

ANDROSCOGGIN HISTORY

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No. 24

PAST AND FUTURE(?) OF AUBURN HALL by Douglas I. Hodgkin

Although it is not on the National Register of Historic Places, Auburn Hall certainly is qualified as one of the most historic buildings in Auburn. Moreover, its prominent location on Court Street and its architecture help to define the essence of downtown Auburn.

However, the future of this landmark is in doubt. With the recent closing of Flanders Clothing and Packard's Pharmacy, the future of the building is in question. The Red Cross rents on an upper floor and a consignment shop has a short-term lease. The building is for sale, but there appears to be little interest in purchasing it. The current owners of the building are even talking about replacing the building with a parking lot!!

On the other hand, the planning of Auburn's Downtown Action Plan for Tomorrow (ADAPT) envisions construction of an addition to Auburn Hall, possibly to house a 50- to 75-room hotel. Therefore, the future of the building may rest on the ability to attract a commitment for such development within the time the current owners are willing to hold on.

The town built the first Auburn Hall in 1855, but it burned in November 1864. Immediately the town set up a committee to build a replacement. E. F. Packard, shoe manufacturer; Harvey Dillingham, prominent farmer; and William S. Young, hotel proprietor, determined that the building should be worthy of a community that was to become a city (in 1869) and that served as the county seat. They contracted with a famous Boston architect, Gridley J. F. Bryant, whose firm designed over 100 buildings in Boston's central business district, including Boston City Hall, the U. S. Post Office, Boston City Hospital, and Suffolk County Jail. Locally, he designed the original County Building and Hathorn and Parker Halls at Bates College.

The 90-by-60-foot brick building with mansard roof and granite trim contained stores on the ground floor, a hall on the second, and town offices on the second and third. For 45 years, Increase B. Kimball and Charles K. Jordan, who had dug the cellar and constructed the stores, leased the stores at

\$8000 and \$4500, respectively, plus one dollar per year "to be paid if demanded." Many stores have occupied the premises, most prominently clothing and drug stores. In 1941 the City of Auburn sold its interest in the building to the owners of Flanders Clothing, Auburn Lunch, and Packard's Pharmacy.

This building was the town hall, and city government meetings were held there until 1916. Police headquarters were in the rear rooms under the stairway of the ground floor entrance, with the jail in the basement beneath. Public gatherings held here included political rallies, county conventions to choose party candidates, debates, and war bond rallies during World War I. NLRB hearings were held there as the culmination of the 1937 shoe strike.

The public schools were frequent users of the facility. This included grammar school graduations, senior class drama, prize-speaking contests, musical festivals, dances, and high school basketball practice and games. In 1884 when fire shut down the regular school building, it was the temporary high school.

Finally, this building served as a civic and entertainment center. Among the activities and events, Skinner lists memorial exercises, special occasion programs, organization conventions, benefits, lectures, evangelists, magicians, traveling "Punch and Judy" shows, band concerts, fund-raising dances and bazaars, dramas, minstrel shows, and the annual Fool's Carnival on April first.

Probably in the early 1940s, the stage and balconies were removed and the hall was partitioned. The new owners leased the hall space to the Federal Farm Loan Organization. From 1946-1961, the State Department of Health and Welfare had its division offices there.

The razing of Auburn Hall would be an immeasurable tragedy. Auburn would lose an important part of its history and identity.

Sources: Ralph Skinner, radio talks, Mar. 13, 20, 27, and Apr. 2, 3, 1966; "Homely Old Auburn Hall, Its Past and Its Future," *Lewiston Saturday Journal*, March 12, 1910; Arch Soutar, "Auburn Hall Now 100 Years Old," *Lewiston Evening Journal*, December 24, 1965; Randy Whitehouse, "Auburn: Downtown Plan Hits Home Stretch," *Sun Journal*, June 10, 1998; <http://rsb.loc.gov/detroit/dtgilman.html>, "Arthur Delavan Gilman"; <http://. . . dtbryant.html>, "Gridley J. F. Bryant"; Ruth Libbey O'Halloran, *Historic Lewiston: Its Architectural Heritage*, p. 71.

