

# Kennebec Current

"Let a thousand fall before Africa be given up!" — the Rev. Melville Cox, shortly before his death in 1833 (see page 6)

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## After Decades of Probing Hallowell's Past, Webber's History



Sumner 'Sam' Webber

Just as you can't judge a book by its cover, you shouldn't judge a life by its early and late phases. Such is the case with Sumner "Sam" Webber.

Webber was born in Rutland, Vermont, and moved to Augusta for a couple of years when he was 3. Now, approaching his 89th birthday, he and his wife, Cathy, have lived in a Manchester town house since last December.

Between those two events, however, he might as well have been called "Mr. Hallowell."

Webber spent the overwhelming majority of his life in the Granite City, and he served it in many ways, most recently as city historian, an office that was established in 1997 to take advantage of his institutional knowledge of the city.

"I told them I'd charge them a dollar a year, and I never took the money," he said.

As Hallowell's official historian for 28 years, Webber conducted historical tours, cataloged documents, answered genealogical queries, and even built parade floats. Finally, when he moved one town away, he quit the unpaid position, a job that doesn't even exist in most other Maine communities.

"But they wouldn't let me resign," he said in a May interview at his Manchester home, explaining that city officials continued to send him historical or genealogical questions they had received from the public. Finally, at the beginning of spring, he put his foot down and quietly retired – again.

Webber has put his stamp on Hallowell in many ways, and especially on its awareness of its own history. He was at various times a city councilor, president of the Row House historic preservation group, a member of the Friends of Hubbard Free Library board, a leader of guided historical tours, a city election worker, and a teacher of U.S. history and other subjects for 33 years at Hall-Dale High School.

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## Maine's Cultural Building Poised for Gradual Reopening

Sometimes, things take a bit longer to complete than one initially expects. This is certainly true regarding the reopening of the Cultural Building, part of the Capitol complex in Augusta.

When the facility was closed in 2020 to alleviate a number of physical problems, it was estimated to be reopened about two

years later at a cost of \$15 million. Two years flew by, but the building remained closed and officials forecast an opening in early 2024 (*Kennebec Current*, September-October 2022). As of this writing, that vision has not yet come to fruition and the cost has tripled; but one of the three branches housed in the building, the Maine State Archives, is getting close.



The Cultural Building in Augusta, shown May 12, is expected to be ready for the Maine State Archives to move back into the structure later this spring. The building, which also housed the Maine State Library and the Maine State Museum, closed in 2020 for rehabilitation and renovation.

Photo by Rich Eastman

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**Current  
FOLLOWUP**

## Speakers Elevate Heritage Council Gathering



Executive Director's  
Note  
**Scott Wood**

On April 29, the Kennebec Historical Society hosted the spring gathering of the Central Maine Heritage Council at Hope Baptist Church in Manchester. CMHC is a collection of historical societies from all over central Maine. The group holds two meetings each year, one in the spring and one in the fall. The day consisted of presentations by speakers and a round-table discussion about challenges that all nonprofit organizations face.

The first presenters were Interim Maine State Archivist Christian Cotz and Digital Archivist Kate Herbert, who spoke about the history of the Maine State Archives, the upcoming move back into the Cultural Building (after almost five years of renovation) and some of the innovations MSA will be returning with. You can read more about that in Bob Bennett's article on page 1. Next, Rob Stevens, from the Arnold Expedition Historical Society discussed Benedict Arnold's 1775 trek to try to capture Quebec, his own experience of following in Arnold's footsteps in 2017, and how AEHS plans to celebrate this year's 250th anniversary of the expedition.

After a short break for lunch, participants from local societies discussed how to address the challenges associated with membership, getting volunteers, and fundraising. I am not sure how many problems were solved, but there was a healthy exchange of ideas, laughter, and several opportunities for collaboration. One participant told me that the day "was wonderful" and then gave me a hug!

Switching gears to society business, for the first time in recent memory, this year's calendar of presenters for the KHS monthly programs is full. Each month has at least one speaker, and October has two. Don't be surprised if even more are added as we progress through the rest of 2025.

Just a reminder: The KHS spring book sale will take place from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. Thursday, May 29, and Friday, May 30; and from 9 a.m. to noon Saturday, May 31 at our headquarters, the Henry Weld Fuller House, located at 107 Winthrop Street in Augusta. In February, KHS cleared out much of its old inventory to have a fresh selection of donated books that are in "like new" condition. There will also be a table of specially priced books, books that are out of print, rare, or more valuable than the regular books.

This will be the first opportunity of the year to find some wonderful books, and shoppers will enjoy the fair price of \$2 for hard-cover books and \$1 for all soft-cover books. Stop by to browse the books, for a chat, or even a cup of coffee. If you have any questions, please call me at the society at (207) 622-7718.



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

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580 on May 12  
Life members: 265

## Kennebec Current

Our 173rd Issue

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The *Kennebec Current* encourages letters to the editor. Email letters to [KennebecCurrent@gmail.com](mailto:KennebecCurrent@gmail.com). All letters are subject to editing for taste, style, and length.

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Courtesy of National Park Service

## Maine's Cultural Building

*Continued from page 1*

The expectation is that following 12 or so weeks of work beginning this month, the archives will be able to reopen. However, for the other two tenants, the Maine State Library and the Maine State Museum, things are still on hold. A bit of history will start us off, and I'll begin with a little personal commentary.

Shortly after I retired from my 38-year career as a teacher here in Maine in 2012, I started doing volunteer research at the Museum State Museum regarding the Civil War and its impact on our state, in preparation for an exhibit that was scheduled to open within a year. Each morning after my commute from South China, curator Laurie LaBar – now retired – would greet me with a list of names, events, and places to research. My time working on the internet and in the archives was interesting and well-spent. But some mornings after a heavy overnight rain, when I entered the complex through the atrium, I walked across wet floors, squishing up substantial water. Sometimes the library and the archives were closed. Staff members often told me that when the Cultural Building had been built, it was a classic “low bid” project.

In 1965, when the Maine State Museum was founded, Maine was the third-to-the-last state to establish such a facility. Its collection was initially housed in a wing of the State House. The Cultural Building opened in 1971 and was largely unchanged until the early 1980s. Following an “extensive review of the Museum’s artifact holdings,” as quoted in the 1985 publication *Made In Maine*, the museum staff decided to open a major exhibit focused on that subject. This effort required massive reconstruction of the building. Various pieces of old mills and other structures and huge sections of factory machinery were among the many new exhibits moved into the museum to create this beautiful show.

As for the archives, changes had taken place there as well.

As described by State Archivist Kate McBrien at an April 29 meeting of the Central Maine Heritage Council, hosted by the Kennebec Historical Society in Manchester, the archives are part of the Department of the Secretary of State. The agency is responsible for the collecting, preserving, storing, making available to the public, and, ultimately, destroying state documents and records. The archives can accept only state documents. According to McBrien, prior to the opening of the Cultural Building, these documents were kept in multiple places in Augusta and were essentially “swept off the floor” into places as unlikely as the Augusta Mental Health Institute, a former hospital treating the mentally ill on Augusta’s east side. She stressed that today, the archives display how the state functions.

