Kennebec Current

"The United States is the only country with a known birthday. ... There is no 'Republican,' no 'Democrat,' on the Fourth of July — all are Americans. All feel that their country is greater than party." — James G. Blaine *(see page 4)*

Volume 36 Issue 1 **A PUBLICATION OF THE KENNEBEC HISTORICAL SOCIETY** **January–February 2026**

Kennebec Savings Plans Major Expansion at Augusta HQ

This architectural rendering shows a proposed five-story building, at upper center, that Kennebec Savings Bank plans to build on the north side of Western Avenue in Augusta between Memorial Circle and Chapel Street.

Image courtesy of the city of Augusta

Kennebec Savings Bank hopes to break ground in June for construction of a five-story, 30,000-to-32,000-square-foot office building on Western Avenue in Augusta that would house its local operations, removing them from the nearby Tappan-Viles House and its 1990 addition on State Street.

The new building, to be located on property the bank already owns, would feature design elements that echo those of the Augusta House, according to Andrew Silsby, the bank's president and chief executive officer. That six-story hotel stood nearby on State Street until its demolition in 1974.

As described in a public meeting in December at Lithgow Public Library, the project would take 18 months. The new building would open in late 2027 with redesigned traffic flow and improved signage.

Expected to cost $14 million to $19 million, the project also calls for tearing down an 1899 shingled wood-frame house at 15 Western Avenue that was designed by John Calvin Stevens, a prominent and prolific Maine architect, and that has links to a pair of historically significant families. The bank bought that property in 2020, according to city records. Bank officials, speaking January 20 at a meeting of the Augusta Historic Preservation Commission, said they had considered moving and rehabilitating the vacant house, but they found that to be too expensive and difficult.

"It was for sale for quite a few years," Silsby said, estimating the restoration cost at $2 million. "Ultimately, this building

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KHS Delivers Civil War Unit's Records to Maine State Archives

When the Maine State Archives reopens later this year in the Maine Cultural Building, it will offer more to researchers than just the 53,000 boxes of material the agency has transferred back into the building.

On January 20, the Kennebec Historical Society, Collections Committee turned over to the archives a set of three 21st Maine Infantry logbooks from the Civil War.

KHS had received them as a gift last October from a person who had acquired them from a collector friend, according to the committee's chairwoman, Emily Schroeder. She said that collector had obtained them several years earlier at a Civil War show in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania.

The society learned later that it was not authorized to keep the books legally, Schroeder said, because state law makes them the property of the archives. Meanwhile, archives workers are busy setting up their refurbished digs to receive the public.

"The collection finally got back here last week. We started moving last May," said Christian Cotz, the state archivist.

From left, Kennebec Historical Society Collections Committee member Rich Eastman; committee Chairwoman Emily Schroeder; Christian Cotz, Maine's state archivist; and Heather Moran, the lead professional archivist at the Maine State Archives, examine two of the three logbooks that the society gave to the archives on January 20.

Photo by Joseph Owen

The agency also plans to improve the accessibility of its documents by posting high-resolution, full-color images of many of its documents on an open-access online platform. The newly acquired 21st Maine logbooks eventually will be among those available to see, he said.

At 135, KHS Shows Its Mettle, Not Its Age

Editor's Note
Joseph Owen

On February 25, 1891, a small group of local residents gathered at the Oak Street office of publisher Charles E. Nash to undertake a worthy project: the establishment of a local historical society – this one.

The Kennebec Historical Society had a promising start, but it endured many years of wavering interest. Then it was sidelined completely during the Great Depression and the world war that followed it. It wasn't until the early 1960s that KHS awoke from that slumber, under the leadership of Joseph Beck. It became active for a few years, meeting at Lithgow Public Library, but then deflated again after Beck died in 1965. A 1971 *Daily Kennebec Journal* story titled "Historical Collection Rots in 2 Lithgow Library Rooms" reported that the society had not held a meeting in the previous two years, and that its future was uncertain. It came back to life later in the 1970s, then faltered again.

The most recent revival occurred in 1990, and the group finally caught fire. It has become a robust champion of Kennebec County history since then. It founded this publication almost exactly 35 years ago, began a regular lecture schedule, later hired a full-time executive director, and established a fixed headquarters – first in borrowed space, then in a rented office suite, and still later in the Henry Weld Fuller Jr. House, which it has owned and occupied since 2008.

Today a large and varied membership, an array of historical programs, a growing archive, and a stable financial condition all portend long-term viability.

Happy birthday, KHS, and long may you thrive.

Inside the Current …

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08 • A life cut short by war

Marine Private First Class Fred W. Cummings of Augusta poses with his young bride, Mary Gratto, in 1942 while on leave from the USS *Hornet*.

Photo courtesy of Tom and Karen Johnson

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

Kennebec Current
Our 177th Issue

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

Writers

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

Vaughan Foundation Honors Kley, Radcliffe for Archiving Efforts

What could an art history major and a geology major have in common? If they're Ron Kley and Jane Radcliffe, it would be having a library named after them.

The pair have been archiving items at the nonprofit Vaughan Homestead Foundation in Hallowell for 19 years. Kley claims they are almost finished, only having 20,000 more items to catalog. Because of their work, the foundation named its research library the Kley/Radcliffe Library.

Radcliffe's educational background is in art history and American art, with an interest in preserving painted wall art. She is currently volunteering at a museum in Bridgton. Kley's educational background tended toward rougher pursuits. He earned his degrees in geology, specifically mining geology.

After college, Ron entered military service and worked with thermonuclear devices. He studied geological impacts of explosions. This work led him to Nevada test sites, where he took high-speed photos of explosions to see how surrounding areas reacted, a task that kept him "creatively occupied and not shot at" while the Vietnam War was still underway.

Later, he decided he wanted to work as a geologist or at museums. The Maine State Museum had just received its funding, and in July 1968 Kley began working there. Three years later Radcliffe joined the museum staff. After working at the museum for 20 years, the two left "without a plan."

Ron Kley, above, and Jane Radcliffe, below, are shown conducting classes at Vaughan Homestead.
Photos courtesy of the Vaughan Homestead

Their adventures began as they took on consulting jobs around the world, setting up computerized archive systems. A few interesting locations included South Africa, three Marine Corps museums, and three stints in Australia computerizing materials in archives, as well as relocating entire archives when the need arose. In Perth, Australia, they were asked to set up a computer program to track the location of parking meters. Then Kley and Radcliffe got a call from the Vaughan Foundation to see if they would catalog the Homestead's archives. The first week they cataloged 860 items. They're still on the job, making intriguing discoveries.

During that time, Kley would describe an item or read a letter and Radcliffe would enter it into a computer. One day Kley was reading a letter from an "American politician" to a member of the Vaughan family, thanking him for a carved marble fireplace piece. The letter was signed by George Washington in 1797. Another item they found was a list of wedding gifts in the early 1900s to a member of the Vaughan family, including a check from an aunt, "and I had to count the zeros to be sure," Kley said. "One, zero, zero, zero, zero, zero, zero – yes, one million dollars."

