

# ANDROSCOGGIN HISTORY

February, 2000

Newsletter of the Androscoggin Historical Society

No. 29

## ZACHARY BLAIR IS NEW INTERN

Our new intern, Zachary Blair, from the Auburn Middle School, has been helping us on Thursday afternoons from 3:00 to 4:30 since early December. He is thirteen years old, loves history and has assisted in various museum duties, such as hanging pictures, helping move things in the cloakroom, helping to make a new frames rack, and similar general duties. We welcome Zachary and thank him for his help!

## OUR MUSEUM HOLDINGS CATALOGED

Our new clerk, Debra Chadbourne, is doing a wonderful job cataloging our museum holdings. She has cataloged all 3000-plus objects in our museum, from the attic to the basement, from the cloakroom to our fire engine in off-site storage. She is now matching our new catalog to the donor records that we have so that she may soon start clearing legal title to the objects.

## HISTORY OF ANDROSCOGGIN COUNTY

Are you interested in obtaining the 1891 *History of Androscoggin County, Maine*, edited by Georgia Drew Merrill? It is a high quality 893-page acid-free Class A library binding hardcover reprint in buckram with the title stamped in gold on the spine. If you would like a copy, then send us your name, address and a check or money order for \$90.00 plus \$6.95 postage and handling, and we shall order you one, as recently republished by the Higginson Book Co. of Salem, Massachusetts. We are passing part of our library discount on to you. We shall order them when we have accumulated a few orders.

## NAMING OUR TOWNS: MECHANIC FALLS

Mechanic Falls was originally part of the Bakerstown Plantation (See "Naming Our Towns: Poland" in this newsletter, June 1999).

After the settlement in 1823, a variety of names were employed for the area by the falls on the Little Andros-coggin. Chadbourne writes, "Old Dr.

Tewksbury from Hebron (now Oxford) who had to follow a logging road in on a dark and stormy night to reach a patient, called the place 'Jerico' by which name it was known for some time. Afterward, in consequence of the large quantity of 'grog' sold, it was called 'Groggy Harbor' . . . ." Petersons also noted the name "Bog Hoot." However, the most common name was "Bog Falls" after "a long stretch of marshy land along the Little Androscoggin."

In 1841 a post office was established and postmaster Samuel F. Waterman suggested the name Mechanics Falls to recognize the workers of the village. Indeed, the prosperity of the town derived from the manufacture of boards, shingles, and boxes, a tannery, brickyards, carpentry, furniture making, and black-smithing. Often the "s" was dropped, and in 1887 postmaster Frank A. Millet suggested the official name of Mechanic Falls. This name was adopted with the incorporation of the town from portions of Poland and Minot in 1893. By then additional industries were paper manufacturing, corn packing, shoe and machine shops, manufacture of steam engines and boilers, carriage building, novelty turning, tool works, canned goods, clothing making, and others.

Sources: Ava Harriet Chadbourne, *Maine Place Names and the Peopling of Its Towns* (Portland, ME: The Bond Wheelwright Company, 1955), pp. 506-507; Eriks Petersons, ed., *A History of Mechanic Falls, 1795-1893* (Mechanic Falls Centennial Committee, 1993), pp. 18, 43-44.

## MEETING NOTICE

The next meeting of Androscoggin Historical Society is Tuesday, February 22, 2000, at 7:30 P.M., in the County Building.

**Topic: "Capt. Samuel B. Washburn Recalls His Union Navy Service During the Civil War"**

**Speaker: David Holmes, retired from Norlands**

## EVENT AT THE FALLS: ANALYSIS

by Nancy Lecompte

That a tragic event occurred at the Great Falls seems quite apparent from the sheer number of stories. Perhaps it is time to look closer for some truths. All versions of the legend have three things in common; the death of Indian People by going over the falls at night, the use of torches or fire to signal the location of the falls, and the interference of another person by moving the signals. In all but one of the versions, the person moving the markers was non-Native.

The need for signals at the falls has always puzzled me. If the Indians involved were local Abenaki, there would be no need for signals! These people lived as one with their environment and their primary means of travel was by canoe using ancient water routes. They traveled to Merrymeeting Bay at least twice each year and were still "numerous at the Falls" when Harris first settled here about 1770. They would have learned from a very early age how to "read a river" during any season and at any time of day or night! Even Indians "from away" would be able to read the signs indicating major falls were ahead. So, why the need for signals? Finding a reasonable explanation may help in sorting fact from fiction.

The version of the legend found in "Ancient North Yarmouth" appears to describe what we might refer to today as a game of "chicken." The signals would have been set at the point where normal folks landed to carry around the falls. Anyone going past this point by canoe (and surviving!) would prove themselves very brave and excellent at handling a canoe. It is very likely that some wagering was also taking place on who dared go the furthest past the markers. This scenario is very believable from a Native perspective, and possibly a true version of the event. However, it does not seem reasonable that a war party would be playing games.

