albion (*Kennebec Current*, September–October 2024). This restored structure is a gem of rail history. Many of those responsible for helping to preserve those days of old on the tracks, including me, are model railroaders. We build replicas of these old structures and machines so people today can see what they looked like, and how and why they were vital to our country.

### Current FOLLOWUP

One of the better-known modelers of the Maine Two Footers, of which the WW&F was a part, is Pete Leach, a resident of Houston, Texas. I first met Leach in 2016 when he visited my layout during the National Narrow Gauge Model Railroad Convention in Augusta. Along with many other visitors, he spent a lot of time touring my version of the Maine Two Footers in On30 scale, which was his scale too. We have kept in touch since then comparing notes on different projects. Pete is a great modeler of not only railroad equipment and structures, but ships as well. Both of these subjects were vital to the rail line he was duplicating, and his efforts were written up in multiple media sources.

However, as the old saying goes, all good things must come to an end. Last spring Leach announced that his layout was slated to be dismantled and replaced by another. He also e-mailed me to ask if I thought that some of his models might be of some interest to folks up here in Maine. These included replicas of the stations in Albion and Wiscasset and other models, too.

I immediately contacted Bob Wallace and Phil Dow, of the Albion Historical Society, and others, and they responded with rousing affirmatives. The process continued as Leach scheduled a trip to Maine in May to transport the models to the east. He and his wife arrived on a fairly late flight to Portland, spent the night there, and showed up at my house in South China the next morning. In the back of his rental car was a huge U-Haul moving box; we made our way up to Albion. When we got there, Dow, the Albion society's president, met us. We unloaded the models and saw their incredible detail and beauty for the first time.



**Pete Leach's miniature model of the Albion train depot includes human figures, railway cargo, furniture, and even birds on the roof.**

Photos courtesy of the Albion Historical Society



**Albion Historical Society President Phil Dow examines a miniature version of Albion's train station, held by its maker, Pete Leach, of Houston, Texas, in May in front of the full-size original station in Albion. The society owns the train station – the only two-story station on the Wiscasset, Waterville, and Farmington Railroad line – and operates it as a period museum.**

All of the models were mounted in a display format. The details and authenticity were fantastic, especially the Albion Depot. Completely constructed of scale wood, the interior is detailed with furniture, shipped goods and people. The colors are a perfect match for those that appear today on the original building, and they were same colors in use there for a few decades before the railroad shut down in 1933.

Leach also brought other models related to Albion, including the long-gone single-stall engine house and some snow fighters. Incredibly, the long flight from Texas had caused little damage. These Albion recreations have found a new home in the restored depot, and those representing the Wiscasset end of the line were accepted by other groups.

Some of these pieces, including the miniature depot, were part the Albion Historical Society display at this year's Windsor Fair.

This development shows that when skilled craftsmen (and women) and other caring and dedicated individuals work together, memories of the past, both full-size and miniature, can be preserved for the future.



— by Bob Bennett

## Land Grant to John Chandler Spurred Winthrop Development

We at the Kennebec Historical Society are thrilled to announce a most significant donation of an original document, specifically a deed for land in Winthrop — known as Pond Town in 1767 — made to John Chandler. Yes, it's the real thing, given to us July 30 by a Pittston resident, the most recent John Chandler in the line. It reads:

We the Subscribers, the Committee of the Kennebec Purchase from the late Colony of New Plymouth, Do hereby agree that Mr. John Chandler shall have a grant of two lots of land of two hundred acres each, near the mill stream in Pond Town, and also one other lot in some other place in said Township, upon condition that he give bonds to build a Saw Mill in One Year, and a Grist Mill in three years, and make one settlement on the said 400 acres, and another settlement on the 200 acre lott, both on the Conditions aforesaid. Boston, June 11, 1767.

[Signed] JAMES BOWDOIN, JAMES PITTS, BENJAMIN HALLOWELL, SILV. [Silvester] GARDINER, JOHN HANCOCK



The Archivist's Pen  
Emily Schroeder



This 1767 deed granted land in Winthrop to John Chandler.

From KHS collection

The John Chandler who came to this area in the 18th century was descended from William and Annis Chandler, of Roxbury, Massachusetts. He was born September 7, 1725, to William and Susanna (Burge) Chandler in Chelmsford, Massachusetts. Within a couple of years the family moved to Westford, Massachusetts. Chandler was contracted in 1750-1751 to build a sawmill and corn mill in New Ipswich, New Hampshire, so he relocated there. Similar to his future situation in Winthrop, he was granted some valuable land, two 70-acre lots from the Masonian Proprietors, on which all the town's factories were to be established. Meanwhile, he married Lydia Townsend of Townsend, Massachusetts, on February 14, 1754.

He agreed to grind corn as often as the inhabitants demanded, but he became disenchanted with this task. Add to the mix threatening Native Americans and a town that was falling apart; many were leaving New Ipswich, so it was time for the Chandlers to move on as well.

The proprietors of the Kennebec Purchase from the late Colony of New Plimouth were formed by the General Court of Massachusetts in 1753. The members were undoubtedly looking for talented and hard-working men to take up their holdings. As the document stated, Chandler could have two 200-acre lots, plus another, if he agreed to build a sawmill within a year, and a grist mill within three. He also had to erect two dwellings.

