



Kennebec Current



"We have been a small but mighty group in a great part due to the efforts and support of Andy Tolman and we will always be so grateful for him."

Taken from the Readfield Historical Society Facebook page (see story below)

Volume 34 Issue 6

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November–December 2024

Arnold Expedition Group, Old Fort Western Plan Events

Next year marks the 250th anniversary of Benedict Arnold's unsuccessful 1775 expedition to capture Quebec during the Revolutionary War. The Arnold Expedition Historical Society, based at the Colburn House State Historic Site in Pittston, formerly the home of Maj. Reuben Colburn (1740-1818), has built a replica of one of Arnold's flat-bottomed "bateaux," boats built by Colburn for the expedition. The group plans to build three more replica Colonial-era bateaux next spring that will be featured in events being planned for next year.

Mike Holt, an Arnold Society board member, said five volunteers led by Robert Stevens, of Woolwich, built the bateau. Stevens is head shipwright with the Bath-based organization Maine's First Ship. Project construction occurred at First Ship's boat yard, the Bath Freight Shed, on the Kennebec River waterfront. A \$5,000 Americana Corner grant paid for building the craft, a stand on which to display it, and interpretive signs, Holt said.

It took from February until May to build the 22-foot replica. When it was finished, Holt said, it was launched in the Kennebec River at Bath.

"We let it swell for three days, then we weighed it, and it was 420 pounds soaking wet," Holt said. "[Arnold March



Arnold Expedition Historical Society members shepherd their newly built replica bateau along Water Street in Hallowell on July 20 as part of the annual Old Hallowell Day parade. The bateau resembles those that Col. Benedict Arnold used in 1775 to ascend the Kennebec River and launch a dramatic but unsuccessful attack on British troops holding the fortress at Quebec.

Photo by Joseph Owen

Continued on page 16

Readfield Mourns Loss of Andy Tolman but Basks in His Legacy

Editor's note: Andrews L. Tolman, vice president of the Readfield Historical Society, died October 22 when a truck hit him on Route 17 in Readfield. Dale Potter-Clark, a longtime member and former president of the society, wrote this tribute in commemoration of her late colleague.



Andy Tolman

Photo by Harvey Boatman

Andy Tolman, our beloved friend, mentor, town father and icon, is gone. The Readfield Historical Society board of directors, the people of Readfield, and many others throughout this area are reeling! His family is devastated.

Andy was known in many circles for his talents and leadership abilities. He performed in several plays at the Monmouth Theater, the Gaslight Theater in Hallowell, and the Waterville Opera House. He was a member of the CODA choir, where he enjoyed sharing his clear, baritone voice; and whenever and wherever else he could break out in song, he did. He exuded a gentle spirit and profound wisdom in all of his skills, no matter where he served – be it as a town selectman or on the school board, the planning board, the budget committee, or the cemetery committee. He chaired most of them at one time or another and left a mark, an impression that few will ever forget. The Readfield Historical Society was grateful when Andy accepted the nomination to join its board of directors more than 10 years ago. He served ably as our vice

president and our North Star.

Continued on page 16

Activities Stoke Society's Recent Momentum



Executive Director's
Note
Scott Wood

Back in June, I wrote about how busy the Kennebec Historical Society was then, with a volunteer recognition event and a concert in collaboration with the Augusta Symphony Orchestra. Well, KHS has not slowed down. In fact, it has more offerings than ever.

In August, KHS had two free presentations: a special program co-sponsored with the Maine State Library featuring Ron White, who spoke about his new book on Civil War icon Joshua Chamberlain; and a week later, the usual KHS monthly program took place, the screening of two silent films produced locally. Both programs were well received. According to the society's records, White's talk drew 58 attendees, and the films brought in another 47.

In September, KHS attended the Maine Genealogical Society's fall conference in Brewer. The society connected with other history-related organizations and spoke with a number of folks who were researching their family ancestors. The MGS conference was followed by the society's own annual meeting and potluck dinner. Several members supplied delicious dishes that were shared by all in attendance. After dining together, members participated in the annual business meeting and despite a shortfall in our current annual fundraising campaign, KHS remains committed to promoting and preserving the county's history.

Also in September, KHS attended Colby College's volunteer fair in Waterville, hosted by Colby's Office of Civic Engagement. The society's goal is to recruit students to volunteer on many projects, from assisting in cataloging the KHS collection to writing for the *Kennebec Current*. There is always something to do.

Speaking of the *Current*, the last two editions have been a whopping 20 pages of disseminating Kennebec County history. The newsletter crew assures me that much more could be added! Special thanks to all who help put the newsletter together, from photographers and writers to volunteers who assist in the mailing.

In November, KHS is hosting another two programs with the assistance of the Maine State Library. The society will then turn its attention to decorating for our annual Victorian Tea Party, to be held on Sunday, December 8.

All of these wonderful offerings could not take place without our valuable KHS volunteers and members. As the holidays approach, I hope you will take the time to visit the society and attend our fantastic free programs!



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

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Kennebec Current

Our 170th Issue

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Inside the Current ...

FEATURES

- 01 • Arnold Expedition at 250
- 01 • Andy Tolman Memorial
- 08 • Tibbetts Left Mark in Augusta
- 10 • Readfield's Iron Fence Inn

DEPARTMENTS

- 04 • The Archivist's Pen
- 13 • Current Bookshelf
- 13 • Around Kennebec County
- 14 • History Through a Keyhole
- 19 • Upcoming programs
- 17 • Your Kennebec Roots
- 18 • Current Followup

NEWS

- 12 • Hallowell's
Weathervane
on Display



Photo by Teddy Faugno

- 03 • KSB Donates Plummer Art
- 06 • Monmouth Firehouse Museum
- 09 • KHS Annual Meeting
- 15 • N. Monmouth Cemetery Upgraded

Local Bank Donates Dozen of Late Artist's Works to KHS

Kennebec Savings Bank has donated 12 framed sketches of turn-of-the-20th century Augusta buildings to the Kennebec Historical Society.

Andrew Silsby, the bank's president and CEO, said the bank commissioned late Hallowell artist Paul Plumer Jr. in 1989 to draw the images, which have been hanging in the bank's lobby since 1990. Among the sketches are drawings of the Maine State House, the former Augusta General Hospital, and the Blaine House.

The bank's lobby is undergoing renovation, and the drawings that have adorned the walls for 34 years will be replaced with a "branding" form of art, Silsby explained.

Branding is a visual representation that conveys an organization's identity, values, and message.

"It will highlight Joshua Chamberlain and the history of the bank," Silsby said of the new wall décor, noting that as governor, the Civil War icon gave a speech to the Legislature that was instrumental in helping pass a bill that resulted in the creation of Kennebec Savings Bank in 1870.

The bank had three different locations on Water Street between 1870 and 1958 before moving to State Street, where it remains today. The same wall design will be in each of the bank's branches, including those in Augusta, Waterville, and Winthrop. The historical society has not determined yet whether or how it will display the Plumer drawings.

Plumer, who died in 2010, grew up in Hallowell and Gardiner. He eventually settled with his wife, Mary, in a 19th-century home on Warren Street in Hallowell, where his studio was set up in a barn adjacent to their home. He was drawn to art from a young age. He studied at the École nationale des Beaux Arts et des Arts appliqués, in France; and the Art Center College of Design in Pasadena, California, his *Kennebec Journal* obituary states. According to a biographical summary on the Maine Arts Commission website, Plumer's work "is found in numerous public buildings in Maine and in various private collections nationwide."

His painting of Hallowell City Hall, called "City Hall Centennial," was selected as the 1999 Old Hallowell Day poster. Another of his paintings was used on the 2004 Old Hallowell Day poster.

In 2002, he painted a view of Maine's capital city that the Augusta Art Committee donated to MaineGeneral Medical Center, which, at the time, was located at the corner of East Chestnut and Arsenal streets in Augusta. It currently hangs in the new hospital at 35 Medical Center Parkway in Augusta.