He said one letter brought them to tears. William Warren Vaughan described the death of his wife by simply saying, "The flame went out."

They are looking forward to finishing the remaining tasks at the homestead, though they wouldn't mind a little help if anyone is interested in volunteering.

The pair did a Kennebec Historical Society-sponsored presentation at the Augusta City Center in October centered around the Kennebec Trading and Mining Company, consisting of 54 people – including a few women – who went to California in 1849, searching for gold. The presentation has been posted to the society's Facebook page. Kley and Radcliffe are trying to follow up on the people who went on this expedition and what they did after the Gold Rush. Readers who have any information on that subject or would like more information about it are encouraged to contact the society.

The Vaughan Foundation administers Vaughan Woods and the Vaughan Historic Homestead, which is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. According to the foundation's website, the homestead was built in 1794 and has remained in the Vaughan family since then. Creating the foundation allows the family to "preserve and interpret the property for its historical, educational, and environmental values."

The homestead and grounds are open daily to the public. A quick visit to the foundation's website, www.vaughanhomestead.org, will give you all the information you need to visit and/or volunteer.

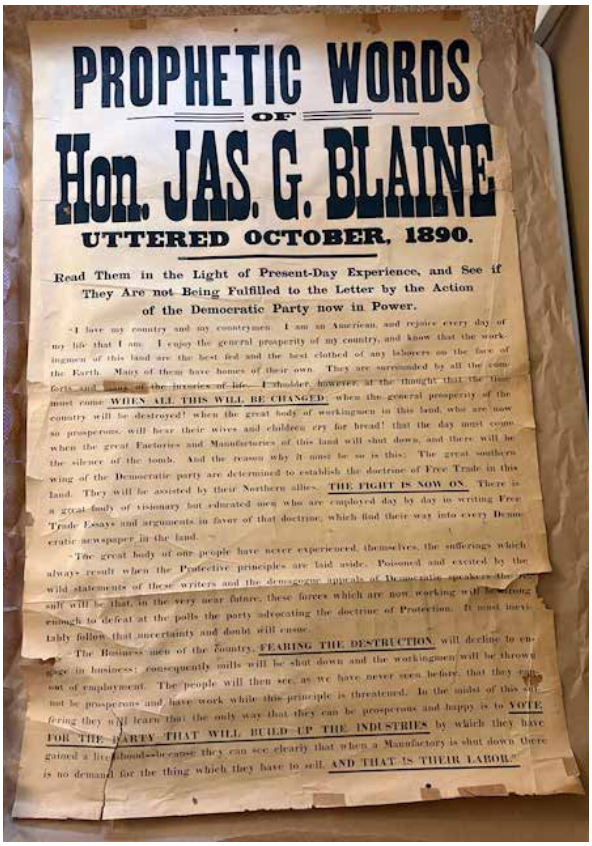
— by Sara Maschino

Society's New Artifact Recalls 19th-century Political Giant

The Archivist's Pen
Emily Schroeder

The Kennebec Historical Society recently bought for $215 on eBay a striking, 38-inches-by-24-inches – broadside, dated 1890, quoting the words of James G. Blaine. It arrived on September 23, 2025.

In his message, Blaine declares the philosophy of the Republican party, saying in part that Democrats would bankrupt the country in their support of free trade. The United States would be ruined if the Democrats continued in power, it maintains. Sounds familiar, doesn't it?



PROPHETIC WORDS
OF
Hon. JAS. G. BLAINE
UTTERED OCTOBER, 1890.

Read Them in the Light of Present-Day Experience, and See if They Are not Being Fulfilled to the Letter by the Action of the Democratic Party now in Power.

"I love my country and my countrymen. I am an American, and rejoice every day of my life that I am. I enjoy the general prosperity of my country, and know that the workingmen of this land are the best fed and the best clothed of any laborers on the face of the Earth. Many of them have homes of their own. They are surrounded by all the comforts and many of the luxuries of life. I shudder, however, at the thought that the time must come WHEN ALL THIS WILL BE CHANGED, when the general prosperity of the country will be destroyed; when the great body of workingmen in this land, who are now so prosperous, will hear their wives and children cry for bread! that the day must come when the great Factories and Manufactories of this land will shut down, and there will be the silence of the tomb. And the reason why it must be so is this: The great southern wing of the Democratic party are determined to establish the doctrine of Free Trade in this land. They will be assisted by their Northern allies. THE FIGHT IS NOW ON. There is a great body of visionary but educated men who are employed day by day in writing Free Trade Essays and arguments in favor of that doctrine, which find their way into every Democratic newspaper in the land.

"The great body of our people have never experienced, themselves, the sufferings which always result when the Protective principles are laid aside. Poisoned and excited by the wild statements of these writers and the demagogic appeals of Democratic speakers they will believe that, in the very near future, these forces which are now working well become cold enough to defeat at the polls the party advocating the doctrine of Protection. It need hardly follow that uncertainty and doubt will ensue.

"The Business men of the country, FEARING THE DESTRUCTION, will decline to engage in business; consequently mills will be shut down and the workingmen will be thrown out of employment. The people will then see, as we have never seen before, that they cannot be prosperous and have work while this principle is threatened. In the midst of this suffering they will learn that the only way that they can be prosperous and happy is to VOTE FOR THE PARTY THAT WILL BUILD UP THE INDUSTRIES by which they have gained a livelihood—because they can see clearly that when a Manufactory is shut down there is no demand for the thing which they have to sell, AND THAT IS THEIR LABOR."

Who was the man behind these words? Blaine was born January 31, 1830, in West Brownsville, Pennsylvania, the third child of Ephraim Lyon Blaine and Maria (Gillespie) Blaine. He was initially educated by his parents and the village school. He spent some time with his uncle Thomas Ewing, a U.S. senator from Ohio, and later secretary of the U.S. Treasury, fostering Blaine's interest in politics and the law.

His résumé continues:

• 1843-1847 – Blaine attended Washington College (now Washington and Jefferson College) in Washington, Pennsylvania, where he excelled in mathematics, literature, and debating.

• 1848 – Blaine began a teaching career at the Western Military Institute of Georgetown, Kentucky (now merged with Vanderbilt University in Nashville, Tennessee). While there, he met Harriet Stanwood, who was teaching at a girls' school nearby. Harriet was the daughter and eighth child of Jacob and Sally (Caldwell) Stanwood, of Augusta. The couple married on June 30, 1850, and went on to have seven children.

• 1851 – The Blaines moved to Philadelphia, where James Blaine briefly studied law. He taught at the Institute for the Instruction of the Blind and wrote a history of that school.

• 1854-1857 – The family moved again, to Augusta, and Blaine became an editor and co-owner of the *Kennebec Journal*. The paper changed its political leaning from Whig to Republican, which aligned with Blaine's politics. He invested his profits in coal mines in Pennsylvania and Virginia.

• 1857 – Blaine was appointed editor of the *Portland Advertiser* but remained in Augusta.

• 1858-1861 – Blaine was elected to the Maine House of Representatives; in 1859, he became chairman of the Republican State Committee.

• 1861-1862 – Blaine was speaker of the Maine House.

