Kennebec Current

"Let me die in the old uniform in which I fought my battles for freedom. May God forgive me for putting on another."
Purportedly Benedict Arnold's last words at his death in 1801. (*see story below*)

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Lectures Offer Reflections on 1775 Quebec Invasion

What momentous military expedition was a failure that inspired later success, was led by a bold officer who later became a traitor, and featured a much-described woman who probably didn't exist, but at least four other women who rarely draw attention?

The Arnold Expedition to Quebec, which was underway 250 years ago this fall, checks off all of those boxes.

On September 26, Augusta's Old Fort Western and the Arnold Expedition Historical Society kicked off a weekend of events commemorating theanniversary of Benedict Arnold's daring 1775 attempt to seize Quebec from the British during the Revolutionary War's first year. Events at the fort began with a day of public lectures.

Current archaeological and historical research presented during the daylong symposium cast a clearer light on the historical and military importance of Col. Benedict Arnold's nearly 200-mile march up the Kennebec through Maine's wilderness to what now is Canada.

Historian Tom Desjardin, author of the 2006 book *Through a Howling Wilderness: Benedict Arnold's March to Quebec, 1775*, described the military campaign that was launched in October 1775 with the goal of taking the British stronghold of Quebec. Arnold led 1,110 Colonial soldiers who embarked from Fort Western in 22-foot flat-bottomed boats (bateaux) ordered by George Washington and made hastily in Pittston at the boatyard of Maj. Reuben Colburn, he said.

After a grueling trip through Maine's wilderness, only 400 of the expedition members reached Quebec. Then they lost the battle by what Desjardin described as "the thinnest of margins." The men voted "democratically" to decide whether to

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Historian and reenactor Sarah Donovan appears in period costume September 26 at Old Fort Western, where she talked about the involvement of women in Benedict Arnold's 1775 march to Quebec.

Photo by Gay Grant

Mount Vernon's Reclusive Hearse Back in Its Neighborhood

The Mount Vernon horse-drawn hearse, all loaded, leaves the Monmouth Museum in May 2018, heading for the Vienna Historical Society.

Photo by Larry Buggia

It is nearly impossible to research Mount Vernon's antique horse-drawn hearse without crossing paths with Ned Rathey. He was well-known there as a substantial dairy farmer who collected cream at farms in the area and he delivered it in his milk wagon to a local creamery. In addition, he served as the Mount Vernon cemetery sexton, which included the responsibility of driving the town hearse.

When Rathey was at the reins, he dressed in a top hat and formal clothing. The hearse was drawn by his striking, well-matched pair of coal-black bays. Starting in 1906 Rathey drove the hearse year-round; sometimes he was enlisted by Winthrop, Belgrade, Rome, Vienna, and other towns in the area. He put sled runners under the high narrow rig in the winter, which made it tough to handle. On springtime's muddy, rutted roads, he was fearful he might tip the top-heavy hearse over. On one occasion it skidded sideways all the way down Currier Hill when Fred Hopkins happened to be

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Help Thriving Society Build Its Annex

President's Message
Kent London

I would have to agree with Joe O'Donnell's last president's column (*Kennebec Current*, September-October 2025) that certain areas of the Kennebec Historical Society are best left to themselves. The advances that Kennebec Historical Society has made in the last few years have been impressive. Executive Director Scott Wood has become a full-time employee, the conversion to PastPerfect archival software went well, and the upgrades to the *Kennebec Current* are progressing. The volunteers have been instrumental in making this possible, and I want to thank them on behalf of the Board of Directors and myself for their generous contributions.

The Finance and Development committees have gotten the society on a firm financial footing, with increased donations to the Moira H. Fuller Annual Fund and the establishment of endowment funds. I want to thank Joe Owen, the Development Committee member, for single-handedly making sure that the Fuller Fund goals were met. The committee needs and is looking for more members.

The re-creation of the Fuller House horse barn and carriage house for a larger archive will be my focus, and I will be seeking help in this task.

The Kennebec Historical Society is in good shape.

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The name of Benton native Asher C. Hinds appears carved into the wheel that rotates the Benton Falls Congregational Church's bell. Hinds (1863-1919) was a journalist and politician who served three terms in the U.S. House of Representatives.

Photo by Joseph Owen

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

Kennebec Current
Our 176th Issue

Staff

Joseph Owen, editor
Rich Eastman, designer
Teddy Faugno, photographer
Sally Joy, adviser, proofreader

Writers

Bob Bennett
Dale Potter-Clark
Gay Grant
Harvey Lipman
Jamie Logan
Emily Schroeder
Earle G. Shettleworth Jr.
Ben Sturtevant
Barbara Warren

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.

Bell, Steeple Back in Place on Two-century-old Benton Church

To the crowd assembled on the lawn September 23 next to the Benton Falls Congregational Church, it was an uplifting experience in the most literal sense.

They watched as workers from Cornish-based Limerick Steeplejacks Inc., moving with the slow, delicate caution one might expect of a bomb-disposal squad, hoisted the church bell and housing into place, then the restored steeple, making the church whole again for the first time since the decaying structures had been removed more than seven years ago. Moving the parts took a few hours.

Current Followup

The project, one of several upgrades needed at the church, originally had been expected to cost about $376,000 (*Kennebec Current*, September-October 2021); but the restoration committee was able to get it done for less, according to committee co-chairwoman Dawnela Sheehan, who also is the church's co-treasurer.

Workers from Limerick Steeplejacks Inc. steady the bell and its rebuilt housing September 23 as the 1,000-pound apparatus begins its ascent to the Benton Falls Congregational Church's bell tower.

Photos by Joseph Owen

On a wind-free day, the Benton Falls Congregational Church's restored steeple moves into place September 23.

The church on Benton Falls Road in Benton draws 20 to 30 people to its Sunday services, Sheehan said. Despite the congregation's small size, however, it has been able to gather about $187,000 in contributions over the past four years through bean suppers and other fundraising activities, Sheehan said. Donors include people who are not members of the congregation. The only remaining part of the bell tower contract is installing a window on the back side of the tower, Sheehan said.