Plumer worked with a variety of mediums including watercolor, oil, drawings, architectural drawings, sculpting, and woodcarving. He also instructed students at Kents Hill School and the Portland-based school now known as the Maine College of Art & Design. According to his obituary, he began working as a freelance illustrator in Los Angeles. In 2007, one of Plumer's sketches was among more than 100 pieces of art from a national selection to run in a book series called *Strokes of Genius: The Best of Drawing*.

The late Katy Perry, a former well-known Hallowell resident and author, quoted in a June 9, 2012, *Kennebec Journal* story, said, "I don't believe any artist ever captured the scenic beauty of Hallowell and its neighbor, the Kennebec River, as impressively as the late Paul Plumer."

She continued, "Historians write words that capture events of the area. Paul painted scenes depicting daily life of the 1990s. These paintings preserve a slice of life for today's citizens and future generations, and will be long treasured."



Kennebec Savings Bank President and CEO Andrew Silsby points out an architectural feature in a Paul Plumer Jr. drawing of the train station that once stood on Water Street in downtown Augusta. The framed drawing was one of 12 depicting Augusta scenes that Plumer drew for the bank. The bank donated them all to the Kennebec Historical Society on October 28 to make way for a lobby renovation that will feature different displays.

Photo by Teddy Faugno

Steel Span Goes Platinum: Augusta's Memorial Bridge Turns 75

It's hard to visualize, but before 1948, Augusta's Memorial Bridge – which will turn 75 years old this November 30 – was only a dream.

Traffic had been backing up at the downtown bridge, and preliminary surveys were made starting in 1933. Mayor Frederick Payne favored another, higher bridge; but the beginning of his term found him dealing with the 1936 flood. In 1939 legislation passed, authorizing the state's highway commission to determine a location, with construction to start by January 1, 1941. This was to be backed primarily with federal funds, with some to be contributed by Augusta, or Hallowell, or Kennebec County.

World War II interrupted this plan. Money could be used for such a project, but only for military needs; bonds were never issued. Another attempt was made, successfully, with 1947 legislation. Here's the rest of the story.



The Archivist's Pen
Emily Schroeder



Memorial Bridge begins to take shape in the late 1940s in Augusta.

Photos from KHS archive

A number of locations were considered, starting with the 1933 surveys made as a combined effort of the city of Augusta and the Civil Works Administration. The four primary options were:

- 1) Make the bridge linking Cony and Bridge streets – the predecessor of today's Calumet Bridge at Old Fort Western – a double-decker.
- 2) Build a bridge from Hartford Fire Station to Cedar and Middle streets.
- 3) Go from the fire station to Cony High School.
- 4) Put up a connection from Capitol Park to Augusta State Hospital and Middle Street.

Other ideas included going a mile or so north and construct a bypass (sound familiar?), using the old railroad

bridge, building an upper deck on the newer railroad bridge, widening the existing downtown bridge, and building new highways on either side of the river to skirt the city center. There was even a suggestion to put the fire station in the middle of a traffic circle. The Planning Division went with option three, concluding there would be less of a grade to deal with and less distance to primary streets, and it would carry more traffic.

Next came the design phase. The cantilever design was the brainchild of state bridge engineer Max Lincoln Wilder, who served in that position from 1929 to 1962. He designed the only three of this type of bridge in Maine in the late 1940s and 1950s, the other two being the Max L. Wilder Memorial Bridge in Arrowsic (1950) and the Aroostook River Bridge in Caribou (1952). Wilder was an Augusta native, and lived at 60 South Chestnut Street, near the Kennebec Historical Society's current location. He graduated from the University of Maine, in Orono, in 1914 with a degree in civil engineering; served in World War I; became the second bridge engineer in 1929; and received an honorary doctorate in engineering from his alma mater in 1961. Along with the first state bridge engineer, Llewellyn Edwards, Wilder helped develop standards used nationwide for the American Association of State Highway Officials.

With the design established, the Maine State Highway Commission announced the official construction start date of May 24, 1948. Monty Higgins, of the *Daily Kennebec Journal*, began writing a series of articles called "Story of a Bridge" starting the following month, detailing the bridge's creation and accompanying events. The society has a scrapbook containing a collection of them.

Leander Montague Higgins, according to various newspaper articles and online genealogical sources, graduated from Augusta's Cony High School in 1942. That year's *Coniad* yearbook contains his picture, along with a list of his many activities over four years at the school. He was noted for playing the sousaphone. He and his parents came from Kentucky to Augusta when he was 10. Higgins attended the University of Maine, in Orono; and Maine Maritime Academy. During the Korean War he was in the merchant marine. He returned to Augusta for a few years, during which time he wrote for the *Daily Kennebec Journal*. He went on to New York, continuing his studies at Columbia University. He and his family remained in New York, and he kept writing, this time for the *Journal-News*, serving the lower Hudson Valley. Following another career as a public information officer, he died in 1981 and is buried in a local veterans' cemetery.

Higgins' bridge columns are witty, educational, and astute. One could check on the status of construction – “pier progress,” you could call it – and he regularly had something to say about the observers he called “sidewalk superintendents.” In a May 28, 1949, column, he wrote that a construction jib “enables the crane to place steel beams in the center of the bridge as delicately and daintily as a sophisticate dropping buttered popcorn into his mouth.” And here's one from April 8, 1949: “The crew was hanging onto swing ropes from the ends of the girders, but a sudden gust began to swing the girder like a swinging metal sign. Sidewalk superintendents who had been sitting on the natural grandstand of the grassy slope scattered like chickens after the first blast from a shotgun.” The amazing photography of Clarence McKay and Roland Veilleux was a wonderful addition.



A jib guides a girder into place during construction of Memorial Bridge.

During construction, 19 buildings had to be moved or demolished to make room. Colonial Beacon Oil had lost Esso service stations on both sides of the river, but those businesses were set up elsewhere. On the east side, one whole house and parts of two others were torn down. The historic Reuel Williams House was lost in 1950 when construction of Cony Circle forced the removal of the 19th-century businessman and U.S. senator's home.

There were more casualties on the west side of the river. Ten houses bit the dust on Gage, Swan, and Crescent streets; and one was moved. The Wayside Inn and Forest's Pharmacy were flattened, as was the A&P supermarket. The Pineland Diner was moved about a half block south on State Street. Monument Park had to be rebuilt. Power lines near the bridge were buried, and two oil storage tanks were moved out of the way.

Here are some of the bridge's “vital statistics.” The cantilever truss is supported on one end and balanced by the span before it, as diagrammed in the November 30, 1949, “Bridge Opening Edition” of the *Daily Kennebec Journal*. Measurements and materials are summed up here: The bridge's 2,100 feet of length included five cantilever deck truss spans of 250, 300, 350, 300, and 250 feet, respectively; five built-up deck girder spans, two at 116.4 feet and three of 117.8 feet; and one multi-girder span of 50 feet. It has two 14-foot-wide travel lanes and two 6-foot-wide sidewalks, making a total overall width of 44 feet and 3 inches.

The May 5, 1948, issue of the newspaper stated that the bridge could support the weight of all of Augusta's roughly 20,000 residents. It details the use of steel in the 10 piers, mass and reinforced concrete in the abutments, bituminous concrete on the roadway, and a wrought iron handrail. For navigation, the river channel allowance is 67 feet; clearance at mean low water is 74.4 feet. Maximum height of the roadway above mean low water is 102 feet.

Participants in the massive project included the Maine State Highway Commission and its chief edgineer; and the divisions of Planning, Soils Engineering, Right of Way, Bridge, and Highway. The construction was performed by crews of W.H. Hinman, Inc., of North Anson; American Bridge Co.; and the local firms of Bridge Construction, Ellis C. Snodgrass, Inc., and J.R. Partridge, the last of these having built the three tollhouses at the bridge's eastern end. (My dad, Don Herrick, was a substitute toll taker there for a while.)

