

Kennebec Current

"Success is not final, failure is not fatal: It is the courage to continue that counts." — Milton Bradley, board game guru (see page 6)

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July–August 2025

Ticonic Bridge: A Tale of Two Communities, Two Centuries



Eastbound traffic, lined up on newly rebuilt bridge lanes, waits for the traffic lights to change July 7 on the Winslow end of the Ticonic Bridge. The south side of the bridge, at left, is expected to remain blocked until late 2026 and under construction until 2027.

Photo by Teddy Faugno

Clement M. Given's book *A Chronology of Municipal History and Election Statistics, Waterville, Maine, 1771-1908* calls that privately financed wooden toll bridge an important step in the development of the Waterville area.

"It was of great convenience to the farming community and was one of the principal factors in making Waterville a prosperous business center," the book states.

One of the bridge's many shareholders was Asa Redington, who seven years earlier had built his stately home on

Continued on page 3

Museum Shop Back in Business After Turbulent Start of Season

The Monmouth Museum gift shop is on the right track again after its regular warm-weather business hours got off to a rocky start – literally.

The shop and the museum's six other buildings are open 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Wednesdays and Saturdays and 1 to 5 p.m. Thursdays and Fridays until the end of September. The museum couldn't stick to that schedule in June, however. The installation of a new water main disrupted traffic on Main Street, where the museum complex is located, so it was open only a few days that month, according to volunteer Orva Appese.

One day, excavation in the street dislodged a rock, which sprang out of a hole.

"Somehow, it came through the window," Appese said, indicating the front of the museum gift shop. She added that the broken pane had been the original glass. The cost of replacing it was \$420.

The water main trench is filled in now and things are back to normal, but that's temporary. Workers still need to dig up the street later this summer to hook individuals houses and businesses up to the new line.

The museum plans to be open this year until September 27, when the town will host its annual Applefest celebration. 🐼



Monmouth Museum volunteer Orva Appese sizes up a repaired window July 5 in front of the museum's shop and ticketing office on Main Street in Monmouth.

Photo by Joseph Owen

Fuller Fund Drive Already Tops 2024 Total



Executive Director's
Note
Scott Wood

Can you believe we have already celebrated the Fourth of July? Seems like the older I get, the faster time moves! Better hurry and enjoy the warm weather, as we will be thinking about jackets, boots, and shoveling you-know-what soon.

Moving almost as fast is the society's 2025 Moira H. Fuller Annual Fund campaign. We continue to collect donations to help the society keep up with operating costs at our headquarters, the Henry Weld Fuller Jr. House, located at 107 Winthrop Street in Augusta. Already the society has collected more in the first six months of this year in donations and grant money than in all of last year. With some outstanding pledges and half a year left, KHS

is hopeful of achieving the 2025 budgeted goal of \$80,000.

The Development Committee has suggested increasing this year's goal to account for the shortfall of roughly \$17,000 in 2024 fundraising. The good news is that over the years, the Board of Directors wisely set aside operating funds in a savings account, which allowed the society last year to function without interruption, but now the funds used to meet the deficit need to be replenished.

Each year, KHS has a lofty Moira Fuller Fund goal of getting 100% participation from its members; and after reviewing the list, I have seen some names who have given for the first time in years and others who have stretched their annual donation. These efforts do not go unnoticed and are much appreciated. If you have not donated or made a pledge to the MFF, I ask that you consider giving something to increase the percentage of those helping KHS meet our increasing expenses. As they say, many hands make light work!

Upcoming KHS events include the Kennebec Classic tennis tournament (see page 7), the "free to attend" July and August monthly programs, and the (dare I say) fall KHS Book Sale happening on September 4, 5, and 6. The KHS annual meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, September 17, and following will be a presentation by Mac Smith about the Great Fire of 1947.

Finally, I encourage you to stop by to receive a brief tour of the historic Henry W. Fuller Jr. house, for some entertaining chitchat, or maybe even a cup of coffee. If you have any questions or would like to schedule a tour, please call me at the society at (207) 622-7718.



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Total membership:

578 on July 8
Life members: 266

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Photo by Joseph Owen

Kennebec Current

Our 174th Issue

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

Ticonic Bridge

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Silver Street. That house now is the home of Waterville Historical Society and its Redington Museum. Two other shareholders were Reuel Williams, of Augusta, and Peleg Sprague, of Hallowell, both of whom were in the Legislature at the time and later became U.S. senators.

The bridge, which cost \$6,500 (equal to about \$215,000 in 2025), was completed and opened in 1824.

“The bridge was of wood throughout and was substantially built but was not high enough and did not prove strong enough to withstand the severe strain of heavy spring freshets,” Giveen’s book reports, using a now-archaic term for floods, “and was in constant need of repair.” The flood of March 1826 washed the entire bridge away, but a replacement was built immediately. A flood in 1836 – the worst on record up to that time – damaged that bridge severely. The owners did not fix it fully for several years. It sustained flood damage again in 1855.

Dependence on the motivation and solvency of private investors led to repeated efforts in the 1850s and 1860s to have government take control of the bridge and make it toll-free, resulting in a rancorous political climate. That contributed to, among other things, the secession of the western part of Waterville, which eventually became today’s town of Oakland.

The public-bridge movement gained critical momentum when another flood carried the Ticonic Bridge away again on October 5, 1869.

“Augusta, fearing danger, sent a crew upriver by train, who grappled and captured the bridge at Vassalboro,” recalls *The Centennial History of Waterville, Kennebec County, Maine*, a 1902 tome edited by the Rev. Edwin Casey Whittemore, thus adding “bridge wrangler” to history’s list of unlikely temporary occupations.

On the following January 21, according to Giveen, Gov. Joshua Chamberlain signed a bill authorizing the Kennebec County commissioners to build a free wooden bridge linking Waterville and Winslow, but requiring those two communities to pay for it. Local leaders objected and presented other options to the Legislature, which ignored them.

“Notwithstanding the opposition, the bridge was built and opened to travel Dec. 1, 1870,” Giveen states. It cost \$32,000 (about \$785,000 in 2025). Only 13 years later, it was deemed unfit for travel, so temporary repairs were made.

In 1884, the two communities agreed to finance and build the first iron bridge at the site. It opened for travel on March 17, 1885.