The church building dates to 1826, when Benton still was part of the neighboring town of Clinton. The bell was purchased in 1828. It was the last bell sold by the Revere Foundry and Copper Mill in Canton, Massachusetts, according to the company's records (*Kennebec Current*, May-June 2023).

Martha Shores, 92, lived on a Benton farm before she and her Benton-native husband, the late Wilson Shores, retired and moved to Clinton. She said she recalls the church hosting three-setting suppers, but now all the meals it offers are take-out items.

Dawn Walsh, who lives on Benton Falls Road, recalls that local farmers donated their produce for the sit-down suppers.

"As time went on, the men were all the coffee pourers. They had stronger arms," Walsh said, noting that the coffee urns were too heavy for some of the women to carry. As might be expected, the church was the setting of many signal events in the parishioners' lives – but not necessarily in the order one might expect.

Shores' daughter Sally Tuttle was married in the church in 1969. Her sister also was married there.

"Over a year ago, Mom and I got baptized at this church," Tuttle said.

Before the tower work began, the restoration committee already had hired other companies to jack up the church sanctuary; level and straighten it; replace rotting stringers, sills, and clapboards; straighten the granite foundation; and replace trusses.

"The next project will be to repair any soft spots in the sheathing of the exterior walls of the sanctuary and replace any damaged clapboards before scraping and painting," Sheehan said in an email message in response to a query.

She said she and fellow Benton resident Barbara Warren, a Kennebec Historical Society board member, plan to work on getting the church building added to the National Register of Historic Places.

— by Joseph Owen

A WABI television report about the bell tower restoration can be seen online here: https://www.wabi.tv/video/2025/09/23/historic-steeple-bell-return-benton-falls-congregational-church/

Mount Vernon's Reclusive Hearse

Continued from page 1

driving it. Hopkins, according to his daughter, the late Hazel Cole, worried about making it home when he drove the hearse because he felt his pair of horses were not as well-matched to the task as Rathey's were.

The town of Mount Vernon acquired the hearse in 1887, 20 years before Rathey moved there. The townspeople approved $500 (about $17,000 in today's value) to buy it, which was an enormous amount for "Mount Vernonites," who are historically known to be fiscal conservatives. Eighteen years later, J. Augustus Randlett made a strap for it and in 1912 the town paid Ella Leighton $2.30 for trimming it. When not in use, it was stored in a small shed near the old Town Hall on Bean Road, a short distance up the road from Rathey's homestead.

This former Mount Vernon hearse is on display at the Vienna Historical Society.

Photo by Beverly Williams Olson

One memorable occasion was the funeral of Benjamin Almon Smith, of West Mount Vernon, who was the father of lifetime resident Mabel (Mrs. Leroy Sr.) Smith. Almon died on December 30, 1923, and his funeral was planned for January 1. A snowstorm set in that day and some parts of Maine got up to 2 feet of snow, so motorized vehicles were useless. Rathey put sled runners on the trusty hearse and made the trip for his old friend.

According to a 1967 newspaper interview with Rathey, he first operated the hearse in 1906 and on occasion up until 1945, when he moved to Winthrop. But with the ever-increasing use of motorized vehicles, the hearse remained tucked away out of sight most of the time in that same small shed.

By 1967 the town garage and sand pile were located where the old Town Hall had been, and the sand pile had outgrown its space. At town meeting that year selectmen proposed the hearse should be disposed of and the shed that housed it torn down to create more room. "(We) would advertise the collector's item," said selectman Walter Greene, "but frankly we don't know who would buy it or how much they would pay." The hearse was described at that time as a remarkably well-preserved, handsome coach. Although the maker's plate was not visible, the German silver-plated hardware was still in excellent condition. From the description, it appears that Rathey had treated it well. Townspeople voted to dispense with the hearse, but only if it was donated to the Maine State Museum. Their only stipulation was that Mount Vernon would be given recognition as the former owner and the museum would take immediate delivery so the shed could be torn down. The museum accepted those conditions and made the hearse a part of its "disappearing Americana display."

Nearly 30 years passed and most townspeople had forgotten or never knew they had owned a horse-drawn hearse. With the town's 1992 bicentennial approaching, the museum offered it back to Mount Vernon, and it was returned in time for the celebration. For several years it was the centerpiece of artifacts on display in a temporary museum set up in the basement of the Town Hall. It was brought out and placed on a flatbed trailer to appear in the Mount Vernon

bicentennial parade that July for one last glorious appearance. It eventually was moved to a local barn for storage, vanishing from most townspeople's minds for nearly a quarter-century.

About 2005, the barn's owner needed the space and asked the town to remove the hearse. Word got out that it had to be moved and the search was on for another home. Monmouth Museum trustee Mark Quinlivan got wind of it, said his fellow trustee Bobbie Bowler, of Monmouth. Bowler recalls visiting the barn with Quinlivan and his wife to see the hearse, saying, "It was beautiful and we had the space at our museum, so we agreed to house it; but it would still be owned by the town of Mount Vernon." Barbara Gilman, of Vienna, recalls that someone from Monmouth came to interview her husband, Burton, about that time, too, in the attempt to learn more about its provenance. Burton Gilman, who died the next year, was a great-grandson of Ned Rathey and known to be a good storyteller, so he was the likely person to be interviewed about it at that time.

In 2015-2016 the Monmouth Museum made some investments and added new exhibits as well as additions to its carriage house. During that time the museum trustees decided to return the hearse to Mount Vernon and keep one that had been donated by the Woolworth estate, Bowler said. It was built in 1911, so it wasn't as old as Mount Vernon's; but it came from a Monmouth family. So the 1887 hearse became an outcast yet again, and the search for another new home was on. As luck would have it, the Vienna Historical Society had purchased the Milton Bradley birthplace and some adjoining land in 2009, and since the group worked to preserve the history of both Vienna and Mount Vernon, the members agreed to take it. The society had no storage space for the hearse at that time though, so it purchased a prefabricated building for $7,000, drove the hearse from Monmouth on a flatbed trailer in May 2018, and transported it to its new home in Vienna village. There it sat untouched, under lock and key until about two and a half years ago.