The closure also affected the state library deeply, although enough of its collections were moved to a temporary site on State Street in Augusta to keep it available to the public to some degree. Retired state reference librarian Emily Schroeder has told me about times when the staff arrived to open the library, only to find water cascading into the space from the archive area located above it. As with the rest of the Cultural Building, the problems with leaks, asbestos, heating, ventilation, and air conditioning were rampant everywhere. But things are looking up.

Hopefully, following the reopening of the archives, the remainder of the refurbished Cultural Building again will be available for visitors to explore the great collections in the museum, borrow books from the library, and find interesting and vital information regarding their past and that of loved ones. Time will tell!



**Laborers work to prepare the Cultural Building’s inner entryway May 12 in Augusta in anticipation of the building reopening later this year.**

Photo by Rich Eastman

– by Bob Bennett



## Accomplishment, Crisis Mingle in Story of Arsenal Chief Michaelis

Otho Michaelis led an accomplished yet periodically tragic life, the end of which he spent in Augusta. He was unable to save his famous officer friend from disaster at the Battle of the Little Bighorn and was traumatized by his inability to save his daughter from drowning in a Kennebec Arsenal reservoir.

Army Maj. Otho Ernest Michaelis (1843-1890) came to this country from the German Confederation at a young age with his family and initially settled in New York City. He was born in Dessau on August 3, 1843, to Emil and Clara (Wolff) Michaelis. In the 1855 New York state census he's listed with his family in Ward 8, with twin sisters Ottily and Anna, age 11, and brothers Meyer, 4, and Wolfe, 2.



German-born Otho Michaelis spent the last years of his life as commander of the Kennebec Arsenal in Augusta.

Courtesy of S.G. Michael

He developed many interests – ordnance, electricity, meteorology, and chess, to name some of his strengths – and he proved to be an able consultant in those fields later on. Michaelis became an amateur chess master at 16 while still in New York. His connection to Augusta is rooted in the expertise he developed with ordnance.

He graduated as valedictorian of the 1862 class at the Free Academy of New York (now CUNY/City College of New York). Soon thereafter Michaelis joined the military, namely the 23rd New York National Guard, and participated in the Battle of Gettysburg. Next came the Signal Corps, where he waited for a commission. This was not easily obtained by a non-West Point graduate, but the Army in the western theater was more forgiving. He gained the support of the “Rock of Chicamauga,” Maj. Gen. George Henry Thomas, and from Gen. William T. Sherman. His career in ordnance took off from there.

He was promoted to first lieutenant on September 12, 1864; brevetted captain, March 13, 1865 for “faithful and meritorious services” (also from the letter noted above); captain, June 23, 1874; and major, February 28, 1889.

During his time at Watervliet, New York, he made and inspected cannon. Those meeting his standards bore his initials.

While at the Detroit Arsenal, on December 29, 1868, Michaelis married Kate Kercheval Woodbridge (1845-1926), only daughter of Maj. Francis Woodbridge and

Elizabeth Cass Kercheval. Kate Michaelis was known for her essays and short stories. More on their large family in a bit.

Eventually, Michaelis met and befriended Maj. Gen. George Armstrong Custer and joined him on the march to the Little Bighorn, begun at Fort Abraham Lincoln, in present-day North Dakota, on May 17, 1876. They had dinner together just a day or two before the ill-fated battle on June 25-26 that year at the Little Bighorn River in what was then Montana Territory.

Custer had been sent there only to do reconnaissance. He made the fatal decision to split his forces and was unprepared to be surrounded by Northern Cheyenne, Lakota, and Sioux. Once Michaelis reached the battlefield, he found his friend, naked, with two bullet holes: one in his left breast, and one in his left temple. Custer may never have seen the person or persons who shot him. Some of the soldiers were mutilated; most were not, including Custer, Jay Monaghan writes in his 1959 biography *Custer: The Life of General George Armstrong Custer*.

A letter up for auction in 2017 on Christie's website (Christie's Auction House, <https://www.christies.com>), written by Michaelis to his wife from the “Camp on the Little Bighorn,” dated June 28, 1876, sets the scene: “300 men and officers butchered ... there were over 3000 well armed, well organized Indian warriors. ... I cannot describe the horrors I have seen.” The letter continues: “The General's body is untouched – his expression serene and peaceful – of course perfectly naked ...”

Edward Settle Godfrey, a second lieutenant with the 7th U.S. Cavalry, also observed Custer's calm appearance. (For more from Godfrey, see “The Death of General Custer,” *Cavalry Journal*, XXXVI, No. 148, July, 1927, pages 469-471.) He also wrote: “Sent a lock of the General's hair off for his poor wife.” (Whoever purchased this letter, with a starting bid of \$40,000, must be quite pleased with their acquisition.)

Michaelis' colorful career progressed. In June 1881 professor Langley of the Allegheny Observatory requested his services for “important meteorological researches” in a letter to Brig. Gen. Steven Vincent Benet, the Army's chief of



The Archivist's Pen  
Emily Schroeder

ordnance, from the chief signal officer. Samuel P. Langley was a noted astronomer. The two joined forces and went on an expedition to California's Mount Whitney, resulting in topographical data helpful to railroad developers, among others.

Michaelis was a gifted technical writer as well. One of his more substantial papers was “The Heavy Gun Question” (*Transactions of the American Society of Civil Engineers*, Vol. 13, July 1884), which he read at the annual convention of the society on June 10, 1884. In it he states that the United States was not sufficiently armed; in fact, our coasts and cities were “utterly defenseless” (page 215); that foundries within our borders need to be supported and re-established; and that cast steel is superior in strength and reliability to cast iron. A second example of his writing skill is the article “The Army of Kukuanaland,” published in the *Journal of the Franklin Institute* in October 1889. Using British author H. Rider Haggard's novel *King Solomon's Mines*, he proceeds to describe an ideal defense system, giving the reader much food for thought with a clever and relatable premise. (Anyone would like to read either of these articles is welcome to do so at the Kennebec Historical Society.)

In addition to the American Society of Civil Engineers and the Franklin Institute, Michaelis was an Original Companion of the Military Order of the Loyal Legion of the United States. He was always busy, mentally and physically, all his life.

