

ANDROSCOGGIN HISTORY

February, 1999

Newsletter of the Androscoggin Historical Society

No. 26

DAVIS FAMILY FOUNDATION GRANT

by Michael C. Lord, Executive Secretary

The Davis Family Foundation of Falmouth, Maine, has awarded the Society a grant of \$12,500 for the purpose of securing clear legal title to some of the more important objects and documents in our collection. This is intended to remove potential conflicts and title threats. We will also attempt to convert permanent loans into donations. This project will involve hiring a private investigator during the next year, which will result in a large file proving clear and legal title to our more important items. We thank the Davis Family Foundation for their kind generosity.

NAMING OUR TOWNS: LISBON

by Douglas I. Hodgkin

The Town of Lisbon is comprised of three villages: Lisbon, Lisbon Center (also called Lisbon Plains), and Lisbon Falls.

In 1799, at the request of a majority of the voters of the Town of Bowdoin, the western section of that town known as West Bowdoinham (now including Lisbon, Lisbon Center, and Sabattus) was to be set off. This was incorporated as the Town of Thompsonborough, in recognition of General Samuel Thompson of Brunswick and Topsham. He was born in Biddeford in 1735, and during the Revolution was colonel of a detachment of volunteers in 1775. Members of the Thompson family were large landowners in the vicinity, as well. Settler Ezekiel Thompson arrived in 1798, having purchased 350 acres from his brother Samuel. Ezekiel held many offices in town and was Postmaster and Collector of U. S. Revenue in the 3rd District during the War of 1812.

However, the residents of the town complained about the "great length" of the name and petitioned for a change in 1801. A legislative act of 1802 authorized a change to a name of fewer letters and syllables. "For no apparent reason, other than its shortness, Able [sic] Nutting suggested the name of Lisbon."

Chadbourne claims that the name change was due to "General Samuel's unpatriotic views." It is not

indicated which views these were, but Thompson opposed adoption of the federal Constitution, favored the secession of Maine from Massachusetts, and criticized George Washington as a slaveholder.

Lisbon Village was known in early days as Lisbon Factory, and was a center of commerce for the region, including residents of South Lewiston.

Little River Plantation was a parcel of land lying between Little River, the Sabattus River, and the Androscoggin River. It was annexed to Lisbon in 1808. Officially, this was known as Little River Village until the U. S. Post Office adopted the name of Lisbon Falls in 1865.

In 1840 the northern portion of Lisbon was set off to form the Town of Webster, now Sabattus.

[Sources: Francis W. Plummer, Sr., *Lisbon: The History of a Small Maine Town* (Lewiston, ME: Twin City Printery, 1970, pp. 4-10; Ava Harriet Chadbourne, *Maine Place Names and the Peopling of Its Towns* (Portland, ME: The Bond Wheelwright Company, 1955), p. 145; James S. Leamon, *Revolution Downeast* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1993), pp. 203-206, 217.]

GOINGS-ON AT THE SOCIETY

by Michael C. Lord, Executive Secretary

- The Society is registered as of October 16, 1998, with the State of Maine, Department of Professional and Financial Regulation, as a charitable organization for the purpose of charitable solicitations for both fund raising and grant applications that may total over \$10,000.
- The amount spent for our 75th Anniversary fund-raising drive was \$1424.63 (2703 letters); and the amount raised, \$1200 to date.
- Calendar year 1998 totals: phone - 674, museum - 400, library - 367, Balloon Festival - 89, Liberty Festival - 0, letters - 854 (including forwarded emails), meeting notices - 499, newsletters - 362, programs sent - 162, meeting attendance - 188, business meeting attendance - 19
- I attended archival workshop on January 7 at the USM Library sponsored by the Maine Historical Records Advisory board. The knowledge gained will improve our ability to win grants.

THREE STORIES: NATIVE AMERICANS LURED TO DEATH OVER FALLS

by Douglas I. Hodgkin

There are at least three stories told years ago about how a band of Native Americans were lured to their deaths over the Lewiston Falls. Two seem to be alternate versions of the same tale; because the facts vary, it is not clear what is fact, if any, or myth. The third story is probably an intentional fictional reformulation.

The first two involve one Weir or Wier who sought revenge for the deaths of his family by seeking to kill as many Native Americans as possible, so that he became a legendary terror along the Androscoggin.

Story One

The Weir family lived in Turner. When the son was between ages 16 and 20, he returned home to find that “the Indians had burned his father’s cabin, killing his father and taking the family into captivity.” He commenced his reign of terror. However, one day many years later, “Old Weir . . . was overpowered by a band of Indians who had been lying in ambush for him.” They bound him and collected a large pile of dry wood to burn him at the stake. All left to summon the rest of the tribe, except one who remained to guard Weir at a place above the falls. The guard built a fire to guide the canoes to the shore.