The hearse is now on display at the Vienna Historical Society. Society President Ingrid Grenon, who restored it, shows how the floor in the body of the hearse slides out to provide better access to a coffin.

Photo by Dale Potter-Clark

Enter Ingrid Grenon, the newly elected Vienna Historical Society president. She has roots eight generations deep in Mount Vernon but was new to the Vienna group, so she had a lot to learn – including what was in that locked building.

"I managed to track down the key and was delighted at what I saw inside," Grenon said.

Unknown to the society members who had elected her, Grenon collects and restores antique carriages in addition to other horse-related artifacts. She is a blacksmith and farrier, too, and has collected a lot of horseshoes and blacksmith tools and saddles dating back to 1790.

"I began to clean up the hearse," she said, "sometimes crawling inside to wash the windows and interior. What a sight I must have been inside that hearse with my legs hanging out the back."

Once it was all spit-shined, she brought in some items from her personal collection and created a display in what the society now calls its "Horse Museum." It has since received an old child's coffin for inside the hearse, to complete the picture.

Ironically, things have come full circle for the hearse and Ned Rathey, because some of his great-grandchildren, Eileen Gilman Lord and Bonnie Jean Gilman, are now among those in charge of its care.

The Vienna Historical Society's buildings generally are open to visitors from mid-July to late August, and by appointment at other times. The society's headquarters is located at 1 Bradley Road, on the corner of Route 41 and Bradley Road in Vienna village. To obtain more information or arrange a visit, contact Grenon at (207) 293-8048 or shoer60@verizon.net.

The writer, Dale Potter-Clark, is one of the founders of the Readfield Historical Society and is a member of its board of directors. She has authored several books, monographs, and websites about central Maine history.

Quebec Invasion

Continued from page 1

make the final attack of the heavily fortified city. The proposal failed by one vote, Desjardin said.

Desjardin stressed that though the campaign was unsuccessful, the battle for Quebec diverted British attention, slowing the British army down long enough for France to decide to come into the war on the side of the Americans. Some of the patriots who fought at Quebec were later at the Battle of Saratoga, Desjardin said, including Arnold, who was Washington's most trusted officer at the time. The Quebec March and Arnold's contributions to the war are overshadowed by what happened later, Desjardin said, referring to Arnold's eventual treason.

Linda Novak, director of Old Fort Western in Augusta, holds a reassembled 1770s jug on November 7 in her office at Augusta City Center. The jug was manufactured in Newburyport, Massachusetts, she said. The shattered jug's pieces were found hidden under tree roots along the Arnold Trail in northwestern Maine.

Photos by Jospeh Owen

Maine author Kenneth Robert's 1930 novel, *Arundel*, based on extensive historical research, is a fictional account of Arnold's march that still captures the imagination of people fascinated with this period of history, Desjardin said.

The novel includes the character of a Native American woman, Jacataqua, who helps guide the army through the wilderness, strikes up a romance with American Aaron Burr, and dies in childbirth in a convent in Quebec. Desjardin said this makes a good fiction, but there is no historical evidence to show it was anything but a myth. For example, he said, there is no archeological evidence to place a major Native American settlement on Swan Island, in the Kennebec River across from Richmond, as Robert describes.

Desjardin suggested that the genesis of the Jacataqua myth could be traced to a well-known participant of the march, Henry Dearborn, from Gardiner, who was later U.S. secretary of war under Thomas Jefferson. Desjardins said Dearborn was "not a fan of Aaron Burr," and he probably told the Jacataqua story to sully Burr's character for political reasons.

Desjardin, a former history professor at Bowdoin College, said the March to Quebec has been shadowed by Arnold's later act of treason at West Point, New York; but his leadership and bravery, and the bravery of his men, still stand as an important chapter in the history of the Revolutionary War.

Sara Donovan, a reenactor and living history historian, who is also a nurse, spoke about the four women now known to have been with the Arnold Expedition. Susanna Greer and Jemimah Warner, wives of two of the soldiers, appear in previously published accounts of the march. However, Donovan said, two other women who were on the march appear in later military pension records uncovered by historian George Quintal, who spoke later in the day.

Donovan said that Jemimah Warner's husband died on the march to Quebec, and she stayed behind to bury him, with no tools, but later caught up with the group, which was 20 miles ahead of her, while carrying her husband's gun and other equipment. It is believed she died later in the battle, Donovan said. The three other women survived.

Donovan's participation in a 2021 reenactment led her to research other period accounts to find out what the women on the march were likely wearing, since none of the records of the march provide this information. Dressed in period garb for her presentation, Donovan described herself as an experiential learner and said that participating in reenactments in period garb she sewed herself, using traditional methods of the Revolutionary period, has given her a different perspective on these historical events. "We learned as you can no other way," she said. "Sewing my costumes the way they did connects me to the women of that time."

As she spoke, Donovan donned clothing layer by layer, describing how the heavy clothing and the fact that the participants were women affected their chances of survival on the arduous journey. One journal account from the march, Donovan said, described how the men had to look away to provide the women privacy while they lifted their layers of skirts above their waists to wade through icy, waist-deep water, to keep their clothing as dry as possible.

Arnold Expedition Historical Society charter member Kenny Wing, an author and historian from Eustis, has been conducting archaeological research since 2005, after a 27-year career with the Maine Forest Service. Wing said he has been steeped in the history of Arnold's march since childhood, when his father discovered and helped document the location of several important Arnold March sites. Wing called the area above Eustis "Arnold Mecca."

Wing said in the "old days," enthusiasts took metal detectors into the Maine woods looking for artifacts to collect; but today, "it is about the science, not collecting." He emphasized that the days of indiscriminate metal detecting are over. If sites are found now, he said, they are identified and excavated by experts.

"If you find something, GPS it and leave it where it is," he said, noting that the Arnold Expedition Historical Society funds professional excavation of such sites.

Wing carefully unveiled a replica of an "ammo box" that was found above the Chain of Ponds. It contained 23 pounds of musket balls in three sizes along with fowling shot. The box had mostly rotted away, but the nails remained, he said. When the site was analyzed, a piece of three-quarter-inch white pine board was found beneath the nails. These boxes, Wing said, were carried with hemp rope held by two men.