His wife, Kate Michaelis, was pretty busy herself. During their life together they brought nine children into the world:

- Guy Hagar Michaelis (1869-1887) died in Augusta at age 18 of consumption.
- Marion Field Michaelis (Mrs. Stanley Skinner) (1871-1942) died in Letchworth, England. She was a noted physicist and an assistant in the Harvard Astronomical Observatory.
- George Woodbridge Michaelis (1873-1927) attended and graduated from Cony High School in Augusta, became a lecturer at Harvard University, then head of a business organization in Boston. In 1905 he married Harriet Manley, the second daughter of Augusta's Joseph H. Manley. He changed his name and used his mother's maiden name in protest to the then-current German chancellor, who was named Georg Michaelis. *The Tampa Times* newspaper of August 15, 1917, carried a lengthy story titled “Michaelis of U.S. Throws Off Name – Does Not Want Name of German Chancellor – Glen Cove, L.I. Man Would Prefer Death to Being Identified With Teutons.” Wow!
- Francis Woodbridge (1875-1933) apparently agreed with brother George when it came to allegiance. An 1898 graduate of Harvard, and later of Harvard Law School, he has a gravestone that credits him with service as an infantry captain in 1917. He died in Falmouth and is buried in Falmouth's Pine Grove Cemetery.
- Margaret Michaelis (1877-1889) died in Augusta, drowning after falling through the ice in a reservoir on the Kennebec Arsenal property. Her father nearly died in an attempt to rescue her.
- Lt. Otho E. Michaelis (1879-1919) joined the Second U.S. Artillery and was cited for bravery during the siege of Santiago de Cuba during the Spanish-American War. He was a member of the Army's Company F, 16th Infantry, stationed at St. Louis, Missouri. His occupation was engineer of works. He died in an automobile accident on March 31, 1919, in Brunswick, Georgia.
- Kathleen Alfred Michaelis (1882-1964) was employed at the Bureau of Naval Aeronautics in Washington, D.C., from the end of World War I until 1930, then worked as house mother at St. Andrew's School in Middletown, Delaware, until 1941. She is buried in Augusta.
- Sidney Clare Morgan Michaelis (Mrs. Gilbert E. Fuller) (1885-1972) lived in Boston and died in Hastings, England.
- Helen Michaelis, born in 1887, lived only one day.

Otho Michaelis the father never fully recovered from the death of young Margaret, which contributed to his passing on May 1, 1890, of “nervous prostration,” as reported in the *Evening Star* in Washington, D.C., the following day (page 5). The *Maine Farmer* newspaper paid tribute to him with great respect, calling him “a gentleman of varied knowledge, and high accomplishments, and a writer of valuable treatises on subjects related to science and the art [of the] military.”

He was buried with eagle feathers from his time at the Little Bighorn, and full military honors in Forest Grove Cemetery, Augusta, alongside many family members.

Fellow Kennebec Historical Society member Harvey Lipman escorted me to the Kennebec Arsenal grounds recently to discuss Michaelis. This picturesque piece of property, across the Kennebec River from the State House, is marked by crumbling buildings designed to store ammunition and weapons. The major walked these grounds; his children played here. It's vital to honor this legacy. I wish I'd met Otho Michaelis. Don't you?



**This segment of an 1878 bird's-eye view sketch of Augusta shows how the Kennebec Arsenal looked shortly before Michaelis arrived there.**

Kennebec Historical Society collection



## First Methodist Foreign Missionary Hailed from Central Maine



In 1833, the Rev. Melville Cox (1799-1833), of Hallowell, became the first person to serve as a Methodist foreign missionary.

Images courtesy of Dale Potter-Clark

In October 1793, Methodist itinerant minister Jesse Lee, from Virginia, first preached in Hallowell, and a Methodist Society was formed there. Capt. Charles Cox and his wife, Martha, of Hallowell, were the first two converts to Methodism in that community. In 1799 Martha gave birth to twins, Melville and Gershom, and when a revival was held there in 1800, the couple had their sons baptized.

Both of the boys grew up to become Methodist ministers, and that career choice eventually would draw one of them to Africa.

At age 18, Melville Cox felt called to the ministry while on a walk alone in the woods near his home, and he began preaching by age 20. He became licensed to preach by the Kennebec District Conference in March 1821 and in 1822 received his first appointment as an itinerant preacher. In 1823 he served the Exeter, New Hampshire, circuit; and in 1824 he was assigned to Buxton, Maine.

Preaching on Methodist circuits was a tough existence in those days. Itinerants often slept on the cold ground at night on their travels between towns, and during the winter they sometimes awoke covered in snow. That life took its toll on Cox, who became stricken with tuberculosis, and he was forced to return home in 1825.

In 1827-28 Cox served in a supervisory position for the Kennebec circuit. During that time the Methodists decided they should build a church in Hallowell. Cox was chosen to find and secure land where a new structure would be raised, and on February 8, 1826, the Methodist trustees paid \$325 to Samuel and Martha Prescott, of Hallowell, for a parcel on what then was called Fifth Street. The church was later dedicated as "Cox Memorial" in honor of Cox. It still stands today at the southwest corner of Middle and Central streets.

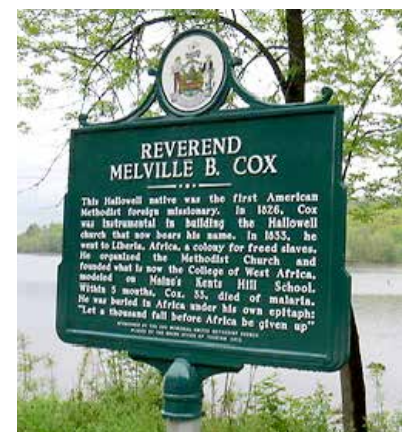
His next assignment was in Virginia in 1828, the same year he married Ellen Cromwell, of Baltimore, Maryland, and their daughter was born. Still in ill health, he gave up the ministry and worked as the editor of *The Itinerant*, a biweekly publication also known as *Wesleyan Methodist Visitor*, which was published in Baltimore in 1830-31. Then tragedy struck in 1830, when both his wife and his daughter died during a cholera epidemic. Soon afterward he followed his calling back to the ministry. His brother, Gershom Cox, became a Methodist minister about 1827 and for 40 years served churches throughout Maine and New Hampshire. Melville Cox's Methodist tentacles reached far beyond those of his brother, however, for in spite of his grief and ill health he became interested in foreign missions.

The Methodist Episcopal Church had formed a Missionary Society in 1819, but a suitable foreign missionary was not found until 1832, when Melville Cox agreed to serve a colony for freed American slaves in Monrovia, Liberia, making him the first overseas Methodist missionary. He boarded the ship *Jupiter* on November 6, 1832, bound for West Africa. Having already made plans for what he hoped to accomplish in Liberia, he wrote in his journal on the voyage, "In making up my mind and in searching for a passage to go out, I have followed the best light I could obtain. I now leave it all with God. ..."

Cox arrived in Liberia on March 9, 1833, but given his already weakened condition from tuberculosis he soon succumbed to malaria fever and died that July. In those five months, Cox had organized the Methodist Episcopal Church in Liberia and founded the College of West Africa, which he modeled after the Maine Wesleyan Seminary (Kents Hill School) in Readfield, where his brother was a trustee.

A historical marker standing on the bank of the Kennebec River in Hallowell describes the short but successful career of the Rev. Melville B. Cox. In 1835 the Rev. Gershom Cox wrote a 240-page biography about his brother titled *Remains of Melville B. Cox, Late Missionary to Liberia: With a Memoir*.

— by Dale Potter-Clark



This historical marker in Hallowell tells of the short but successful career of the Rev. Melville B. Cox.



## 23andMe Bankruptcy Shows Risk of Sharing Personal Data

In the last issue of the *Kennebec Current*, I suggested to a friend that she submit her DNA to Ancestry.com to determine if she had any Native American ancestry. The result indicated she did not; rather, she had 5% West African blood instead.