The arrival of trolleys prompted the construction of an arched trolley bridge adjacent to the Ticonic Bridge in the first decade of the 20th century. When a large block of ice slammed into the bridge during a March 1936 flood, two truss spans collapsed into the river. With the short-lived age of trolleys over by then, a reconstruction project widened the number of travel lanes for motor vehicles to four for the first time. The bridge was widened again in 1970 to accommodate an increase in traffic. By the 2020s, according to the Maine Department of Transportation, the hybrid bridge had outlived its usefulness.

Cianbro, a corporation based in Pittsfield, is building the latest version of the Ticonic Bridge. The new span will feature 6-foot-wide sidewalks on each side and 5-foot bicycle shoulders, according to the company’s website. A Federal Highway Administration grant is funding about half of the cost.

The bridge, expected to be finished by May 2027, is “designed to last a century,” according to Cianbro’s website.



— by Joseph Owen



A trolley crosses the Ticonic Bridge from Waterville to Winslow in the early 20th century.

Photo courtesy of the Maine Historic Preservation Commission

Pottsville – Chelsea's “Sin City”

Hard though it may be to believe, the town of Chelsea was home to a small settlement that came to be known for bootlegging liquor and – possibly – wild women. Let's go back to 1890, when the Kennebec Central Railroad began its life as a short line between Randolph and Togus, transporting passengers and coal. (See “Historic Trailhead,” page 12.) Add a secluded area between Route 226 and the railroad track, plus Prohibition, and the result was fertile territory for nefarious activity. Once in Chelsea, look for the Windsor and Hankerson roads intersection on Route 226, then head north. Go past Hillcrest Drive, and Pottsville Road was about 800 feet farther on the left.

The August 27, 1901, *Daily Kennebec Journal* announced that the town was looking for bids to build the road, which was to be 196 rods long. (A rod equals 16.5 feet, so the total would be 3,234 feet.) Most of the adjacent property belonged to Orrin Ricker. He was active in town business, according to Chelsea town reports: liquor agent, 1908 and 1912; school committee, 1921 and 1929. He provided wood and repaired schoolhouses in 1923 and worked on the town's highways and bridges during the same period. Helen C. Taylor in her *Chelsea, Maine History* (1996), stated that he was a bootlegger,



The Archivist's Pen
Emily Schroeder



This map of Chelsea, from the cover of *Chelsea, Maine History: Volume 1*, shows where the Pottsville community existed.

Courtesy of Chelsea Historical Society

ironically, along with his neighbors. Pottsville existed on both sides of the track, and it had its own platform. The Chelsea station was about two miles away, toward Randolph. There were only a handful of houses, each one providing liquid refreshment. Some occupants were old soldiers who had left the veterans' home at Togus, willingly or not. The censuses of 1920 and 1930 list the more stable residents. In 1920 we find five individuals, two of those owning their homes. By 1930, there were two individuals and three families. The Wood family of six people was renting, while the Sleepers (four people), the O'Connells (husband and wife), Mr. Dennehy, and Mr. Dingley owned their dwellings. Others came and went.

Another family in the area was the Obens (or Obans). Henry Sr.'s granddaughter was Bea (Beatrice) Campbellton, who, despite her unhappy childhood in Pottsville, survived until the venerable age of 100. She died on December 31, 2016. Her legacy was an account of life in Pottsville that we can read, an article published by the *Kennebec Journal* on November 12, 1984 (“Pottsville – Chelsea's ghost town hides memories of home brew and ...”) Campbellton's parents were Sarah and Henry Jr. She said she didn't realize her father was an alcoholic until years later. He worked on the railroad and shoveled coal. He believed in physical punishment, and she suffered the consequences.

Her savior was grandmother Silna Oben. Henry Sr. was poor and unable to provide for his family. In a state of drunkenness, he hanged himself on March 9, 1912, four years prior to Bea's birth. Bea reported that one could find “home brew and wild women” in Pottsville, which served what was then called the National Soldiers Home, at Togus. The soldiers would walk the track to get liquor after their paychecks came on the first of the month. If they had too much, they slept it off on a nearby knoll known as Pine Island or Drunkard's Roost. She also informed us that the road led to “Old Man Potts' place.” She was likely referring to John Potts, who was a resident of the soldiers' home at one time. Libby Doak, a Chelsea Historical Society member, found that Potts owned half an acre on the west side of the tracks, as of 1896. He was born in England in 1822; enlisted as a soldier on October 3, 1862; and served in Company A of the 12th Rhode Island Infantry. He was discharged on July 29, 1863, and admitted to Togus in 1885. He passed away, with no effects, on May 5, 1900, and is buried at Togus.

In the quest to find arrest records for Pottsville, this reporter found one incident, in the March 23, 1914, *Daily Kennebec Journal* (page 3): “A Search and Seizure by Sheriffs.” Three deputies had arrived at Nellie Bollier's home two days prior and

“found sufficient evidence to cause the arrest of the proprietor. ...” She was arraigned before Will C. Atkins, municipal court judge in Gardiner, and found guilty of “maintaining a nuisance.” Nellie couldn’t come up with the \$100 fine and was sent to jail for 60 days. Two men were arrested as well, being drunk, and paid their fines. A third was encouraged to leave town and promised to do so immediately. Surely there were many more events similar to this; if only the records had been preserved.

Time marched on. The last Kennebec Central train ran on June 29, 1929. Contracts for coal transportation for Togus were awarded to trucking operations. The last two locomotives went to Wiscasset in 1933. Prohibition ended that same year. Services offered in places like Pottsville weren’t needed. Chelsea voted to discontinue the road in 1941, and all the houses were gone, either by fire or neglect, by the 1950s.

Chelsea resident and Chelsea Historical Society member Mary Street walked the road a few years ago. She could get through, but she was slightly hindered by a beaver dam. The property is now privately owned.

Many towns and cities have, or had, interesting neighborhoods of their own; how about yours?



KHS to Consider Bylaws Changes at September 17 Annual Meeting

The Kennebec Historical Society’s annual meeting will begin with a potluck supper at 5 p.m. September 17 at South Parish Congregational Church, located at 9 Church Street in Augusta, followed at 6 p.m. by the society’s annual business meeting, consideration of bylaws changes, and election of members of the board of directors. Guest lecturer Mac Smith is expected to speak about his book on Mount Desert Island’s devastating fire of 1947, beginning around 6:30 p.m. (See page 15.)