CIVIL WAR LETTERS OF OSGOOD D. NASON

Osgood Dana Nason, brother of Horace F. Nason whose letters were featured in the February 1998 newsletter, was born in Chesterville, Maine, 27 December 1842, son of William and Aurilla (Leach) Nason. He enlisted in the Maine Infantry, 7th Regiment, 14 July 1861, and received a disability discharge 13 June 1863. He died 18 November 1867 in East Livermore (Livermore Falls). The Society has transcripts of his letters to his sister Laura Nason and his brother-in-law Charles Pinkham.

Luinsville (?) Fairfax Conety Va, Dec 12th 1861

Brother Charles,

You have no doubt ere this heard the particulars of our fight at Winchester. . . . Our Regt. being on reserve was not engaged. . . . I went over the field next morning and came to the conclusions that soldiering was not what it has been cracked up to be. In every direction the ground was covered by shapeless masses called dead men but they did not look much like men. Some looked more like damaged rag bags than men. In one place where our men charged over a stone wall they were piled in heaps.

. . . Evry meall we get a mess of hominy puding and molasses once or twice a weak and I and Bob Jenins (?) eats so mutch that it all most kills us so you see we liv As to fiting the nerist I hav come to it was last night on picket I stood on a post whare a bout a hour before the sentnal that was on that post shot a rebel dead and he and the one next to him fiared at another and wounded him in two places and he run off but they got him agane. Our boys fire evry night but I gess thare rebels are stumps and cows. . . . We have seen some cold wether hear but now snow but mud enough to make up and it is the stickest stuff that I ever see. If we want to plaster or build a chimly all we hav to scrape up some mud and it is beter than eny plaster that I ever see. It will pull shoes off as fast as we can put them on. One of our boys was a going on picket the other night and he run into a mud hole and walked out of both of his shoes. . . . I want you to send me Arthurs ambrotype (?) and tell and I will send you mine when I get a charnce to hav it taken. . . .

Camp No 6 in the fealld

Clarwick (?) County Va Apr 15th 62

C.F.P. How are you old fellow and how is the rest of the folks. . . . if you could see me about this time you would see a fellow about 5 feet 11 in in high weight 150.50 Coolar black or very near it and hard in looks and harted in curicten (?) And take him all round he is a hard boy. You must not expect to see the boy that worked on the medow last fall with you. . . . now I will giv you a look

at my house . . . it is a linnin affar jest big enough for fore and is in two square peases about 5 feet square which bottom to geather and then two crutches drove in the ground with a pole in the top and the tent put over the pole and drawed out and pinned to ground. . . . now I will write a little about our advnce from Newport News . . . we moved forward without eney trouble till about noon when the first thing that we new our companey was within fifteen rods of a rebel fort. thay was at work on it. the left of our Company saw it before the rite did and haulted but the rest of us went on and ther was theree of us on a marsh in plane sight of the fort when the left opned fire on the fort. thay had all got across the marsh into the woods but me when the first thing that I new whize went a bullet close to my head. Says I OD this will never do and the way I scrached gravle was a caution

White horse Landing Va May 17th

Brother Charles

I resieved two letters from you this morning. In one you spoke of the safe arival of my money which I was very glad to hear and you spoke about what you should do with it. It makes no diference to me what you do with it. If you want to use it yourself eney whare it will be of an advantage to you do it. If not do what you think best I dont care what you do with it. . . . We are now Camped within to easey days marches of Richmond and we start agane this afternoon and by the time you get this we shall be in Richmond or els all killed. Some think that we shall hav some hard fighting but the most of them think we can go thare without much trouble but that remained to be proved. But we hav got little Maclellan with us and whare he goes we will follow if it is to the end of the World. that is just what we think of our Comanding Gen. Gorge B. Maclellan

Dear Sister:

. . . You spoke about a May party. we had a May party but it was on the fifth of May and it was at a place called Williamsburg and we picked a few flowers but insted of May flowers they was the flowers of the rebble army and so I think thay were worth pickin dont you It is fine weather out hear and the crops look finely. The corn is about big enough to hoe and the wheat is on the head. we hav been drilling a little today in a piece of wheat that is all headed out. The piece has got about a hundred acres and it looked nice I tell you. It is a pity to spoil itt but that is the frutes of war to leave distruction in its path. this war is an awful thing I tell you. you cant hav no idea of it up thare in olde maine.

