

ANDROSCOGGIN HISTORY

October 1991 Newsletter of the Androscoggin Historical Society No. 4

SOCIETY ACQUIRES 1849 FIRE ENGINE

The Board of Directors voted at its August meeting to purchase for \$2400 the Excelsior No. 2 hand pump fire-fighting engine pictured here. This was one of a pair of the first engines used in the Lewiston-Auburn area. The City of Auburn fire department will house the vehicle.

HISTORY OF THE EXCELSIOR NO. 2

Research by Clarence E. Penley

Prior to 1849 there was no organized effort to control fire in the village that was growing around Lewiston Falls. In that year the Lewiston Falls Village Corporation was formed and was granted its powers by the Maine State Legislature as recorded in *Special Laws of Maine*, Volume 6, 1847-1856.

The corporation was authorized to raise money for the purchase, repair and preservation of one or more fire engines, hose and other apparatus for extinguishment of fire, construct reservoirs and aqueducts to supply water for said engines, for erecting and maintaining suitable engine houses, organizing and maintaining within the limits of said corporation an efficient fire department.

The corporate limits included a portion of the Town of Lewiston in Lincoln County and a portion of the Towns of Auburn and Danville in Cumberland County. The southern boundary was the Little Androscoggin River to its junction with the outlet of Taylor Pond.

The officers of the corporation were to be three assessors, collector, treasurer, and clerk. The assessors were to levy taxes upon the polls and estates of residents and the estates of non-residents within the limits of the said corporation. The assessments on the estates shall consider value, location and its hazard of loss by fire. The polls were not to be in excess of \$.50 per person.

Josiah Little Esq. and Alonzo Garcelon, or either of them, were authorized to issue a warrant directed to some member of the corporation to notify the legal voters to meet and to vote by ballot on the question of accepting the Act creating the corporation. The Act was approved on July 30, 1849.

On October 30, 1849, the Excelsior Engine Co. #2 was formed with Jesse Lyford (later a mayor of Lewiston) as its foreman and G. W. Foss and Orrin Morse as assistants. This company of 57 men was to be stationed on the west bank of the Androscoggin River (now Great Falls Plaza). At the same time the Engine Co. of Androscoggin #1 with 57 members was formed and stationed on the east bank in the Town of Lewiston on Chapel Street.

On November 26, 1849, Hunneman and Co. of Roxbury, Mass., delivered to the corporation two 5½" bore hand tubs known as Androscoggin #1

(Tub #365) and Excelsior #2 (Tub #374), the tub numbers being those of the Hunneman Company.

Each engine was an open tub with a copper lined tank mounted on four wheels and hauled by hand. Two piston type pumps -- one on either side -- ejected the water as six to eight men on each side pushed down on the rails. If the hand tub were near a source of water, then a suction hose twenty feet long could draw up the supply. Otherwise the tub had to be filled by a bucket brigade.

The Hunneman Company manufactured hand-operated fire engines from 1792 to 1883 when steam fire engines forced the hand engines off the market. William C. Hunneman, the founder of the company, was a coppersmith, and learned his trade in the shop of the old master, Paul Revere.

The Lewiston Falls Village Corp. continued until 1856, when the Legislature passed an act creating the Lewiston Village Corp. and the Auburn Village Corp. The Lewiston company received the hand engine Androscoggin #1 and all other properties situated in the Town of Lewiston. The Auburn company received Excelsior #2 and all other properties located in Auburn and Danville.

Alonzo Garcelon and Daniel Holland were authorized to place a notice in the *Lewiston Falls Journal* calling voters in the corporate limits to vote by ballot on the question of accepting the Act to create Lewiston Village Corp. The same procedure was followed in Auburn by James Goff and Edward T. Little with notice to voters published in the *Democratic Advocate*. The act creating the Auburn Village Corp. was approved March 14, 1856.

The new Auburn corporation had for its officers: clerk, Ambrose Harriman; assessors, Edward T. Little, Nelson Dingley and John Merrill; treasurer, Phillip Briggs. Excelsior #2 chief engineer was Charles Clark, with assistants S. P. Miller, W. H. Waldron, and George Drinkwater. Police officers and night watchmen were Benjamin Dunn, Asa P. Miller, Thomas Littlefield, Andrew Pettingill, and John Merrill.

On March 18, 1867, the Auburn town meeting voted to authorize the selectmen to purchase the fire engine and other properties of the Auburn Village Corp. The equipment was in need of repairs. An appropriation of \$550 was voted to repair the engine and shingle the station roof.