For details about the potluck supper, please contact Anne Cough, either by email at acough60@yahoo.com or by phone at 582-2823.

The Nominating Committee had not completed its recommendations for board candidates by press time.

Changes to the society’s bylaws in Article VIII, Committees of the Society, Section 1, D, and Article VIII, Committees of the Society, Section 7, will be proposed.

Current KHS Bylaw, Article VIII, (Section 1, D) Committees of the Society:

D. The Executive Committee shall review, at least annually, the performance and effectiveness of the Director, and shall recommend the compensation and benefits of the Executive Director.

Proposed Change:

D. The Executive Committee shall review, at least annually, the performance and effectiveness of the Executive Director, **taking into consideration the Personnel Committee’s recommendation.**

Current KHS Bylaw, Article VIII, (Section 7) Committees of the Society:

7. Personnel Committee. The Personnel Committee shall recommend policies relating to the recruitment, compensation, benefits, and retention of Society employees, and volunteers, other than the Director, and all employee policies and programs.

Proposed Change:

7. Personnel Committee. The Personnel Committee shall recommend policies relating to the recruitment, compensation, benefits, and retention of Society employees, and volunteers, **including** the Executive Director, and all employee policies and programs.

Anyone who has questions about the two proposed bylaw changes is encouraged to contact Executive Director Scott Wood at 622-7718 or drop by the historical society’s headquarters, located at 107 Winthrop Street in Augusta.



KHS Welcomes the Following New Members

Jonathan Gammans — Sidney

Chantal Jennings — East Winthrop

Willis & Donna Young — Augusta

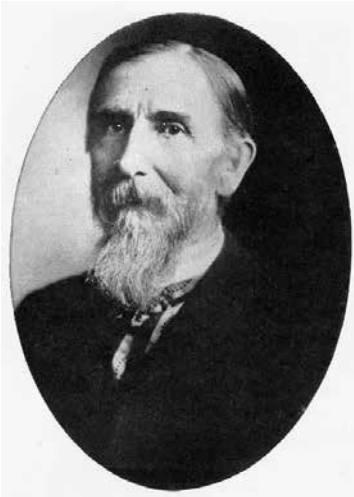
and continues to recognize ...



Kennebec Current principal sponsor

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Meadow Park Development
O’Connor GMC

Vienna Boy Milton Bradley Gained Fame as Board Game Guru



Vienna-born Milton Bradley achieved fame as the creator and maker of board and card games, action puzzles, educational materials for school students, and more.

Image courtesy of the Vienna Historical Society

How many times did you play Candy Land with your siblings or friends when you were young? As you got older, you may have played The Game of Life as you sat around the table after a family meal. If so, did you ever notice the “MB” logo on the box? “MB” stands for the multi-million-dollar Milton Bradley Company, which became a name familiar to just about everyone after 1860.

Milton Bradley hailed from Vienna, in Kennebec County, where he was born November 18, 1836, in his parents’ home. He was the only child of Lewis and Fannie (Lyford) Bradley, whose parents had migrated from Rockingham County, New Hampshire, to Vienna (in the case of Lewis Bradley’s family) and Mount Vernon (the Lyfords) between 1799 and 1804. Lewis Bradley had built the house in which his son was born.

Milton Bradley was his parents’ only child. The couple saw to it that he was raised in a hard-working, Christian household. They disapproved of dancing, drinking alcohol, or gambling; but they did enjoy playing chess and checkers with their son, and they read to him in the evening. Education was important to Lewis Bradley, who taught his son mathematical concepts by using objects such as apples. The boy was a quick learner. His father’s emphasis on education and their pleasure in reading and game playing came to serve Milton well as an adult.

Lewis Bradley was a carpenter. He also ran a potato starch factory until the potato blight hit in the early 1840s, when he was forced to close his business. He moved his family from Maine to Lowell, Massachusetts, in 1847, and from there to Haverhill. Despite changing schools more than once, Milton Bradley was strong in science and mathematics, thanks to his father’s tutoring, and he also became a talented artist and draftsman. He studied technical drawing at the Lawrence Scientific School at Cambridge, Massachusetts, earning money to help pay his tuition by giving drawing lessons and selling stationery and writing supplies to his fellow students. Because of his parents’ financial limitations, he left Lawrence after a year and went to work as a draftsman. That led to his interest in lithography.

Milton Bradley was living in Springfield, Massachusetts, and working for a railroad company as a lithologist when he got the idea for his first board game, The Checkered Game of Life. He was 24 years old in 1860 when he decided to put all his energy into making board games and established his own company. It was reorganized in 1884 and named the Milton Bradley Company. His first venture was to New York City, where he readily sold the hundreds of Life games he had produced himself to newsstand, stationary, and department store merchants. After that, his game quickly became a sensation. By 1861 he had manufactured 40,000 sets of The Checkered Game of Life.

In 1869 Bradley heard a lecture about a new concept of education for 5-year-olds, called “kindergarten.” His interest was sparked and he began to champion the kindergarten philosophy of learning through play. Before that, young children had been taught through memorization of facts and numbers. Bradley began producing materials that could be used in kindergarten classrooms, such as crayons, watercolor paints, and colored paper. By the end of the 19th century, his company was producing about everything a school could need, including desks, chairs, tables, chalkboards, paper, paints, educational toys, and games.

Bradley, often called the “father of board games,” continued to invent and make toys, games, and school supplies until he died on May 30, 1911, in Springfield. In 2006 he was entered into the National Inventors Hall of Fame.

Bradley’s birthplace in Vienna is still standing. The Vienna Historical Society bought it in 2009 – from the Waite family,



Ingrid Grenon, president of the Vienna Historical Society, indicates where repairs have been made to the foundation of the Milton Bradley birthplace.

Photo by Dale Potter-Clark

after whom the house is named – and since then has worked to preserve it, as well as the history of Vienna and Mount Vernon. The circa 1832 Cape Cod-style house still retains many of its antique interior features, including the granite and rubble stone foundation.