Work was finally completed close to the date set for opening, November 30, 1949. The crowd was estimated to be around 5,000. Burton Cross – then a state senator, soon to be governor – cut the ribbon on the west side just after 10:30 a.m., unofficially dedicated the bridge to “Mr. John Q. Public and his wife.” An invocation was given by the Rev. Douglas H. Robbins, of the Winthrop Street Universalist Church. State Highway Commission Chairman Lloyd B. Merton spoke about the planning and promotion efforts of many, including the Maine Legislature and Max Wilder. Other speakers were Lucius D. Barrows, chief engineer of the highway department; Augusta Mayor Richard B. Sanborn; former mayor and congressman Charles P. Nelson; and Gov. Frederick G. Payne.

Church bells rang. Fire and factory whistles blew. The Cony High School Band played the “Star Spangled Banner.” Over the next 12 hours, more than 8,000 vehicles crossed. The oldest among the throng that day was 95-year-old Ephraim Ballard, of Sidney. Ballard was the great-grandson of Ephraim Ballard I, a surveyor who built Augusta's first covered bridge. (The Kennebec Historical Society has a brief movie clip of the first cars crossing Memorial Bridge.)

After all this fanfare, the bridge still needed an official name. Many proposals were submitted to the local Chamber of Commerce. Just under 100 suggestions were received. Some were for honoring individuals: Waugh Memorial Bridge, for the late Army 1st Lt. Robert T. Waugh (1919-1944), who was awarded the Medal of Honor posthumously for his actions in World War II; Margaret Chase Smith Bridge, after the then-U.S. senator; James G. Blaine Memorial Bridge, after Augusta's famed 19th-century politician and statesman; Max L. Wilder Bridge; Cross Bridge; and Gov. Payne Bridge. Location

Continued on page 7

New Monmouth Firehouse Museum Preserves Fire Squad's Legacy

“I can think of no more stirring symbol of man’s humanity to man than a fire engine,” American novelist Kurt Vonnegut wrote in his 1959 comic science fiction novel *The Sirens of Titan*.

That remark, uttered by a character in the novel, resurfaces frequently in the nation’s firefighting community. Now it has found a home in central Maine, prominently displayed on the website of the newly opened Monmouth Firehouse Museum.

German troops took Vonnegut (1922-2007) prisoner during World War two and confined him in a slaughterhouse in Dresden, Germany, where he survived the Allied firebombing of that city in 1945. As a result, he probably appreciated better than most people the sacrifice and generosity of spirit embodied in firefighters, and particularly those who are volunteers. Perhaps he also would have applauded the recent revitalization of the Monmouth site where some of those volunteers worked.

The small museum, located at 756 Main Street, is housed in a former firehouse built in 1904.

Monmouth suffered several fires in the late 19th century, including one in 1888 that destroyed many buildings in the center of town, according to the museum’s website. That prompted voters to allot \$1,200 in 1903 – equal to about \$43,000 today – to establish a fire department, resulting in the construction of the firehouse.



Monmouth Museum volunteers Guylaine Lucas, left, and Linda Ridlon stand in front of the Monmouth Firehouse Museum on September 11. They serve as occasional docents at the firefighting museum, which stands just a few steps north on Main Street from the Monmouth Museum’s gift shop.



Monmouth’s 1941 GMC Buffalo pumper firetruck stands in one of the bays at the Monmouth Firehouse Museum.

Photos by Joseph Owen

The firehouse served the town until 1962, when the department moved into its current three-bay station, located at 771 Main Street, as well as a station on Wilson Pond Road in North Monmouth. The 1904 firehouse had been in private hands for many years when a newly formed private nonprofit Monmouth Firehouse Museum organization bought it in August 2023.

“It was the original building. It was just a shell, and they restored it,” said Linda Ridlon, a volunteer at the nearby but separate Monmouth Museum who sometimes performs duties as a docent at the firefighting museum.

Firefighters are the backbone of the nonprofit’s membership.

“It’s open to about anybody that has to do with the town or the department,” said Greg Koller, a museum board member and the town’s third assistant fire chief.

Koller said restoring the building, which included moving it off its deteriorating foundation in 2023 and away from a nearby stream, cost more than \$75,000. Raffles, a golf tournament, and donations of cash and materials covered the museum’s expenses. The Manchester-based Kennebec Cabin Company – the home of the *Maine Cabin Masters* television show – did the interior work. The museum transformation is expected to be the subject of an upcoming episode of the show, Koller said.

The museum houses a 1942 GMC Buffalo pumper truck that the town acquired when the truck was new, as well as an 1852 handtub pumper that Monmouth sold to Gardiner but is now back in Monmouth as a loaned artifact. Various items commemorating the town’s firefighting past line the museum walls. The museum also is expecting to receive the old firehouse’s siren, now housed at the Monmouth

Museum, according to Ridlon. Museum members are hunting for all the additional Monmouth-related firefighting memorabilia that they can find.

The firehouse museum relies on help from Monmouth Museum volunteers for conducting tours. The firehouse is closed for the season, but when it reopens next spring, the group hopes to align its schedule of business hours with those of the Monmouth Museum, said Fire Chief Dan Roy, who also is chairman of the Monmouth Firehouse Museum board. The Monmouth Museum's business hours this summer and fall were 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Wednesdays and Saturdays and 1 to 5 p.m. Thursdays and Fridays.

Outside the old firehouse, the museum group recently installed a memorial to firefighters, police officers, and emergency medical personnel who died in the World Trade Center in New York while trying to rescue trapped occupants after two hijacked passenger jets crashed into the site's twin towers on September 11, 2001, causing them to collapse.

The group obtained a slice of structural steel from the World Trade Center's South Tower four years ago and incorporated it into the memorial's design. It held a memorial dedication ceremony in September.

— by Joseph Owen

At right, a memorial recalling the September 11, 2001, crashes of two hijacked passenger jets into the World Trade Center's twin towers in New York City stands on the north side of Monmouth's firefighting museum. The memorial honors firefighters, police officers, and emergency medical personnel who died while trying to rescue people from the buildings, as well as others who continued to work at the site after the buildings collapsed.



Augusta's Memorial Bridge Turns 75

Continued from page 5

inspired some proposals, such as Capital Bridge, Kennebec Bridge, Fort Western Bridge, Arnold Gateway (for Benedict Arnold, who led a famed military expedition up the Kennebec in 1775), and Cushnoc Skyway (invoking a Colonial-era name for the settlement at Augusta), Kennebec Arch, and Augusta Sightseeing Bridge. More fanciful suggestions were also offered, including Belleview, Spirit of 1950, Gold Star Reflection, Suntrail Bridge, and Vacation Gate.

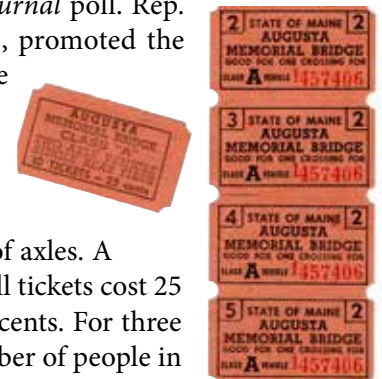
The most popular was Augusta Memorial Bridge, according to a *Daily Kennebec Journal* poll. Rep. Henry R. Albert, R-Augusta (a future longtime Kennebec Historical Society member), promoted the name successfully in the Maine House of Representatives, saying the bridge would serve as a “memorial to the men who have given their lives in the several wars.” The Legislature passed the naming resolve and Payne signed it on May 18, 1951.

Those familiar with the bridge will remember having to pay tolls for 18 years to help defray the ever-increasing bill for this fantastic bridge. Estimates went up to \$3.2 million, most of it federally funded. The posted sign gave varying fees, according to the number of axles. A vehicle with two axles and single tires was charged 10 cents; motorcycles, the same. Ten toll tickets cost 25 cents. If you had dual tires on two axles, the fee went up to 15 cents, or 10 tickets for 50 cents. For three or more axles, it was 20 cents one way, or 10 tickets for \$1. There was no limit on the number of people in vehicles, and pedestrians were not charged at all. The last legitimate toll was paid on October 6, 1967.