In 1870 the Auburn City Council voted \$5500 to buy a steamer and on November 12, 1870, voted \$6500 for construction of a new Engine House at

Court and Spring Streets. On June 16, 1871, Steamer Co. #1 was formed to operate the steamer and attending hose reel. After 1875 interest in the Excelsior began to wane and by 1878 it was not being used.

In 1878 the City Council voted to station Excelsior #2 at North Auburn. The Engine Hall of 2½ stories was built at North Auburn in 1880 "between the bridges." Excelsior #2 was kept on the ground floor along with road machinery. The second floor was a social hall and used some time as a grange hall. In 1884 the North Auburn Company disbanded.

On February 2, 1887, Excelsior #2 was leased to an independant company, Veteran Firemens Association, on condition it be kept in Auburn except to attend musters. Signers for the company were Adam or Abram Libby, foreman; Charles P. Hunt, 1st asst. foreman; Edward W. Dunn, 2nd asst. foreman.

On April 2, 1890, the Excelsior was sold to the town of Buckfield.

On March 23, 1906, the Veteran Firemans Assn. was reorganized under officers George Allen, pres.; H. M. Sprague, sec.; Fred M. Rollins, treas. At a reunion banquet of former members at Lake Grove House on May 1, 1906, the V.F.A. voted to purchase the Excelsior from Buckfield. By July 4, 1906, it was back in Auburn, appearing in the parade in the neighborhood known as the "city of Perryville." (Newspapers of the day refer to Perryville as the city located "beyond the railroad, north of the watering trough.") Excelsior was housed in a small building on the westerly side of Turner St. south of the M.C.R.R. bridge.

On October 6, 1906, a meeting was called at Engine Hall for a hearing on the request by V.F.A. to the City Council to move Engine Hall "intown" to house Excelsior #2. Citizens of No. Auburn turned out in force. The petition was denied. On December 15, 1912, Engine Hall was destroyed by fire.

At some point Excelsior was purchased by Franklin Reed, who later loaned his fire equipment collection to the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities. When Mr. Reed decided to sell his collection and SPNEA decided they could not maintain it, we took the opportunity to purchase the Excelsior #2 in order to return it to the community where it had served.

Some material in this article was previously published in Clarence Penley, Geneva Kirk & Gridley Barrows, *Historic Lewiston: Its Fire Department* (Auburn, Maine: 1989), pp. 2-4, 26.

AHS HISTORY

(Part Three)

by Harold Dutch

We pick up the society's story in the year 1950. Clarence E. March was elected president; Wesley A. Small, clerk; Imelda Thibault, treasurer; and Mrs. Henry A. Pierce, custodian. The office of curator, listed since 1942, was not filled nor mentioned again in the '50s. This was an active decade for the society, and we'll devote this space to our benefactor Everett A. Davis.

At a directors meeting on November 14th, Mr. Davis, who lived in Lewiston, offered property he owned in Auburn to the historical society: a two-story house and barn at 83 High Street, being rented at the time.

Everett A. Davis was the great, great grandson of Amos Davis, a pioneer settler and the first Davis in this area. Everett Davis lived on Lisbon Road in the family homestead. He had written a history of Lewiston, based on the Elder Papers that David and Elizath Young recently edited to be published by Heritage Books under our sponsorship. Mr. Davis was elected to the AHS board in 1947 and made an honorary member in 1950. He was a retired president of Peoples Savings Bank, 83 years of age at the time of his gift. When in 1909 he married Thirza Wagg, who died in 1948, he owned a variety store on Ash Street in Lewiston. The newspaper reported he was a "prominent Republican, ex-tax collector, former member of Lewiston city government." The Davises produced no children.

His offer was that the house become the society's meeting place for 20 years, with meetings starting in two years. At the directors meetings in December and January, discussion centered on the extensive repairs and renovations needed to make the property suitable for a museum, which the minutes referred to as the "Davis-Wagg Museum." A list of repairs included an oil burner to replace a coal furnace, refinishing ceilings, papering walls, replacing electrical and bathroom fixtures, and remodeling the barn as space for the museum. The board voted to continue renting the property.

Attorney Willis Trafton Jr., a new member of the board, was to talk with Auburn assessors about abatement of taxes and later reported they agreed to reduce the assessed value by 50 percent. He then requested that the city council appropriate an amount for the society's use equal to the tax. There

is no report of the council's response. In 1951, \$1,000 was offered anonymously if the society raised \$5,000 for the renovations needed, and the next year, an additional \$1,000 was offered, but in later minutes there is no further mention of money raising, leading us to believe the amount was never realized.