The cellar recently created a big problem for the society. A member discovered that a foot of water had leaked inside. Further inspection revealed its walls had shifted enough to endanger the stability of the entire structure. “We were told by a contractor that we were lucky the first floor didn’t cave in on us,” said Ingrid Grenon, the society’s president.

The estimated cost for doing all the interior and exterior work is \$200,000.

The society has secured a contractor who specializes in restoring historic structures and currently has \$67,000 available to start the work, of which \$32,000 is dedicated to the cellar’s interior. The rest will be used for excavation and installation of a drainage system around the building’s exterior to prevent further leaks, according to Grenon.

“This house is an important part of Vienna’s history, and we are going to do our best to save it,” she said.

Milton Bradley’s birthplace is located at the intersection of Route 41 and Bradley Road in Vienna village. The building is open to the public this summer from 10 a.m. to noon Saturdays or by appointment.

The society plans to host an outdoor flea market there from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. Saturday, August 23, when visitors to the house are welcome. Anyone who wants to set up an outdoor booth there is welcome to do so at no charge, although donations are accepted. For details, contact Ingrid Grenon at (207) 293-8048 or shier60@verizon.net. Donations supporting the restoration of the Milton Bradley birthplace can be mailed to Vienna Historical Society, c/o Ingrid Grenon, P.O. Box 177, Mount Vernon, ME 04352.

Photo by Joseph Owen



The Milton Bradley birthplace in Vienna, known as the Waite House, stands at the west corner of Town House Road (Route 41) and Bradley Road in Vienna. It is owned by the Vienna Historical Society.

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

Kennebec Classic Taking Tennis Players’ Registration



For its seventh annual outing, the Kennebec Classic tennis tournament has deployed a secret weapon to attract participants: a new logo. While the event, sponsored by the Kennebec Historical Society and the Central Maine Tennis Association, has been growing continuously from year to year without any special gimmicks, such new ideas are always welcome.

Registration is now open for the three-day weekend event, which is scheduled to divide its competition between Augusta and Waterville. Open doubles for ages 40 and older will take place August 8 at the Melendy Tennis Courts, located behind the Buker Community Center in Augusta. Open A-level singles competition will occur August 9 at the North Street courts in Waterville, while B-level singles will take place the same day at the Melendy courts in Augusta. Finally, on Sunday, open doubles matches will be played on the North Street courts, while B-level doubles will occupy the Melendy courts.

Registration fees — \$16 for singles and \$24 per doubles team — are payable at the event sites. Proceeds from the event will help support the day-to-day activities of the Kennebec Historical Society.

Requests for more details should be addressed to: centralmainetennis@gmail.com

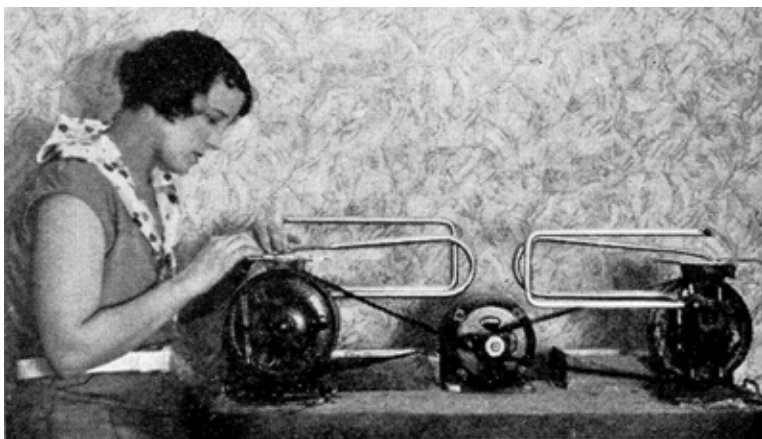


To register for the Kennebec Classic, scan the QR code above.

Phyllis McLellan, Kennebec County Puzzle Crafter

The Great Depression of the 1930s brought an unemployment rate of 25 percent nationwide, plus even more lost income because businesses cut workers from full-time to part-time hours. One result was a craze for jigsaw puzzles that started around 1930 and peaked in 1933.

People could no longer afford to go out for dinner and a show. Instead, they bought or rented these pastimes for an inexpensive evening's entertainment at home. They could choose from an ample supply of puzzles. Many of the unemployed turned to making jigsaw puzzles in home workshops to supplement their diminished incomes.



Phyllis McLellan, then of Gardiner, cuts jigsaw puzzles at her kitchen table in 1931

Images courtesy of Anne D. Williams

Phyllis McLellan is a good example of these small-scale entrepreneurs. She was born in Randolph on March 18, 1907, and spent most of her adult life in Gardiner. The Kennebec Historical Society recently acquired one of her jigsaw puzzles, courtesy of a donation from Judith Stackpole, a longtime member and supporter.

McLellan's story, written in June 1931 from her home at 85 Highland Avenue in Gardiner, appeared in the booklet *What Others Have Done with "Delta" Tools in Hobby, Spare Time and Production Work*. She wrote:

I am twenty-four years old and believe I am one of the youngest puzzle manufacturers.

The last of December, 1930, I purchased one of your American Giant Scroll Saws from Edward & Walker Co., Portland, Me. The first of January, 1931, I

started to make jig-saw puzzles. I am at the present time supplying twenty of the leading gift shops in Maine. My husband is a salesman, and is away most of the week. I make my puzzles in spare time.

I found out that I could not keep up my orders with one machine, so I purchased another one of your American Giant Scroll Saws from Edward & Walker Co., Portland, Me., a few weeks ago. My husband helps with this machine over the week-end. I intend to hire a girl to use this other machine, so I may do twice the business. All of my puzzles are made in my kitchen, which the snapshot I have enclosed shows.

Starting January 1st to June 3rd, I have sold \$979.91 worth of puzzles. After paying for plywood 1/8 inch thick, freight, prints, signs, boxes, sandpaper, glue, labels for boxes and saws for machine, there is a clear profit of \$775.93, which is an average of \$35.26 per week. I still have large orders to make up for last of June and first of July delivery, not figured in on this amount.

A weekly profit of \$35.26 was remarkable in 1931, especially for one so young. Skilled production workers who still had jobs typically earned only \$10 to \$25 a week.