In the dark Weir was able to get a hand free and then called his guard to him; “then with a lightning-like motion he seized the Indian’s knife from his belt and buried it in his heart.” Weir extinguished the fire, hurried to a high bank below the falls, and built another fire. This misled the others to paddle too closely to the falls and all perished.

[Source: “A Story of Lewiston Falls,” *Lewiston Saturday Journal*, March 24, 1888.]

Story Two

Joe Wier was a peaceful farmer, but “coming to his cabin home in the town of Scarborough, one day, he found that his entire family had been murdered and scalped by the Indians.” His life then became a hunt for revenge.

Once, he learned “that a party of Indians were coming down the Androscoggin river on their way to

destroy a settlement down the valley. Wier came up to Lewiston and waited for events in a secluded spot.” Soon a Native American came along to build the fire above the falls to guide the others. Wier clubbed him and “then ran down to the highest point on Laural [sic] Hill and built a huge bonfire.” When those upstream saw this, they entered their canoes, started down the river, and soon were caught in the strong current. “Tradition says that scores of them perished and for days their bodies drifted to the shore.”

It is claimed that Wier’s grave is in a neglected cemetery near Yarmouth Village bearing only the inscription “Joseph Wier.”

[Source: L. C. Bateman, “Lewiston Falls and Its Three Heads, Present in Photographic, Geologic and Legendary Lore,” *Lewiston Journal, Illustrated Magazine Section*, September 3, 1921.]

Story Three

The third story probably was intentional fiction. It is a reprint of “A Lewiston-Auburn Tradition Retold by Ervin [sic] W. Canham in the Edward Little High School Oracle.” The following is a summary:

A Native American girl was sleeping in a lean-to near Deer Rips. She heard a noise, awoke, and saw a band of Abenaki in war-paint making portage around the rips. She concluded they were on their way to massacre the settlement near the falls and then in turn they would be able to drive out her own people.

She slipped out of the lean-to, hurried down-river, and soon saw the scout who had gone on ahead to light the beacon fire above the falls. As he bent about his work, she clubbed him with “a short, stubby oak branch, about two feet long.” She tied him up, took a pitch-pine torch from the fire, put out the rest of the fire, and then hurried to the base of the falls. She climbed a pine tree, and ignited its upper branches.

The party of six canoes sighted the fire and paddled down the river. A bolt of heat lightning revealed to the Indians too late where they were.

[Source: Ervin [sic] W. Canham, “The Old Man of The Falls,” *Lewiston Journal, Illustrated Magazine Section*, June 5, 1920.]

Our 75th Anniversary postcards of the 1823 bridge at the site of the Longley Bridge are still available for 25¢ each or five for \$1. Call us at (207) 784-0586.

LEE R. WARD'S WORLD WAR I LETTERS

Lee Royce Ward of Auburn graduated from Edward Little High School and attended Bates College. He left college to enter military service. The Society has a collection of letters he sent to his mother, Mrs. F. E. Ward, 53 School Street, Auburn, during his World War I service, 1917-1919. Most were written while he was stationed at Evacuation Hospital #8, Camp Greenleaf, Fort Oglethorpe, Georgia. The following are selections:

Fort Oglethorpe [Jan. 27 1918 postmark]

... Don't be worried about the quarantine of which I wrote you last time. Our throats have all been examined + three men isolated. The rest of us are absolutely all right but we are being sprayed, nose + mouth, every day. . . .

February 1, 1918 [postmarked Feb. 11]

. . . We have been having gas drills lately. We sat down with gas masks on in a room full of poisonous gas. We drill in the open field with gasmasks on, going thru the regular formations . . . One of the fellows, Tilly, has promised to kodak me in the mask. . . .

. . . It's a treat to hear some of these Southerners talk. They have the same kind of humor that you find in Maine but the way they put things makes it funny to me. I heard two fellows fighting about something one had done + one said, "How come?" for "Why?" It sounded strange, but I've heard it a dozen times since. I got used to "you-all" long ago. "Over yonder" means anywhere from two steps to across the ocean. . . .

If anybody asks about me (that doesn't know I'm in the army, I mean) just tell them I'm in the Regular Army. We regulars look down a long, long ways on the conscripts (National Army) +, not quite so far, on the National Guard . . . The conscripts are put up in two story barracks + are treated easy. We sleep in tents + you can bet I'm as hard as nails. The medical department is rated as the highest branch of service, the infantry, the lowest. The evacuation hospitals are the most desirable branches of the medical department for they are practically out of danger (except for airplanes + gas) + in a position to see the action. . . .

[Postmark Chattanooga, Tn, Feb. 18]

. . . And you want to know what keeps me so busy. It's about thirty officers, and a bunch of non-coms. I'm on detached now, of course, but in camp we drill four hours, have lectures three, stand in line for meals, (chow is our word) mail, etc., eat, and listen to announcements about 4. That gives us about four hours for police (cleaning quarters), study for lectures, mending clothes, + writing letters. At the hospital we work all day + sometimes after supper + have to be in bed, lights out at nine. . . .