I neglected to state that in the past, I was not a big fan of using online DNA services, as they seemed to be too risky. I felt giving companies control of what is arguably your most sensitive personal



Rich Eastman



information was hazardous, as the information could be used against you, leaving you with little recourse if that information was in hostile hands. Even though most of the more popular DNA services, such as Ancestry.com, contain some language delivering a privacy guarantee that your personal information would not

be shared with third-party research companies, the policy clearly states, “without your explicit consent”; many people, when signing up, bypass these warnings and blindly approve such requests for permission without understanding the broad reach of what’s being given.

On March 23, the DNA company 23andMe filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy after a 2023 data breach in which attackers gained access to information from nearly 7 million customer profiles, resulting in the company settling a class-action lawsuit for \$30 million and CEO Anne Wojcicki stepping down. When 23andMe filed for bankruptcy, numerous state attorneys general, including Maine’s Aaron Frey, issued recommendations that the states’ 23andMe customers delete their DNA data and withdraw consent to third-party users, citing company instability while going through the bankruptcy process. Consumers of these online DNA services must realize that DNA data, no matter what the privacy guarantee, becomes an intangible asset that can be sold. In fact, if you take a close look at your company’s privacy guarantee, you may find a clause giving permission to sell your DNA information to any third-party company for research.

You can freeze your credit, change your password, or replace a stolen phone, but you can’t ever change your DNA. The news that 23andMe filed for bankruptcy should set off alarms. This company collected genetic information from over 15 million people, and yours could be sold as part of bankruptcy proceedings, absorbed into a merger, or leaked in a breach. If you’ve used 23andMe, Ancestry, MyHeritage, or a similar service, and want to delete your information, download your raw DNA file in case you need it for medical reasons. Save it to an encrypted drive, not a cloud service. Here’s what to do:

### 23andMe

- Log in to your 23andMe account on a desktop computer. Click your profile photo, then click “Settings.” Scroll to “23andMe Data” and click “View.”
  - Click “Delete Data,” and you’ll need to confirm it twice to delete your DNA data and profile.
  - You’ll get a confirmation email. Click the link to finalize.
- Want your saliva sample destroyed too? Email [privacy@23andme.com](mailto:privacy@23andme.com).

### Ancestry

- Log in to Ancestry on a computer. Click your name in the top right, then go to “Account Settings.” Click the DNA tab and select the test you want to delete.
- Click “Delete DNA Test Results and Revoke Consent.” Enter your password.
- To delete your account, return to “Account Settings,” scroll to the bottom, and click “Delete Account.” Click the link in the confirmation email.

### MyHeritage

- Send an email to [privacy@myheritage.com](mailto:privacy@myheritage.com). Make sure your email contains the language “formally requesting the complete and permanent deletion of all personal, account, and genetic data associated with my profile, as allowed under state data privacy laws.”

### FamilyTreeDNA

- To remove your genetic data (DNA matches, ethnicity estimates, etc.), contact FamilyTreeDNA customer service at (713) 868-1438 with your request. FamilyTreeDNA will remove all your genetic data within a reasonable time.
- Opting out of research: If you have opted in to FamilyTreeDNA research, your data will not be used in new research projects after you request it, but it may still be part of completed or ongoing research projects.

### 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](mailto:susan.super@yahoo.com).



# Arnold Expedition Veteran Lies Buried

**A**mong the people represented in the old Mount Vernon Cemetery off Winthrop Street in Augusta is a not-so-forgotten patriot of the American Revolutionary War whose contributions to the war effort occurred exactly 250 years ago.

William Dorr was born July 13, 1757, the 14th child of revolution-supporting parents, in Roxbury (now part of Boston), Massachusetts. His father, Ebenezer Dorr II, was a member of the Committee of Correspondence and Safety and helped organize the Roxbury militia. His older brother Ebenezer Dorr III, 10 years his senior, was one of the famed Sons of Liberty and acquainted with leading figures of the Revolution such as Samuel Adams, Dr. Joseph Warren, and Paul Revere. Family lore says that William Dorr participated in the Boston Tea Party at the age of 16, which is likely, considering his family's patriotic fervor and proximity to Boston.

As tensions with the British crown continued to mount in the 1770s, Dorr joined the Roxbury militia and served as a fifer in the company of Capt. Moses Whiting, in the regiment of Col. John Groaton, under the command of Maj. Gen. William Heath. His older brother Jonathan was a private in the same company.

Dorr was 17 when he responded to the alarm of April 19, 1775, as a minuteman in the Battles of Lexington and Concord, where his company engaged the British regulars at Menotomy (present-day Arlington). Heath described the encounter this way:

On descending from the high grounds in Menotomy, on to the plain, the fire was brisk. At this instant, a musket-ball came so near to the head of Dr. Warren as to strike the pin out of his ear lock. Soon after the right flank of the British was exposed to the fire of a body of militia which had come in from Roxbury, Brookline, Dorchester &c. For a few minutes the fire was brisk on both sides; and the British had here recourse to their field pieces again; but they were now more familiar than before. ...

In September 1775, while in Cambridge, Massachusetts, Dorr enlisted as a private for an expedition to Quebec under Col. Benedict Arnold. Dorr kept a journal of the difficult trek through the Maine wilderness from Cambridge to the fortress at what is now Quebec City. Some excerpts:

Sept 13th, Marched from Cambridge in the evening, and encamped that evening at Malden.

Sept 16th. In Newburyport, waiting for the vessels, getting ready to carry us to Kennebec.

Sept 19th. Early this morning weighed anchor with a pleasant gale, our colors flying, drums and fifes a playing, and the hills all around covered with pretty girls weeping for their departing swains. This night had like to have proved fatal to us. We were immediately all called upon deck, expecting every moment to be dashed in pieces against the rocks, but the wind fortunately freshen(ed), we got clear after several tacks, to the great joy of us all.

Sept 20th. Arrived in Kennebec River, rowed and sailed up against the wind and tide.

Sept 21st. Arrived at Fort Western, where we halted for some days, and here we were furnished with bateaux and provisions, for carrying us up the river. Continued here the 22, 23, 24th.

Oct 1st. Pushed up over rocks and shoals, where we were many times overhead in water, pulling the bateaux over, and arrived at the carrying place in the evening.

Oct 3rd. Pushed up 11 miles on our way. Capt. Hendrick's company of riflemen shot a young moose, which weighed about 200 lbs; but we had none of it, they being before us. This day we left all inhabitants and entered an uncultivated country, and a barren wilderness. The timber for the most part is birch, pine, and hemlock. Some places on the riverside there are pieces of ground, (with) large sugar trees.

