

ANDROSCOGGIN HISTORY

October, 1999 Newsletter of the Androscoggin Historical Society No. 28

THE MUSIC HALL IN LEWISTON

It has just been announced that the district court will be located in the Music Hall building at 69 Lisbon Street, Lewiston. This is very good news, not only for the redevelopment of downtown Lewiston, but also for the preservation of a signature structure in the Lewiston landscape that has served a notable role .

After a fire destroyed several stores, leading citizens approached then U. S. Representative William P. Frye for assistance in construction of “the best opera house east of Boston.” He apparently contributed as much as a sixth of the cost. In his address at the opening on December 17, 1877, he stated, “But I say to you that cities like ours will have a theatre. And we claim that you put an audience into such a beautiful place as this, and it will tend to virtue.”

The 1300-seat house was designed by John Fox of Boston, who also designed the Providence Opera House. “The seats are divided into four classes: the parquette, the body of the house from the center, sweeping to the orchestra; the parquette circle, outside the parquette rail; the balcony, two front rows in the gallery; the family circle – the balance of the gallery.” Arthur G. Staples, a reporter, recalled in 1938, “The city was proud of Music hall. It boasted, so that Portland could hear. For Portland had nothing but a barn-like structure in which plays were given. Music hall was as grand to Maine as the Metropolitan in New York.”

The first performances were “Maritana” and “Rose of Castile” by the Boston English Opera Company and the comedy “Married Life” by the Metropolitan Company. For many years, manager Charles Horbury recruited top-level traveling stock companies, minstrels, drama, melodrama, and outstanding musicians of the day. The hall went out of business in the 1930's, but it still was used occasionally for a couple decades.

The street level of the building initially was divided into six sections for stores. By the 1960's a single hardware store owned the premises and gutted the theater for storage space.

Local historians now should be delighted that the building looks forward to a use that permits its survival as an integral part of Lewiston's future.

Sources: “The Opening of Music Hall,” *Lewiston Saturday Evening Journal*, December 18, 1877; Marilyn Hackett, “L-A Buildings Are Alive with Memories,” *Lewiston Journal*, November 1, 1986; Alice Frost Lord, “‘A.G.S.’ Recalls Early Days in Lewiston Theatres,” *Lewiston Evening Journal*, March 16, 1938.

NAMING OUR TOWNS: POLAND

The Town of Poland is part of what was a tract of land called Bakerstown granted in 1736 to soldiers in a certain company who fought in Canada in 1690 as part of the expedition that attempted to wrest Canada from French control. It was found that the grant was in New Hampshire and therefore outside the jurisdiction of Massachusetts. A new grant in 1765 encompassed what are now Poland, Minot, Mechanic Falls, and Auburn. It was apparently named “in honor of Capt. Thomas Baker who killed an Indian sachem on the bank of the rapid stream entering the Pemigewasset near Plymouth, still called Baker's River.”

Poland was incorporated as a town in 1795. Some speculate it was named for the nation of Poland or to honor those such as Kosciusko or Count Pulaski, who aided the colonists in the Revolutionary War. Varney claims it was named for “Poland, a noted Indian chief of the region.” However, J. W. Penney asserts, “Without successful contradiction, to Moses¹ Emery belongs the honor of naming the town of Poland, the name having its origin from a favorite psalm tune of his, and presented by him with the petition to the General Court of Massachusetts Bay.” Emery was one of the earliest settlers, and as representative to the General Court requested the privilege of naming the town.

Minot separated from Poland in 1802; Auburn, from Minot in 1842; and Mechanic Falls from portions of Poland and Minot in 1893.

Sources: Ava Harriet Chadbourne, *Maine Place Names and the Peopling of Its Towns* (Portland, ME: The Bond Wheelwright Company, 1955), pp. 425-426; Geo. J. Varney, *A Gazetteer of the State of Maine* (Boston: B. B. Russell, 1886), p. 454; the address of J. W. Penney, in Alva Bolster Ricker, et al., *Poland Centennial* (New York : Printed by Andrew H. Kellogg, c1896) , p. 85.