Puzzle income was important in the McLellan household for several years. The 1933 Augusta city directory lists her husband, Amory, as a puzzle manufacturer, not (as he was in other years) a salesman. By then they were living on the other side of the Kennebec River, at 63 Water Street in Randolph.

McLellan must have produced a lot of puzzles in the early 1930s, since they turn up periodically in Maine and on eBay. Some of McLellan's outlets for rentals and sales included Tibbetts' Pharmacy in Hallowell, Fessenden's Library in Portland, and Miller's Pharmacy in Cumberland Mills.

The McLellan puzzles are well made, with tricks to fool the puzzler. The



McLellan often incorporated figure pieces into her puzzles.

ones I have seen – almost a dozen – range from 150 to 300 pieces. She always split corner pieces in two, so they had no right angles. Some have figure pieces such as the ones illustrated in the Delta booklet. Many, but not all, are cut on color lines. Several have wavy rather than straight edges.

Interestingly, some of the puzzle labels identify the maker as Mrs. Amory P. McLellan, and others (possibly later) as Phyllis McLellan. She likely had ended her puzzling days by 1936, when the couple moved to Brunswick Road in Gardiner. No puzzles with that address on the label have surfaced.

By the 1940s she had become an antiques dealer, and had a shop in Chamberlain, Maine, where she summered. Her husband died in 1964 at the age of 70. Two years later she married Joseph H. Glaser, a widower from the Cleveland area. She died childless in Lakewood, Ohio, on May 31, 1974. The ad for the June 1975 sale of her possessions in Maine described her as a “well known dealer-collector.”

She was not alone as a Maine puzzle crafter. The *Lewiston Evening Journal* of March 4, 1933, reported there were more than 100 puzzle makers in Maine at the time. Puzzle crafters in Kennebec County included Florence Barbour and Ruth Howes in Augusta; Sidney Longley, A. Allen, Lucy Rowe, and Angie Emery in Waterville; and Glad Houser in Litchfield. Edwin E. Lewis, a noted architect, had preceded them; he made puzzles in Gardiner in the 1920s.

Anne D. Williams, the author, has been collecting and researching jigsaw puzzles history for more than 40 years. She is the author of The Jigsaw Puzzle: Piecing Together a History (Berkley, 2004), plus another book, three exhibition catalogs, and dozens of articles on all aspects of American jigsaw puzzles. She holds a doctorate from the University of Chicago and is professor emerita at Bates College in Lewiston. She welcomes comments, questions, and historical tidbits about jigsaw puzzles at puzzles@bates.edu.



“It Won’t Be Long Now,” with label for the puzzle on outside of box.



Abandoning Cursive Makes Family History Indecipherable

When my own ancestral research started to include early 16th- and 17th-century wills from England, I came face to face with my own inability to read the English language. It wasn't that the writing was bad or illegible; it's just that I couldn't read what the letters meant. Handwriting in those days was vastly different, as many letters looked like other more recognizable letters. For example, the letter "e" looked more like "h," "a" looked like an "o," and a double "s" looked more like a fancy "f." A little comparative word usage eventually helped to alleviate that problem.



Rich Eastman



An article I read recently brought that handwriting recognition problem back to mind but with a modern twist. A statement in the article claimed that a Harvard professor, after passing out Civil War documents for an assignment her class was working on, realized that fully two-thirds of her students couldn't read the documents. It wasn't that they were poorly written; it's just that the group couldn't read cursive writing.

Think about it: If the class had 30 students, that means that 20 couldn't read cursive writing, meaning that if any of their relatives had written letters, the students wouldn't have been able to read about their family history within those letters.

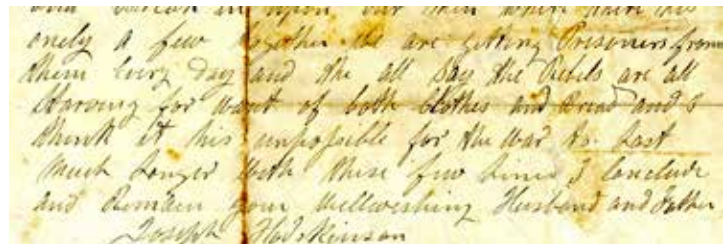
Cursive writing has always been around us, especially those of the "older persuasion." I'm sure many of you recall the cursive lettering that was put on green banners and posted above the blackboard in elementary school. In 2010, everything changed as the Common Core State Standards dropped cursive from the national kindergarten-through-grade-12 curriculum requirements. Instead, they mandated that fourth-graders "demonstrate sufficient command of keyboarding skills to type a minimum of one page in a single sitting." Cursive was not required. Schools began dropping it from their curricula.

Within three years, 41% of elementary teachers had completely stopped teaching cursive. Today, educational researchers estimate that about 50% of children in K-12 education haven't received any instruction in reading or writing cursive. That is half of American kids!

The National Archives now actively recruits volunteers who can read cursive in order to transcribe and digitize their backlog of records. They refer to cursive as an increasingly rare "superpower." Recent data paints a troubling picture. About 45% of Americans struggle to read their own handwriting, and 70% have trouble reading notes from coworkers; yet 86% of adults still write things down for organizational purposes. We

write, but increasingly, we can't read what we write. Students who learned cursive report they "rarely use it and seldom read it." The skill atrophies without practice. Even handwriting teachers are abandoning pure cursive. A 2012 survey at a Zaner-Bloser conference found only 37% of handwriting teachers primarily wrote in cursive; 8% of them printed. The majority — 55% — used a hybrid style. If the teachers don't use it, why would students?

All this said, what can we do? For years, we've been told to write the name of a loved one on the back of the person's picture in pencil so we and countless others will know who is in the picture. As a product of the cursive generation, I believe we also need to decipher these old letters in cursive and save a "translated" and digitized copy of great-great-grandfather's letter to home during the Civil War, or perhaps grandmother's diary she kept on her journey to America aboard that passenger ship, recounting her voyage in steerage. As they say, a picture is worth a thousand words; but a letter in their own hand explains it all in priceless detail.



This is an excerpt from a Civil War letter written in 1863 by a soldier speaking about the horrors of battle. Can you read it? Can your younger relatives read the cursive writing?