Lydia Chandler was busy adding to the family tree, as was expected at the time. She gave birth to:

- John, born November 27, 1754, who had 15 children
- Noah, born April 25, 1756
- Joel, born September 10, 1757; six children
- Lydia, born July 5, 1759
- Kezia, born April 17, 1761
- Molly, born March 9, 1763; four children
- Lucy, born March 7, 1765; five children
- Susanna, born July 22, 1766; died January 7, 1771
- Hannah, born January 19, 1768; nine children
- Rhoda, born August 21, 1769
- Susanna, born September 3, 1772; died September 14, 1784
- David, born June, 26, 1775

Transportation to and from the Kennebec River was a problem. In 1768 a road was cleared through the woods to Hallowell, with oxen and carts. Perhaps part of it overlaps with today's U.S. Route 202.

John Chandler contributed much to his town. He was instrumental in the establishment of Pond Town as Winthrop on May 6, 1771. He was first selectman from 1771 to 1775; town treasurer, 1773 to 1784; and, constable, 1775 to 1776. Chandler's Mill Pond was named for him; now it's known as Maranacook Lake. One mill in the village made it to 2012, but was too costly to revive and so was removed.

Surely you will agree that we would be lost without our courageous, pioneering town fathers and their families. History would have far less meaning.

Until next time ...



## Bowdoin Students Bring Volunteer Aid to KHS

The Kennebec Historical Society hosted Bowdoin students on August 27, enlisting their help in cataloging and archiving items in the society's collection.

The Brunswick college's Joseph McKeen Center for the Common Good organizes trips for incoming freshmen, a requirement of all first-year students, which focus on connecting students with local communities through exposure and volunteering. Of the 11 students who participated, two were upperclassmen and nine were freshmen.

"This was an opportunity for KHS to make larger connections with Bowdoin College. These students have the potential to talk with other students and professors, thus creating a network of contacts," said the society's Executive Director Scott Wood. "Kennebec County history doesn't only happen within the confines of the county border. It overlaps into nearby municipalities."

During their visit, which lasted a couple of hours, the students received a tour of the building, learned the history of KHS and discovered how the society operates today. Later, the students volunteered by processing some of the material in the society's collection.

Wood said, "My hope is that the students got a taste of how KHS preserves and promotes Kennebec County history and that they understand how important this work is."

The society continues to recruit students to act as interns from nearby colleges and universities. Schools or students interested in such opportunities may call Wood at (207) 622-7718.



Eleven Bowdoin College students paid a visit August 27 to the Kennebec Historical Society's Winthrop Street headquarters in Augusta. Sitting in the front row, from left, are Micole Gentry, Irene Dong, and Jayden Monteiro Rosado; second row, Kevin Chen, Carlie Bemis, and Louisa Hemr; third row, Christian Smith, Yasmine Nee, and Anita Mahabir; and standing in the top row, Jude Baker and Khoudia Diaw.

Photo by Scott Wood

## KHS Welcomes the Following New Members

Robert Caverly — Chelsea    Thomas Creeley — Augusta    Terry Gerald — Wells    Jill Godlewski — Augusta  
and continues to recognize ...



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## ❧ In Memoriam ❧

**Daniel H. Warren Jr.**, 76, of Pittston, died August 29 at home. He was a lifetime member of several historical societies – including, since 2020, the Kennebec Historical Society. He also was a former longtime president of the Arnold Expedition Historical Society and the former resident caretaker of the Maj. Reuben Colburn House, the state-owned Pittston home whose builder and original occupant, Colburn, arranged for the construction of boats that Col. Benedict Arnold used to ascend the Kennebec River and attack Quebec in 1775. Warren, whose ancestors were among Pittston's original settlers, was a collateral descendant of Colburn. He had retired as a state bank examiner. He is survived by his son, Daniel H. Warren III; a sister, Nancy, of West Gardiner; and several nieces, nephews and cousins.

**Robert E. Gross**, 75, died September 2 in Augusta. A Chicago native, he earned a bachelor's degree in sociology at Lake Forest College and a master's degree in social work at the University of Southern Maine. He was a health planner for the Maine Department of Health and Human Services for 27 years, retiring in 2005. He had been a Kennebec Historical Society member since 2022. His survivors include his wife, Ava, also a KHS member; first wife Julie Jones, of Hallowell; four children; and a grandson.



## Whittier's Mill Undergoing Dramatic Transformation in Mount Vernon



**The historic Whittier Mill in Mount Vernon is undergoing a major renovation.**

Photos by Dale-Potter Clark

**T**hree Whittier brothers came from Salisbury, Massachusetts, about 1765 to settle in Pondtown (today's Winthrop). They are believed to be the first to settle in the northern parish that split off to become Readfield in 1791. The youngest of the three was 13-year-old William, who developed a farm on the shore of Whittier Pond, known today as Carleton Pond.

In 1774 William married Betsy Hankerson. They became parents to 20 children between 1775 and 1805. The first eight were born in Readfield. History tells us the couple welcomed weary travelers into their home day or night by leaving their door unlatched, food on the table, and, on cold nights, a 4-foot log on the fire. They no doubt remembered their own isolation and hardships when they first moved into the Maine wilderness.