NAMING OUR TOWNS: LEEDS

Leeds was first settled in 1779 by Thomas and Roger Stinchfield. As the Pejepscot Proprietors claimed the area, they laid out the township in 1789-1781 and called it Littleborough for one of the proprietors, Colonel Moses Little of Massachusetts. When the residents petitioned for incorporation, they requested the name Cuba. However, in the act of incorporation in 1801 the Legislature gave the name Leeds. This was chosen to honor the first settlers' father, John Stinchfield, a native of Leeds, England. He had emigrated from there in 1735 and settled in Gloucester, Massachusetts, and in 1755 moved to New Gloucester, now Maine.

Sources: Ava Harriet Chadbourne, *Maine Place Names and the Peopling of Its Towns* (Portland, ME: The Bond Wheelwright Company, 1955), p. 98; J. C. Stinchfield, et al., *History of the Town of Leeds* (Lewiston, ME: Lewiston Journal Co., 1901), pp. 1, 6, 7, 17.

LARD POND

Near Route 4 in Turner, just across the Auburn line is Lard Pond, whose name is explained by Phillip R. Rutherford, *The Dictionary of Maine Place-Names*: During a timber operation in the woods of Turner Township, a logging crew sat down for lunch on the banks of this pond. One of the men opened his lunch bucket to discover that he had picked up his wife's lard bucket that morning by mistake. The loggers thought that this was so funny they named it for the incident [p. 3].

AHS OFFICERS RE-ELECTED

At our annual meeting on May 26, 1998, all officers and members of the Board of Directors were re-elected. They include A. B. (Bob) Palmer, Jr., president; David C. Young, vice president; Michael C. Lord, executive secretary; Mary M. Riley, recording secretary; Alma Palmer, membership secretary; Susan Sturgis, treasurer; and Richard L. Trafton, attorney.

The Board of Directors for 1998-1999 are Gridley Barrows, Leslie M. Eastman, Natalie G. Foye, Franklin Goss, Bernice Hodgkin, Douglas I. Hodgkin, Edward Hodgkin, Eva Labonte, Merton Leavitt, Warren B. Randall, Norman E. Rose, and Gordon V. Windle. Honorary directors are Ingrid Dutch, Florence Gremley, Geneva A. Kirk, Robert G. Wade, and Leslie M. Wight.

GOINGS-ON AT THE SOCIETY Report of the Executive Secretary by Michael C. Lord

- This Executive Secretary has compiled two lists, one of historical organizations in Androscoggin County and one of Maine State historical organizations. Each is about a page long (in small print), and anyone wanting a copy of either or both should send a #10 business-size envelope SASE to the Society. You are invited to suggest additions and corrections.
- As many of you are aware, the Lewiston Sun-Journal has been publishing historical photos, mostly from our files, on the back page of every Saturday edition. A copy of each is being saved in order to make a scrapbook for the Society's reference.
- Our 75th Anniversary Post Card is for sale at 25 cents each or five for \$1.00. We are planning to have a special cancellation postmark this November. We have several thousand post cards to sell.
- The Maine Grants Information Center is actively promoting historical preservation and cultural tourism. This secretary attended a grant writing seminar at Bates College on May 15th (taking some time on his lunch hour to visit the Muskie Archives). I shall also attend another session titled "Meet the Grantmakers" on June 18th at the Maine Maritime Museum in Bath.
- Records for our fiscal year ending May 31 indicate 807 telephone calls, 399 museum visits, 370 library visits, 183 meeting attendance, and 732 correspondence, excluding programs, meeting notices, newsletters and junk mail.
- Did you know that George Bush was stationed at what is now the Auburn-Lewiston Municipal Airport in Auburn for about one month during World War II, probably residing in Lewiston? I have obtained from the President George Bush Memorial Library in Texas a World War II photo of him in uniform for our files.
- We have in our possession a musical celestina with approximately twenty fragile paper

music rolls. This executive secretary has catalogued and preserved the entire collection by wrapping them in acid free archival quality paper and housing them in light-proof archival quality acid- and lignin-free boxes.