• 1863-1876 – Winning election to the U.S. House, he served as House speaker in the 41st through 44th Congresses.

• 1872 – Blaine was cited as a potential candidate for president, but he worked for Ulysses Grant's reelection. Democrats accused him of accepting bribes involving fraudulent railroad contracts, citing the so-called Mulligan letters. (See Edward Stanwood's *James Gillespie Blaine*, Houghton Mifflin and Co., 1905).

• 1875 – Blaine helped to pass the Civil Rights Act of 1875, aiding African Americans in the South. He also proposed the Blaine Amendment, advocating separation of church and state.

• 1876 – Blaine started out as a front-running candidate for president, but the effects of the railroad scandal were still being felt; he lost the nomination.

• 1877 – With Lot Morrill, of Augusta, having resigned from the U.S. Senate the previous year to become Grant's Treasury secretary, Maine Gov. Selden Connor appointed Blaine to fill the Senate vacancy. As a senator for four years, he pushed for a strong dollar, hoping to limit the issuing of silver coinage and increasing the use of gold to back the dollar. He also advocated expanding the Navy and the merchant marine.

• 1880 – Rutherford Hayes did not want another term as president. Blaine sought the nomination, but Republican

convention delegates eventually went for James A. Garfield. Following the latter's election, he offered Blaine the office of secretary of state.

• 1881 – As secretary of state, Blaine sought more trade with Latin America to lessen British domination and an increase in exports generally. He also aimed to limit Britain's involvement in the construction of a canal through Panama, and the future of the Kingdom of Hawaii was on his mind as well. These topics were to be discussed at a Pan-American conference, but such a meeting did not materialize until years later. On July 2, Blaine and Garfield were entering the Baltimore and Potomac Railway station together in Washington, D.C., when the president was shot by Charles J. Guiteau. Garfield's death on September 19 ended the shared foreign policy initiatives, and Blaine resigned.

• 1882-1884 – Blaine, out of political office, wrote the first volume of *Twenty Years of Congress*, published in April 1884.

• Early 1884 – The Republican convention in June nominated Blaine for president on the fourth ballot. Augusta was jubilant. Edward G. Mason, a student at Dirigo Business College, recalled the excitement in an article titled "The Presidential Campaign of 1884 in Mr. Blaine's Home City" (*New England Magazine*, May 1901, pp. 248-257). Massive crowds gathered on Water Street; hats were flung into the air; a flag was raised that said, "OUR NEXT PRESIDENT, JAMES G. BLAINE." There was a cacophony of bells, whistles, horns, cannon fire, and the Allen Publishing House steam siren. The celebration was statewide. Blaine's running mate, Gen. John A. Logan, appeared in Augusta on June 24.

This illustration of James G. Blaine appeared in Edward Stanwood's book *James Gillespie Blaine*, published in 1905.

KHS collection

• Late 1884 – Blaine faced many obstacles to victory. especially after two defeats. His opponents kept the Mulligan letters alive. A clergyman in New York made an unfortunate statement that made Blaine appear anti-Irish. Also in New York, some suggested that election returns had been falsified. The Mugwumps, a faction of former Republicans, were rejecting the party's corruption. In the general election, Blaine won his home city and state but lost the popular vote nationally to Grover Cleveland, 4,911,017 to 4,848,334. More important, Cleveland won the Electoral College vote, 219-182.

• 1886 – Blaine's second volume of *Twenty Years of Congress* was published in January.

• 1887 – While traveling in Europe, Blaine issued his "Paris Message" in response to Cleveland's address to Congress on the issue of tariffs. He called for uniting and empowering the Republicans; retaining control of the domestic market; protecting the South; and abolishing the tobacco tax, but keeping the one on whiskey.

• 1888 – Blaine, still abroad when the Republican Convention met, decided against running again for president. Benjamin Harrison won, leaving the secretary of state's office open.

• 1889 – Blaine was given his former position one last time. He hoped to improve relations with Central and South America, in addition to parts of Europe. He and Harrison shared an expansionist agenda. They were considering establishing a naval station at Pearl Harbor and another at Pago Pago, Samoa. They supported the autonomy of Samoa, Korea's independence from China, the elimination of Britain's dominance in Latin America, and the confirmation of the United States as the leading economic and political power base. Blaine favored increasing trade with South America and bilateral reciprocity treaties. In October 1889 the 17-nation Pan-American Conference finally took place.

• 1890 – The McKinley Tariff proposed to raise duty on imports to nearly 50% in an effort to protect U.S. workers from outside competition and help fund the federal government. Blaine suggested reciprocity clauses: Ports should receive products from other nations in the Americas at reduced or no duty, as long as those nations were receiving U.S. products in equal measure. The act finally became law on October 1, after 450 amendments.

In 1892, having suffered the deaths of three children in three years and his own deteriorating health, Blaine quit the Cabinet and declined to run for president. After returning to Washington, D.C., that fall from his summer home in Bar Harbor, he caught a bad cold. Complications set in, and he died January 27, 1893. Philadelphia's *Weekly Press* of February 1 (of which the Kennebec Historical Society has a copy) stated the event was "A Painless and Peaceful End to a Great and Noble Career." The cause of death was given as tuberculosis and heart failure.

James G. Blaine, an adopted son of Maine, was buried in Washington; but his remains and those of his wife were moved in 1920 to the Blaine Memorial, located at the corner of Blaine Avenue and Green Street in Augusta.

Until next time … .

Continued from page 1

Kennebec Savings Bank

This John Calvin Stevens-designed house at the northeast corner of Western Avenue and Chapel Street has been the property of the Kennebec Savings Bank since 2020. The bank is seeking a demolition permit to remove it as part of its plan to construct a five-story office building immediately east of the house.

Photo by Teddy Faugno

is so deteriorated that's it's not economically possible to save it."

The commission imposed a 90-day demolition delay to allow time for review of other options. The delay period ends in mid-March, 90 days after the bank applied for a demolition permit.

"I was really sad when I got this," commission member Cheryl Clukey said, referring to the agenda item about the permit. She asked whether interior features could be salvaged.

"To the extent that we can preserve anything inside, we would certainly do that," said Craig Garofalo, the bank's executive vice president, who is supervising the development project.

Businessman Richard Parkhurst praised the bank for its contributions to the community, but he called for a more protective solution. "I'm in opposition to tearing down another historic building," he told the commission, then offered to negotiate with the bank to find a way to buy the house and move it. Silsby said the bank would consider letting someone do that.

Parkhurst played a large role in the ongoing effort to restore the long-neglected Colonial Theater on Water Street. The bank has become a major sponsor of that effort.

The bank hopes to get its project on the Augusta Planning Board agenda for April or May, Silsby said January 24 in an emailed response to questions. Platz Associates, of Auburn, is the architectural firm that designed it. A building contractor has not been chosen.

The bank is keeping the Tappan-Viles House and making no changes to the original structure, but Silsby said it will move lobby functions and drive-thru windows from the annex to the new building. On December 18, the bank bought the nearly vacant Maine State Grange headquarters next door at 146 State Street, with the stated intention of preserving that. The bank now owns the southern half of the block bounded by Western Avenue and Chapel, Green, and State streets.