They were carrying these heavy boxes in freezing weather and practically starving, he said, adding, "How did they carry on?"

New sites and new artifacts are still being found and documented, Wing said. After his presentation, audience members had an opportunity to see items that have not yet been on display.

In a talk that was thorough, detailed, and comprehensive, including images showing period maps, Jonathan Bratten, a military historian, described Arnold's march as being akin to exploring a new frontier. Borders were unclear, and a diverse group of Native Americans who did not identify themselves with one side in the conflict added uncertainty to it. The Wabanaki had more influence and bargaining power in international affairs, he said.

Old Fort Western, shown here on November 17, was the site of a great feast held for Benedict Arnold's men as they ascended the Kennebec River in bateaux in the fall of 1775.

Photo by Joseph Owen

During the Revolution, colonists were committed to working with Native Americans and not against them, seeing the threat as lying with the British, Bratten said.

"In order to get natives to support the American cause, promises of expanded trade with Boston were made," he said.

George Quintal shared an 18-minute clip from the Benedict Arnold documentary by Talon Films, for which he was a consultant. After the film, Quintal spoke about his 51-year quest to find all the names of the men and women who went on the expedition.

Quintal showed two large binders, bearing the names of 1,034 men and four women he had found. Based in his examination of 2,700 rolls of pension records held in the National Archives, he estimates the total on the trip was around 1,100.

Quintal has found information in unlikely places, including, for example, a British-issued wanted poster for two of the captured men who escaped. The poster described Edward Agnew from Pennsylvania as, "a stately good looking man…a shrewd, sensible fellow," and John Brown, also from Pennsylvania, as, "a slim young man about 22 years of age, fair hair cut quite short, much the look of a Yanky. …"

Quintal described the Access database of statistics about the march he has created, which can be searched by categories, such as how many sets of brothers went on the trip, and how many men were married, and what their ages were.

However, Quintal said, there is little information available on why someone would want to volunteer for the expedition. Whatever their motivation, it is clear that Arnold's men were endeared to him and were later heartbroken when he became a traitor to the American cause.

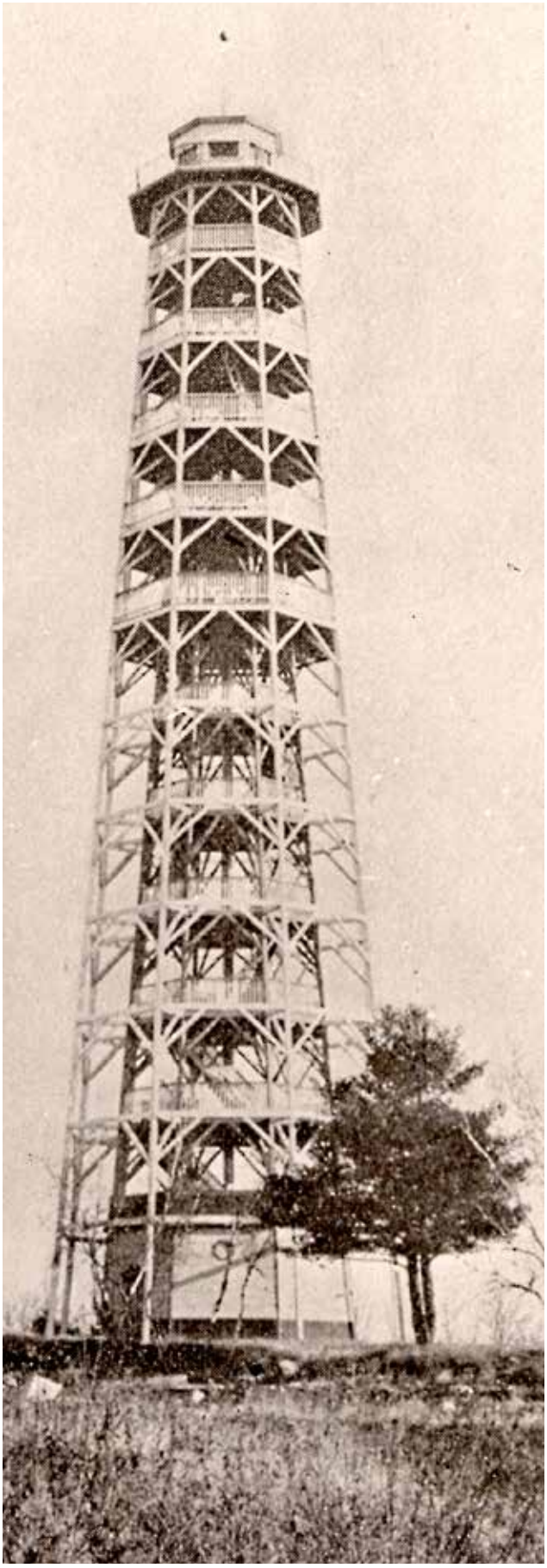
Michael Cecere, an author, historian, and retired history teacher from Williamsburg, Virginia, discussed events happening throughout the 13 rebellious colonies, providing historical context for the Arnold expedition. Even before shots were fired at Concord and Lexington in April 1775, Cecere said, the British were getting nervous about their security in New York. As ideas of independence grew in popularity among the colonists, the British began to leave New York. As they left, Cecere said, the British took not only their own arms, but wagons of additional munitions.

When confronted by colonists, the British felt well within their rights to put the colonists down, but exercised restraint. Cecere suggested that if the British had reacted with violence there, it could have been the start of the war. As things turned out, British troops occupied New York City for most of the war, leaving only when the colonists emerged victorious.

After all the lectures, there was a brief panel discussion with the presenters.

Old Fort Western is a National Historic Landmark fort, store, and house, built in 1754 on the banks of the Kennebec River in Augusta. It stands next to Augusta City Center, the seat of municipal government. The Arnold Expedition Historical Society's cultural base has been the former home of Maj. Reuben Colburn, the Colburn House State Historic Site, along the Kennebec River in Pittston; but that structure remains in disrepair and unusable.