Gary Hawkins, a former *Kennebec Journal* sports editor and writer, told me in a recent conversation about a bit of deception that was brewing in his 18-year-old mind when the bridge became toll-free, and he was not alone. He and his friend Frank Johnson were trying to hitchhike to a dance at the Augusta State Armory, and they weren't having much luck. Becoming bored, they concocted a scheme whereby they took the signs proclaiming the bridge toll-free and pitched them over a banking. Each of them went into a tollbooth and accepted tickets or dimes, sometimes even giving drivers directions. They made about \$3. About a half hour later, around 9 p.m., the police appeared, which ended the charade. Hawkins thinks an “ornery cab driver” turned them in.

I don't believe the officers gave them a ride to the dance, if they ever made it there at all.

Until next time!



From the KHS archive



Architect Tibbetts Thrived in 19th-century Augusta Building Boom

On the eve of the Civil War, Augusta was a flourishing community of 7,600 residents. In addition to being Maine's capital, the city was a manufacturing center for textiles and lumber. Railroad lines connected Augusta to Portland in the south and Bangor in the north.

During the 1860s, Augusta experienced a significant increase in the construction of homes, churches, and commercial blocks. One of the principal architects of these buildings was John C. Tibbetts. Nothing is known of Tibbetts' early life except that he was born in Maine in 1826 and married Caroline A. Blake, of Hallowell, in 1848.

Of the several homes that Tibbetts designed in Augusta, at least two survive – his own house at 47 Eastern Avenue and the Alanson B. Farwell House on State Street, now the Kennebec Savings Bank. Built in 1865, Tibbetts' house is a stylish two-story Italianate dwelling with a bracketed entrance portico and a bracketed overhanging roofline.

In 1864, Farwell, an attorney and politician, acquired the two-story Federal-style house that had been built by the Rev. Benjamin Tappan in 1816. Between the fall of 1864 and the spring of 1865, Tibbetts remodeled the Tappan House into an impressive mansion featuring elaborate Italianate trim and a decorative cupola. The *Kennebec Journal* declared in its edition of May 5, 1865, "The dwelling of A.B. Farwell, Esq. on the late Doctor Tappan estate is one of the most commodious, convenient and elegantly furnished with all the modern conveniences of any in the city."

During the 1860s, several churches were built or remodeled in Augusta. Tibbetts was responsible for alterations to the Green Street Methodist Church in 1867 and the First Baptist Church on Winthrop Street in 1868. Both buildings adopted an Italianate appearance under Tibbetts' direction.

Built in 1828, the Methodist Church was remodeled from August to December 1867. In his 1870 book *The History of Augusta*, James W. North gave the following description of the project:

The building was raised five feet and seven inches, giving an audience room twenty-four feet high. The roof was newly shingled, the tower which sat upon the gable was taken down and a new tower built in front, surmounted by a ribbed spire of graceful proportion and ornamental finish, capped by a finial over one hundred feet from the ground. The enlargement gave an entrance way in the tower and provided room for fourteen pews. ... The building has the appearance of a new finely proportioned, modern constructed house, all of which was accomplished at an expense not much exceeding seven thousand dollars.

Tibbetts' transformation of the Green Street Methodist Church was followed by that of First Baptist Church of 1835



Mid-19th-century architect John C. Tibbetts left a legacy of his work in several locations in Augusta. The examples shown here are, at top, a series of three storefronts on the west side of Water Street, at the Bridge Street intersection; and at bottom from left, a home at 47 Eastern Avenue, Green Street Methodist Church, and the Viles-Tappan House, a State Street building that now is the headquarters of Kennebec Savings Bank.

Photos by Teddy Faugno

Continued on page 9

KHS Annual Meeting Draws About 40

About 40 members and guests gathered for a potluck meal, the Kennebec Historical Society's annual meeting, and a lecture September 18 at South Parish Congregational Church.

Members elected Anne Cough, Rich Eastman, and Josh LaVerdiere to the society's Board of Directors for two-year terms. Cough, a board member for 18 years, is chairwoman of the society's Program Committee. Eastman, on the board since 2019, is the *Kennebec Current* page designer and a Collections Committee member. LaVerdiere, appointed to the board in 2023, is chairman of the Building and Grounds Committee.



The board took on Robert Bennett and Barbara Warren as appointed members at its October meeting. Both of them have served on the board previously.



Kennebec Historical Society Executive Director Scott Wood makes announcements to the membership September 18 during the society's annual meeting at South Parish Congregational Church in Augusta.

Photos by Teddy Faugno



At left, Tom Johnson, of East Winthrop, who has volunteered technological assistance at Kennebec Historical Society lectures for several years, appears to be – but probably isn't – sizing up Bill Logan, of Augusta, as his potential successor during the society's annual meeting September 18 at South Parish Congregational Church in Augusta.

Tibbetts' Buildings

Continued from page 8

from March and November 1868. North also described this \$14,000 project in *The History of Augusta*:

The house, with its entrance on Perham Street and facing the courthouse, was turned around to front Winthrop Street, raised many feet higher in the walls, a new tower and steeple added and made modern in the construction of the interior arrangement and external finish.

In 1862 and 1865 major fires destroyed commercial buildings on Augusta's Water Street. While architect Francis H. Fassett, of Bath and Portland, designed many of the new buildings in the burned areas, Tibbetts planned several three-story blocks on the street. Surviving examples of his work are the buildings constructed for Joseph Anthony, Erastus Haskell, and Ira Sturgis at Water and Bridge Streets. These handsome Italianate structures feature cast iron and glass first-story shop fronts and decorative brick arches that frame the second- and third-story windows. The *Kennebec Journal* edition of April 7, 1867, reported that "the corner store will be built by Mr. Sturgis with an ornamental round corner."

During the 1860s, Tibbetts provided designs for a variety of projects in Augusta. In 1866 he oversaw the remodeling of the Governor's Office and the Executive Council Chamber in the Maine State House. In 1867 he submitted a plan to reconfigure the front of the Kennebec County Courthouse. This unbuilt proposal called for enclosing the open bays of the portico with large multi-pane windows. The same year he designed a laundry for the Maine Insane Hospital, later known as the Augusta Mental Health Institute.

On November 26, 1871, the *Daily Kennebec Journal* published a detailed description of the new home of William H. Libby on Cedar Street. The article cited the builder as Thomas White, of East Winthrop, and the designer as "J.C. Tibbetts, architect, now of Chicago." This is the last known published reference to Tibbetts. Did he leave Augusta for Chicago to participate in the rebuilding of the city after the devastating fire of October 8, 1871? The balance of his life remains a mystery.

In Augusta, Tibbetts left an enduring mark on the city with such landmark buildings as the A.B. Farwell House (Kennebec Savings Bank), the Green Street Methodist Church, and his Water Street commercial blocks.



— by Earle G. Shettleworth Jr., Maine state historian

Restored Iron Fence Inn Reflects 19th-Century Mogul's Ambition

*Editor's note: Carol and Doug Doorenbos hosted an open house in August at their newly opened Iron Fence Inn, a lodging at 1163 Main Street in Readfield, with four guest rooms. The couple has been restoring the property gradually for the last 28 years. The building also is known as the Asa and Ursula (Smith) Gile House. This story about the house is adapted with the permission of author and local historian Dale Potter-Clark, who wrote it for the 2016 book *The Founders and Evolution of Summer Resorts and Kids' Camps on Four Lakes in Central Maine*, by Potter-Clark and Charles L. Day Jr. Asa Gile, who commissioned the home's construction with his wife, also built the Elmwood Hotel in Readfield Corner, which was similarly ostentatious for a rural Maine village. Only an ell of the hotel remains.*



Owners Carol and Doug Doorenbos stand at a door on the driveway side of the Iron Fence Inn on August 31.

Photo by Joseph Owen

Morrill, also a future governor. Like Gile, Anson Morrill's business ventures centered in Readfield, but his tentacles reached far beyond the town. The Readfield Woolen Factory was floundering when Anson Morrill bought it in the 1850s, but he turned it around and received acclaim for doing so.⁵ Hundreds of people received income from that factory's success, both directly and indirectly, and the townspeople were grateful.