The white 15 Western Avenue house, originally painted olive green with white trim, was built for Lyman and Addie Weever, the *Daily Kennebec Journal* reported as its construction was nearly finished. Lyman Weever's 1918 obituary identifies him as a restaurateur who owned and operated Weever's Dining Rooms on Water Street.

A later occupant, Sarah Burleigh, was the widow of Clarence Burleigh, who had been a co-owner of the *Daily Kennebec Journal*, and was a daughter-in-law of Gov. Edwin C. Burleigh, according to Joseph Beck, a former Kennebec Historical Society president who wrote about the house in his 1962 book *Historical Notes on Augusta, Maine*. Waterville Mayor and chiropractor Clinton Clauson owned it for about five years before he was elected governor in 1958. More recently, the building housed an optometry practice and a law office.

Besides designing the Western Avenue house, Stevens, the architect, also redesigned the Tappan-Viles House, which is listed on the National Register of Historic Places; and the Grange building. The latter was the longtime home of militia Maj. Gen. Henry Sewall (1752-1845), a Revolutionary War veteran who was with George Washington's army at Valley Forge in the winter of 1777-78, and whose 65-year diary chronicles much of Augusta's early history. The building's only current tenant, an investment management service, had made plans before the property's sale to move out, Silsby said.

"We fully intend to put the building to use in some form, but have not made any final determinations on that yet," Silsby wrote.

Kennebec Savings Bank was incorporated in 1870. It opened on Water Street, then moved in the mid-20th century to State Street. Silsby said it is the 10th-largest Maine-based bank, with total assets having grown from $800 million 10 years ago to $1.8 billion today. It employs 207 people, including more than 140 in Augusta.

— by Joseph Owen

Editor's note: Kennebec Savings Bank is the principal financial sponsor of the Kennebec Current. *It is also a major contributor to the periodical's publisher, the Kennebec Historical Society.*

In Using Ancestry.com, Let the Researcher Beware

Rich Eastman

One of the largest online sources of genealogical information available is Ancestry.com. This subscription-based website has over 3.5 million subscribers, with more than 30 billion records and over 100 million family trees. Often referred to simply as "Ancestry," it provides subscribers with a user-friendly format to record their own family trees and receive "hints" about other records pertaining to their ancestors as the tree is being built.

Your Kennebec Roots

Ancestry, on its surface, sounds like an excellent resource for both the casual and the professional researcher, but the website has one major flaw – human error. The records speak for themselves; however, they are indexed and transcribed by people who often make simple mistakes. Indexers who live, say, in the Midwest, might not recognize a common surname in Kennebec County. For instance, "Perkins" might get indexed as "Parkins," "Hutchison" as "Hutchinson," or "Harrington" as "Herrington." Even towns and cities may be interpreted incorrectly, such as "Buxton" as "Boxton," "Readfield" as "Reedfield," or "Hallowell" as "Hollowell."

An excellent case in point is the town of Easton, Massachusetts, for which someone incorrectly submitted the town's vital records for indexing as coming from Easthampton. Some of my ancestors originated in Easton, but even though they were easily located in original records, the index stated "Easthampton," so now hundreds of family trees contain the incorrect location. Hints, or links, to one's ancestor are now incorrect and subsequent searches for one's Easton ancestor will not succeed if records are searched by town.

As you build a tree, hints will appear with links to other family trees (or records), and all one has to do is add that family tree to the next generation and the family will automatically flow into your tree. The problem with this is that it also imports the mistakes and errors of that tree. Such errors get compounded as people flow in the new information without checking all the details. Some of these errors are quite simple, such as misspelled surnames, dates that don't make sense (Did Grandpa actually live to be 135?), marriages that occurred well after the children were born, or even a parent who died well before one of the children was born. The owners of these trees never bothered to cross-check these occurences with records, many of which are available within Ancestry.

So, what can you do when this happens? In order to keep your family tree as accurate as possible, go back over every detail of the new information you are uploading to your tree and make certain the information (ages, locations, vital records) make sense. Verify added generations against the records available for towns or written family genealogies, and search other local town records, if need be.

When mistakes are found, Ancestry provides a method of notifying the company and its subscribers about the incorrect information. In records, find the one in question, click on "Add or update information" on the summary page or tools icon, select the information type (name, birthdate, place, etc.), provide the updated details, and click "Submit Alternate." You may also submit corrections to other people's family trees by attaching documented proof to your tree and adding a story detailing the error.

Undoubtedly, Ancestry is a wonderful tool; but the researcher should always take indexes, transcriptions, and all human-related text submissions with a huge dose of common sense.

QUERIES:

WILLIAMS – Seeking to verify the birth of the Rev. Samuel Williams, born November 26, 1779 (according to Avon town records). He married Mary Philbrook, of Mount Vernon, on October 21, 1800, in Readfield. He was a Free-Will Baptist minister and settled in Avon before heading west to Pennsylvania. Samuel was the son of Samuel Williams and Sobriety Bunker, originally from Barnstead, New Hampshire. Any help is greatly appreciated. Contact Susan Super at susan.super@yahoo.com.

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

WILLIAMS/CLARK – Seeking information about the family of Joshua Williams and his wife, Bethiah Clark Williams, who settled in China in 1788 from Marlborough, Massachusetts. He first appears in the 1790 census for Jones Plantation as a laborer with no assets and five children. He was a Revolutionary War soldier who fought in the battle of Bunker Hill and then the Battle of Long Island, where he was wounded. Any info on his family and the reason he came to Jones Plantation/China would be greatly appreciated. Please contact Trish Newcomb at garyntrish@roadrunner.com.

LEGION POST'S NAMESAKE SAW HISTORY...

From left, Fred W. Cummings Jr., O'Neil G. Lajoie, both of Augusta and home on leave from training at Parris Island, and local recruiting officer Marine Sgt. Robert Toombs, stand in front of the Marine recruiting office in Augusta in February 1942.

Daily Kennebec Journal file photo

The Marine Corps opened its recruiting station in Augusta on May 20, 1941, in the same week when Fred Cummings Jr., of Augusta, turned 21. War clouds loomed, and Cummings was eager to correct a disappointment. In the previous February, the peacetime draft had conscripted several men from the neighborhood, but not him. For the last three months, they all had been down at Camp Blanding in Florida, training with Maine's 103rd Infantry.

Back in World War I, Cummings' father had been a member of the 103rd. Old enough to ignore the concerns of his parents, Cummings – who is commemorated today in the name of the Augusta's Fitzgerald-Cummings American Legion post – thought it was time for him to join up as well. He ascended the main staircase at Augusta City Hall on Cony Street. On the second floor, he quickly spotted the correct office door, bracketed by recruitment broadsides. He walked in and introduced himself to a Staff Sgt. Robert Toombs. The paint was barely dry on the office walls.