William Whittier's brother Nathaniel was a brother-in-law to Jedediah Prescott, of Winthrop, a well-known surveyor and member of the Massachusetts House of Representatives. By the 1780s the two men had acquired all of Goshen (Vienna) and part of Washington Plantation (Mount Vernon) and started to sell lots cheaply enough to draw people into those settlements. William Whittier recognized potential in the water power that flowed into Bishop (Minnehonk) Pond and bought the land bordering both sides of the stream, which included the water rights, from there northward to the outlet of Flying Pond. In 1788 he sold his East Readfield homestead and moved his family to Mount Vernon.

He built a dam there at the outlet from Flying Pond and a second dam on the outlet into Minnehonk, creating mill ponds at both locations. He built a sawmill on the east side of the stream, for which he carried a pit saw blade on his back from Hallowell; and he built a grist mill on the opposite side of the stream. Before that, settlers either hand-ground their grain or toled it to grist mills in Hallowell, Winthrop, or Readfield.

**William Whittier's circa 1790 house remains standing today, although it is no longer a part of the mill property.**



Whittier built the first frame house in that area near his mills – a large one to accommodate his growing family. More newcomers moved into the immediate area, and Whittier's Mills soon evolved into Mount Vernon village. As a man of religious zeal, Whittier helped form the Particular Baptist Church in 1799. He became deacon of the congregation and held meetings at his home. The mills burned between 1790 and 1800, and townspeople came to console Whittier. He calmly responded, "I have a house not made with hands in eternal heaven," and he rebuilt his mills.

The mills changed hands many times after William Whittier died in 1814, but they remained active into the 20th century. The sawmill was long gone and the grist mill had laid dormant for decades when it went up for sale in 2023. That's when Matthew Wittek, of Baltimore, Maryland, came along.

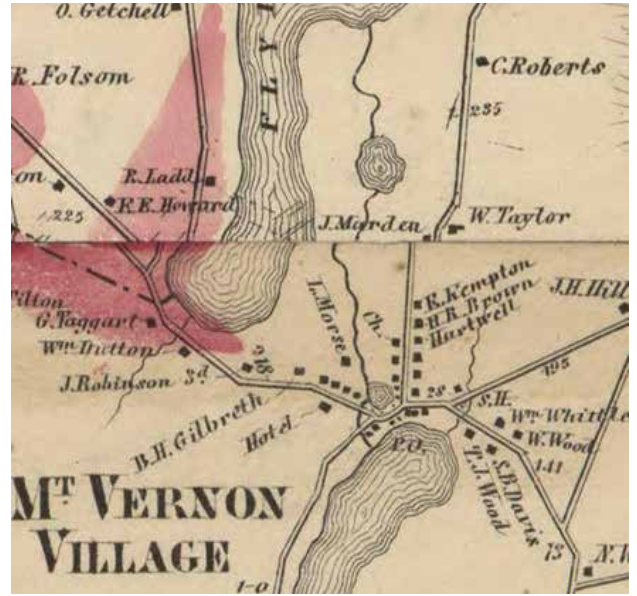
Having lived and worked in Washington, D.C., and in Baltimore for 30 years, Wittek was ready to enter the next chapter of his life. He sold his nursery and landscaping business and his art studio in Baltimore and began searching for a place of respite in Maine. He'd visited various coastal locations and experienced the hustle and bustle of tourist season when he realized he'd prefer to live in a more peaceful, rural area farther inland. His real estate agent told him about the old mill in Mount Vernon.

"I came and sat on the curb and watched the goings-on here for a couple days," Wittek said. What he saw was an active, vibrant community where several buildings already had been or were in the process of being revitalized. He also noted that a nearby café was attracting a lot of people to the village. He learned from some local folks about the migration of hippies, back-to-the-landers, and artists who had moved there from "the city" in the 1960s and had remained there, adding another level of culture to the old farming community. Having flipped 22 buildings in Maryland and as someone who enjoys old collectibles, art, and agriculture, Wittek soon recognized the potential in the old mill and its location. He purchased it in February 2024.

Wittek and his partner, Eugene H. Whiting Jr., began work there in March and filled two dumpsters on the first day. Since then they have taken up permanent residence in Mount Vernon and have made some impressive progress in refurbishing the old mill. As of this writing, they have added new windows, insulation, wiring, and plumbing. Partitions have been added in order to create retail spaces, an eatery of some kind, and an art studio on the first and second floors.



The new owner of Whittier's grist mill, Matthew Wittek, stands where grain was once milled. Some of the mill's mechanical parts remain and can be seen above him. This part of the building will be one of several retail spaces.



This 1856 map shows the two mill ponds between Flying and Minnehonk ponds created by William Whittier's upper and lower dams.

An apartment will encompass the entire third floor, and decks will be added to the back side overlooking the mill pond. The dam has been cleaned out, the mill wheel painted, and the exterior re-sided with cedar shakes. Wittek is hands-on with support from local craftsmen as the work continues at a fast pace.