The circa 1867 Asa Gile mansion stands out among other homes on Main Street in the quiet little village at Readfield Corner. When anyone finds out my connection to Readfield, I am invariably asked, "What is the story on that big house on Route 17?" Well, here is the whole story.

Asa Gile was a Mount Vernon native who married Ursula Smith, of Readfield, in 1844. She was a daughter of Capt. John Smith and a granddaughter of Mathias Smith, who in 1768 became one of the first men to settle in town. The Smith family was well-known and held in high esteem in Readfield's circles. Capt. John owned a profitable store at Readfield Corner. He was also a successful attorney. His participation in various organizations, including the Universalist Church, and his significant land holdings added to his prominent standing in the community.

Gile was also involved in several business ventures. He owned a woodworking shop at Factory Square, where fly rods and coffins were made, and he ran a sashes and blinds factory on Factory Square.¹ Gile studied law under future Gov. Lot. M. Morrill, of Readfield, and built up an active law practice as well.² As an opportunistic lawyer, he became involved in many land deals and investments. He was also a benefactor, as evidenced in 1860, when he financed the construction of a second floor on the fifth district schoolhouse, complete with stage and assembly hall.³ Townspeople made use of the space, where they held various gatherings such as plays, concerts, and temperance meetings, which Gile himself attended and fully endorsed.⁴

In spite of his philanthropic nature and business savvy, Gile did have a downfall.

The story goes that Asa Gile became competitive with his law tutor's brother, Anson P.

When Readfield's sons marched off to fight in the Civil War, the future looked mighty grim for their wives and children. How would they ever survive without the muscle power or earned income from their menfolk? About that time, the woolen factory was awarded a contract to make material for the Union soldiers' uniforms. This was a blessed relief that kept some families afloat on the

The revival of the Iron Fence Inn, located on Main Street (Route 17) in Readfield, took 28 years of restoration and reconstruction.

Photo by Joseph Owen



home front. Morrill was a hero yet again.

In 1855 Morrill was elected governor of Maine and his journey toward even wider success began. When he received the Republican nomination for U.S. House of Representatives in 1861, Asa Gile ran against him on the Democratic ticket. Not only did Morrill soundly win that election,⁶ but he went on to serve in various other political posts and boards of directors over the years, including the presidency of the Maine Central Railroad.⁷ By all indications, Morrill flew right past Gile in his business and political pursuits, but when he began construction of a new mansion house,⁸ Gile was not to be outdone.

Asa and Ursula Gile bought her father's homestead on Main Street in 1854, but Capt. Smith continued to live there.⁹ Within a few years, perhaps after Smith died in 1860, they began making plans for the construction of their own grand manor. In 1868 they donated



This photo shows what the Asa and Ursula (Smith) Gile House, now called the Iron Fence Inn, looked like before its restoration began.

Photo courtesy of Dale Potter-Clark



The home of Capt. John Smith stands on Church Road in Readfield next to the Readfield Union Meeting House. Smith's home was moved there from Main Street more than a century and a half ago so his daughter and her husband could build a new home – now called the Iron Fence Inn – on the Main Street site.

Photo courtesy of Dale Potter-Clark

Smith's homestead to the Union Meeting House on Church Street and arranged for it to be moved onto a lot adjacent to the meeting house. The Gile had a magnificent home built where the more modest Smith mansion formerly had stood. Their new home dominates the Readfield Corner landscape to this day.

According to oral tradition, every time Morrill added an ostentatious feature to his estate, Gile did the same at his own. His Italianate-style mansion boasted features such as seven Italian marble fireplaces, hand-carved woodwork, six bedrooms, a modern kitchen, a tennis court, and an ornate fountain. Elaborate staircases led to the second and third floors. From the "captain's nest" atop the third floor one could see for miles around. Framing the impressive grounds was a decorative wrought-iron fence set in a granite foundation.¹⁰

The house deteriorated over the years, approaching the point of irreversible decay, until Doug and Carol Doorenbos bought it in 1996 and set about the painstaking task of saving it – while restoring much of it and recapturing the features they could. They did most of the work themselves, according to Carol, hiring contractors to work on big jobs like the foundation and roof. Having finished three bedrooms and bathrooms on the rear ell two years ago they have opened it as an inn appropriately named "The Iron Fence Inn."



– by Dale Potter-Clark

¹ Hoyt & Fogg; *Maine State Yearbook and Legislative Manual*; 1882; p. 394.

² Burleigh, Charles; *The Genealogy and History of the Guild, Guile and Gile Family*; 1887; p. 286.

³ The fifth district schoolhouse eventually became Readfield's Town Office. It is known today as Asa Gile Hall.

⁴ *Kennebec News, Lewiston Evening Journal*, August 29, 1876.

⁵ Kingsbury, Henry D., and Simeon L. Deyo, editors, *History of Kennebec County, 1628-1892*. New York: H.L. Blake & Co., 1892, chapter on Readfield. Also, Dale Potter-Clark collection.

⁶ Burleigh, p. 286.

⁷ Potter-Clark collection.

⁸ The Anson P. Morrill mansion on Sturtevant Hill Road was destroyed by fire. It was located near the Morrill Road intersection.

⁹ Kennebec County Registry of Deeds, Book 196, p. 414, November 8, 1854; also 1856 map of Readfield.

¹⁰ Potter, Evelyn, *Hints of a Glorious Past; The Summer Times*, Aug. 3, 1989; p. 20. Note: Most of these features of the Gile House remain intact as of this writing.

Hallowell's Weathervane Sculpture Gets Up Close and Personal

It may never match up with the 20th century's greatest art heists – such as the one in 1990 at the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum in Boston, or the 1911 pilfering of Leonardo Da Vinci's *Mona Lisa* from the Louvre in Paris – but the theft of the bronze sculpture from the weathervane atop the Hallowell Fire Department fire hose drying tower in 1983 will go down in history as among the most daring and dastardly art thefts in Kennebec County lore.

Hallowell residents recently had a chance to relive that infamous event and inspect the sculpture, which unlike the Gardner's priceless paintings by the likes of Vermeer, Rembrandt, Manet, and Degas, was fortunately recovered and returned to the Granite City in a timely manner for all to enjoy.

Historical researcher Jane Radcliffe gave a presentation September 14 at Hallowell's City Hall Auditorium, where she discussed the creation of the sculpture that adorned the 40-foot fire tower on Second Street for more than a century, along with the story of its brazen theft and amazing recovery (*Kennebec Current*, May-June 2023).

Radcliffe shared a slideshow on a large portable movie screen in front of the second-story theater stage. Once her presentation was complete, she moved the screen aside. Behind it stood the gilded weathervane sculpture, which depicts a firefighter driving a horse-drawn fire hose wagon, at center stage. Attendees oohed and aahed when they got a glimpse of it – a reaction perhaps similar to that of their 19th-century predecessors when the sculpture was first unveiled in 1870. The viewing event was billed as an opportunity for folks to see it up close for the “first time in 140 years!!”

Until recently, the sculpture was kept in secure storage in the Police Department after it was removed from the old fire station in April 2023. Several years ago, the city considered mounting it on the new fire station, which opened in 2018 at the Stevens School, but opted not to move ahead with that plan. Radcliffe is thankful for aesthetic reasons that it didn't happen.

“The proportions were all wrong,” she said, noting the new fire station is only a single-story building.

For now, the plan is to display it at City Hall, possibly in a glass case for the public to view, and probably more frequently than once every 140 years.



Attendees at a lecture about the old weathervane that stood on top of the Hallowell Fire Station's hose tower move in for a closer look at it September 14 at Hallowell City Hall.

Photo by Ben Sturtevant

— by Ben Sturtevant 

KHS Welcomes the Following New Members

Diane Doyen — Augusta
Ingrid Grenon — Mount Vernon
Eric Hooglund — Belgrade Lakes

F. Andrew James — Hollis, New Hampshire
Edward Lorusso — Belgrade
Kathleen McKay — Benton

William Stokes — Augusta

and continues to recognize ...