EVENT AT THE FALLS: MORE STORIES

Immediately after the publication of our February newsletter, Nancy Lecompte of Ne-Do-Ba provided the program concerning "Local Native American History" at our February meeting. Ms. Lecompte believes some event did happen at the Falls, but she noted the implausibility of the three stories published in the newsletter. She has provided us with additional accounts discovered by researchers for Ne-Do-Ba:

[Joe] Weare was once at Lewiston Falls, where a large war party of hostile Indians had collected, and were having fine sport paddling their canoes far up stream and then drifting down with the rapid current to the head of the falls at which point they had a bonfire to warn them how far they might descend in safety. Weare waited until the Indians had gone up the river, then emerged from his covert and extinguished their fire and built another below the cataract in a tree, at a height corresponding to the one built by the Indians. This deceived them so that their canoes were in the rapids and beyond control, before they realized their danger and were swept over the falls to death and destruction.

From: William Hutchinson Rowe, *Ancient North Yarmouth and Yarmouth 1636-1936* (Somersworth: New England History Press, 1980 reprint).

A raid on Topsham was planned and a flotilla of canoes sailed down the Androscoggin to attack the settlement. Two warriors were sent ahead to build beacon fires on the Island above the falls at Ameriscoggin (Auburn-Lewiston) as night approached. These scouts met some white hunters, who learning their mission, plied them with liquor until they became helpless, knocked them on the head and built the warning lights below the falls.

Deceived by the decoy fires the whole fleet of canoes, freighted with painted warriors, went over the falls to their destruction.

From: J. W. Thompson, "Rokomeko of the Anasaguncooks," *Lewiston Journal* [prob. magazine section], date unknown.

Another article, "Last of the Rockomekos" (author, newspaper, and date unknown) is quite similar. The target of the raid, however, was Brunswick, and the date 1688 was given. Also, it was indicated that the families were included in the party.

Another story is a family oral tradition shared with Ne-Do-Ba by a Lewiston resident several years ago:

When the Abenaki were camped in the area for any period of time they would set torches out to mark the West Pitch of the Great Falls, because that pitch could be navigated by canoe.

One evening a settler was out working by the bank of the river. It was getting dark and his work was not finished, so he took the torches at West Pitch to use for light – not knowing why they were there. About that time three Indians came down river

and using the relocated torches as a guide to the West Pitch, missed the pitch and were killed.

As a result of this, the Abenaki placed a curse on the river, saying that forever after, three whites would die at the hands of the river every year.

Another story was recently told by a descendant of a woman known as "Black Granny" who was very likely Abenaki/Negro mix - probably the daughter of a freed slave named Benjamin Coffin and an Abenaki woman. 'Black Granny' came from what the family refers to as the Deer Rips Village. There was also a Gulf Island Village according to their oral tradition. This would be at the time of early settlement of the area.

The Abenaki of the Deer Rips and Gulf Island villages were having problems with the local settlers harassing their women. The possibility of rape was mentioned. After awhile, the Abenaki men had had enough and decided to take things into their own hands. They came down to the Great Falls by canoe after dark. For some reason, someone had been sent ahead to set out torches on each side of the falls. The men from the two villages had planned to split up, half going to the Auburn side and half to the Lewiston side to deal with the culprits. Apparently, a settler got wind of what was going on and moved the torches. All of the Abenaki men were killed going over the falls.

Some of the surviving families went to Canada to be with relatives. Some of the local settlers brought the remaining survivors (women and children) into town to be cared for. "Black Granny" was a child of one of the women brought to town.

You may locate more information about Native Americans and about Ne-Do-Ba at their web site: <<http://www.avcnet.org/ne-do-ba>>. You may send e-mail to ne-do-ba@megalink.net. The USPS address is Ne-Do-Ba, _ Nancy Lecompte, 1093 Main Street, Lewiston, ME 04240. We thank Ms Lecompte and Ne-Do-Ba for providing this material.