Upon completion there will be three shops on the first floor, including a yarn shop; Wittek's own retail space of old collectibles, which he'll call "Foraged"; and his partner's Americana Black art studio. There will be four additional studio spaces on the second floor. Sizes will vary from 300 to 450 square feet. Wittek is aiming for a soft opening this November, and by May 2026 he hopes to be running full-throttle with all spaces occupied.

Many townspeople have expressed their support. In fact, there is excitement in the air about the revival of the old Whittier Mill, which is fast evolving into a more picturesque spot in the village than ever before. Signs that read "Wm Whittier Mill 1790" hang from two sides of the exterior in tribute to its founder.

Follow whittermill on Instagram to view photos and videos of the owners' progress since work began in March 2024.

*The author, Dale Potter-Clark, is a founder of and historian for the Readfield Historical Society and author of nonfiction and historical fiction set in central Maine. She can be contacted at (207) 441-9184 or crossings4u@gmail.com.*





# Ocean Point Development Sprang



This Dr. Leander J. Crooker portrait is from the 1892 book *Illustrated History of Kennebec County, Maine*.

Image courtesy of KHS

**P**ASSION, curiosity, ingenuity, self-assurance, and fearlessness — Dr. Leander J. Crooker owned these characteristics in spades; and from youth to old age he freely used these natural gifts to succeed in most of the endeavors he pursued. A man of action once his mind was focused on a particular end, at 19 he launched his 61-year career as a physician and surgeon. With this same single-mindedness, he later purchased and developed a large promising tract of land, becoming the founder of the Ocean Point summer colony, all while carrying out his busy medical practice.

Leander James Crooker was born February 24, 1837, in Brookfield, Queens County, Nova Scotia, fourth in a family of seven children. His father, Dr. William Sebra Crooker, himself the son of a physician, was a native of Wiscasset, Maine, who had moved to Nova Scotia as a young man and married Pamela Durland. He settled in Brookfield and is noted as the first physician to settle in that part of the province.

In his youth, Leander Crooker displayed an interest and natural aptitude not just for medicine and surgery, but also mechanical skills. At the age of 12 he performed his first surgical operation by extracting a tooth from an old man. In his early teens, Crooker left home and passed most of a year with his sister Anna Crooker Kennedy in Somerville, Maine, attending school, working on farms and spending time in a lumber camp. He later earned money traveling about the area doing clock repairs, which enabled him to take a course of medical study, after which he returned to Nova Scotia. His family attempted unsuccessfully

to dissuade him from pursuing medicine, “fearing his daring, adventuresome spirit would lead him to attempt more than he could perform,” according to his *Daily Kennebec Journal* obituary. With the laws concerning medical practice not being as stringent as they later became, he was able to pick up cases on his own and soon developed a good reputation as the “Boy Surgeon.”

In 1857, at age 20, Crooker returned to Maine, setting up his practice as a “botanic doctor” in Vassalboro. At the time, his older brother Dr. Aaron P. Crooker had his own medical practice in Belgrade. The following year, Leander Crooker married Clara B. Tarbell in Waterville. He soon expanded his practice to include one day a week in Augusta to see patients, with ads placed in the *Maine Farmer* boldly claiming “Cancers Cured,” and the newspaper itself stating “... we can conscientiously commend him to public confidence.” His energy and strong self-assurance in his own skills is remarked on in the *Illustrated History of Kennebec County, Maine* (1892, Henry L. Kingsbury and Simeon L. Deyo, editors): “It seemed as if he were impelled





# from Augusta Doctor's Vision

by some unseen power to operate, and his natural mechanical ingenuity was a potent factor in his surgical skill. He could go to a blacksmith's and forge out for himself any of the simpler instruments he required." His dedication to his avocation and patients is noted in the story of how after a year in practice in Vassalboro, he walked several miles through deep snow to operate on a strangulated hernia, reaching the patient's home late at night. He performed the operation successfully by the light of two tallow candles with the assistance of a neighbor.

His wife, Clara, died in 1862, followed by his brother Aaron in 1863. After his brother's death, Crooker moved to Belgrade and took over his brother's practice. Around this time, Crooker must have realized that it would be of benefit for him to pursue further education in medicine, and by 1865 he had moved to Boston, set up a practice there, and attended lectures at Harvard Medical School.

In 1867 he married Fannie A. Guppy, of Boston, and in 1869 their only child was born and named for his father. In 1870 he moved to Augusta and allowed himself the time to attend the final course of lectures and the examinations at Dartmouth College. He was awarded his Doctor of Medicine degree after 13 years of an active practice of medicine and surgery.