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Getting Older Helps Add Perspective to Samantha Smith Story

As an elementary school student in Portland in the 1990s, I learned about who Samantha Smith was. We were taught about her with the backdrop of our classroom maps having slowly transitioned from having the Soviet Union to Russia, a change we didn't really grasp. We knew Smith had written a letter to another country's "president," and we knew she was from Maine and famous; but that was about all that stuck, at least for me.



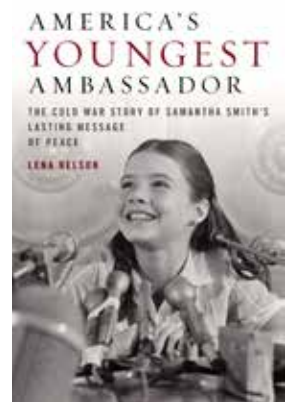
Decades later, I saw her statue every day when I parked and went in to work at the State House. By then, I had a better understanding of the Cold War. However, it wasn't until reading Lena Nelson's book *America's Youngest Ambassador: The Cold War Story of Samantha Smith's Lasting Message of Peace* (Kennebec Current, March-April 2023) that I fully appreciated Smith's impact and how unlikely a situation she and her family were in as internationally recognized figures.

Nelson grew up in the Soviet Union, so she knew Smith's story from that perspective. She shares her own story alongside Smith's, including how she has gotten to know Smith's mother, Jane, over the years. This approach to Smith's story helps demonstrate the way that the world was connected over one letter from a girl from Maine. In the age of the internet, when access to nearly every society and culture is at our fingertips, the magnitude of such connection between children in opposing Cold War nations is difficult to grasp. Nelson writes in such a way that the magnitude is conveyed well, and the story is interesting to follow, too. Her perspective also helps magnify the fact that Smith was a child through all of this, which is remarkable to think about.

Another striking aspect of the book is the sheer closeness of it all. This girl who made an international impact was from Manchester – the next town over from me. She died far too young, in a plane crash in Auburn. Her funeral was at St. Mary of the Assumption Church in Augusta, with notable figures attending to mourn her loss.

For people who lived through Smith's emergence into international fame, such revelations probably won't emerge from reading the book, and there may not be much new. However, the perspective Nelson brings makes it worth the read, whichever perspective and whatever experience you bring to the book. It's also a quick read, though not lacking in substance.

The Maine State Library, Augusta's Lithgow Public Library, and Gardiner Public Library all have copies of *America's Youngest Ambassador* available to borrow. It is also available for purchase on Amazon.



– by Jamie Logan

Around Kennebec County

CHINA

The **China Historical Society's** exhibits will be available for viewing in the old Town House from 9 to 11 a.m. November 5, Election Day. The Town House is next to the current China Town Office, on Lakeview Drive (U.S. Route 202/Route 9).

MONMOUTH

The **Monmouth Museum** gift shop, located at 758 Main Street in Monmouth, is closed through most of November, but will open November 30 for Small Business Saturday and the community's holiday tree-lighting event.

VASSALBORO

The **Vassalboro Historical Society** plans to hold its annual meeting at 5 p.m. November 10 at the Vassalboro United Methodist Church, located at 614 Main Street (Route 32), about halfway between the North Vassalboro and East Vassalboro village centers. The event begins with a potluck supper, followed by election of board members and other business. Attendees who wish to bring food for sharing are encouraged to call the society at (207) 923-3505.

Vassalboro will be the setting for a December 14 "Christmas through the ages" house tour, according to **Vassalboro Historical Society** President Janice Clowes. A tour ticket costs \$15 per person, which is nonrefundable. Several Vassalboro homes will be open for ticketholders to visit, and they will be decorated in ways typical of various historical periods. The time of the tour will be announced later on the society's website. The event, a successor to those held in Winthrop in 2022 and Belgrade in 2023, is a fundraiser for the society. To buy tickets or get more details, call the society at (207) 923-3505.

WINTHROP

The **Winthrop Maine Historical Society** is hosting a lecture, "Taking the Trolley to Island Park," by Phil Morse from 6 to 7 p.m. November 14 at the society's headquarters, the Winthrop History and Heritage Center, located at 107 Main Street in Winthrop. Morse, a Saco resident, is a longtime volunteer at the Seashore Trolley Museum in Kennebunkport. His lecture will describe the history of the trolley system as well as that of the park, which was located at the north end of Cobbossee Lake in East Winthrop.

Readfield's Library Once Was Home of Dr. Samuel Currier

Webster's Dictionary defines "community" as "a unified body of individuals," such as: the people with common interests living in a particular area broadly: the area itself.



History Through
a Keyhole #15

When Dr. Samuel Currier arrived in Readfield in 1800 from Winthrop, he set about to establish himself in the community, treating patients and delivering babies for nearly 48 years. His son, Dr. George Currier, continued the practice another 15 years until his death in 1863.

Their stately Main Street home remained in the Currier family through Dr. George's daughter Alice and her sisters, Harriet and Emily, who cared for Alice after both parents had died. Harriet removed to Skowhegan in 1885 to live with her son. Alice married Amos Herrick Eaton, of Kents Hill, in 1869 and lived in Middleboro,

Answer to Keyhole #15

Q: What is this?

A: The top of Readfield Community Library's front door

Q: Where is it?

A: 1151 Main Street in Readfield

Q: What's historic about it?

A: The house was the home of the Currier family, including two doctors, father and son, who treated local people and delivered babies for a combined total of 63 years in the 19th century.



The Readfield Community Library was once the Dr. Samuel Currier house, also known as the Community House.

Photos by Rich Eastman

the second floor. It also hosted meetings of the Lions Club, Boy and Girl Scouts, the Home Extension Club, the Rifle and Pistol Club, dancing classes, and more. The Little Town Club volunteers soon began improving the old house, installing a modern kitchen, a youth room, and painting the house inside and out.

A small room had been made available for use as a lending library in 1946 but the rest of the house was for public use. Public suppers, hunters' breakfasts, chaperoned record hops, and private celebrations were held here, as well as Readfield Day, held every August, a precursor to Readfield Heritage Days. By the late 20th century, the membership in The Little Town Club had dwindled significantly, and the organization was disbanded. In July 1988, the Community House was given to the Town of Readfield.

The Readfield Community Library started in the Currier house as a small one-room lending library in 1946, located in the southwest front room. It expanded to two rooms in 1959 and eventually moved across the street to the Town Office at Gile Hall. The library was incorporated as the Readfield Community Library, Inc. in 1975 and remained at Gile Hall until 1988, when it was moved back to the old Currier homestead.

Since then, many hours of volunteer work by members of the community have been logged to maintain the building, including regular maintenance, the updating of systems, and converting the upstairs dance room to a functioning library containing a children's room, a piano, a comfortable reading area, and many pieces of artwork by local folk art painter Olive Bishop Smith.

For further information, contact Melissa Small, the head librarian of Readfield Community Library.

Massachusetts, though she continued to own the Currier homestead throughout her Middleboro residence.

In 1886, Emily conveyed the old homestead to Alice Eaton. It was transferred in 1913 by sister Mary Eaton to Alice E.S. Eaton, a daughter of Amos and Alice Currier Eaton. Alice donated the building in 1946 to an organization known as "The Little Town Club," an incorporated group of concerned citizens dedicated to preserving the old house and establishing it as a community center.

For many years, known as the Currier-Eaton House, it was also known as "The Community House," as the residence became a social center for Readfield, with dances held in the grand room on



This period staircase winds to the second floor, which formerly held dances. The large ballroom now houses a children's room and large reading area.



— By Rich Eastman

History Through a Keyhole — Puzzle 16

Brenda Lake's email seemed to have been hammered out in a nonstop burst of excitement, as though she had just won the Powerball lottery.

"I immediately recognized this photo!" the Readfield resident gushed to us, referring to the photo clue in our September-October issue. "It is the front door, with fan above, of the Doctor Samuel Currier House (circa 1800) at Readfield Corner." She added later, "Incidentally, I chose and put up that wreath on the door, and am pleased to see it printed in the *Kennebec Current*!"