This summer, the editor found yet another story in our files that suggests tragedy at Lewiston Falls. Leon C. Baldwin of Fulton, New York, wrote a brief letter to the Society in 1965, in which he states,

I would like to relate a story that my dear Mother told of her Great Grandfather John March many years ago was canoeing down the Lewiston River when he found some Indians following him it was night so he tied a lantern to the back of his canoe and the Indians followed the light which went over Lewiston Falls, he swam ashore and escaped from them. . . .

In our February 2000 issue, Nancy Lecompte will provide an analysis of the various stories. She attempts to sort out the grains of truth from this variety of accounts that have developed over the years.

THE NOTEBOOK OF THOMAS DRESSER THORNE

We offer our thanks to Mrs. Eugene Mahoney of Belfast, Maine, who recently donated to the Society the notebook of Thomas Dresser Thorne (1814-1905). Thorne, who lived at Thorne's Corner in Lewiston, was a contractor responsible for many buildings in our area. A list of these was published in the June 1995 issue of this newsletter. The notebook also contains the words and notes of music, as well as recollections of local history. The following are selections from the latter:

I am called a veteran Singing School Master If time makes veterans then I am one. My first S. School was in a red School House where now are located the Continental Mills in Lewiston. Well do I remember of My Schollars Col. Temple Tebbets, George B. Smith, Josiah and Joseph Pickard, Mrs. Laura C. Thorne Miss A. A. Thorne, Miss Lucinda Litchfield This was during the winter of '38 and '39 After this we usually taught during the winter season till after the war one or more terms. [p. 4]

1860 The Androscoggin Musical Association was organized about this time of which I had the honor of being the first President. [p. 7]

Organization of the first Baptist Church of Lewiston [DATE?] Sevices [sic] to be held in the Free Baptist Church Maine St. Lewiston, the building remains there the same only gone up higher. . . [corner of Main & Chapel Streets] we were requested to furnish Music for the occasion I assented, saying it might cost to furnish a suitable orchestra. Mr Cobb replied I will take care of that

The orchestra as follows.

Reuben Seavey of Hallowell 1st violin

Nathan R. Reynolds, Lewiston 2d "

Freeman Newell, Auburn vio. cello

Franklin Simmonds [sic] Lew. bass

We formed a special choir for this occasion at this time not one living but myself. [p. 8]

Pleasant reccollection [sic] of the many Meetings and associations with our Musical friends of Maine of our Youthful days. . . . Dean Frye, the Grand father of Seator [sic] Wm P. Frye, was a fine Tenor Singer in his youthful days. Why did you give it up! Reply 'twas not my calling Maj. Wm. R. Frye, Never took a part in Singing School or choir but gave his pesence [sic] when he could to encourage often inviting us, the choir, to meet at his house, and furnis [sic] refreshments Mary Frye was a good natural singer died young [p. 14]

My first visit to Lewiston Falls.

Standing on the hill near where R. C. Pingree's office is now located [near where canal now crosses Main St.] could see a grist and saw mill, and a carding and fulling mill. below the hill where now stands Hotell [sic] Atwood

was a low one story house, known as the mill-house [corner of Main and Mill Streets]. Opposite was a two story house known as the Col. Little house. . . Some rods down river stood the Abner Harris House who was the builder and one of the first settlers. . . . At this time there was no bridge across the river. At this time there was but one small house between the hill and the corner [of Main and Sabattus Streets]. this was the home of the Frye family, located where now stands the brick house in the corner of Maine and Middle St's . . . in 1837 I visit Lewiston again . . . The road from the corner to the Mill Hill curved to the north so that the road bed as then traveled was taken for a foundation for the Frye Block and other buildings did the same. But the time had come for the road to be made straight. Col. E. Ham being road commissioner made straight the highway but not without some opposition. [pp. 51-53]