Oct 24th. Our provisions growing scanty, and some of our men being sick, held a council and agreed to send the sick back, and to send Captain and 50 men forward to the inhabitants as soon as possible that they might send us some provisions. Accordingly the sick were set back and Capt Handchit with 50 men was sent forward. Before this Col Enos, with three captains and their companies turned back and took



**Representatives of local Sons of the American Revolution and Daughters of the American Revolution groups attend a 2023 ceremony at which a Sons marker was placed at the grave of Arnold Expedition member William Dorr at Mount Vernon Cemetery in Augusta.**

Images courtesy of Brian Dorr



# d in Augusta Cemetery

with them large stores of provisions and ammunition, being discouraged (as we supposed) by difficulties they met with. This day got forward nine miles. The water very rapid and many of our boats were upset and much of our baggage lost and provisions and guns.

Nov 1st. This morning started very early and hungry and little satisfied with our night's rest. Traveled all day very briskly, and at night encamped in a miserable situation. Here we killed a dog and we made a great feast without either bread or salt, we have been 4 or 5 days without any provisions, and we went to sleep that night, a little better satisfied. Our distress was so great, that dollars were offered for bits of bread, as big as the palm of one's hand

Nov 2nd. This morning when we arose, many of us were so weak, that we could hardly stand, and we staggered about like drunken men. However we made shift to get our packs on, and marched off hoping to see some inhabitants this night. A small stick across the road was sufficient to bring the stoutest to the ground. In the evening we came in sight of the cattle coming up the riverside, which were sent by Col. Arnold, who got in two days before. It was the (most) joyous sight that ever I beheld, and some could not refrain from crying for joy. We were told by the men, who came with the cattle, that we were twenty miles from the nearest inhabitants. Here we killed a creature, and we made noble feast and some of the men were so hungry, before the creature was dead, the hide and flesh were on the fire broiling.

In the failed attack at Quebec on December 31, 1775, American Maj. Gen. Richard Montgomery was killed, Arnold was wounded, and Dorr was "captured and held prisoner along with several hundred that same day." From his journal:

Dec 29, 30, 31st. This night prepared to storm the city in two different places. Gen. Montgomery with York forces on one quarter and Col. Arnold on the other hand. It began to thicken up towards night and snowed very much. We were ordered to be in readiness, and at 2 o'clock at night, we were mustered, and got all fit for scaling the walls and marched near the city, some with ladders, some with axes, and some with saws. Gen. Montgomery with his forces, on the one quarter and Col. Arnold on the other hand. Gen Montgomery was to throw three rockets into the air for a signal for each party to strike together. Accordingly, about 5 o'clock, in the morning, began the attack; but they could not get to the walls, but retreated back to their quarters, Gen. Montgomery and two leading officers were killed by the fire from the city. There were three or four false flashes made, for a signal to retreat, Col. Arnold did not receive them, but carried on the attack on his quarter, and got possession of their two-gun battery, and took 70 prisoners carried back, and the captains themselves then took the lead, and drove the enemy, until over powered by numbers and surrounded, we were obliged to surrender ourselves prisoners of war. During the attack Capt. Hendrick and Capt. Hubbard, with Capt. Morgan's first Lieutenant were killed. Likewise they set St. Roche all on fire. We were all put in the French convent, and there they gave us a gill of rum to drink and hard bread to eat.

While a prisoner, Dorr was officially enlisted into the Continental Army on January 1, 1776. Eight months later, he was released from prison, sailed down to New York, and was discharged from the Continental Army. His discharge record states:

About the tenth of October 1776, when by reason of health, having suffered much by fatigue and exposure, [Dorr] was discharged from the service [by the Commander in Chief] at Kings Bridge, in the State of New York.

Dorr married Jane Partridge on March 30, 1779, and moved to Hallowell with his family in October 1788. James W. North's 1870 book *The History of Augusta* mentions him in its genealogical notes:

In passing up the Kennebec with the expedition in 1775, he camped in Hallowell, one night, by the spring of water on Main street, near the Currier tavern. After the war he returned to Maine, stopping at Bath, where one or more of his children were born, and in Oct. 1788 came to Hallowell and settled at the Hook.



**Washington State resident and Sons of the American Revolution member Brian Dorr visits the gravestone of his fifth-great-grandfather William Dorr in 2023 in Augusta's Mount Vernon Cemetery.**

*Continued on page 10*

## Arnold Expedition Veteran

*Continued from page 9*

Dorr purchased land at The Hook (modern-day Sheppard's Point), where he ran a slaughterhouse. He served in his community as fishery inspector, tax collector, highway surveyor, fence viewer, school committee member, and hog reeve, a position that entails recovering a penalty for swine escaping from their enclosures.

In 1805, Dorr was appointed U.S. deputy customs inspector, a post that called for him to review entry of foreign ships into U.S. ports, appraise imported goods, and levy custom duties. Many years later, he would be fired from his government job indirectly by President Andrew Jackson, as reported in the *Brattleboro* (Vermont) *Messenger* on December 11, 1829:

Veteran Reform. William Dorr, a revenue officer at Bath, Maine, has been removed from office. He is one of the few surviving veterans who performed the celebrated march through the wilderness of Maine, previous to the attack upon Quebec, by Montgomery and Arnold. As that event took place early in the revolutionary war, the survivors are all aged men. We understand that one, and perhaps one more, is still living in this county. Mr. Benjamin Trim, who died some months ago at Dummerston, was one of the soldiers of that expedition.

Remarkably, of the brave and devoted band who performed that celebrated march, soon-to-be traitor Benedict Arnold was the leader, and future Vice President Aaron Burr was one of the private volunteers.

Mr. Dorr, it seems, had become too old for his station. President Jackson has a wonderful hostility to old men, as the holders of office. There is only one office of which he thinks an old and infirm man capable – that of president of the United States.

Dorr applied for a pension as a Revolutionary War soldier in June 1830. Under oath he states:

Schedule, of my whole estate and income, [ ] clothing and bedding excepted – vis no Real Estate and no personal property except a few articles of old house hold furniture, vis – 6 chairs – 3 tables – 1 old desk, 1 iron pot – 1 pot kettle, and a few articles of crockery wear and knives, forks, and spoons all not worth more than fifteen dollars.

I have no debts due me that can be collected, and I owe many formal debts which I am unable to pay. My family consists of my self, who by occupation am a leather dresser which I am wholly unable to pursue by reason of laments in my legs and have been so for more than twenty years. Jane my wife aged 70 years feeble & infirm and my grandson Ebenezer 7 years is healthy as common that since the 18th of March 1818. The following changes have been made in my property and situation – in October 1829 I was removed from the office of Inspector of the Revenue for the part of Bath Maine and on this herein appointed in my place, being destitute of property I now need the assistance of my country for support.

Dorr was awarded a pension of \$96 a year. He and wife Jane had nine children, their firstborn being named Richard Montgomery Dorr after the fallen general. Dorr died at the age of 83 on August 13, 1840. Jane Dorr died nine years later at age 89. They are buried together.

On October 1, 2023, a Sons of the American Revolutions grave marker was placed at William Dorr's grave to remember and honor his service in the cause of liberty.