Well, we're pleased too. We only hope Ms. Lake won't try to sell her prize – a year's free membership in the Kennebec Historical Society – on the black market, where such a rare commodity has been known to attract staggering sums of money. Or are we thinking of mint-condition Cabbage Patch Kids?

In any event, for our next clue, we offer the photo at right. This site is easily visible from a public road in Kennebec County. Readers who can identify it are asked to contact the *Current* and tell us three things: what the object is, where it is, and what the historic significance of the property is.

Answers may be sent by email to KennebecCurrent@gmail.com or by postal mail to Kennebec Historical Society, Attn: *Kennebec Current*, P.O. Box 5582, Augusta, ME 04332. The winner, to be selected randomly from all correct answers submitted, will be awarded a year's membership in KHS for the respondent or a friend or relative. If nobody meets that threshold, the editor reserves the right to make the award to a respondent who provides a partial correct answer.

The full answer and more information about the subject will be provided in the January-February 2025 issue of the *Kennebec Current*. Answers are due by December 31. Good luck.



North Monmouth's Pleasant Point Cemetery Gets Facelift

The 198-year-old Pleasant Point Cemetery behind the North Monmouth Community Church, located on Main Street in North Monmouth, is enjoying a much-needed facelift thanks to the Monmouth Cemetery Association and Colette Monuments of Lewiston.

Over the past several months, workers have taken down and removed several large white pine trees, which opened up the forest canopy above the graveyard. Colette workers then power-washed the numerous tombstones, most of them marble and some made of granite. The crew straightened each monument into an upright position. Some of them had cracked or even fallen over through the years.

Although it sits on a beautiful wooded peninsula jutting out into one end of the Tex Tech Industries mill pond and a portion of Wilson Stream, the cemetery looked dilapidated and covered by fallen branches before the upgrade.

The earliest recorded burial in Pleasant Point Cemetery was that of Mary Prescott, according to Bobbie Bowler, of Winthrop, a historian who has written five books on the history of Monmouth, which includes the village of North Monmouth. Prescott, who died June 12, 1828, was the wife of Elder Jedediah B. Prescott, according to her gravestone.

The North Monmouth Community Church, which has no connection to the cemetery, was built in 1852.

"We have 13 cemeteries we look out for. Our trustees were very pleased with how this one turned out," said Mary Turner, Monmouth sexton and president of the Monmouth Cemetery Association. "The town gives us money every year. The reason they are so bright and clean is because we have them cleaned. They use a power washer."

The town's appropriation is supplemented by donations and fees for purchase of cemetery lots. "We have to set up perpetual care," Turner said.

This year the town appropriated \$35,000 for cemetery care, Monmouth Town Manager Justin Poirier said. The cemetery association gave the town a \$23,000 reimbursement, leaving just \$12,000 as the town's share of costs.

Ross Blais, of Colette Monuments, said, "We did a lot in there. It's been an ongoing work. A lot of the stones had chipped away." He said the cemetery restoration was finished this fall.

"We try to make it as close as we can to its original state," he said.



Recent upgrades at the Pleasant Point Cemetery in North Monmouth, shown here on September 11, have given the graveyard a tidier, airier appearance. A mill pond fed and drained by Wilson Stream is just over the ridge in the background.

Photo by John Hale



— By John Hale

Arnold Expedition Group

Continued from page 1

participant] Dr. Center's journal said not one of them weighed less than 400 pounds."

The replica bateau was featured in this summer's Old Hallowell Day parade and at Fort Halifax Days in Winslow, Holt said. "We landed it at Waterville landing, and poled and rowed it upstream to Fort Halifax, so we know it floats."

Holt said Maine Maritime Museum's boat shop in Bath did a drawing and materials list to enable the Arnold Society to create kits to build five more bateaux, with the materials all cut to assemble, for \$2,500 each. The Friends of Fort Halifax have agreed to build one, he said, and the group is working with towns along the Arnold March route who have expressed interest in building additional bateaux to display on stands at waterfront parks and other public places to celebrate the 250th anniversary.

Kittery students from R.W. Traip Academy's boatbuilding program also built their own replica bateau this year, and Holt said the school is giving the boat to the Arnold Expedition Historical Society.

Celebration events are still in the planning stages, Holt said, but bateau races on the Kennebec, complete with portages in teams, will be a feature. The society is also planning guided hikes and tours of key sections of the march route, and caravan tours featuring various points along the Arnold Trail.

On September 27, 2025, Old Fort Western in Augusta will conduct a re-enactment of the "Great Feast" that the Howard family hosted at the fort for Arnold and his company leaders on the eve of the expedition. Linda Novak, the fort's director and curator, said the fort was a staging area for the expedition, and all the activities and foods the fort is planning to serve will be "true to our site," based on eyewitness accounts, journals and other historical sources. The meal will likely be served to Arnold March re-enactors, she said.

"We could use bear meat, if anyone gets some during hunting season," she said, adding in addition to bear meat and venison, 100 pumpkin pies were served at the feast.

Novak added that the fort still has one of the bateaux built for the 200th anniversary in 1975, which she referred to as the McCobb bateau. It is not an exact-size replica, Novak said, but serves a purpose in the fort's timeline program. 🐾

– by Gay Grant



Arnold Expedition Historical Society members work on building a bateau March 19 in Bath that is a copy of those used in the 1775 expedition.

Photo courtesy of the Arnold Expedition Historical Society

Andy Tolman

Continued from page 1

We'd had a lively, productive board meeting that late afternoon of October 22. We celebrated the progress RHS has made in the last 10 or 11 years since Andy, Bob Harris, Jeanne Harris, and I first came aboard. We planned for the year ahead and how we might continue to grow and serve the community. Andy updated us on RHS projects he and his wife Susie were working on. He reported on the status of a grant proposal he had recently submitted. He said he would find a photo in his extensive archives for this year's RHS Christmas card – Andy was an avid photographer – and he agreed that yes, he would continue as our vice president for another term. It was a role he enjoyed.

After the meeting adjourned, Andy hugged all of us, then headed out the door on his way to a 6:30 p.m. CODA chorus rehearsal in Winthrop. His beloved Mazda Miata was parked on the opposite side of Route 17. One of us saw Andy trip or stumble as he walked toward the car. As he was getting up, a pickup truck came upon him, and life changed in a heartbeat.

The town of Readfield shut down all its services on October 28 in honor of Andy Tolman. His other fellow RHS board members and I were among the dozens who gathered to say a final goodbye and to help lay Andy to rest in a "green" burial at the Kennebec Land Trust's Baldwin Hill Conservation Cemetery. Did I mention Andy was also a conservation advocate who volunteered for the trust and the 30 Mile River Watershed Association? Well, he was, and he did so much more than can be said in this brief tribute.

We will never forget Andy Tolman and will always remain so grateful for how he touched our lives. 🐾

When Doing Genealogy, Strive for More Than Mere Dates

Congratulations! You've just completed your five-generation chart and now know the vital records (births, marriages, and deaths) of all your great-great-grandparents. But who were they? Where did they work or live? What organizations did they belong to? What were they like?



All too often in the search for our ancestors, we get locked into the vital records to weave our family tree but never find out who they really were or what impact they had on their communities. More recent generations of ancestors might have left stories with some of our present-day relatives, but earlier

generations have been forgotten and lost with the passage of time. Fortunately, there are ways we researchers can fill in the blanks on our ancestor's lives.

One such resource is Newspapers.com, a subscription-based website that allows you to search for your ancestor in published newspapers. Newspapers.com is the largest online newspaper archive consisting of more than 300 million pages of historical newspapers from more than 11,100 newspapers from around the United States and beyond, with a special focus on full runs and portions of runs of well-known, regional and state titles in addition to small local newspapers. The collection includes a broad range of dates, mostly covering the 19th and 20th centuries. For us folks in Kennebec County, the site has a searchable index for the *Kennebec Journal* and the *Morning Sentinel*. It also includes papers from other Maine regions like the *Bangor Daily News*, the *Portland Press Herald*, *The Times Record* of Brunswick, the *Sun-Journal* of Lewiston, and several other historic newspapers from smaller regions. These articles often reveal what groups your ancestor was associated with, whom they might have visited, or what trips they took, what legal interactions they had, and even what school connections they made. Some articles also might include a photo of your ancestor and his or her acquaintances. You can subscribe to Newspapers.com for about \$8 a month for basic and \$20 for "plus" – with some pretty steep discounts for some six-month memberships (\$45 and \$75, respectively). As newspapers.com is owned by Ancestry.com, Ancestry does offer a 50% discount off the Newspapers.com subscription.