1837 we contracted with Samuel Pickard Esqr to build the block on Maine St. known as the Frye block. At the Same time Daniel Holland built a large two story house opposite, where now central block is situated [corner of Main and Lisbon Streets]. . . . at this time there were no streets leading North or South from Maine St [p. 53]

1839, Streets were to be opend [sic] one called Chappel [sic] St. leading northerly and one Southerly called Albion St. now Park St. [p. 54]

1870. Was appointed assistant Marshall [sic], by S. S. Marble Marshall [sic] of Maine to take the Census of Lewiston, and took four wards. J. S. P. Ham the other three Many were the difficulties here we had to meet. Some times having the door shut in your face, but having patience, then O, I thot you was a pedler [sic], at another time I called on the Mistress of a large bording [sic] house all ladies, after my buisness [sic] was made known, she said to me I will have nothing to do with it and departed in a hurry, I took from my pocket a small pamphlet and followed, I read a sec.. of the law to her showing her the consequences of refusing to give the information required. Then a time was agreed on for to meet herself and boarders [p. 43]

LIVERMORE HOUSE

We sadly note the burning of the Deacon Elijah Livermore House in Livermore, on June 30, 1999. This historic structure was the home of the Livermore/Livermore Falls Historical Society and the Livermore Center Neighborhood Club. Mr. Dennis Stires, playing the part of the house itself, spoke about this house at our April 27, 1999, meeting. Our condolences go to Mr. Stires and all others involved.

GOINGS-ON AT THE SOCIETY
by **Michael Lord, Executive Secretary**

- In July we were awarded a **grant** in the amount of \$500.00 from the **Gannett Foundation** via WCSH-6 in Portland, Maine, for the purpose of computerizing our collections. This grant, coupled with others, will help us achieve our goal of getting our holdings, both library and museum, on computer, thus greatly enhancing our ability to help researchers. We thank them for their generosity.
- We welcome our **new clerk, Ms. Debra Chadbourne**, who came on board October 1st. She will be cataloging our collections in preparation for clearing legal title to them. Her salary is being paid by a grant from the Davis Family Foundation, and other grants will be applied, as well, as they arrive.
- We now have both a **fire extinguisher and a smoke detector** in our small museum as recommended by our Conservation Assessment Program Architectural Report. Our thanks go to our new volunteer Bob Purington for installing them.
- **Acquisitions highlights:** We have been given the notebook of Thomas Thorne of Lewiston (featured in this newsletter) and the 1865 diary of Josephine S. Lemont of Greene (to be extracted in the February newsletter). Glenn Skillin of Biddeford donated a handwritten booklet that gives history, census and death records of Lewiston, Auburn and Danville in 1847, with updates from 1858-1863; we shall provide material from this in a future issue. We have salvaged from the construction on and around Court

Street, Auburn, a trolley spike and several cobble-stones. We have purchased a bibliography titled *Northeast Indian Resource Secrets*, an MPBC- produced video titled *Till Shiloh Come*, a book titled *The Courthouses of Maine*, and several other things. We have also been given a genealogy of the Campbell family, several copies of the Androscoggin County issue of the journal *Covered Bridge Topics* (with thanks to editor Joseph Conwill), the family papers and photographs of Rev. Elijah Jones of Minot, as well as other things.

- Please check your mailing label! If it says "98-99" on it, then your membership needs to be renewed. Individual memberships are \$15, family memberships are \$25, and life memberships are \$150. Please remit all payments to Mrs. Alma Palmer, Membership Secretary, P. O. Box 67, Minot, ME 04258-0067. Telephone (207) 783-2513. Please also make sure your address is up to date. Thank you.

MEETING NOTICE

The next meeting of Androscoggin Historical Society is Tuesday, October 26, 1999, at 7:30 P.M., in the County Building.

Topic: "Archaeology in the Androscoggin Valley of Maine"

**Speaker: Bruce Bourque,
Chief Archaeologist, Maine State Museum**

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