Rental income from the property brought in a little over \$600 a year, but, of course, at the same time money was being spent on upkeep. Cost and care of the property was obviously of deep concern to the directors. It was suggested in 1952 - the year Everett Davis died - that a reduction in rent be offered a new tenant if he would do repair work on the house. Funds were voted to buy materials for the repairs. In 1953, the directors were authorized to sell the property "if an advantageous offer is received," and in November, 1954, it was up for sale at \$7,000. It was sold, according to the Registry of Deeds, in June, 1955, to Floyd R. Ray, real estate agent. The price is not recorded.

The Davis estate in October of 1953 sent the society \$19,000, and the following year, an additional \$1,612. Mr. Davis also left the society books and papers, a steel safe, and a steel cabinet. And thus ends our story of Everett A. Davis, put together from, at times skimpy, meeting minutes and treasury reports. His gifts were certainly a boon to the historical society when it really needed help. At the end of 1949, the cash balance was \$344.98; at the close of 1959, the balance in cash, savings banks, and treasury notes was over \$24,000. In the next issue, we'll take up other business of the society in the '50s and the work of Clarence March.

BOND ISSUE FOR PRESERVATION OF HISTORIC BUILDINGS

On the November ballot in Maine you will find a combined bond issue question for \$3.5 million for major renovations and improvements at state parks (including \$1.5 million for Fort Knox) and \$1.5 million for preservation of buildings on the National Register of Historic Places that are owned by nonprofit organizations or municipalities. The latter would establish "a matching grant program to restore and preserve historic buildings open to the public, including the State House, which is not subject to the matching requirement." If approved by the voters, the program would be administered by the Maine Historic Preservation Commission. This passed the House last June 94-47 and the Senate 30-3. A similar bond issue was defeated in the 1990 election.

THE DIARIES OF TRUE WOODBURY

True Woodbury was a native of Newbury, Mass., and came to Pejepscot, now Danville, about 1781, as one of its earliest settlers. He later built a frame house, that was the oldest in Danville. Woodbury kept a diary for many years, which was stored up in the attic. When the old house was demolished several years ago, many volumes of the diary were destroyed. The few yearly volumes that this Society has were picked out of the debris of the house. We have the diaries for 24 December 1805 to 18 February 1808 and 11 April 1810 to 27 August 1823. There also is an account book with entries between 1770 and 1803, as well as some diary entries for the period 1776-1779.

Here are a few entries from lost portions of the diary that were published in a newspaper article:

September 1824 11 Training in this Town at mr. Buckleys

14 General Muster to Day at Walnut hill North yarmouth

October, 1825. 17, we finisht Gathering Apples and Spread the flax.

November, 1825. 24, thanksgiving throughout this State Moderate wether we took up our flax.

September 1826. 19 Isac Evleth Come here to Make Shews. Brother Loring and his wife Staid here Last Night.

September 1826. 23 a Cold Rain Storm Isac Evleth finished five pair of Shews that is one pair for My self one for My wife one for Betsey one for Nancy and one pair for Sally I paid one Dollar Down Cash Silver.

29 Isac Evleth had one bushel of corn

October 7 Isac Evleth had one Bushel of Apples cold weather we began to hall in Some Corn

July 1826. 9 Sunday a fine hay Day the Grass hopper is a Burden to Man and a Burden to the hungry Beast.

11 we halled in the 8th and 9th Loads of hay weather hot I planted 170 hills of corn where the plants was Eat

12 I planted 56 More Corn hills Got in the 10th and the 11th and the 12th Load of hay I was to Royals Store Excessive heat this Day

August 1826 2 Between the Hours of one and two After Noon there fell a Storm of Hail here Larger than Musket Balls it Broke 40 Squares of Glass in the fore Side of My House out of 4 windows

January 1826. 15 thaer fell hail and Rain that froze to Ice to Meke 2 or 3 inches Last Night it appeared Afterwords there was 4 or 5 I Am this Day Seventy years of Age Pray I that God Would fit and prepare me for My Great and Last Change I Am thy unworthy Sarvant

NEWSLETTER INDEXED IN GPAI

The Genealogical Periodical Annual Index has accepted this newsletter for indexing. Genealogists, libraries, and historical societies that subscribe to GPAI now will have access to the articles we publish, as well as learn of our holdings that might be relevant to them.

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