Another great resource is local directories that include addresses, occupations, neighbors, and sometimes family members. These volumes may be found at your local library and the Kennebec Historical Society library. They have also been offered in Ancestry.com in a searchable format.

Some of the most overlooked resources are local libraries, historical societies, and genealogical groups. Many of these organizations house private unpublished family histories written by fellow descendants of yours who had access to family data and donated these writings to the various collections. One such example would be the Taconnett Genealogical Society in Winslow, which houses many family histories from the Waterville and Winslow area. To see what these organizations have, just contact them and ask what they have on hand. These unpublished family histories often contain a wealth of personal information.

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 5 children. He was a Revolutionary War soldier who fought in the battle of Long Island and then Bunker Hill 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.

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

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



Rich Eastman



Genealogy Chapter Prepares to Leave Its Embattled Riverfront Home

The Winslow-based Tacconnett Falls Chapter of the Maine Genealogical Society, which has occupied the town-owned former Winslow Public Library building for more than two decades, is preparing to move out of the building.

Current FOLLOWUP

The Lithgow Street site is only a few dozen yards from the Kennebec River. The river flooded in December 2023, filling most of building's cellar, knocking out the furnace, and leaving behind heating oil contamination that flowed into the cellar from nearby buildings (*Kennebec Current*, January-February, July-August, and September-October 2024). Chapter members and a contractor cleaned up the mess, but the furnace still is not working and excessive humidity pervades the building.

Tacconnett Falls members voted on October 20 to accept the terms of a proposed agreement that would allow them to move the contents of their genealogical library to the former St. John School on South Garand Street in Winslow. A volunteer crew began packing boxes and crates later that month in preparation for the move, and a local moving company has offered to transport the boxes free to the new site.

The tentative agreement is subject to approval by the Roman Catholic Diocese of Portland, which owns the former school building. It would allow the group to use a room in the building for six months. The chapter's collection would not be available to the public during that period.

The chapter already has begun looking for a permanent, accessible site that can it occupy after that.



Clockwise from left, Bruce Hanson, Barbara Warren, and Dawn Delaney wipe and pack books October 19 at the Tacconnett Falls Genealogical Library in Winslow.

Photo by Joseph Owen

Benton History Group Pursuing Nonprofit Status

After months of periodic negotiations and discussions, a group of Benton residents who are interested in preserving local history never reached agreement on whether to affiliate itself with the Kennebec Historical Society and instead is preparing to apply for nonprofit status on its own, according to members of the group.

KHS had proposed to take the group on as a semi-autonomous chapter (*Kennebec Current*, March-April 2023), performing recordkeeping, financial tracking, and other services in exchange for a minimum number of Benton residents becoming dues-paying KHS members. It would have been the society's first such arrangement with another group.

Several years ago, the Chelsea Historical Society donated all of its archival material pertaining to that town's history to the Kennebec Historical Society, but the Chelsea group and KHS did not entertain the idea of any kind of administrative affiliation.



What's This??

This object stands at the entrance to the Sidney Historical Society's headquarters in the Grange hall in Sidney. The society knows a lot about local history, but it can't identify this. Readers who know what the objects are may contact the *Kennebec Current* at kennebeccurrent@gmail.com.

Photo by Joseph Owen



Book Sales Net \$3,687 in '24

The Kennebec Historical Society received a total of \$3,687 in revenue from its sales of donated used books in 2024 at its headquarters, the Henry Weld Fuller Jr. House.

The amount received, which includes money generated at the final three-day sale on the first weekend in September, was \$187 more than the board of directors had budgeted for income from the sales, according to Executive Director Scott Wood.

KHS plans to host a monthlong book sale in February 2025 at the Fuller House, which is located at 107 Winthrop Street in Augusta. Bibliophiles will have access to the books from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. on Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays.

Upcoming Programs

It's Tea Time Again

For all but one day of each calendar year, the Kennebec Historical Society is steeped in the traditions of Kennebec County History. But on that one day, it's the society that does the steeping – of tea.

The society's annual Victorian tea party is scheduled for 2 to 4 p.m. Sunday, December 8, at KHS headquarters, the Henry Weld Fuller Jr. House, which is at 107 Winthrop Street in Augusta. KHS member Marie Tesch has volunteered to provide musical entertainment on the piano. Members and the public are invited to celebrate the holiday season at this annual event, which the late Mary McCarthy instituted a generation ago in the dining room at the previous KHS location at 61 Winthrop Street.

A variety of goodies will be available to sample, including cookies, other snacks, coffee, and tea. Come and enjoy the festive decorations. 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.



Augusta Symphony Orchestra musicians Virginia Flanagan, on the harp, and Kathryn Brant, on the clarinet, entertain guests December 3, 2023, during the Kennebec Historical Society's annual Victorian tea, held at the Henry Weld Fuller Jr. House, the society's Augusta headquarters. Also, ASO President Christopher Lansley played the flute at the event, which drew about 50 attendees. The performances were part of an ongoing collaboration between the society and the symphony, which holds some of its meetings at KHS headquarters. This year's tea is scheduled for December 8.

Photo by Scott Wood

January 2025: “Through the Eyes of Maine”

The book *Through the Eyes of Maine* is a work 166 years in the making.

In the northernmost corner of what was fast becoming a fractured nation, diarist Hilton W. True, of Gardiner, began keeping a journal in 1857. When civil strife began to divide our nation in late 1859, he recorded it. In his entry of December 2, he noted the execution of John Brown, the most polarizing figure of the Antebellum Era. Following this cataclysmic event, civil war became inevitable.

Beginning with the Confederate attack on Fort Sumter, True wrote about the events that helped define the first 18 months of the American Civil War, concluding with an account of the Battle of Antietam, in which his family suffered a deep personal loss.

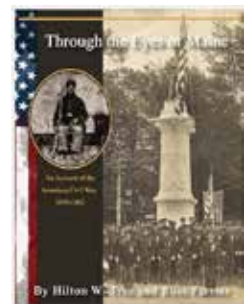
Discovered in 2018 by historian Ross Farmer, the Kennebec Historical Society's online lecturer for January, this account features details on key battles and important figures who helped shape the most contentious period in our nation's history. Farmer, based on True's recollections, offers a 21st-century discernment of this primary source.

The illustrated book offers a summary of events that led to disunion and war between the states. Throughout the journal, familiar names such as Abraham Lincoln and Robert E. Lee, along with lesser-known figures such as Galusha Grow and Alexander Shaler, flow together with accounts of battles. It also delves into topics such as transportation, communication, music, patriotic fervor, national symbols, the press, and the meaning of life and death. *Through the Eyes of Maine* concludes with an overview of Maine's contributions to the cause of Union and a biographical sketch of True.

Farmer is a retired former history teacher who taught in the Belle Vernon Area School District near Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. The book, his first published work, is available on Amazon.com in paperback and hardback editions.

Farmer's presentation about his book can be watched on Facebook Live at 6:30 p.m. on January 15. It also will be archived on the society's Facebook page for those who want to watch it later. For more information, call Scott Wood, the society's executive director, at 622-7718.

This program, originally scheduled for presentation last February, was postponed because of technical difficulties.



Cover courtesy of the author

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Business hours: 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Tuesday through Thursday or by appointment. Appointments are highly encouraged. Call first.

Mailing address: P.O. Box 5582, Augusta, ME 04332-5582

Society's email address: kennhis1891@gmail.com

Telephone: (207) 622-7718

Website: www.kennebechistorical.org

Current email address: KennebecCurrent@gmail.com