In the decade after the receipt of his medical degree, Crooker continued building his practice as a highly respected and skillful surgeon, with accounts of some of his more difficult cases being published in the newspaper. He variously worked as a solo practitioner and in partnership with other physicians, including Dr. George Brickell and Dr. John F. Hill, who later became Maine's governor. He was considered a thoughtful and caring family doctor as well, often staying with a seriously ill patient for days until the worst had passed. One published account in the *Daily Kennebec Journal* in 1873 describes a father giving Crooker a gift of \$1,000 as a token of gratitude for saving his child's life by his days-long ministrations. His desire to develop improvements for surgical practice never wavered, with one of his surgical tool inventions, Crooker's Spiral Ligator, written of in the January 22, 1874, issue of the *Boston Medical and Surgical Journal*, and praised as a more convenient and inexpensive instrument of its kind. Crooker became a naturalized citizen in 1874. Soon afterward, his younger brother Dr. Phineas A. Crooker set up his own

*Continued on page 10*



**"The Anchorage," built by Leander J. Crooker, was erected by Crooker at Ocean Point. Other businessmen from Augusta soon followed.**

Photo courtesy of Deborah Noblesmith



**Cottages both grand and modest line Shore Road at Ocean Point, which is part of the town of Boothbay.**

Photo by Teddy Faugno

Continued from page 9

## Dr. Leander Crooker

medical practice in Augusta and Hallowell.

As his business continued to increase in the 1870s, Crooker's vision and energy for other pursuits also appears to have expanded, especially his investments in real estate – most notably, his acquisition of a large tract of coastal land on Linekin's Neck in Boothbay that by his actions would become what is now known as Ocean Point. In the summer of 1876 Crooker and a friend were visiting the area when they met William Kenniston and his two sons, Albert and George, the owners of a large portion of Linekin's Neck.

Dr. Leander Crooker Jr. describes his father's reaction to seeing the area in a paper he wrote in 1912, "Ocean Point as a Summer Resort": "When Dr. Crooker first saw Ocean Point .... (he) became forcibly impressed from the start at summer colonization on Squirrel Island, that it would rapidly grow and, as a sequence, any desirable property on the main land near by, would prove a good investment in the end. With him, thought always begets immediate action, and, prompted by the above idea, he looked the land over and made business arrangements with the Kennistons." Crooker and the Kennistons quickly had the land surveyed and cleared, and had lots plotted, with Crooker giving it the name "Ocean Point."

To give the enterprise a good start, he offered 10 lots free on the condition they be built on within a year. Nearly all of the 10 lots were given to people from Augusta, and for several years after that most of the lots were purchased by Augusta folks. The first cottage to be completed was that of Dr. Crooker, which in 1880 was sold to Adeline Noble, of Augusta. Dr. Crooker bought out the Kennistons' interest in 1882 and so became the sole owner of all the property. He brought



This 1888 booklet advertisement touts the improvements made at the Ocean Point summer colony in East Boothbay.

to Ocean Point the same zeal and vision he had shown in his surgical practice. His commitment to making this summer colony a success was demonstrated by his building a wharf for steamers; building a hotel; building, buying, and selling numerous cottages; buying adjoining land to add to the colony; ensuring the availability of fresh water; and numerous other upgrades. Throughout his life, he continued his mission of creating at Ocean Point a more attractive and valuable colony.

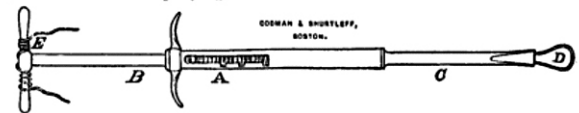
The 1870s also found Dr. Crooker increasing his participation in politics, running as a Democrat for alderman of Ward 2 in Augusta in 1876. It was a few years later, when he became involved with the Greenback Party, that the tremendous effort he gave to everything he had previously pursued failed to produce the results he probably expected.

### A NEW SPRING LIGATOR.

LYNN, Jan. 1st, 1874.

MESSRS. EDITORS,—This instrument, to which I desire to call the attention of the profession, is the invention of Dr. L. J. Crooker, of Augusta, Me. The original instrument, made by him, I saw while on vacation last summer, and was sufficiently interested in it to ask permission to take it to Boston and bring it to the notice of Codman & Shurtleff. It was at once appreciated by them, and they will engage in its manufacture, under the name of Crooker's spring ligator.

The instrument is designed for the removal of anything for which gradual is preferred to rapid removal, and its *modus operandi* will be readily understood from the accompanying cut.



A is a tube containing a spiral spring. B is a smaller tube, sliding within A. C is nearly solid, having a perforation only large enough for the passage of the wire ligature, D. By pushing in the tube, B, the spring is compressed, and is held so by engaging a screw attached to B, in one of the notches seen on the slot in A. The ligature can then be applied, tightened and fastened at E. The spring then being released, the action is obvious to any one.

A Boston Medical Journal letter describes a tool invented by Dr. Leander Crooker.

Publication images courtesy of Deborah Noblesmith



a terrific whirl and leap, he flung the dollar upon the floor. ...”

By October 1879, Crooker and other members of the short-lived Greenback Party in the area had “given up talking politics and settled down to business.” He continued to be involved to varying degrees in politics, supporting the Democrats and later serving as a delegate to their state convention.

In the 1880s his surgical and family practice continued to thrive, and it was reported that he often consulted with other surgeons on difficult cases. One such physician, Dr. W.P. Giddings, of Gardiner, was a personal friend with whom he spent holidays and vacations at Ocean Point, and a well-respected doctor in his own right.