Image courtesy of Rich Eastman

QUERIES:

YOUNG, David – b. Wednesday, May 1, 1753, Exeter, New Hampshire; fought along with his younger brother in the Battle of Bunker Hill, after which he saw Pittston while paused en route to Canada; m. 1778; 1779 moved to East Pittston, Maine; {son of Aaron Young and Abigail Dudley, b: 10/31/1716, Exeter, New Hampshire, d: 11/18/1802, Exeter, New Hampshire; daughter of James Dudley, 1680-1746, and Mercy Folsom, 1691-1746;} d. Thursday, February 15, 1825, East Pittston, Maine; and **YOUNG, Elizabeth Clark** – b. Thursday, March 7, 1758, Exeter, New Hampshire; m. 1778, Exeter, New Hampshire; 1779, moved to East Pittston, Maine, d. Wednesday, May 7, 1834, East Pittston, Maine.

YOUNG, Joanna – David and Elizabeth Young's daughter, my third-great-grandmother, was Joanna Young (Scammon), b. February 5, 1791, East Pittston, Maine; m. Eliakim Scammon, November 9, 1809; d. March 16, 1860; buried with her husband and their daughter, Elizabeth, in Maple Grove Cemetery, East Pittston, Maine. Who are Joanna Young's siblings – David and Elizabeth Clark Young's other children, all of whom were born in East Pittston, Maine – and what did they do? Contact: Pamela Roby at PamelaRoby831@gmail.com



Genealogy Group Occupies New Headquarters in Waterville

Finally shaking off the effects of a flood that submerged the basement of a building it had occupied for more than two decades, the Taconnett Falls Chapter of the Maine Genealogical Society has moved into its new Waterville headquarters.

Current FOLLOWUP

The group signed a one-year lease on June 20 for three rooms in the back of a former American Legion hall at 21 College Avenue. Over the next few weeks, it repacked the contents of its library into about 350 boxes at its

temporary site, the former St. John School in Winslow, and gradually began transferring the library and the group's furniture and equipment to the new location. The move was essentially completed by July 10.

The Kennebec River flood that prompted the transition occurred in mid-December 2023 at the town-owned former Winslow Public Library building on Lithgow Street in Winslow (*Kennebec Current*, January–February 2024). It nearly filled the cellar but left the contents of the first-floor library contents undamaged. However, water that remained in the building over the following months yielded high humidity levels that threatened the group's books and papers. That and the potential for more flooding prompted the group's members to vote last October 20 (*Kennebec Current*, November–December 2024) to move out of the library building and accept Corpus Christi Parish's offer of temporary storage in its former school building.

The town's public library itself had decamped from the 1926 brick building after a more severe flood in 1987, heading for higher ground on the east side of Winslow.

Chapter officials expect to spend the rest of July and all of August adjusting to their new digs, then determine what their business hours will be, based on the availability of volunteers.

The chapter's latest move is not the first time it has established its headquarters in the Elm City. Before settling in Winslow, it occupied second-floor space for several years in what later became the Paul J. Schupf Art Center for the Arts on Main Street in Waterville.



A Scout and adult supervisors from Scout Troop 436, of Waterville, help members of the Taconnett Falls Chapter of the Maine Genealogical Society carry chapter items from one of several vehicles used to move the chapter into its new headquarters July 10 at 21 College Avenue in Waterville.

Photo by Joseph Owen

❖ In Memoriam ❖

Alice V. Bonenfant, 86, an Augusta native and life member of the Kennebec Historical Society since 1983, died December 19, 2024, in Augusta. She held jobs at Edwards Manufacturing and Central Maine Power Company before working as co-owner of Bonenfant Construction with her husband, Paul. She also donated to the society many items related to local history. Her survivors include four children, seven grandchildren, and six great-grandchildren.

Oscar Thomas "Tom" Feagin, 86, of Hallowell, died May 27 in Waterville. A former Kennebec Historical Society member, he donated the bulk of his vast personal library to the society in 2023 when he moved out of his former home in Readfield. Feagin, an Oxford, Mississippi, native, was a physician with Kennebec Internal Medicine in the 1970s. He left Maine to work in the South but returned to Maine in retirement in 2004, with his late wife, Judy. His survivors include two sons and three grandchildren.

Richard L. Harriman, 91, of Pinellas Park, Florida, and a native, longtime summer resident, and former town historian of Randolph (*Kennebec Current*, July–August 2021), died May 19. He had been a Kennebec Historical Society member since 2006 and a life member since 2017, and he belonged to other historical societies as well. An Air Force veteran who learned to fly, the Gardiner High School graduate later moved to Florida and worked for the Florida Power Company. He supported KHS by donating collection items and participating in fundraising campaigns. His survivors include wife Judy Harriman, also a KHS life member; a daughter; two stepdaughters; two granddaughters; and three great-grandsons.

Historic Trailhead Almost Obscured by Commercial Activity

Anyone traveling on busy Route 27 through Randolph might completely miss the entrance to a historic railroad bed that once was the starting point of the Kennebec Central Railroad, which delivered passengers, coal, and other goods to the veterans' home at Togus.



History Through
a Keyhole #19

This location is the beginning of the Old Narrow Gauge Volunteer Trail, which covers a portion of the historic Kennebec Central Railroad roadbed and lies within the town of Randolph. The town owns the right of way on this portion of the roadbed, and the Old Narrow Gauge Volunteer Trail Committee has been working to upgrade the existing trail to a hiking-and-bicycling trail.

In 1985, local Eagle Scouts established the trail with help from the town and the Maine

Answer to Keyhole #19

Q: What is this?

A: A trail entrance

Q: Where is it?

A: Just south of the IGA market in Randolph

Q: What's historic about it?

A: This trail follows the old Kennebec Central Railroad Narrow Gauge Railway to USVA Togus.



This trailhead marks the beginning of the Old Narrow Gauge Volunteer Trail. Here, the Kennebec Central Railroad began its five-mile journey to the Veteran's Home at Togus.

Photo by Rich Eastman

Department of Conservation's Summer Youth Corps Project, according to the Maine Trail Finder website. It was given the official name "The Old Narrow Gauge Volunteer Trail." Unfortunately, the trail was not maintained, and over the years it grew over and washed out in places. In the summer of 2003, a committee was formed to improve, upgrade, and establish more permanency for the trail.