*The author, Brian Dorr, is a retired firefighter who lives in Poulsbo, Washington. A five-times-great-grandson of William Dorr, he won election recently as president of the John Paul Jones chapter of the Washington state society of the Sons of the American Revolution.*

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## KHS Welcomes the Following New Members

Cheryl Belden — South China  
Cross Insurance — Augusta

Sharon Nadeau — Belgrade  
Rayna Leibowitz — Litchfield

*and continues to recognize ...*



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## Hallowell Historian Sam Webber

*Continued from page 1*

“Everybody knows him,” Hallowell City Clerk Lisa Gilliam said, adding that it wasn’t unusual for Webber to bump into some of his former students at City Hall.

“Hallowell has been fortunate to have Sam Webber as its longtime city historian,” Maine State Historian Earle G. Shettleworth Jr., himself a Hallowell resident, said via email in reaction to the news that Webber had stepped down. “Sam has spent decades collecting the history of the community and generously sharing it with all those who are interested. He is the model of a local historian.”

Webber has produced several written works about the city’s past, including a booklet on Hallowell schools of the 1870s; a memoir of his own childhood there, *Black Cat and Other Stories: Recollections of My Childhood in Hallowell, Maine during the 1940s*; and stories about other people who lived in the city, *Reflections & Recollections: Celebrating Hallowell’s 250th, 1762-2012*.

“We got all the older people in Hallowell to write about their life, because we knew that generation would disappear,” he said of the last of these efforts, on which he collaborated with the late Katy Perry.

Outside of Hallowell, Webber also was the first curator at Augusta’s Old Fort Western, performing that duty from 1973 to 1981. Asked how he managed to do that job while also teaching high school students, he said he had “a lot more energy” in those days.

He received Hallowell’s annual Citizen of the Year honor in 1996, the year he retired from Hall-Dale.

“I’m sure I’ll miss (teaching),” he told the *Kennebec Journal* at the time, adding prophetically, “But I’ll be doing a lot of other stuff around here. ... I saw the bright lights of the city, but I came back here. Hallowell is a community.”

Over the years, Webber also accumulated a vast personal trove of documents, letters, and other memorabilia associated with the cemetery, the shipbuilding business, the granite industry, letters former students wrote him from the Persian Gulf War, and other subjects. When he moved, he packed up most of it, intending to donate the collection eventually to the Hubbard library. It amounted to two-and-a-half pickup truck loads. Webber said Historic Hallowell committee member Bob McIntire gradually is doing most of the cataloging of it.

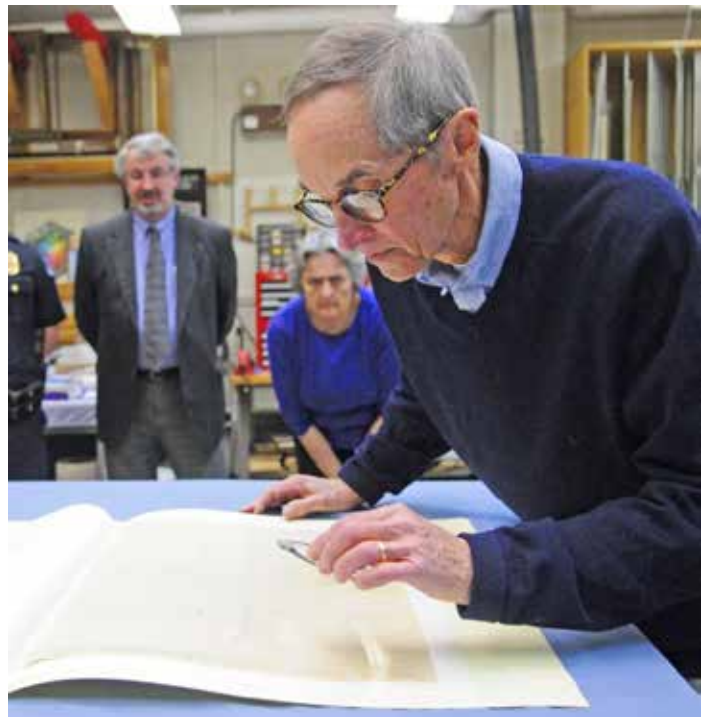
Annie Jirkovsky, who runs the library, got to know Webber when she moved to Hallowell in late 2017.

“Sam taught me everything I needed to know about the library and this town,” she said, adding later, “I would cite him as one of the reasons I have been so successful at a library director.”

Gilliam, the city clerk, said there are no prospects yet for finding a replacement for Webber as city historian.

Asked what advice he would give to whichever person eventually steps forward to assume that role, Webber responded, “Hopefully have a background in genealogy. Use city records as much as you can.”

— by Joseph Owen



Hallowell City Historian Sam Webber examines writing on the back of the city’s 1776 printed copy of the Declaration of Independence in 2015 at the State Museum. The document was put on display later that year on July 4 at Hallowell City Hall.

Courtesy of the *Kennebec Journal*

## Most Recent *Current* Issue Knocked it out of the Park



Just a quick note to say that your latest issue (April-May 2025) of the *Kennebec Current* is superb! I belong to many groups and receive their so-called newsletters, which have little to no substance. However, and I can’t say this about too many things I read, I read this issue cover to cover. Well written, and a nice variety that should please everyone! Kudos to your volunteer and obviously knowledgeable members! Well played!

Tim O’Brien, North Belgrade



## Courthouse Lawn Sundial Lightened Surveyors' Burdens

**A**t the old Kennebec County Courthouse in Augusta, the courtroom was where judges and juries took the measure of defendants' moral compass for the better part of two centuries.



History Through  
a Keyhole #18

Meanwhile, outside the building, an actual compass was used to gauge the accuracy of property boundaries in the county.

Drawing scant attention today, the device is the creation of Moses Bridgman Bliss, a Pittston inventor who applied his talents across a wide range of disciplines. It stands on the State Street side of the building, close to the Court Street intersection.

The courthouse fixture actually is a circumferentor, a surveyor's compass that measures horizontal angles. A 2009 report in the *Kennebec Journal* said it originally had a removable wooden cover, then a metal one fixed in place. That was removed in 2009 and replaced with the square, transparent acrylic cover that shields it now.

### Answer to Keyhole #18

**Q: What is this?**

**A: A sundial**

**Q: Where is it?**

**A: On the southern end of the front lawn of the Kennebec County Courthouse, located at 95 State Street in Augusta**

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

**A: The sundial, erected about 1870, helped surveyors determine the difference between magnetic north and true north.**



The Moses Bliss sundial rests on a pedestal in front of the Probate Court wing of the Kennebec County Courthouse.

Photo by Rich Eastman

The device also functions as a sundial, thereby earning a spot on the nonprofit North American Sundial Society's website ([sundials.org](http://sundials.org)). Its brass dial, 18 inches in diameter, rests atop a concrete pillar, marked in quarter hours with magnetic variations engraved at intervals of degrees. The Roman numerals denoting the hours are partly faded. The sundial was one of many erected at Maine courthouses from 1869 to 1871, the sundial society states on its website, citing research by Harold E. Nelson, senior geodesist at the Maine Department of Transportation's property office.

"Nelson said the monument would have been used by local land surveyors to test their compasses against true north," the society's report added.