By early 1882 Crooker had decided to move his family and medical practice to Portland, and he was given a farewell party at the Hotel North with “some of the leading business and professional men of Augusta. ... Mayor P.O. Vickery arose, and in behalf of the company presented the doctor with a magnificent solid gold Elgin watch, hunter cased, with a massive gold chain. The value of the token was about \$300 (about \$9,000 in 2025). ... Mayor Vickery paid a graceful and glowing tribute to Dr. Crooker’s skill as a physician and sterling worth as a man.” However, within two years Crooker and his family were back in Augusta. The death in 1886 of his mother, Pamela, who had been visiting at his home on State Street, was followed by that of wife Fanny in November. At that time, his son, Leander Jr, also called Lee, was pursuing medical studies at Bowdoin College and then Dartmouth College, where he graduated in 1890. He entered practice with his father and also managed a drugstore.

Crooker had for the most part lived on Winthrop Street and kept an office on State Street, but by 1900 he bought a large property on Augusta’s east side on Stone Street, which he also farmed, keeping cows, chickens, and horses, as well as growing and selling vegetables from his garden. His medical practice was as busy as ever, and his visits to Ocean Point, for pleasure and business, also continued. In early 1900 he bought a “yacht” partly for the purpose of traveling to Ocean Point, but it burned a few months later. He then bought a scow to take lumber to Ocean Point for building cottages, later buying various boats for travel to Ocean Point as well as for pleasure cruising.

In 1915, at age 78, he “joined the ranks of automobile owners of the city” and was soon using this mode of transport to visit his beloved Ocean Point. Later that summer, suffering from illness, he spent three months at Ocean Point in hope of regaining his health. He returned in October to Augusta and resumed his medical practice with his son, limiting himself to office practice and consulting. Not long after that he sold his lot with the buildings at 85 Stone Street, along with the rest of the farm, which was bordered by Stone and Davenport streets and was being surveyed and cut into house lots. Today, Crooker Street stands as a reminder of that time. The next year his sister Catherine Crooker Pishon, widow of Henry Pishon and mother of Hiram Pishon, died in Augusta. On February 24, 1917, *The Portland Evening Express* published an article titled “Dr. L.J. Crooker of Augusta One of Oldest Practicing” in honor of his 80th birthday. By September his health had failed rapidly because of stomach cancer, and on October 9, 1917, one of Maine’s best-known physicians died at his home on Davenport Street, having been in continuous practice for 61 years.

There is much to admire about Crooker beyond his long years of service as a physician and surgeon or his inspired development of Ocean Point. He shines and should be remembered for the example he set as a self-made man, living life on his own terms, contributing valuable and compassionate services to all, deeply dedicated to his community while remaining true to himself.



With the addition of a front porch nearly complete behind him, Manchester resident Fred Snow, a Kennebec Historical Society member, sits in front of the Snoze Nest, a seasonal Ocean Point cottage his family has owned and occupied since the 1950s. Some of his relatives summured at the shore there much earlier. The “OP” on the license plate behind him stands for “Ocean Point.”

Photo by Teddy Faugno

*The writer, Deborah Noblesmith, lives in Saco. Her family is one of those who became summer residents of Ocean Point.*



## Oakland's Memorial Hall a Tribute in Stone, Brick

In the latter part of the 19th century, most Maine communities were content to erect a stone obelisk, or a column, or a tablet to commemorate their residents who died in the U.S. Civil War.

Oakland had a more ambitious plan.

Despite the community's diminutive population of only about 1,500, the local Soldiers Memorial Association organized and did the fundraising for a multi-purpose building that still stands on Church Street a century and a half later. The group later turned the building over to the Grand Army of the Republic veterans association. Today the town of Oakland owns it.

Massachusetts architect Thomas Silloway (1828-1910), whose designs resulted in the construction of more than 400 church buildings in the eastern United States, drew up the plans

for Memorial Hall. Construction began in 1870 and was completed in 1873, the year in which the town was incorporated as West Waterville. (It became Oakland in 1883.)

Since then, the brick-and-stone, Italianate-Gothic building has housed a bank, a post office, town meetings, a library, school events and classrooms, vaudeville performances, and other entertainment, according to the Oakland Area Historical Society's website.

Today the building has been largely vacant for four decades, and a long list of repairs awaits completion. A local nonprofit, the Oakland Memorial Hall Committee, has been working to make them happen.

A couple of years ago, it engaged University of Maine Architecture students to produce designs for redevelopment of the building's interior. Early this year, an engineer and preservation expert from the Portland firm Barba + Wheeler Architects toured the building to assess its condition and potential. The eventual upgrades are expected to cost more than \$1 million. The committee has been conducting bottle drives, cookbook sales, benefit concerts, mail solicitation campaigns, and other fundraising activities to support that effort.

— by Joseph Owen



History Through  
a Keyhole #20

### Answer to Keyhole #20

**Q: What is this?**

**A: A stained-glass rose window**

**Q: Where is it?**

**A: On the center gable of Memorial Hall, located at the southeast corner of Church and West School streets in Oakland**

**Q: What's historic about it?**

**A: The structure is one of the few Maine buildings that commemorate a community's Civil War dead.**



Memorial Hall in Oakland

Photo by Teddy Faugno

## History Through a Keyhole — Puzzle 21

If spring is when a young man's fancy turns to love, then summer must be when nobody's thoughts turn to our historical puzzles. We heard from a grand total of zero readers about the stained-glass window depicted alongside the story on page 12. We also know, however, that this is the season when you might have been exercising double-time to be able to fit into that Spandex bathing suit you once wore in high school, or recovering from your Aunt Zinne's monthlong stay on your fold-out couch with her three yappy chihuahuas. Who has time for puzzles? Even so, here's another one.