— by Gay Grant and Scott Wood



Fuller Observatory:

The Archivist's Pen
Emily Schroeder

Have you ever visited the bathroom on the first floor of Kennebec Historical Society? If so, you've undoubtedly seen the gigantic image of a wooden tower hanging on the wall.

The Fuller Observatory existed for a brief four years at the end of the 19th century. It stood high above Augusta's west side, in the Granite Street neighborhood. At 391 feet above sea level, the spot was variously known as Oliver's Ledge, Locke's Ledge, Fuller's Ledge, and, most recently, Burnt Hill, immediately northeast of Augusta State Airport and north of the cluster of cemeteries on the upper end of Winthrop Street.

The tower was the brainchild of Augusta native Albert T. Fuller, grocer and visionary; more on him in a bit.

When it first opened in 1891, the tower was eight stories beyond the ground floor, 100 feet tall, and octagonal in shape. Chairs were placed on the stairs. Fuller charged 10 cents per visitor, and he even provided telescopes for viewing the surrounding landscape. Though it was reportedly was painted in bright colors, we don't know what they were.

The site was known then as Oliver's Ledge. Captain Nathan Oliver (1797-1854) had lived nearby. He had owned the ledge and had worked the stone quarry that was there. He was a pillar of the First Baptist Church in the city.

Fuller purchased 33 acres on the hill in 1890, clearing some of the land and providing a bandstand and picnic area.

The builder of the tower's first eight stories was John P. Wyman (1828-1901), listed in Augusta city directories as a carpenter from 1871 until his death. He lived with his family at 123 Bridge Street. Wyman had strung guy wires from the seventh floor that were 166 feet long and bolted to the ledge. Fuller and Wyman were confident that 250 people at a time could be on the tower, and that wind would never be a threat to it. Interestingly enough, Fuller thought it wasn't high enough and added four more stories in 1892.

In a *Daily Kennebec Journal* article titled "Augusta Man Part Builder of Old Fuller Observatory," published on December 21, 1929, we get more construction details from the second builder, W.W. (William) Jackson (1862-1942). Posts and beams were 6 feet by 8 feet and 4 feet by 8 feet, bolted to ledge. The ground floor diameter was "about 42 feet"; the diameter at the top was 17 feet. Guy wires were attached to the ninth and tenth floors. In the center of the top was a flagpole, about 25 feet high. By 1942, Jackson had lived in Augusta for 65 years, most recently in the neighborhood, at 18 Pike Street. His obituary (*Daily Kennebec Journal*, May 13,

The Short Life of an Augusta Landmark

1942) credits him with the construction of the lighthouse in Lake Cobbosseecontee, the Madison paper mill, and other large plants, in addition to the observatory.

There was also a caretaker: William H. Getchell, who was born on North Street in 1858, and who was a lifelong bachelor. He kept records of the number of people who ascended the tower; sometimes as there were as many as 500 a day. Getchell's other assignments in the city included watching over the old covered bridge, on which he maintained a candy and cigar store. He also had a cobbler shop on the east end of the bridge. Following the demise of the observatory, he spent 21 years as caretaker of Fort Western. He was highly regarded as a public servant, evidenced by the final tribute given in his obituary (*Daily Kennebec Journal*, September 6, 1935). He is buried in Mount Pleasant Cemetery.

This southward view from Fuller Observatory shows Augusta's south side as well as parts of Hallowell.

From the KHS archive

As for the man who started it all, Albert (A.T.) Fuller was born in Augusta to Thomas A. (1817-1890) and Caroline (White) Fuller (1823-1882), on November 21, 1845. He was the eldest of nine children. Thomas Fuller established a downtown grocery business on Water Street in 1865, later running it with his son Albert. The book *Leading Business Men of Lewiston, Augusta and Vicinity* (1889) reports that the Fullers "carry an immense stock of Groceries, Provisions and Country Produce. … (T)he stock carried here has no superior in the city" (page 124).

Albert Fuller married Emma Randall (1849-1941), on June 17, 1867, in the city. Their children were Lillie Marion Fuller (1870-1879), Adelaide (Fuller) Lee (1872-1960) and Blanche Emma (Fuller) Scott (1881-1936). They lived at 44 North Street, several blocks northeast and downhill from the tower site.

Business was apparently very good, considering Fuller's investment in the tower and recreational area. He enjoyed

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At left: The Fuller Observatory, which was located above Granite Street in Augusta, stood for only three years before toppling in a violent storm on the last day of 1895. Above: This eastward view from Fuller Observatory shows Augusta's west side in the foreground and its east side in the background, across the Kennebec River. Several large buildings shown in the photo no longer exist.

From the KHS archive

Fuller Observatory

Continued from page 9

A group of men stands in front of Albert Fuller's store on Water Street in downtown Augusta.

From the KHS archive

additional profit in the establishment of Augusta Granite Company (1893), mining the granite on his acreage. He was still a director of the company in 1895.

Property remained important to him, judging by the 175 entries bearing his name in the Kennebec County Register of Deeds index. Some involved neighboring towns. His granddaughter, Marjorie Lee Sewell, stated that he had built several homes on North Street.

Thousands climbed the steps to enjoy the unparalleled views offered at the observatory, in all directions; but, as they say, all good things must come to an end. That end came in the form of a hurricane temperatures nearing 60 degrees, torrential rain, and violent wind. It was New Year's Eve in 1895. Trees and chimneys fell. Roofs were blown off. Twelve-year-old Virgil White was seriously injured when part of the Johnson Brothers shoe factory roof fell on him in Hallowell. The John Hancock Ice House in Gardiner suffered a similar structural fate. Mother Nature left many victims, and the Fuller Observatory was not spared. Reasons given for the failure vary, from a faulty clamp to a defective guy wire. Suffice it to say there was a loud crash, and it was gone, another landmark lost.

Fuller did not rebuild, but he continued to thrive on North Street until he died on November 19, 1913. He had had pneumonia for only two days. He and most of his family are buried in Mount Pleasant Cemetery, close to the tower site.

My thanks to longtime Kennebec Historical Society member and retired surveyor Orland Bean, of Sidney, who researched deeds of Fuller's land and helped pinpoint the location of the tower. We hope to visit the site soon and experience some of Fuller's vision.