Bliss (1798-1885) referred to his device as a "Standard Time-teller," according to Gardiner Public Library Director Dawn Thistle, who cited research on file in the library.

"He is likely best known in Kennebec County for his work as a surveyor and for the maps and plans he drew up in the 1830s-1850s," Thistle said in an email response to the *Kennebec Current* questions about the sundial. "He

created a survey map of Pittston lots in 1836 and an 1846 map of 'Gardiner with the Adjacent Village of Pittston' (now Randolph), as well as many plans referred to in deeds of the same time frame."

Bliss patented designs for "a moveable hay press" in 1827 and "a moveable cider mill and press" in 1829, according to Thistle. He also held various local elective offices, including county commissioner in the 1840s and 1850s, which made him partly responsible for upkeep of the courthouse land where the sundial later was erected.

His professional interests were hardly confined to Kennebec County, however. An advertisement placed in several editions of the *Kennebec Journal* in 1855 touts his services as a surveyor and land agent. It states, "Having traveled in the Western states and territories for several months the past season, he feels confident that the information he possesses, both in surveying and localities, will enable him to attend to any business entrusted to his care, with propriety, promptness and dispatch."

In addition, Bliss petitioned Congress to adopt a decimal system of weights and measures, foreshadowing today's use of the metric system in nearly every country but his own.

Bliss and his Hallowell-born wife, Paulina, moved around 1868 to Eau Claire, Wisconsin, where their daughter lived.

An item in an 1875 edition of the *Kennebec Journal*, reporting on Bliss returning to Maine to visit friends in Augusta, reminisces about the inventor having "contributed valuable scientific articles to the columns of the Journal" when he lived in Pittston. Bliss died at the age of 86 in Eau Claire when a wood shed roof, overtaxed by the weight of accumulated snow, collapsed onto him while he was gathering firewood, according to a story about the accident in *The Eau Claire News*.

"He was a most estimable [C]hristian gentleman and was held in the highest respect by those who knew him," the newspaper reported.

— by Joseph Owen 

## History Through a Keyhole — Puzzle 19

Three people submitted correct answers to our Puzzle 18 photo, which in our world constitutes an avalanche of responses. Gardiner Public Library Director Dawn Thistle, in an email, informed us about the courthouse sundial so comprehensively that we have half a mind (or so we've been told) to recruit her to supervise the "History Through a Keyhole" feature from now on. Unfortunately, she already has a demanding day job, and it provides her an actual paycheck.

For her correct response, Thistle wins a year's free membership in the Kennebec Historical Society. We also received an acceptable answer from Augusta resident Danny W. Howard, as well as from Winthrop attorney Howard Lake, who encouraged us via email to "keep the mysteries coming."

Your wish is our command, Mr. Lake. The scene in the photo at right is easily visible from a public road in Kennebec County. Readers who can identify it are asked to contact the *Current* and tell us three things: what the object is, where it is, and what its historic significance is.

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

The full answer and more information about the subject will be provided in the July-August issue of the *Kennebec Current*. Answers are due by June 30. Good luck.



## Local Historical Society Enshrines Town's Past in Vassalboro

Thanks to the collections and work of the Vassalboro Historical Society, the town of Vassalboro now has an entry in the Images of America book series from Arcadia Publishing.

Each chapter of the 2025 book is dedicated to a different area of the town, so you will not find a chronological history here. What you will find is an incredible array of photographs that transport you back in time to when Vassalboro was bustling with mills, schools, churches, and trolleys. (There also seemed to be a somewhat frequent habit of moving whole buildings via horse-powered transport contraptions.) Many of the captions that accompany the photos note the current state or ownership of properties today, as well as the family connections that exist.



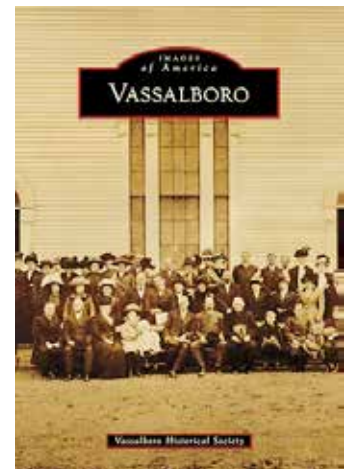
For the well-versed Vassalboro historian, the book might be a light jaunt into the past and a review of familiar information. For the genealogist, there might be connections (or photos) to spark new lines of inquiry. For the casual historian who loves "fun facts," there are tidbits such as the Starkey being the only variety of apple to originate in Vassalboro. For the Vassalboro resident, there's a plethora of insight into the past of sites you might drive by regularly.

One highlight of the book is the seemingly little things that give a town its character. In the present, capturing it may not seem important; but looking back generations on, a seemingly insignificant moment matters greatly to the larger story of a place.

For Vassalboro, the photo of the "Three Amigos" (page 24) jumped out as just such a moment in time. It shows VHS volunteers Paul Duplessie, David Bolduc, and Roy Brackett wearing horse collars, as though they were beasts of burden. Former longtime VHS President Kent London said the photo alludes to the fact that the trio – of whom only Bolduc is still living – set up and took down furniture for meetings, moved objects when necessary, fetched historical items from donors, painted buildings, supervised the removal or demolition of other buildings, and performed other tasks for the society.

"All three of them were absolutely meticulous," London said.

While there is much to be learned from the pages of *Vassalboro*, it is these kinds of photos that will make you stop and appreciate the human history saved in the pages. *Vassalboro* is available for purchase at the Vassalboro Historical Society for \$20, or online at [www.imagesofamerica.com](http://www.imagesofamerica.com).



– by Jamie Logan



## Around Kennebec County

### ALBION

The town of Albion has given its annual Spirit of America Foundation Award to the **Albion Book Committee** and the **Albion Bicentennial Committee**, both of which helped the town celebrate the 200th anniversary last year of changing its name to “Albion” (*Kennebec Current*, September-October 2024). The award was presented at the March 15 town meeting, according to the Albion Historical Society’s Facebook page.

### VASSALBORO

Former **Vassalboro Historical Society** board member David Theriault, wife Linda, and son Aaron and will perform a free violin-and-piano concert from 3 to 5 p.m. May 18 at the society’s museum, located at 327 Main Street in East Vassalboro.

Ray Caron, a Winslow historian, plans to give a **Vassalboro History Society** lecture from 3 to 5 p.m. July 20 about the history of China Lake, focusing on the era from 1890 to 1920. The event is scheduled for 3 to 5 p.m. at the society’s museum in East Vassalboro.

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

### WATERVILLE

Steve Thompson will give a presentation for the **Waterville**

**Historical Society** at 6:30 p.m. May 22 at the **Redington Museum** about Nelson, Waterville’s famous racehorse. He will also speak about Nelson’s owner, Charles Horace Nelson, and Waterville’s three trotting parks. Doors open at 6 p.m. The museum is located at 62 Silver Street in Waterville.