The scene in the photo at right 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](mailto: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 answer will appear in the November-December issue of the *Kennebec Current*. Answers are due by October 31.





## Even for History Insiders, *Maine Trivia* Worth a Look

If you're reading the *Kennebec Current*, you're probably smarter about Maine trivia than the average black bear. But that doesn't make it any less fun to flip through a volume of trivia about our state. *Maine Trivia*, by Dean Lunt and John McDonald, was published by Islandport Press in 2022. It's a neat little volume with wide-ranging factoids and longer blurbs on what makes Maine Maine.



There are plenty of history and government questions and answers, ranging from Leif Erikson, a historical figure from more than a millennium ago, up through our current governor. Are sports more your trivia category? This book has that, too. Did you know

the baseball scout involved in signing Jackie Robinson to the Brooklyn Dodgers was a Washington County native? You'll also find a chapter on arts and literature, as well as facts on a smattering of celebrities such as film star Bette Davis.

What would a book on Maine trivia be without nature and wildlife? Here's a fun fact from the book: another name for blackflies is buffalo gnats. As for what English settlers once called whales, take a guess and check out the book to find the answer.

In the last chapter of the book, "Extra Credit," you'll find more exposition – and a few trick questions. Here's one for the next time you want to start an argument and liven up a party: Where does Down East begin?

The acknowledgements for *Maine Trivia* include a few names that are likely very familiar to KHS members, along with a bounty of book titles to explore.

While not heavy history, *Maine Trivia* offers exactly what its title promises, plus some bonus historical context for the answers and a few chuckle-worthy moments sprinkled throughout.

*Maine Trivia* is available to borrow at the Maine State Library. It also can be purchased at [www.islandportpress.com](http://www.islandportpress.com).

– by Jamie Logan



## Around Kennebec County

### MONMOUTH

The **Monmouth Museum**, located on Main Street in Monmouth, will be open for Applefest, scheduled for September 27.

### READFIELD

The **Readfield Historical Society** and the **Readfield Community Library** are co-sponsoring a September 25 lecture by Elizabeth DeWolfe about her new nonfiction book, *Alias Agnes: The Notorious Tale of a Gilded Age Spy*. The book looks behind the scenes of an attention-grabbing six-week trial revolving around a jilted woman who took her ex-lover, a U.S. congressman, to court and the stenographer who used subterfuge to expose the plaintiff's secrets. DeWolfe is a history professor at the University of New England in Biddeford. The one-hour free event is scheduled for 6 p.m. at the Readfield Town Office, located at 8 Old Kents Hill Road.

### VASSALBORO

Vassalboro resident Elizabeth Mitchell, the first



Leanne Baker, of Westbrook, and Christy Dagsaan, of Savannah, Georgia, work on their paintings August 31 on Water Street in Hallowell during the city's second annual Artwalk event, which featured works by local artists scattered through the city's downtown and along the waterfront in Granite City Park.

Photo by Joseph Owen

woman in U.S. history to have been elected both speaker of the House of Representatives and president of the Senate in any state, will talk about her career in politics September 21 at the **Vassalboro Historical Society's** museum in East Vassalboro. Mitchell served as a Maine House of Representatives member from 1990 to 1998 and as a Maine Senate member from 2004 to 2010. She was the Democratic nominee for governor in 2010. The event is scheduled for 3 to 5 p.m.

An all-school reunion of former **Vassalboro School** students is scheduled for 1 to 4 p.m. September 28, at the **Vassalboro Historical Society's** museum in East Vassalboro. Attendees are encouraged to bring photos and other mementoes of their time at the school. An OSP food truck will be at the event.

The **Vassalboro Historical Society** will host its annual meeting and potluck dinner from 3 to 5 p.m. November 9 at the Vassalboro United Methodist Church, located on Main Street between North Vassalboro and East Vassalboro.

## Upcoming Programs

### October: “Moving Pictures of the ’30s”



Front of the Belgrade Hotel

Photo courtesy of Frank Chandler

**F**rank Chandler was born in 1890 in Belgrade, a member of the fourth generation of Chandlers in that town. During the mid- to late 1930s, Chandler made many 8-millimeter films of everyday happenings. There were many reports in local newspapers of Chandler showing his moving pictures at the Grange and other venues. Some of these moving pictures will be shown October 15 at the Kennebec Historical Society’s regular monthly program, with subjects including a visit to Water Street in Augusta, the aftermath of the 1936 flood in Gardiner, and a circus at the Belgrade Hotel; along with scenes of farm and social life.

The Chandler family has deep roots in Belgrade. At one time Belgrade Lakes village was called Chandler’s Mills. The name changed later to Belgrade Mills,

and then to Belgrade Lakes.