Until next time!

London Takes Second Turn at KHS Helm

Kennebec Historical Society members elected Kent London, of Vassalboro, president of the society for the second time September 17 at the society's annual meeting, which was held at the South Parish Congregational Church parish hall in Augusta.

London, 69, had been the society's executive vice president for seven consecutive years and has been a KHS Board of Directors member since January 2013, including a two-year term as society president from 2015 to 2017. As president, he replaces longtime board member Joseph O'Donnell, who became president in 2023. O'Donnell remains on the board as one of four people assigned to appointive seats at the board's October meeting.

Sara Maschino, of Gardiner, was elected as the board's new executive vice president. Rob Caverly, of Chelsea, is the new treasurer, replacing Mark Laney, of Winthrop, who has stepped down from the board but plans to remain active on two KHS committees. Jamie Logan, of Augusta, was elected to a second term as secretary.

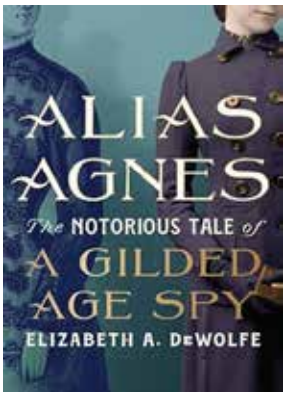
The other board members re-elected for two years at the annual meeting are Stefanie Barley, of Augusta, Stephen Langsdorf, of Hallowell, Joseph Owen, of Augusta, and Emily Schroeder, of South China. Board members Rich Eastman, of Augusta, Josh LaVerdiere, of China, and Anne Cough, of Gardiner, are in the middle of two-year terms and continue to serve on the board as elected members.

Robert Bennett, of South China, Sam Oppenheim, of Gardiner, and Barbara Warren, of Benton, are the other three board members who were appointed at the October meeting.

KHS members at the annual meeting also approved a change in the society's bylaws that assigns to the KHS Personnel Committee more involvement in hiring, evaluating, and determining the pay of the society's executive director. Previously, the board's Executive Committee was solely responsible for those tasks.

The meeting, which also included a potluck supper and a lecture by Mac Smith about his book on the 1947 Mount Desert Island fires, drew about 50 attendees.

Maine Woman's Snooping Influenced Gilded Age Trial



A stenographer from Wiscasset, Maine, working undercover for an attorney. A woman from Kentucky, the former mistress of a congressman. Washington, D.C., in the 1890s. A very public trial, pitting a politician against the former mistress.

These are all the ingredients for an intriguing novel, but it's a true story. Deeply researched and engagingly written by University of New England professor Elizabeth DeWolfe, *Alias Agnes: The Notorious Tale of a Gilded Age Spy* is a rich dive into that era in Washington.

Current Bookshelf

The tale of "Agnes" – actually Mainer Jane Tucker – and her cunning maneuvers to befriend and discreetly interrogate Madeline Pollard, the former mistress of U.S. Rep. William C.P. Breckinridge, a Kentucky Democrat, is intriguing and engaging on its own. Add in the context of Washington society and the finer points of its etiquette navigation, then throw in plenty of heated courtroom drama, and you have a well-rounded, informative story of our nation's past. It may be a micro-history in its way, telling the story primarily of two women, but in that story so much more is revealed about life in Washington, how women were making strides toward independence, and the minutiae of trial law as practiced on the most public of stages. One review of *Alias Agnes* aptly concludes that DeWolfe "lights up the culture of the time" in the book.

There are also many glimpses of life in Maine, as Jane/Agnes is in frequent contact with her family through letters.

The way DeWolfe discovered Jane's/Agnes' story is itself a balm to historians and those working hard to preserve archival collections. In the prologue, she explains how she followed one mention of the name to another thread of the story, and then another, eventually tying it all together and realizing she had a meaningful historical story to tell.

A list of local bookstores where you can purchase the book is available at www.elizabethdewolfe.com. It is also available at the Maine State Library.

– by Jamie Logan

Around Kennebec County

AUGUSTA

Former Portland lawyer Jack Montgomery is scheduled to speak November 18 about his new book, *From the Holocaust to Maine: Testimony of the Survivors*, at the **Holocaust and Human Rights Center of Maine's** Michael Klahr Center, located on the campus of the University of Maine at Augusta. Montgomery's photographs of survivors of the Nazi effort to exterminate Europe's Jews will be on display at the event. The book also showcases portraits of survivors, some of whom were among the HHRC's founders. The event begins at 5 p.m. and is open to the public.

WINTHROP

The **Winthrop Maine Historical Society** plans to enter a float in Winthrop's December 6 holiday parade down Main Street, which is scheduled to begin at 3 p.m. The society's float will depict Betsy Ross and the U.S. flag she designed. Also, the society is hosting its fifth annual cookie walk from 3 to 7 p.m. December 12 and 10 a.m.-3 p.m. December 13 at its headquarters, the **Winthrop History and Heritage Center**, located at 107 Main Street. All cookies cost $10 per pound. Proceeds from the event will help support the society.

KHS Welcomes the Following New Members

Dozier Bell — Waldoboro
Kelly & Nick Jordache — Fleetwood, Pennsylvania
Tom Keefe — Augusta
Ann Merlau — Augusta
Melanie & Kirk Mohney — Gardiner
James Ostiguy — Randolph
Jennifer Parrish — LaBelle, Missouri
Stephen & Susan Plate — Augusta
Amy Yocum & Kevin Cronin — Madison, Wisconsin

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Monmouth's Cumston Hall Reaches Timeline Milestone

History Through a Keyhole #21

Answer to Keyhole #21

Q: What is this?
A: A Greek revival-style portico topped by a pediment

Q: Where is it?
A: It forms part of the main entrance to Cumston Hall, located on Main Street in Monmouth.

Q: What's historic about it?
A: The building, listed on the National Register of Historic Places, was the gift of a prominent citizen, retired educator Charles Cumston, to his hometown.