Pfc. Fred Wilfred Cummings Jr., USMC Serial No. 311871, became one of the first Marine recruits Toombs would enlist from Augusta for service in World War II. Eight weeks later, with basic training complete, Cummings was posted as a member of the Marine armed guard aboard the newly commissioned aircraft carrier USS *Hornet* in Norfolk, Virginia.

Things were moving fast in Cummings' life. There was a girlfriend, too, a young woman from Winslow named Mary Gratto. What to do, what to do? Ignoring blunt but realistic advice he had received from the ship's chaplain in a letter the family still possesses, the couple had their engagement announcement appear in the *Daily Kennebec Journal* on December 6, just one day before events in Pearl Harbor would change everything.

On February 9, 1942, all non-essential personnel aboard the *Hornet* received an unexpected leave of ship for four days, according to the ship's log, which is posted on the U.S. Naval Institute's website. Cummings took an overnight train to Augusta and married Gratto the next day. Two days later, the honeymoon over, Cummings was on the train back to Virginia. Neither imagined the immediate meaning that the marriage vow, until death do us part, would have. For the briefly happy couple, those two days would be the entire extent of their time together as husband and wife.

Military secrecy was the real reason for the four-day opportunity. Big plans were afoot. Just the week before, on February 2, the USS *Hornet* quietly had sortied 100 or so miles offshore from Virginia with odd cargo on her flight deck: two Mitchell B-25 planes. There, Army Air Force personnel under the command of Lt. Col. James Doolittle boarded the planes, revved the engines until they were about to burst, and took off – a final test for what, at the time, no one was revealing.

On April 18, the *Hornet* was 650 miles off the coast of Japan with crew at general quarters – a directive that all available personnel report to their battle stations. The *Hornet* turned its bow into the pitching seas and howling wind. Cummings was assigned to an anti-aircraft gun emplacement just aft of the ship's island on the starboard edge of the flight deck. With the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor still fresh in every American mind, 16 B-25s took off to bomb Tokyo. The Doolittle Raid would become the most inspirational American bombing raid of war in the Pacific. Each plane ascended safely, with Cummings watching as, one by one, they disappeared into the low horizon.

Unfortunately, the Doolittle mission had delayed critical flight training, leaving the *Hornet* not quite fit for battle. This problem notwithstanding, on June 4, 1942, it joined its combat-veteran peers, the USS *Enterprise* and the USS *Yorktown*, at a point in the Pacific 250 miles north of Midway Atoll. Outnumbered three against four in carrier strength, the American battle group lay in wait for the enemy's island invasion fleet. The Battle of Midway began. At first contact, the *Hornet* launched its full strike force. Navy pilots in 59 planes took off; only 20 returned.

AND THEN SUCCUMBED TO IT.

Squadron VT-8, consisting of 15 obsolete Devastator torpedo bombers, loaded up and lumbered off. They attacked without fighter cover. Cut down by the enemy as they approached the Japanese carrier fleet, the squadron losses were catastrophic. Not one plane returned and only one pilot, Ensign Gay, survived. Ill fortune also followed the Dauntless dive bombers, Squadrons DB-8 and VS-8. Misdirected, neither of those units even reached the enemy ships. Lacking fuel, a major portion of the pilots ditched in the sea.

Organizing the attack was not any easier for the *Enterprise* and the *Yorktown*, but in a vicious air battle, their aircraft eventually did strike home. Three Japanese aircraft carriers were sunk. In a late-afternoon second sortie, these same forces again found the *Hiryu*, the fourth and final Japanese carrier. That ship was set aflame as well.

British military historian John Keegan, in his book *The Second World War*, described the Battle of Midway as "the most stunning and decisive blow in the history of naval warfare." In one day and for the rest of the war, the naval balance of power in the Pacific turned in favor of the United States.

Aboard the *Hornet*, the flight deck was busy recovering the disabled airplanes. An F4F Wildcat from the *Yorktown*, barely aloft, attempted an emergency landing. The plane was riddled with bullet holes; the pilot, Ensign Daniel C. Sheedy, was wounded in the leg. Touchdown was nothing more than a controlled crash. As the plane careened down the deck, the right landing gear collapsed. Six of the plane's 50-caliber machine guns burped a three-second burst. The bullets strafed the starboard edge of the flight deck. Five men lay dead while, scattered about, another 20 were wounded. Cummings was one of the unlucky five. A Navy combat photographer snapped a picture, the instant of Cummings' death seen as puffs of smoke burst from the gun barrels on the leading edge of the wings.

Marine Platoon Sgt. Ernest R. DeLong described the incident in a letter to Cummings' mother three years later, shortly after the war ended, from a Marine school in Quantico, Virginia.

"Your son and I were quartered in the same part of our compartment and also worked on the same gun," he wrote, adding later about Cummings' death, "… I believe you will be glad to hear that it happened so quickly he never realized anything unusual had occurred. His passing was a great blow to everyone as no one was thought of more than he. … It's awfully awkward to write a letter of this type but I want you to know all my sympathies belong to you."

Fred W. Cummings Jr.

Cummings had grown up on Sand Hill, a French-Canadian working-class neighborhood of Augusta. Like almost everybody there, he spoke Quebec French first before learning English. He was educated in the parochial school system, plus a year or two at Cony High School, before taking up the plumbing trade, according to Cummings' niece Kathleen Alley, of China. According to custom, he lived off a weekly allowance; and he turned his wages over to his mother for savings and family expenses.

His father, Fred Cummings Sr., turned over his paycheck, too. He worked at the city garage, driving dump trucks in summer, snowplows in winter. Mother Lillian worked part time in a curtain shop down on Water Street. The parents were no stranger to tragedy. Of the eight children born to them, only three survived into adulthood, two girls and a boy, Alley said.

Fred Cummings Jr. represented the final hope to carry on the family surname, Cummings, which was an anglicized play on words. (The original Quebecois family name was Viens, meaning literally "come.") For mother and father, it was especially hard to accept this final legacy: Cummings was the first Augusta man to die in combat in World War II; Mary, his wife, four months a bride, became the first war widow in Winslow.

The after-action report did not speculate on what had triggered the machine guns. In letters to the family, Cummings' bunkmates said they were left to wonder. Perhaps the pilot, landing in a diminished mental capacity, failed to flip the disarm switch; or perhaps the plane was so shot up that the electrical system short-circuited. More battered aircraft circled overhead, waiting to land. Whatever evidence there had been disappeared. The wounded ensign was lifted from the plane. A deck crane pushed the wreck overboard. The next day, the dead, including Cummings, were buried at sea. There was no investigation nor any recrimination. Rear Adm. Marc Mitscher, commander of the *Hornet*, personally recorded the five casualties as deaths in combat.

Just 17 days after Cummings' death, the Rev. Joseph Ovila Casavant, the longtime parish priest of St. Augustine Church, organized a Requiem Mass. The sense of loss was still fresh. This was the first memorial service of its kind in

Continued on page 10

Continued from page 9

Fred W. Cummings

Augusta. The mayor, other city dignitaries, and Sand Hill neighbors all packed into the church, with the front pews reserved for the grieving Cummings family.