[postmark Feb 21] Wednesday night

. . . . The only thing, I dislike about this place is the distance, I don't dare to figure it out, between us. But perhaps it was that same distance that killed my first feelings when I got here — homesickness, and desire to get out of the army. There are fellows here, whose homes are just a few miles away, just enough to get home every week-end. Every Monday, I see them just as homesick as when they first joined. . . .

Savoy Hotel, Chattanooga, Tenn, March 9 1918

I am in Chattanooga to-night. This time I'm at a good hotel. . . . I am here in Chat with Charley Mitchell, a Colby man, who knows Zack Taylor well. I met Bill Cloutier to-night. And a fellow named Parkman who used to drive for Swift in Lewiston. Also Iva's [Lee Ward's sister] roughneck friend, Walter Sanderson of Auburn. . . .

[postmarked Apr 10] Tuesday night

I hardly think you need to worry about me in connection with submarines for a while yet. We are still here in Georgia, stuck in the mud. . . . I got a Bates Bulletin today. My name was enrolled in it among the "heroes." It also had a piece about Prof. Johnny. It is too bad that so many words are wasted on useless, worthless men that when the truth is told about a good man like Prof. Johnny it fails to ring true. Compare the obituary of Jonas Edwards to that of the "Beloved Professor" and you will see what mean. . . .

[postmarked Apr 16] Monday

. . . I went to Chattanooga Saturday. I only had enough money to get there and back but I found out for the first time that there was a good library in town — 'nuff sed. I got a Bates Bulletin the other day. It had a list of the Bates' men in service. I was included in the class of 1920 Hm!!!

[May 22, 1918, written on envelope]

This is my last chance to write to you for awhile, so please don't worry about not receiving letters from me. I can't tell you where I am or where I'm going, but I can say this is probably the last time I shall write from this country. I am feeling great just now and expect to feel so for some time to come, so don't think I'm sick. . . .

[post card] June 17, 1918

Have been away from company on detached service but am back now. Have hospital in pretty little town quite a way back behind lines. Am well and working hard. . . .

June 18, 1918. . . . We are quartered just now in a very pretty little town quite a distance behind the lines. . . . I have quite a few chances to improve my French and I am taking them all. . . . We had been here only two days, however, when they sent me, as one of a group, away on detached service. The place they sent us was an American Red Cross Hospital in a large city, just what city I may not say.

SKINNER TRANSCRIPTS

We conclude the list of Ralph Skinner's transcripts of his radio addresses that are available in the Society's files.

1969

Aug. 20 Charles Starbird, Master Historian
Aug. 22 How King Became Governor
Sep. 8 The Growth of Stevens Mills
Sep. 10 The Passing of Everett Greaton
Sep. 12 More on Stevens Mills
Sep. 15 Out Minot Avenue Way
Sep. 17 The Passing of Bill White
Sep. 19 Squire Little's Cape
Sep. 22 Fond Memories of the Knight House
Sep. 24 Farmer's Almanac 1970
Sep. 26 The Lewiston-Auburn Dead in Vietnam
Sep. 29 Auburn's Two Centenaries
Oct. 9 Second Year of Goff Hill Improvement
Oct. 1 She Saved the Squire Little House
Oct. 3 Susan Small's Story
Oct. 8 Elias Gove, Prince of Peace
Oct. 10 Our Elm Trees Were Planted
Oct. 13 The Hershey Draft Near End
Oct. 15 Something Else in October
Oct. 17 Bond Issue Referenda
Oct. 22 Local Doctors in W. W. II
Oct. 31 The Narcissus Is Saved
Nov. 3 Gold Star Mother, 1969
Nov. 7 Image of the Ageing
Nov. 10 French Ambassador to Visit Here
Nov. 12 The Old Bullen Map
Nov. 14 Impressive West Pitch
Nov. 21 Lake Auburn Lowe House
Nov. 24 More about Lake Auburn Lowe House

<http://www.rootsweb.com/~meandrhs>
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1970

Mar. 2 The Old Toll House is Doomed
Mar. 2 Poland's Double Observance
Mar. 16 Sesquicentennial Start
Mar. 23 Auburn's First Winter Carnival
Mar. 20 First Week Sesquicentennial

VIETNAM MEMORIAL WALL RUBBINGS

Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund volunteer Kathy Ferguson has provided our Society with the name rubbings of all twenty-nine heroic individuals from Androscoggin County who died in service of their country in the Vietnam War. This includes the name of Thomas J. McMahon, who was awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor. Our executive secretary has had copies made of his high school senior photo that was kindly loaned by McMahon School in Lewiston, one for our files and one that we sent to the Fund for their website at www.vvmf.org.

MEETING NOTICE

The next meeting of Androscoggin Historical Society is Tuesday, February 23, 1999, at 7:30 P.M., in the County Building.

Topic: Local Native American History & Genealogy

Speaker: Nancy Lecompte of Ne-Do-Ba, a Lewiston-based educational organization that teaches Abenaki history and culture.