Cumston Hall is a 125-year-old architectural miracle in Monmouth that houses Cumston Public Library, the Theater at Monmouth, and the Monmouth Community Players. At the theatre, which wrapped up its 56th season in September, patrons can see everything from Shakespeare to performances by modern Maine humorists and anything in between. The library was dedicated on June 27, 1900, and has grown to hold impressive collections of books, audio books, e-books, magazines, videos, and more for adults, teens, and children.

Not only does the building accommodate theatrical productions and the library, but community members hold events there as well, such as the town's annual apple festival and the Christmas tree lighting. On any given day, one might find high school students inside posing for their senior portraits. On Friday morning Monmouth Museum volunteers are on the lower level, cataloguing thousands of items in their vault. The Age Friendly Committee comes together there to make plans for how they can help their elderly neighbors stay in their homes. The Cumston Area Quilters hold meetings there to work on projects. Children arrive for story hours, adults for author talks and free yoga stretching classes. Love on a Leash therapy dog training, fiber arts workshops, puzzles, crafts, games and other activities occur there. That all feels appropriate and normal to the administrators at Cumston Hall because, after all, it was built for the community to serve as a town hall.

Cumston Hall was completed in 1892.

Photo by Rich Eastman

Charles M. Cumston, the man who presented the building to the town as a gift, was born in Scarborough in 1824. He moved with his parents and four older siblings to Monmouth when he was very young. Cumston attained his early education in Monmouth. After graduation from Monmouth Academy, he attended the Waterville Institute for a time before graduating from Bowdoin College at age 19. Cumston taught in Monmouth, Litchfield, Turner, Gray and Alfred before moving to Massachusetts. There he taught in Reading, Woburn, and Salem before beginning a 26-year career as a prominent, highly regarded headmaster at the English High School in Boston. In 1870 Bowdoin College bestowed an honorary docotorate in legal studies on him.

Dr. Charles Cumston donated Cumston Hall to the town of Monmouth in 1900.

Image courtesy of Dale Potter-Clark

Cumston never married. In 1874, at age 50, he retired to his parents' homestead on Academy Street in Monmouth, where he had a large house erected to accommodate summer visitors – but only after he'd become convinced that he could save the original homestead by adding to it. The residence was completed about 1892. It remains standing today. Soon afterward, the septuagenarian financed the construction of Cumston Hall at the site of the village bandstand and the deteriorating circa 1844 town hall, adjacent to Monmouth Center Cemetery. His cost was $25,000 and upon its completion in 1900 he sold it to the town of Monmouth for a dollar. Townspeople gratefully named the hall in his honor.

Cumston was successful in his intention to create a Romanesque/Queen Anne-style building for the public that was beautiful, inspiring and educational. He brought in

another Monmouth man, Harry Cochrane, to design and decorate the building. A caucus room, a reading room, a library, and a reception room were included on the first floor – all to serve various municipal and community needs – and the entire second floor held a grand music hall with a 20-foot-wide proscenium. The initial plan was to add kerosene lighting, but Cochrane convinced Cumston otherwise. He had a power plant built, making Cumston Hall the first electrified structure in Monmouth. Twenty-one stalactite-style lights with opalescent, straw-colored globe shades cast a profuse glow over the 50-foot-square main floor and the 16-foot-wide balcony. Seating in excess of 500 was installed with a main floor sloping toward the stage so all could see the stage clearly. The music hall balcony is supported by the building itself, as Cumston did not want to affect the sound or sight lines with columns. One can whisper on stage or drop a pin from 5 feet up, and either can be heard clearly from the rear wall, the *Lewiston Daily Sun* reported at the time of the building's dedication. The paper's entire news coverage of the event spanned the greater part of four pages.

Harry Cochrane designed and decorated Cumston Hall in Monmouth.

Image courtesy of Dale Potter-Clark

As for the architect, Harry Cochrane was born in Augusta; but when his mother died 10 days later, he was sent to live with his grandparents in Monmouth. He graduated from Monmouth Academy and went to study art in New York City, Chicago, and Europe. He later worked as a musician, architect, photographer, author, and composer as well as an artist. His works include the decoration of more than 150 churches and lodges in New England and New York. Cumston Hall, one of Cochrane's crowning glories, is most noted for his cherubic murals that adorn the ceiling, and the intricate hand-molded ornamental plasterwork that frames the walls, boxes, and proscenium arch of the stage. More than 100 stained-glass windows also add highlights to Cumston Hall.

While at his winter home in Boston, Cumston died from the effects of a cerebral hemorrhage in February 1906. His only surviving heirs were a niece and two nephews. He is buried in Forest Hills Cemetery and Crematory in Boston's Jamaica Plain neighborhood.

Harry Cochrane's only child never married. She drowned at age 32 when vacationing on Monhegan Island. Cochrane died in 1946 at a Lewiston hospital from complications following surgery. He is buried with his daughter and wife Ida in Monmouth Center Cemetery.

Cumston Hall has been listed on the National Register of Historic Places since 1973.

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.

History Through a Keyhole — Puzzle 22

Kennebec Historical Society life member Doug Rooks, having been in and out of Monmouth's Cumston Hall over the past several decades, said he had no trouble recognizing our photo of a section of that landmark in our September-October issue. In contrast to that, he said he wouldn't have known the subject of our previous clue, Memorial Hall in Oakland, "unless I'd fallen over it." Heartened by his bout of perceptiveness, we present our latest challenge.

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 objects are, where they are, and what their 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 January-February 2026 issue of the *Kennebec Current*. Answers are due by December 31. Good luck.

County's Early Town Names No Longer Recognizable

Rich Eastman

Anyone researching ancestors in town property deeds or census records are often surprised to find their relative living in a town the researcher has never heard of. That's due to many towns in Kennebec County having gotten their start with a different name.

With the exception of Vassalboro and Hallowell, nearly all towns had at least one name change, and several had two changes, or even three. Around 1820, when Maine became a state, Kennebec County played host to Harlem, Ligonia, Malta, New Sandwich, and Starling. The names hardly are recognizable now, but these towns are more familiar as China, Albion, Windsor, Wayne, and Fayette. Settlements in the late 18th century were often named after prominent statesmen or in honor of the first settlers in that area.