Speaker Dennis Harrington is scheduled to give a lecture June 12 at the **Redington Museum** on Bowdoinham native Robert Brown Hall (1858-1907), an internationally recognized composer, conductor, and cornet soloist who founded the Waterville Military Band in the 1890s. Doors open for the free **Waterville Historical Society** event at 6 p.m., and the presentation begins at 6:30. The state of Maine celebrates R.B. Hall day by gubernatorial proclamation each year on the last Saturday in June.

Scott Holst, a retired Waterville Fire Department captain, will speak July 10 at the **Redington Museum** about his new book, *History of the Waterville Fire Department*, which developed from Holst’s searches through old records, log books, and private collections. The book will be available for purchase that evening. Doors open for the free **Waterville Historical Society** event, which will feature displays of firefighting equipment, at 6 p.m. The presentation begins at 6:30.

### WINTHROP

Bob Pelletier, a longtime Winthrop resident and Kennebec Historical society member, and a retired former schools administrator, spoke to the **Winthrop Maine Historical Society** on April 10 about how the town’s residents of today can understand and appreciate their predecessors of the mid-1800s. While Pelletier’s lecture is over, the society recorded it and has posted it on its YouTube channel. It can be found here: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aS8cG\\_\\_9kgg](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aS8cG__9kgg)

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## 🌿 In Memoriam 🌿

**John R. Stewart**, 80, of Winthrop, an electrical engineer and longtime Kennebec Historical Society member, died April 27 at his home. A graduate of the University of Maine who grew up in Old Town, he worked for the city of Bangor’s engineering department, for Bangor Hydro Electric Company, and for Central Maine Power Company in Augusta. His obituary described him as a “gifted woodworker, painter, carver, blacksmith, and fabricator.” His survivors include wife Enga, also a KHS member; two sons; several grandchildren; and dozens of foster children.

**Philip Tiemann**, 99, a member of the Kennebec Historical Society for 17 years, died March 27 at his home in Augusta. He grew up in New Jersey and Vermont and was a veteran of both World War II and the Korean War, serving in the latter as a tank platoon leader in the 89th Tank Battalion, 25th Infantry Division. He remained on active duty until 1966, then in the Army Reserve until 1978, ending his service as a lieutenant colonel. He earned a Bachelor of Science degree in engineering from Norwich University, in Northfield, Vermont. After his active-duty years, he worked for the Maine Department of Transportation. He helped the society conduct many of its sales of used books over the years. His late wife, Donalda, and their daughter Maryann, who died in February, both also were longtime KHS members. His survivors include four other children, nine grandchildren, and 12 great-grandchildren.



## Upcoming Programs

### June: “Silent Films in Maine, Part III”

Film restorer and historian Ed Lorusso returns to the Kennebec Historical Society lecture June 18 with a third dose of Edgar Jones’ silent black-and-white “North Woods” movies.

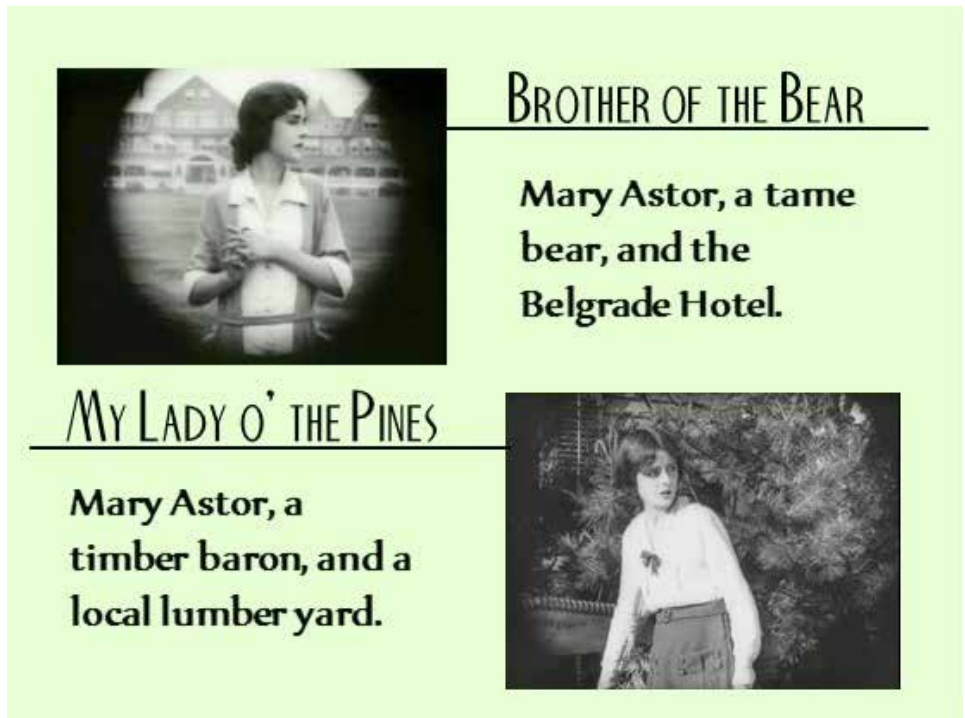
His presentation will feature the films *Brother of the Bear* and *My Lady o’ the Pines*, both released in 1921 and both starring Mary Astor, who then was a teenager beginning an acting career that lasted for more than four decades, including a star turn with Humphrey Bogart in the 1941 movie *The Maltese Falcon*. Lorusso drew appreciative KHS crowds twice last year for showings of four other Jones films.

All the films shown in the lecture series were made in the period from 1919 to 1921, when Augusta was home to a movie production company founded by Jones and local businessmen. Jones came to the area to use the Kennebec River and the surrounding lakes and forestland to capture local writer Holman Day’s stories on film in all four seasons. He brought in a company of actors and a film crew, who all lived together at 129 Sewall Street in Augusta; and he used locals as extras in the films, which premiered at the Colonial Theater.

Six of the dozens of two-reel films from this era are known to survive. Four are archived at the Library of Congress in various collections, and British Film Institute donated a pair to Northeast Historic Film in Bucksport.

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

The Kennebec Historical Society presentation is free to the public (donations are gladly accepted) and will take place at 6:30 p.m. Wednesday, June 18, at Augusta City Center, located at 16 Cony Street in Augusta. If you have questions about the program, call Scott Wood, executive director, at 622-7718.



Poster courtesy of Ed Lorusso

### July: “Tracking Down Genealogical Documents in the Digital Age”

Deeds from 1793 and baptismal records from 1837 haven’t changed, but how we get access to those records has changed dramatically in the last 20 years. In addition to increased access to digitized records for family and local history, new tools have been developed to aid in finding and analyzing relevant research documents.

B.J. Jamieson, the Kennebec Historical Society’s speaker for July, will describe a few of the most useful tools in her lecture.

Jamieson, an Augusta resident who worked for several years as a genealogy librarian at the Maine State Library, has been tracing her ancestors for almost 30 years, making bonus trips to Scotland and Ireland for research. She also has helped others track down their wayward relatives for almost as long. Along the way, she’s acquired graduate degrees in library science and genealogy to improve her research skills.

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

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**Telephone:** (207) 622-7718

**Web site:** [www.kennebechistorical.org](http://www.kennebechistorical.org)