Program presenter Sharon Young Nadeau grew up in Sidney, studied criminal justice at the University of Maine at Augusta, and took employment at the school a few days after graduating. For the next 42 years she remained employed within the University of Maine System. After settling into retirement, she got involved with the Belgrade Historical Society, after which her brother Cliff Young tugged her into the Sidney Historical Society as well. She is president of Belgrade Historical and secretary at Sidney Historical.

The KHS presentation is free to the public (donations are gladly accepted) and will take place at 6:30 p.m. Wednesday, October 15, at Augusta City Center, located at 16 Cony Street in Augusta. For details about the program, call Scott Wood, KHS executive director, at 622-7718.

### October Extra: “The Kennebec Trading and Mining Company”

**A** group of Mainers from the lower Kennebec Valley formed a collaborative called the Kennebec Trading and Mining Company. In late March 1849, they headed out west to seek their fortunes in the California goldfields. Ron Kley will talk about the company October 28 and provide a list of its members and the Kennebec County hometowns to which they are connected. The program will also include a general overview of the gold rush.

A third-grade teacher inspired Kley to start collecting local rock and mineral specimens, and by the time he got to college, he was a geology major specializing in mineralogy, ore minerals, and mining. After graduation, he continued his studies in mining geology, earning a master’s degree and aiming for a doctorate. Kley had a summer job lined up with a Canadian mining company that went bankrupt; but luckily, he found a job with the Boston Children’s Museum, organizing its rock and mineral collections.



KHS speaker Ron Kley

Kley eventually was hired as a staff member of the newly created Maine State Museum and remained there for 20 years.

After that, along with a former State Museum colleague, he went into business as a museum consultant and contractor, working with clients throughout North America and in Europe, Africa, and Australia. For the past 20 years, Kley has worked as a curator and archivist at the Vaughan Homestead in Hallowell.

This Kennebec Historical Society presentation is free to the public (donations are gladly accepted) and will take place at 6:30 p.m. Tuesday, October 28, at Augusta City Center, located at 16 Cony Street in Augusta. For details, call Scott Wood, executive director, at 622-7718.



**In the January 24, 1848, entry of the diary of Henry Bigler, a Sutter’s Mill worker, he stated that “some kind of mettle was found in the tail race that looks like gold.”**

Image courtesy of Maine State Museum



## Additional Program

### November: “Working the Woods”



**A steersman guides a steam log hauler around 1915.**  
Clarence Morton photo courtesy of the Morton family archive

Millions of acres of forest cover northern New England, particularly Maine. People have been cutting trees for hundreds of years. Logging was essential to the first European settlers' survival, and it remains vital today. Mary Morton Cowan's November 19 lecture and slide presentation for the Kennebec Historical Society will describe logging procedures from Colonial times to the present day, beginning with primitive cutting and transporting methods, including the mast trade with Britain.

Cowan's presentation encompasses developments from log drives and steam-powered log haulers to recent innovative wood products and industrial advancements in tree harvesting. Her program addresses challenges caused by climate change and discusses the future of our forests—all topics included in her new logging book, *Timberrr! A History of Logging in New England*.

Cowan's fascination with forests and logging was inspired by her family. The Mortons owned Paris Manufacturing Company, located in South Paris, where they made sleds, skis, and other wood products. They also operated a lumber camp, where her father lived as a young boy. The program includes many photographs taken by her grandfather Clarence Morton.

Cowan has been writing books and articles for young readers for 35 years and has won several awards for her work. A Maine native, she graduated from Westbrook High School and Bates College, where she concentrated her studies in English and music. She is a member of the Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators and of the Maine Writers and Publishers Alliance.

The KHS presentation is free to the public (donations are gladly accepted) and will take place at 6:30 p.m. Wednesday, November 19, at Augusta City Center, located at 16 Cony Street in Augusta. For details, call Scott Wood, executive director, at 622-7718

## Two-city Kennebec Classic Tennis Event Draws Dozens

The seventh annual Kennebec Classic tennis tournament attracted dozens of players August 8 and 9 to the North Street Recreation Area courts in Waterville and the Buker Community Center courts in Augusta.

The Kennebec Historical Society event featured 30 players in open singles, 10 in “B” Singles, and 12 doubles teams, according to organizer Billy Noble.

Jonah Chen, of Auburn, defeated Steven Kurban, of South Portland, 8-0 in the final of the Open Singles on Saturday in Augusta. Jade Young, of Madison, defeated Alyssa Eaves, of Topsham, 8-1 in the “B” Singles on Saturday in Waterville.

Jason Tardif and son Logan Tardif, both from Waterville, beat Rob Disch, of Waterville, and Teddy Faugno, of Augusta, 8-4 in the Open Doubles in Augusta.

The society thanks the event's sponsors, which are Quality Copy, Inc.; McKee Morgan, LLC, PA; A-1 Seamless Gutters; Shaw & Son Outdoor Maintenance, LLC; and Connected Credit Union. Proceeds from the event help support day-to-day operations at the Augusta-based Kennebec Historical Society.



**Asa Stroman of Skowhegan serves up an ace at the Kennebec Classic tennis tournament.**

Photo by Rich Eastman



**Winners of the Kennebec Classic tennis tournament are, left to right, Jonah Chen of Auburn, Jade Young of Madison, and Logan and Jason Tardif of Waterville.**

Photos by Billy Noble

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