Currently the trail covers 1.25 miles. Next to Goggins IGA on Water Street, a large sign signals the beginning of the trail. It leads up a ravine for 0.4 mile before crossing Windsor Street, where the trail continues on the other side at the crosswalk. The trail then follows the meandering Little Togus Stream. Continue to follow the trail for about a mile, traversing the small stream and passing a small pond along the way. The trail's end is not currently marked.

The Kennebec Central Railroad existed for one purpose: to transport passengers and goods to and from the National Home at Togus – now the Togus Veterans Affairs Medical Center – the first VA hospital in the country. The railroad served the veterans' home from 1890 to 1929.

The railroad ran from the Randolph terminus by the Kennebec River through Chelsea to Togus, a total distance of five miles. Passengers walked across the bridge from Gardiner to take the train to Togus. Veterans used the train for visits to Gardiner, and townspeople took the 20-minute ride to use the facilities and grounds at the veterans' home.

Passenger traffic on the Kennebec Central Railroad started to decline when an electric trolley from Augusta to Togus started in 1901. However, a government contract provided that all the coal for the veterans' home was to be brought by barge from East Coast ports upriver to Randolph and then transported on the railroad to Togus. That prolonged the railroad's life. Passenger traffic steadily diminished with the advent of the automobile, and the coal contract was terminated in the spring of 1929. The last train ran on June 29, 1929.



The last train engine to run the Randolph-to-Togus line, KCRR No. 4, has been restored by the Wiscasset, Waterville and Farmington Railway Museum.

Photo courtesy of the Wiscasset, Waterville and Farmington Railway Museum

— by Rich Eastman

History Through a Keyhole — Puzzle 20

All of you readers, perhaps bludgeoned into a semi-comatose state by the recent sweltering weather, passed up the chance to impress us with your keen observations about the Randolph trail signs that appeared as the Puzzle 19 clue in our May-June edition. That photo apparently was about as welcome as a skunk in a perfume shop. You have our profound apology. Our puzzle czar will now go sit on a stool in a corner in our office, facing the wall silently until suppertime. (He will not be wearing a dunce cap, however; those are pointy and could hurt people.)

So now what do we do? Perhaps we can awaken you from your summer torpor with the more conspicuous window design in the photo at the right. The window is easily visible from a public road in Kennebec County. Readers who can identify it are asked to contact the *Current* and tell us three things: what the object is, where it is, and what its historic significance is.

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

The full answer and more information about the subject will be provided in the September-October issue of the *Kennebec Current*. Answers are due by August 31. Good luck.



Photo by Teddy Faugno

Book Casts Light on Waterville's Flame Chasers

The 2024 book *History of the Waterville Fire Department* is a 513-page tome that chronicles the establishment, growth, and seemingly every other detail of its title subject. Written by Capt. Scott Holst, the volume may not be a light read, but it is certainly a valuable historical resource.



With research and photos culled from newspapers, government documents, personal archives and recollections, and logbooks, Holst has created a book that not only preserves the history of the Fire Department, but

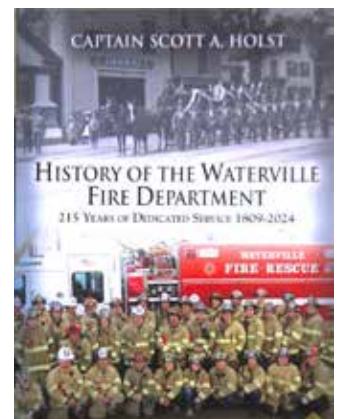
of Waterville and its people. The latter third of the book consists of the "History of Fire Personnel," mini-biographies highlighting those who have been part of the department's history right up through 2024. It's a history of department personnel, yes, but also of Waterville families and community connections.

Interested in rail history? Read about the development and use of the Fire Train on page 167.

Readers will also get a peek at Waterville town politics over the years. It's not as dry as you might think, either. In fact, the book describes one debate about Fire Department issues at the city level as a "red-hot controversy."

And what would a fire department history be without information on the fire dogs? There is of course a section on the firehouse dogs – and cats. The many horses who served the department well are also profiled.

History of the Waterville Fire Department is available to be checked out, as well as to consult in the reference section, at the Waterville Public Library. It is also available for purchase on Amazon and at the city's fire station.



Cover image courtesy of Waterville Fire Department



Waterville Fire Battalion Chief Ryan Cote shows off an antique portable hose rack May 16 in the basement of Central Fire Station in Waterville. The Fire Department is the subject of a 2024 book detailing its history.

Photo by Joseph Owen

– by Jamie Logan

Around Kennebec County

ALBION

The **Albion Historical Society** has scheduled an open house for noon to 4 p.m. July 26, which is Albion Community Day, at the narrow-gauge railway station on Benton Road, according to the society's Facebook page. The event will feature a slide show about the way Albion looked in 1950. The nearby blacksmith shop also is scheduled to be open to visitors.

AUGUSTA

The **Colonial Theater**, a century-old downtown nonprofit arts venue that is undergoing gradual renovation and expansion, is open for self-guided tours from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. every Tuesday and Thursday through September 11, and at the same times on the following Saturdays: August 2, August 23, and September 13. For more details, call (207) 209-3525.

GARDINER

"Dog Day Afternoon," a film festival celebrating of dogs in silent movies, will be presented from noon to 4 p.m. August 9 at the **Johnson Hall** Opera House, located at 280 Water Street in Gardiner. Hosted by veteran Kennebec Historical Society presenter Ed Lorusso, the third annual film festival conducted by Augusta's **Colonial Theater** features live music by Jeff Rapsis. Tickets cost \$25 each. A list of movies to be shown can be found on the theater's website, augustacolonialtheater.com.

READFIELD

The **Readfield Historical Society** is hosting an Olden Days Schoolhouse Event, a one-room schoolhouse immersive experience showing what school was like in the late 1800s, and featuring a teacher. The program is designed for children ages 5 to 12. It is free, but registration is required in order to limit participation to 20 children because of space limitations. To register, contact the Readfield Public Library by calling (207) 685-4089, sending an email to librarian@readfieldmaine.org, or sending a message to the library through Facebook. The event is scheduled for 6 to 7:30 p.m. July 17 at the society's headquarters, a former one-room schoolhouse located at 759 Main Street in Readfield Depot.