- I am in the process of seeking additional information on items in our holdings. After the replies arrive, I shall report on them in the next newsletter.

SKINNER TRANSCRIPTS

We continue to catalog Ralph Skinner's transcripts of his radio addresses that are available in the Society's files.

1968

Feb. 24 Squire Little's Ailing Father
 Feb. 25 Life's End for the Littles
 Mar. 9 Auburn Saving Bank Centenary
 Mar. 10 The Day of the Mayors
 Mar. 16 Mayor A. M. Penley, 1887-88
 Mar. 17 Mayor A. R. Savage, 1889-1891
 Mar. 20 Big News Come to Us
 Mar. 24 W. W. Bolster - 1893
 Mar. 25 Winchester G. Lowell 1892
 Mar. 30 Hillman Smith, 1894-95
 Mar. 31 Our Two Big Floods
 Apr. 6 Nathan W. Harris, 1896-98
 [Apr. 7] William H. Wiggin, 1899
 Apr. 13 J. S. P. H. Wilson -- 1900-1901
 Apr. 14 Eben G. Eveleth, 1902-1903
 Apr. 20 Alonzo Q. Miller, 1904-1905
 Apr. 21 David R. Hastings, 1906
 Apr. 27 John R. Webber, 1907
 Apr. 28 Irving L. Merrill, 1908-1911
 May 4 Manual Training and Public Playgrounds
 May 5 Mayor Merrill's Last Year
 May 11 Charles E. Williams - 1912
 May 12 The Progressives Take Over

May 18 "Progressive" Accomplishment
 May 19 Henry R. Porter 1915-1916
 May 25 Ralph F. Burnham, 1917-1919
 May 26 First Public Health Service
 June 7 New Look at Industry
 June 8 The Board of Health Era
 June 9 City Health Department
 June 15 Remember the Auburn Industries
 June 16 Auburn Bakeries
 June 22 Penley, Meat Packer
 June 23 Meats and Provisions
 June 29 Auburn Textiles
 June 30 Building Trades
 July 6 Enter Automobiles
 Oct. 5 Maine: Dawn of America
 Oct. 6 The Sesquicentennial Set-up
 Oct. 12 News in the Classroom
 Oct. 13 Season of History Talks
 Oct. 19 History Side to Urban Renewal
 Oct. 20 Two Great Diary Keepers
 Oct. 26 Luther Bonney Remembered
 Oct. 27 The Old and the New in Turner
 Nov. 2 Grammar School Graduations
 Nov. 3 High School Graduation, 1901
 Nov. 9 City Care of Cemeteries
 Nov. 10 The First Armistice Day in L-A
 Nov. 16 The Longfellow Shrine
 Nov. 17 Early Maine Railroads
 Nov. 24 Back to Bakerstown
 Nov. 30 Famous Stallions
 Dec. 1 Auburn Man in Custer Massacre
 Dec. 7 Down Through the Wars
 Dec. 8 The Olfene Market Change
 Dec. 14 Lewiston Grew Up by the River
 Dec. 15 Background for a New Park
 Dec. 21 An Edna Cornforth Scrapbook
 Dec. 22 Edna Cornforth's Boys and Girls
 Dec. 28 Edna Cornforth Gets a Job
 Dec. 29 Humor, Cornforth Style

1969

Jan. 4 E. L. Orchestras and Bands
 Jan. 5 More Cornforth Lore on E. L.
 Jan. 25 Historic Young's Corner
 Jan. 26 The Last Wellsweep
 Feb. 1 Wee House Has Long History
 Feb. 2 Wee House and the Water Dowser

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