The version that comes to us as oral tradition also gives a good reason for the signals - to mark the West Pitch for navigation reasons. After studying old pictures of the Great Falls, it does seem reasonable that the West Pitch could be navigated by canoe. But, it might be a little tricky after dark without the use of a navigation aid. So, this scenario provides a reasonable explanation for signals and is possibly a good version of the event.

At what time did the event happen? If the Abenaki were a war party, this event could have taken place anywhere from 1675 to 1761. The version of the legend that gives a specific date of 1688 has too many inconsistencies to consider this date valid. If local settlers were involved, the event would have been much later. Lewiston was settled about 1770. We have accounts of Abenaki families camping at Deer Rips, West Pitch, and Laurel Hill well into the 1870's.

Who and how many died in the event? That they were Androscoggin Abenaki is almost certain. Depending on the time period, they may have had their primary village at Laurel Hill or Canton Point (Roccomeco), or they were a nomadic family band if the time period is after Lewiston settlement. We would expect to find some documented evidence of the event, if a large number of Abenaki died during a war period or after settlement. No evidence has been found to date, making a major disaster very unlikely. Versions that mention war parties traveling with families should be totally discounted - families would never be involved! I speculate the number of deaths to be perhaps two to five.

Who moved the signals? Joseph Weare is named most often. Joseph was born about 1737 in North Yarmouth, some 12 years after his grandparents (Felt) were involved in an Indian raid at North Yarmouth. In "Ancient North Yarmouth" we find the following note about the "legendary Joe Weare, Scout and Indian killer ... being nineteen years old at the time of the last Indian outrage in town, some of his alleged exploits are plainly fictitious and all are very improbable." In the legends that mention Joseph Weare, the background given for him is totally wrong or grossly exaggerated - creating great doubt about the accuracy of other details in those versions.

The most recently found version of the legend names John March. I find myself asking many questions about this account and would like to see some additional background for John before passing any judgement on this version.

As an educated guess, I would narrow the time down to the last two war periods (1744-1748 and 1755-1761) or very early settlement (1770-1810). I would not place Joseph Weare as the "hero" of the event, but would leave that person nameless. I believe the movement of the signals was intentional if this happened during war time, but probably unintentional if it happened after settlement.

Personally, I favor the early settlement period and generally believe the oral accounts or the game of chicken are reasonable scenarios for the "Tragic Event at the Great Falls."

### THE 1865 DIARY OF JOSEPHINE (JOSIE) S. LEMONT

Josie Lemont (1847-1918), daughter of Samuel and Jane (Sawyer) Lemont, grew up in Greene and Lewiston. She married in 1870 Daniel W. Pulsifer and lived on Bailey Hill in Poland. Her great grand-daughter Ellen Goss of Arlington, Virginia, transcribed and edited her diaries of 1865 and 1869 and donated a copy to the Society. By 1865, Josie's father and both brothers had died, one in the Civil War. During this year, she finished school in Greene, moved back to Lewiston, and taught in Leeds. Here are selections:

Feb. 1 . . . Have been to school as usual. Examination today. Expected Mr. Gilbert in but he did not come. Converse Daggett, Mother, & Aunt were in this P. M. Exploerated (?) quite well. Got quite a compliment from Converse.

Feb. 2 . . . It is the last day of school. . . .

Feb. 4 . . . Have been to Lewiston all day with Mother shopping and have a dress for spring & buttons. . . .

Mar. 2 . . . Went to a party last night at Mr. Washburn's. Coming home got smashed up . . . Charlie started this morning for Yarmouth.

Mar. 3 . . . It seems lonesome since Charlie went away. We meet and we part & we meet - but to part. Mother is making pies. [Goss note:] (Charlie may have been a boy she was interested in who lived Lewiston.)

Apr. 10 . . . Glorious news. The surrender of Lee and his army. Have been celebrating all this P. M. Illuminated this evening, all over the city. Went down to the hall.

Apr. 15 Horrible news from Washington this morning. The assassination of President Lincoln and attempted assassination of Lee Seward and son. Horrible affairs.

June 2 . . . Went down street this morning. Weighed 119 lbs. Expect to go to Greene tonight. Going from there to Leeds tomorrow. God grant that I may have good success.

June 5 . . . Got up 6½ O'clock so as to be ready to go and get my certificate. Attended Church all day yesterday. It was a very good sermon. I was very warm and uncomfortable at Church.

June 6 . . . Commenced school yesterday. Got on finely. No trouble at all. Felt rather tired last night. Do

not feel so tired tonight as last night. Had to scold a little today. Some roguish boys.

June 7 . . . Had good luck at school today. Feel rather tired tonight. It made me faint to talk so much. Expect the committee in this week. Do not dread it much.

June 14 Went down to Mr. Aditon's [sic] last night to a social gathering. Had a pleasant time and a pleasant ride. Got home at 12 o'clock. Went straight to bed tonight.

June 15 . . . Nothing new except the arrival of the Minister and his wife this morning. Were here to dinner and supper. She was very pleasant. Had quite a sing tonight.