Dale Potter-Clark, the **Readfield Historical Society** historian, plans to lead a history walk August 9 on Dudley Plains in Readfield, where the Dudley family first settled about 1770. The hour-and-a-half walk is schedule to begin at 10 a.m. at 582

Plains Road. For more details, contact Potter-Clark at (207) 441-9184 or crossings4u@gmail.com.

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.

VIENNA

The **Vienna Historical Society** is presenting the play "Aunt Hannah's Premonition" at 7 p.m. on July 24 and 25, and 2 and 7 p.m. July 26 at the Vienna Union Hall in Vienna. Written by the society's 94-year-old playwright Beverly Wight Smith and directed by Ellie Andrews, the play is set in 1928 in Vienna. It concerns an overly ambitious schoolmaster, a traveling preacher, wives staying out at meetings so late that their husbands are forced to prepare their own supper, and fears about an escaped convict. Admission costs \$12. All ticket sales and donations will be used to support restoration of the society-owned Waite House, the birthplace of board-game mogul Milton Bradley. The theater is located at 5 Mountain Road in Vienna.

WATERVILLE

Jessica Couture, the **Waterville Historical Society** outreach coordinator, is scheduled to give a lecture about an early 20th-century aviation pioneer at noon August 25 at

Spectrum Generations, located at the Muskie Center at 38 Gold Street in Waterville. The subject of the talk is Charles O. Jones, who suffered fatal injuries when his dirigible *Boomerang* caught fire, plunging him to earth in front of thousands of spectators in 1908 at the Central Maine Fairgrounds in Waterville (*Kennebec Current*, September-October 2023). Attendees should call ahead to (207) 873-4745 to assure that seating is set up for them and to get details about the optional lunch that will be available.



Playwright Beverly Wight Smith, acting as "Matildy," and Elizabeth O'Donoghue, playing "Vinny," rehearse a scene recently from the Vienna-themed play *Aunt Hannah's Premonition*, which Wight Smith wrote. The play is scheduled for four performances over three days, July 24-26, in Vienna.

Photo courtesy of the Vienna Historical Society

Upcoming Programs

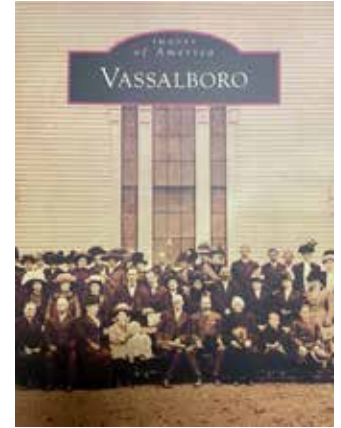
August: “Vassalboro Gives Riverside Town Its Moment of Glory”

Jan Clowes is a Vassalboro native who has been president of the Vassalboro Historical Society for about 17 years. During her first week in the position, Julie Lyon, the society’s curator, showed her a brochure from Arcadia Publishing, saying that she wished they were able to assemble the material that would enable the company to publish a historical book about their town. Instead, the brochure went back into a drawer for years.

When Clowes retired, she finally had a chance to begin the process of creating the book, *Vassalboro*. Today the book finally is in print (*Kennebec Current*, May-June 2025). As the Kennebec Historical Society’s featured speaker for August, Clowes will talk about that process, including the tasks that went well and those that were a struggle. She will answer questions and offer suggestions to help those considering their own publications.

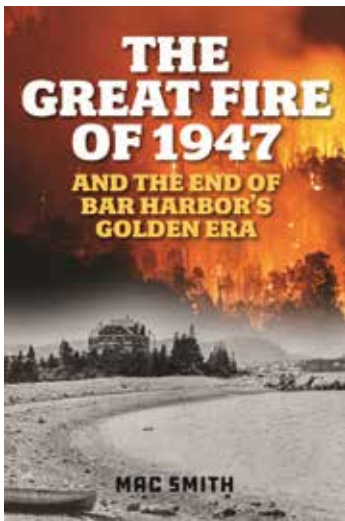
Each chapter in the book focuses on a different area of the town, harking back to a time when mills, schools, churches, and trolleys dotted Vassalboro’s landscape together.

The lecture is scheduled for 6:30 p.m. Wednesday, August 20, in the auditorium at Augusta City Center, located at 16 Cony Street in Augusta. Admission is free, but donations are welcome. Copies of *Vassalboro* will be available for purchase for \$20.



Book cover courtesy of Jan Clowes

September: “When Bar Harbor Burned: The Fire of 1947”



A new book about the fire that ravaged Mount Desert Island just after World War II will be the subject of the Kennebec Historical Society’s September lecture.

The Great Fire of 1947 and the End of Bar Harbor’s Golden Era, by Mac Smith, tells the story of the desperate evacuation of residents through the heart of an uncontrolled forest fire burning all across the island. After an extremely dry summer, all areas of Maine spent the month of October fighting fires, with the island seeing the worst of the damage. Soon after the first flames were spotted, in a last, desperate and deadly escape from the quickly approaching and ever-growing flames, many Bar Harbor residents found themselves fleeing to the water, while others fled in a caravan for the causeway behind a bulldozer that cleared the way, all the while watching the loss of many of the mighty cottage-mansions and historic hotels that once symbolized the island’s heritage as a summer playground for the world’s richest people. Through extensive research, Maine author and historian Smith brings this important part of the state’s history to life. His 280-page book was

published in July by Down East Books.

Smith is a Navy veteran of the 1991 Persian Gulf War and former reporter for *The Bar Harbor Times*. He lives in the village of Sandy Point, part of the town of Stockton Springs. He is the author of several books of Maine history, including *Mainers on the Titanic*, *Peyton Place Comes Home to Maine*, *Siege at the Statehouse*, *Disaster at the Bar Harbor Ferry*, and *Plain Madeleine*.

The lecture will take place about 6:30 p.m. Wednesday, September 17, at South Parish Congregational Church, located at 9 Church Street in Augusta. It will begin immediately the society’s annual meeting (see page 5) has concluded. Copies of the book will be available for purchase. The lecture is free, although donations are encouraged. For more details, call KHS Executive Director Scott Wood at (207) 622-2118.



Mac Smith, author and KHS speaker for September

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