As people settled into place, Casavant stood at the door, confounded. The flag guard of American Legion Fitzgerald Post No. 2, as it was known then, presented itself. Behind them was an honor guard of Marines, the men in parade dress uniforms with rifles. There was a quiet confrontation. With the contingents refusing to leave the military accoutrements outside the church and remove their uniform caps while inside, the dismayed Casavant impulsively denied them entry into the church.

When the service concluded, surviving family members were first to leave. As they descended the church steps, an impromptu ceremony of honor took place, according to Alley and her sister, Karen Johnson, of East Winthrop. On the front lawn, state and national colors waved in the wind. The Legion and Marine Corps men, having stood outside for an hour, drew up to attention. A folded flag was presented to Lillian Cummings, now a Gold Star mother. In honor of her fallen son, riflemen presented a three-shot volley. The crowd was silent. The steeple bell pealed.

Puffs of smoke on a crippled F4F Wildcat fighter plane indicate the location of guns firing uncontrollably as the wounded pilot makes an emergency landing on the USS *Hornet* on June 4, 1942, during the Battle of Midway. The spray of bullets kills five servicemen, including Fred Cummings Jr., of Augusta

Photo courtesy of Tom and Karen Johnson

Fred Cummings Sr. was a veteran and a member of the Fitzgerald Post. Lillian Cummings was distraught about what she considered to be Casavant's lack of respect for the Marine uniform. She never fully forgave the priest.

When the Roman Catholic archbishop in Portland learned about the incident, he sent Casavant a letter of reprimand, according to Cummings' relatives. The following Sunday, Casavant made a full apology from the pulpit. In a permanent change of culture for St. Augustine, the American flag was placed in a highly visible place in the nave.

A total of 291,557 Americans died in combat in World War II. The Requiem Mass for Fred Cummings Jr. at St. Augustine Church was just the first. By the time the war ended in 1945, practically every church in Augusta would host a similar memorial service.

Cummings is not a hero in the same way as a Doolittle or a Mitscher. Cummings was full of the everyday stuff that made men such as Mitscher and Doolittle into heroes. This is the story of a common soldier, a modest person with simple aspirations. Cummings' military career and marriage encompassed just 13 months. But those months were some of the most momentous in American military history. It is the backdrop of the Doolittle Raid and the Battle of Midway that make Cummings' personal story so poignant.

Mary Gratto Cummings, a bride of just four months and then a widow, never remarried. She lived out her life with her parents in the family home in Winslow, residing there, even after they died, until her own death in 1999.

Organized in 1919, Fitzgerald American Legion Post No. 2 in Augusta had been named after Gunner's Mate James Fitzgerald, the first Augusta man killed in action during World War I. He had been lost at sea in 1917 when a torpedo from a German submarine sank the destroyer USS *Jacob Jones* off the coast of Cornwall. In 1946, as new veterans joined the post, the name was amended to Cummings-Fitzgerald American Legion Post No. 2 in honor of Cummings as well, the first Augusta man to die in combat during World War II.

Sheedy, the pilot, survived his wound and the crash landing aboard the *Hornet*. Despite the tragic end to his mission, he received the Navy Cross for heroism. One of just six fighters, he ferociously protected the vulnerable *Yorktown* torpedo planes as they launched yet another forlorn attack upon the Japanese carriers. Sheedy is credited with having fought off three attacking Zero fighters during the action, destroying one in the process. He ended his Navy career with the rank of commander. He is buried at Arlington National Cemetery, having died at the age of 89 in 2005.

In 1982, while attending the launching of a destroyer in Bath, Sheedy was interviewed by WGAN-TV reporter Bill Johnson directly about the Battle of Midway. His interview is available on YouTube (www.youtube.com/watch?v=12VGMH-k3IQ). Sheedy recalled the events that day, June 4, 1942, the strain of the memory becoming ever more evident. No longer able to deflect questions with generalized answers, he finally said, "No other comments."

The author, Harvey Lipman, acknowledges contributions to this article from Tom and Karen Johnson and Kathleen Ally, members of the extended Cummings family.

Basketball Keepsake for the Ages Makes Appearance at Cony High

The Kennebec Historical Society has become the proud caretaker of the famous "Championship Ring," the bent hoop from the basketball championship that Cony won over Presque Isle in 1978.

In 1978, Augusta's Cony High School Rams boys' basketball team defeated the previously unbeaten Presque Isle Wildcats in the Eastern Maine Class A Final at the Bangor Auditorium, winning decisively, 87–59.

As the game's final buzzer sounded, the excitement overflowed. Cony players rushed to the south-end basket to cut down the net; but under their collective weight, the entire backboard unit came crashing to the floor. When it hit, the force of the impact bent the rim, creating what would forever be affectionately known as the "Championship Ring." Bangor Auditorium staff members later presented the damaged rim to Cony head coach Dave Pound as a memento of the game.

Pound passed the rim to team captain Steve O'Brien, who served as its steward for more than 30 years. O'Brien eventually entrusted the rim to assistant coach Rusty Atwood. Today the Championship Ring is preserved and cared for by the Kennebec Historical Society.

The dramatic ending of the 1978 championship led to a lasting change in tradition. Since that tournament, post-game net-cutting ceremonies have been conducted using a stepladder, ensuring players can remove the prized nets from each rim safely.

On January 22, the Kennebec Historical Society visited Cony High School as the Rams hosted the Gardiner Area High School Tigers. Society representatives were on hand with the Championship Ring, video footage from the 1978 game, and other artifacts from the KHS collection, sharing the story and highlighting the importance of preserving Kennebec County history.

In Memoriam

Alton "Al" Cook, 81, of Augusta, a longtime Kennebec Historical Society member and volunteer, died January 5 at his home in Augusta. He was a third-generation Maine Central Railroad worker until 1986, when he went to work for Central Maine Power Co. He also volunteered often at the Wiscasset, Waterville & Farmington Railway Museum in Alna. His survivors include two children and two grandchildren.

Joan B. Oakes, 86, of Needham, Massachusetts, an Augusta native and a longtime life member of the Kennebec Historical Society, died October 18 in Needham. A graduate of Nasson College in Springvale and Gates Business College in Augusta, she was a former president and 47-year member of the Needham Garden Club. Her survivors include husband Richard Oakes, two children, and three grandchildren.

Sumner "Sam" Webber, 89, of Manchester and earlier a longtime resident of Hallowell, died December 1 at Togus. A longtime KHS life member, adviser, and supporter, he was Hallowell's official but unpaid city historian from 1997 until his resignation last spring (*Kennebec Current*, May-June 2025). He also taught history and other subjects for 33 years at Hall-Dale High School, was a Hallowell City Council member, and held many other public posts in the city, as well as serving decades ago as the director of Old Fort Western in Augusta. His survivors include wife Catharine, two children, and two grandchildren.

Kennebec River's Boom Islands Recall Log-drive Era

Last fall was the 50th anniversary of the demise of an iconic practice on the Kennebec River: the log drive. The Maine Legislature, influenced partly by environmental protest groups, had passed a law putting an end to any such drives as of October 1, 1976, but the industry had been transitioning to trucks anyway. The last major Kennebec log drive occurred on November 16, 1975.