June 16 Stormy today. Have been some lonesome today. Kept school all day. Expected the Committee in today but he did not come. Do not see the reason why some of them do not come. Feel rather tired tonight.

June 17 . . . The sun came out this P. M. and has been exceedingly hot, especially in the schoolroom. Had quite a shower after school. The lightening [sic] was beautiful.

June 23 . . . Have been watching the clouds for I wanted to come home today and I did. Had a fine ride and found the folks all well and glad to see me.

June 30 . . . Great rejoicing over the return of the boys - Frank & Duane . . . [Goss note:] (Apparently they were returning from the Army.)

July 4 Bright and beautiful. Was up at an early hour to see the Fantasticks. Very queer looking set. Went down to the Common with Fred, heard the Auction report. Came home and got dinner. Went to see the Balloon. Then went to tea & again to see the fireworks. They were very good.

July 5 I shall say nothing about the weather today for I have things of more importance. Met with a sad accident coming home - about 11 o'clock. Got thrown from the wagon.

July 6 Am feeling quite lame from the affects [sic] of my fall Tuesday night. It was fortunate were hurt no worse. My arm and hip are quite lame but shall soon get over it. Have been in school all day. Got along better than I expected to this morning.

July 18 . . . Taught school all day. My school was rather small, only 12 scholars, just half as much generally.

July 24 Have been in school all day. This is the 7<sup>th</sup> week of my stay on Quaker Ridge and It will soon be over. and I shall return home once more. . . .

Aug. 1 . . . If I had not been sick I should have been home now & my school closed, but that has made me one week later.

Aug. 5 Sat. The last day of school and I am not sorry. Kept this A. M. & part of this P. M. Went onto the Ledge tonight after school - Achie [her sister], I, and

Duane - & it rained, pouring all the way down. We got as wet as sops.

Sep. 4 ...Came up to Greene... Am going to stay this week with Grandma [Margaret Larrabee Sawyer]. She seems to be about the same, very feeble, but seems to know me.

Sep. 7 . . . Grandma seems weaker today. I can see that she fails every day a little & Aunt is getting nearly beat out.

Sep. 16 . . . Went up to Greene to the funeral this morning. Looked upon the last remains of my dear Grandmother - An old Apostle.

Dec. 7 . . . We do not make a thanksgiving. We are all alone and shall knit harnesses all the day.

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

We have been busy since our last meeting in November. We have rearranged some of the hanging works on the walls of the large museum. We have built a new frames rack for the framed media stored in the cloakroom (our volunteer Bob Purington helped with this along with Zachary Blair). We have also installed a cloth covering on the skylight in the large museum to filter out some of the ultra-violet light that was damaging our collections. Many thanks to our two volunteers for their help.

We have had several accessions since the October newsletter:

- The American Association of Museums has given us a free copy of *A Museum Guide to Copyright and Trademark*. This will help us with legal issues and possibly reprinting local histories.
- A copy of a Daguerreotype of the steam engine "A. Garcelon," which was one of the very earliest locomotives used in this area.
- A two-foot section of trolley track from last summer's construction on Court Street.
- The very first ever Maine Turnpike Pass, #0001, issued to Mr. Robert Pacios of Lewiston, who

<http://www.rootsweb.com/~meandrhs>  
Douglas I. Hodgkin, Editor  
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was head of the Turnpike Authority at the time.

- A copy of a current traveling art exhibit catalog of Lewiston artist Marsden Hartley.
- Mr. Charlie Plummer's *Bicentennial Souvenir Picture History of Lisbon, Maine*.
- A pair of Sno-Wing skis made in Auburn of oak.
- The recent *Made in Maine* episode on Androscoggin County.
- David Richards, a former executive secretary of the Society, dropped by with a copy of his doctoral dissertation titled "*A City of Vivid Contrasts*": *Antimodernity and Modernity at the Poland Spring Resort, 1860-1900*.
- The 2000 edition of the *Maine Register*.

### **BUTTER HILL**

"About 1820 the area farmers used to gather in the general store to talk, and among them was a man who lived on this hill [located in Livermore near Turner line]. As he was always stealing from the store, the owner decided to lay a trap for him by placing some fresh butter so that it was accessible and told a number of the other men of his plan. As this man started to leave the store, he slipped the butter under his cap. Being hemmed in by the other men and not wanting to look suspicious, he continued sitting next to the stove, where the storekeeper had a hot fire burning. Before long the butter began to stream down his face as it melted under his heavy cap. From then on his home was called Butter Hill."

Source: Phillip R. Rutherford, *The Dictionary of Maine Place-Names* (Freeport: Bond Wheelwright Co., 1970), p. 1.

**POSTCARDS.** We still have our 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Post Card for sale at 25 cents each or five for one dollar. It is a reproduction of Giddings's 1834 painting of the mills and houses of Lewiston and Auburn, as well as the bridge and falls.