Your Kennebec Roots

The following table shows present-day communities, their year of incorporation as a town, and their earlier names:

Albion (1824) ..... Ligonia (1821), Fairfax (1804), Freetown Plantation (1790)
Augusta (August 1797) Harrington (February 1797), Hallowell (1771)
Belgrade (1796) ..... Washington Plantation (1774)
Benton (1850)..... Sebasticook (1842), Clinton (1795), Hancock Plantation (1776)
Chelsea (1851)..... Hallowell (1771)
China (1818)..... Harlem (1796), Jones Plantation (1774)
Clinton (1849) ..... Maine (1848) ("Maine" was the name of the town), Hancock Plantation (1795)
Farmingdale (1852).... Formed from parts of south Hallowell and north Gardiner
Fayette (1795) ..... Starling Plantation (1779)
Gardiner (1803)..... Gardinerston (1754)
Hallowell (1771)
Litchfield (1795) ..... Smithfield Plantation (1777)
Manchester (1854)..... Kennebec (1850), Manchester (1771)
Monmouth (1792)..... Wales Plantation (1781)
Mount Vernon (1792). Washington Plantation (1774)
Oakland (1883)..... West Waterville (1873), Winslow (1802), Taconnet (1771)
Pittston (1779) ..... Gardinerston (1754)
Randolph (1887)..... West Pittston (1887), Pittston (1779)
Readfield (1791) ..... Pond Town (1765)
Rome (1804)..... West Pond Plantation (1780)
Sidney (1792) ..... Vassalboro (1771)
Unity Township (1942) Unity Gore Plantation (1853) Vassalboro (1771)
Vienna (1802)..... Wyman Plantation (1786), Goshen (1782)
Waterville (1802)..... Winslow (1771), Kingsfield Plantation (1754)
Wayne (1798)..... New Sandwich (1773)
West Gardiner (1850). Gardiner (1803)
Windsor (1822)..... Gerry (1821), Malta (1809), New Waterford (1790)
Winslow (1771)..... Kingsfield Plantation (1754)
Winthrop (1771)..... Pond Town (1765)

In Memoriam

Gary C. Goodrich, 90, of Augusta, a Kennebec Historical Society member since 2005 and life member since 2011, died July 14 at his home. He was a graduate of Maine Central Institute in Pittsfield and of the University of Maine, at Orono, where he studied engineering, interrupting his studies with a period of service in the Army. He worked as a civil engineer for the Government Services Administration at Government Center in Boston before retiring in 1980. He donated generously to the society's fundraising campaigns over the years. His survivors include two half sisters, six nephews and nieces, and five great-nephews and great-nieces.

Susan S. Thomas, of Winthrop, a former Kennebec Historical Society member, died October 12 at Central Maine Medical Center in Lewiston after a brief illness. She and her husband of 69 years, Ben, founded Thomas Agency Real Estate in 1984 and Thomas Insurance in 1982. Both businesses remain in operation. A graduate of Falmouth High School and the University of Maine, where she received a master's degree in education, she also served as chairwoman of the Maine Real Estate Commission, chaired the Winthrop Town Council, and taught real estate courses at the University of Maine at Augusta. Her survivors include her husband, a son, and two grandchildren.

Upcoming Programs

December: "Lost and Found: Silent Films in Maine"

Evelyn Brent and Edgar Jones star in *In the River*, directed by Jones.

Photos courtesy of Ed Lorusso

With a new lost film found, there are now five films recovered of the 25 films that Edgar Jones made in and around Augusta from 1919 to 1921. The newly found film, *In the River*, (1920), was Jones' seventh film, shot in early spring of 1920. It premiered at the Colonial Theater on August 12 that year. It was directed by and stars Jones as the man who tries to save a mail-order bride (Evelyn Brent) from a phony marriage to bad man (Carlton Brickert). The finale features canoes in the rapids headed toward a waterfall, filmed on Cobbosseecontee Stream in West Gardiner.

The roughly 20-minute film will be shown in its entirety during the Kennebec Historical Society's December 3 program in Augusta. The program also features two scenes from mostly lost films made by Pine Tree Pictures, a Portland-based film company (1921-23). An ingenious desert storm was featured in Maine for *The Girl from Porcupine* (1921), and a raging forest fire was the highlight of *Blazing Barriers* (1923), starring Waterville native Lew Cody.

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

The Kennebec Historical Society presentation is free to the public (donations are gladly accepted) and will take place at 6:30 p.m. Wednesday, December 3, at Augusta City Center, located at 16 Cony Street in Augusta. For details, call Scott Wood, executive director, at 622-7718.

Waterville native Lew Cody stars in *The Girl from Porcupine*, 1921, made by Pine Tree Pictures.

Get Those Pinkies Up! Time for a Victorian Tea

In yet another challenge to the vaunted tradition of spending a frosty fall Sunday afternoon on the couch and shouting at whatever televised travesties some NFL football players are inflicting on their fans, the Kennebec Historical Society offers an alternative way to spend one's pre-holiday time: a tea party.

The society's annual Victorian Tea is scheduled for 2 to 4 p.m. Sunday, December 7, at KHS headquarters, the Henry Weld Fuller Jr. House, which is at 107 Winthrop Street in Augusta. Members and the public are invited to celebrate the holiday season at this annual event, which a former society president, Mary McCarthy (1936-2004) instituted a generation ago in the dining room at the previous KHS location, the Johnson-Baker-Shelton house, at 61 Winthrop Street.

A variety of cookies, other snacks, coffee, and tea will be available. Anyone interested in decorating, serving, or bringing some tasty treats is asked to contact Executive Director Scott Wood by email at kennhis1891@gmail.com or by phone at 622-7718.

Attendees at last year's Victorian Tea sample the delicious offerings of tea, cakes, cookies, and confections.

Photo by Rich Eastman

The January program for the Kennebec Historical Society had not yet been determined by press time. For updated information, please check our Website at www.kennebechistorical.org, or call Scott Wood, executive director, at 622-7718.

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Business (annual, fewer than 25 employees) – $100 ___ Corporate (annual, 25 employees or more) – $150 ___
Nonprofit group (annual) – $50 ___ Donation (optional): $ _____

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