History Through a Keyhole #22

A half-century later, drivers on Maine Avenue in Farmingdale still can see evidence of this industrial past. A chain of 10 small, rocky, man-made islands – including the ones shown at left – extends from southwest to northeast across the river from the Farmingdale shore to the southern tip of Browns Island. The islands were used to anchor booms that stretched across the western side of the river, enabling loggers to trap and sort the logs that accumulated there, then float them away on rafts to sawmills, according to historical notes on the Farmingdale town website.

Boom islands dot the Kennebec River in Farmingdale as a reminder of the great log drives of the 19th and 20th centuries.

Photo by Rich Eastman

Farmingdale's riverfront was the site of many other industries over the decades, included shipyards, brickyards, potteries, a glue factory, and a large sawmill. The log drives lasted longer than any of them.

The Kennebec logging industry thrived at first on pine trees. For the first time anywhere in Maine, spruce trees were cut commercially in the Kennebec Valley in 1850, according to Robert E. Pike's 1967 book *Tall Trees, Tough Men*, a 1967 anecdotal history of the logging trade. By 1880, with Maine's emblematic pine trees becoming increasingly scarce, the spruce harvest represented four-fifths of the logs on the river. By about 1900, the Hollingsworth and Whitney company controlled logging on the upper Kennebec.

In addition to causing environmental problems, log drives also exacerbated the effects of floods. An 1896 inundation that drenched the low-lying parts of riverfront communities also hurled logs repeatedly against and over the bridge linking Gardiner and Randolph. The resulting seven-mile backup of logs, ice, swept-away houses, and other wreckage was so immense that authorities used dynamite to blast it apart.

With the river's restoration to relatively good health in the late 1970s, the chain of islets in the Kennebec remains as little more than a decorative necklace harkening back to a bygone era.

— by Joseph Owen

Answer to Keyhole #22

Q: What are these?
A: Boom islands off Brown's Island

Q: Where are they?
A: East of Maine Avenue (U.S. Route 201) and Kennebec Street in Farmingdale

Q: What's historic about it?
A: The islands represent a once-thriving logging industry on the Kennebec River

History Through a Keyhole — Puzzle 23

Imagine a piercing wind whistling its way up the Kennebec River in the scene depicted in our November-December issue as History Through a Keyhole clue 22. Well, such wind is also all we heard in our email inbox, as well as in our post office box, while we were waiting for somebody to solve the puzzle. Nobody did. Just for that, we're going to squander the $5,000 – or was it $10,000? – in secret prize money on a *Kennebec Current* cabin-fever office party, complete with karaoke renditions of the Beatles' song "I'm a Loser" and ABBA's "The Winner Takes It All."

We don't give up easily, however, so here's another clue. 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.

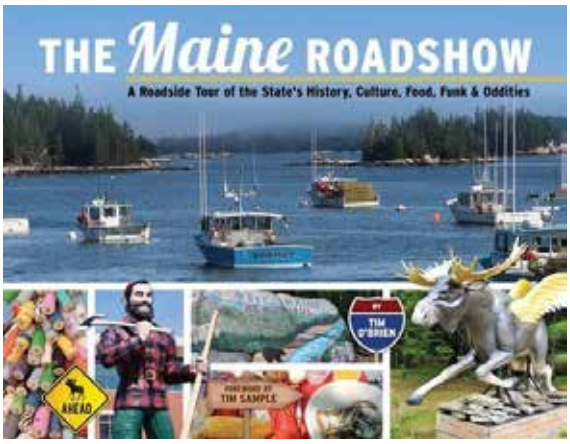
Answers may be sent by email to KennebecCurrent@gmail.com or by postal mail to Kennebec Historical Society, Attn: Kennebec Current, P.O. Box 5582, Augusta, ME 04332. The winner, to be selected randomly from all correct answers submitted, will be awarded a year's membership in KHS for the respondent or 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 March-April issue of the *Kennebec Current*. Answers are due by February 28. Good luck.

Roadshow Shows There's No Place Like Maine

Current Bookshelf

With the snow and ice, this is not an ideal time of year to travel through Maine's back roads to discover the quirkiness our state has to offer. However, to paraphrase a phrase, the beautiful thing about books is that you can see the world without stepping away from your couch and woodstove.



For a tour of Maine – including its quirkier side – check out Tim O'Brien's *The Maine Roadshow*. The book is broken up geographically, so you could ostensibly use it as a tour guide for your travels, even following the many restaurant (mostly diner and seafood shack) recommendations.

Each page features about half a dozen sites with a paragraph of description. There are fun facts and even traffic warnings; in the Moosehead Lake area, O'Brien is careful to remind you to look out for logging trucks as you explore the sites.

O'Brien includes many of the expected sites, e.g. the Maine State House; but even if you're a student of the state, there are likely some features sites that will be new to you. For me, they included the Cahill Tires Orange Monster in Bath, Pink Floyd the Dinosaur in Belfast, the Snowmobile on a Pole with Skeleton in Cambridge, and the fresco murals of the Solon Meeting House.

Love taking photos in those "big chairs"? O'Brien includes a list of where to find them throughout the state. If you need some clever mailbox ideas, some of the best O'Brien found are included in the book, too.

The book was published in 2023, and a few of the sites and features in the book are no longer in existence. Notably for this area, the Augusta sturgeons displayed on Water Street have disappeared.

The Maine Roadshow is available through the Maine State Library. The Kennebec Historical Society also has a copy.

– by Jamie Logan

Around Kennebec County

AUGUSTA

Old Fort Western's recorded lectures celebrating Maine's 2020 statehood bicentennial and commemorating the 1775 Arnold Expedition, which now are available on the website of Augusta's CTV7, the local-access cable television channel, are scheduled to move by the end of the month to the fort's website, according to Linda Novak, the fort's director and curator. The web address will be http://oldfortwestern.org.

GARDINER

With the nonprofit **Gardiner Library Association** turning 145 years old this year, the library is hosting a birthday party to celebrate from 11 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. February 14 at Gardiner Public Library, located at 152 Water Street. Director Dawn Thistle plans to deliver a talk on the history of the library, which the association owns and maintains. The public is invited. For details, call (207) 582-3312.

READFIELD

In observance of the 250th anniversary of the American Revolution, the **Readfield Historical Society** plans to host "Arnold Expedition up the Kennebec River," a lecture by Maine historical fiction author and historian Norman R. Kalloch Jr., at 1 p.m. March 14 at Gile Hall, located at 8 Old Kents Hill Road in Readfield. In case of stormy weather, the backup date is March 28. Kalloch, a member of the Arnold Expedition Historical Society, will present his program after the society's business meeting. For details, call (207) 441-9184 or email readfieldhistorical@gmail.com. The program is co-sponsored by the **Winthrop Maine Historical Society**.

SIDNEY

Sara Donovan, a historical reenactor, plans to speak in late February to the **Sidney Historical Society** on "Women on the Arnold Expedition." At presstime, the exact date and time of the event were undetermined. Details will be available by calling the society's president, Cliff Young, at (207) 242-6913. The event will take place at the society's headquarters, a former Grange hall located at 2986 Middle Road in Sidney.

WINTHROP

Sara Donovan, a historical reenactor, is scheduled to speak to the **Winthrop Maine Historical Society** on "Women on the Arnold Expedition" at 6 p.m. April 9 at the society's headquarters, the **Winthrop History and Heritage Center**, located at 107 Main Street in Winthrop. For details, call (207) 395-5199 or email winthropmainehistorical@gmail.com. The program is co-sponsored by the **Readfield Historical Society**.

Upcoming Programs

January: "A Firsthand Look at Secondhand Books"

Kenneth Gloss
Photo by Pichi Photography

In a recorded presentation, the Kennebec Historical Society speaker for January, Kenneth Gloss, describes some of the joys of the "hunt" for antique books and talks about some of his favorite finds.

Gloss outlines the history of the Brattle Book Shop, located at 9 West Street in Boston, which dates to 1825; being a second-generation owner of it; and growing up in the book business. He has many anecdotes to share about private and institutional collecting as well as guidelines for starting a collection. His talk lasts for about an hour.

Gloss is a member of the Antiquarian Booksellers Association of America and the International League of Antiquarian Booksellers, and he is a fellow of the Massachusetts Historical Society. He appraises for several post-secondary education institutions, including Harvard University, Boston University, Boston College, and Tufts University's Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy. Gloss has done appraisals of material seen on PBS television's *Antiques Roadshow* and also hosts a biweekly podcast, *Brattlecast: A Firsthand Look at Secondhand Books*.

The Brattle Book Shop in Boston
Photo by Jeffrey Dunn

The KHS presentation is available now on the society's Facebook page, having been posted on January 21. It also will be archived at the society's headquarters for those who want to watch it later. For more information, call Scott Wood, the society's executive director, at 622-7718.

February: Ex-slave Found Refuge in Hallowell

"Recollecting Jim: James Matthews and His Journey from Bondage in South Carolina to Freedom in Hallowell," the Kennebec Historical Society's February presentation, traces the life and afterlife of an enslaved man whose voice survives in an anonymously published slave narrative first printed in Maine in 1838.

James Matthews' gravestone
Photo courtesy of Sam Webber

The man's account was long dismissed or left unexplored, but professor Susanna Ashton discovered his identity first by finding only the nickname "Jim," and then learning that he was James Matthews. His testimony can be reassembled through careful attention to detail, place, and archival context. Beginning with Matthews' harrowing account of enslavement in South Carolina and his escape northward, the presentation follows his arrival in Maine and argues that Hallowell became the final and most consequential site of his life. Drawing on abolitionist newspapers published in Hallowell, census records, poor-farm records, cemetery evidence, and Matthews' own testimony, Ashton demonstrates that "Jim" can be confidently identified as Matthews, a Black man who lived his final decades in Hallowell and is buried there. Rather than offering a seamless biography, the talk reflects on the ethical work of historical recovery when lives are recorded unevenly. Centering Hallowell as both an abolitionist publishing hub and a place of refuge, this program invites the community to consider how local records preserve Black presence, suffering, endurance, and belonging, and why these fragments matter to history today.

Susanna Ashton

KHS presenter Susanna Ashton is professor of English at Clemson University, in Clemson, South Carolina, and a scholar of 19th-century American literature and slavery. She is the author of *A Plausible Man. The True Story of the Enslaved Man who Inspired Uncle Tom's Cabin* and a specialist in authorship, and the testimony of witness. She regularly writes and speaks for both academic and public audiences, with research focused on recovering the lives of formerly enslaved people through archives, newspapers, and local history.

Ashton's presentation is scheduled to be posted on the society's Facebook page on February 18. It also will be archived at the society's headquarters for those who want to watch it later. For details, call Scott Wood, the society's executive director, at 622-7718.

Upcoming Programs

March: "History and Fate of the Clipper Ship *Snow Squall*"

First slide of Charles Lagerbom's presentation
Image courtesy of the presenter

The American clipper ship *Snow Squall* was a Maine-built merchant carrier that participated in the China trade and gold rushes of California and Australia. It tangled with Confederate raider ships during the American Civil War and made numerous roundings of Cape Horn, one of which helped bring about its end. Condemned in the Falkland Islands, the ship eventually was recognized as one of the last remaining representations of the clipper ship era, which brought about the incredible effort to bring the *Snow Squall* back home to Maine.

Charles H. Lagerbom, the Kennebec Historical Society presenter for March, received his bachelor's degree in history at Kansas State University and a master's degree in history and archaeology at the University of Maine. He has organized shipwreck surveys in Maine lakes and sites linked to the 1779 Penobscot Expedition, and he has participated in the search for the 17th-century English galleon *Angel Gabriel* off Pemaquid. He spent two field seasons in Antarctica as a glacial geology field assistant for University of Maine Quaternary Institute, now called the Climate Change Institute. He is the author of *Henry R. Bowers: The Fifth Man* (1999), *Whaling in Maine* (2020), and *Maine to Cape Horn: The Most Dangerous Journey* (2021). His book *The Hero Way: History and Science of an Antarctic Research Vessel* is due to be published this winter.

A 30-year-plus veteran teacher at Belfast Area High School, Lagerbom is the social studies department chair and teaches advanced-placement U.S. history and an archaeology elective. He is also part of the Belfast Marine Institute Floating Classroom, an initiative to get students out, in, around, on, and under the waters of Penobscot Bay for marine commercial, career, and education opportunities. Lagerbom travels in connection with and speaks on topics regarding Antarctica, Cape Horn, Maine whaling, and New England colonial and maritime history.

Lagerbom's presentation is scheduled to be posted on the society's Facebook page on March 18. It also will be archived at the society's headquarters for those who want to watch it later. For details, call Scott Wood, the society's executive director, at 622-7718.

Charles Lagerbom

KHS Welcomes the Following New Members

Samuel Baker — Augusta
Megan Bastey — Augusta
William Dunn — Augusta
Michael Levey — Winthrop
Robert Nardi — Waterville
Ruth Ann Smith — Monmouth
Ford Stevenson — Wayne

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KHS Fuller Fund Campaign Draws Record Sum of Donations

The Kennebec Historical Society's annual Moira H. Fuller Annual Fund campaign broke into six figures for the first time in 2025, drawing $104,696 in donations to cover most of the society's annual operating expenses.

The campaign collected 16.7 percent more money that it had done in 2022, the year of the previous record. Also, for the first time, 100 percent of the KHS Board of Directors members – those who served the entire year and those who served only part of the year – contributed to the campaign. The board members collectively gave $12,962 to the effort, another record.

The overall number of Fuller Fund donors was 182, the third-highest total in the annual campaign's 18-year history. The highest total, 197, was achieved in both 2021 and 2020.

The society's Charles Nash Fund campaign, which is conducted every fall and underwrites much of the cost of acquiring new collections items and preserving the collection's existing contents, raised a total of $5,075 in 2025. That result is better than average, and more than the $4,500 income projected in the KHS annual budget.

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