

ANDROSCOGGIN HISTORY

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Newsletter of the Androscoggin Historical Society

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LEWISTON ELKS BUILDING IN DANGER OF DEMOLITION

of Portland, Maine, April 9, 1999. The latter apparently provided no maintenance, and openings allowed pigeons and weather to enter. It is reported that there is damage to the inside as a result of this neglect.

The owners of the *Sun-Journal* argue that this damage makes it difficult to preserve the building. Moreover, they argue that its layout makes it difficult to provide handicapped access. However, historic preservation and reuse does not require that the insides of a building be preserved intact. From a community's perspective, the exterior is of most value. Demolition of the entire building would create a hole in the landscape. The interior may be restructured to the owners' needs.

Until recently, the *Sun-Journal* kept their plans secret in order to obtain the properties without the inflation of asking price that would occur if owners became aware of the plans. However, if historic preservationists now question the plan, they will be rebuffed with the argument that money and time has been sunk in current plans; why did we not raise questions earlier?

The newspaper is a family-owned business. We should hope that this family with its local roots would have some concern for the historic physical landscape of the community. This editor urges you to contact the members of the James Costello family if you believe that the Elks Building is worth preservation.

Write to the editor of the paper. If your letters are published, the publicity might help lead the business side of the newspaper to change its plans.

It also should be mentioned that the City of Lewiston's Economic Development Department is aiding and abetting these plans. The overriding concern seems to be retention of jobs in the downtown. If you wish historic preservation to be taken into consideration, contact Gregory A. Mitchell at gmitchell@ci.lewiston.me.us or 207-784-2951, Ext. 302. It would not hurt to speak to Mayor Kaileigh Tara or members of the City Council, as well.

by Douglas I. Hodgkin There is grave danger that Lewiston will soon lose another of its historic buildings. The local newspaper, *The Sun-Journal*, plans to expand its operations to encompass the area bound by Park, Pine, Bates, and Ash Streets, except for the Lewiston Post Office and the Bradford House, #37 of the *Barry Colwell and Protective Order of the Elks Association*, July 7, 1897, principally set at 36 Lisbon Street. On November 22, 1905, the building on the corner of Ash and Middle Streets and soon constructed its new facility. The Elks have been an important part of the community ever since, both in their provision of local leadership and in the social events held in their building.

Their exalted rulers have included former Maine governor James B. Longley. Other leaders of the organization who have been important political or business leaders have included Alton A. Lessard, Frederick A. Hall, Frank M. Drigotas, Frank Coffin, Vincent Belleau, H. L. Gosselin, and Laurier A. Roy.

The building has not been placed upon any list of historic places. This is primarily a function of how the lines for a historic building survey were drawn. The line happened to go down Middle Street and the Elks Building happens to be on the wrong side of the street.

Just because a building is outside that arbitrarily defined survey area that focussed on the core of downtown Lewiston does not mean it cannot be of historic or architectural note.

Simply a look at the building should impress the observer. Its style is elegant and it contributes to the sense of place created by the Post Office (which seems to echo some of the Elks Building features), the telephone company building, and the Healy Asylum.

The Elks have moved to a new place on Lisbon Road. On May 30, 1997, they sold their old building to boxer Joey Gamache, who planned to open a restaurant. He started renovation, but when his financing fell through, he sold the building to Pier Properties, Inc., a real estate speculation firm

COLLECTIONS MANAGEMENT SOFTWARE

In June, 2000, the Maine State Archives sent us free software titled Collections Management System, which is appropriate for historical societies and similar organizations. It standardizes data management for historical organizations around the state. This may in the future enable researchers and others to determine what our holdings are through a centralized system.

THE WAY TO BLANKET HORSES

The following advice was published in *Lewiston Evening Journal*, February 11, 1869:

But few persons, comparatively, understand how to apply a blanket to a horse to protect him from contracting cold. We frequently see the blanket folded double and laid across the rump and a part of the animal's back, leaving those parts of the body which need protection entirely exposed to the cold storms or chilling winds.

Those parts of the body of a horse which surround the lungs require the benefit of a blanket in preference to his flanks and rump. When we are exposed to a current of cold air, to guard against any injury from contracting cold, we shield our shoulders, neck, chest and back. If these parts be protected, the lower part of the body will endure a degree of cold far more intense, without any injury to the body, than if the lungs were not kept warm with suitable covering. The same thing holds good in the protection of horses. The blanket should cover the neck, withers and shoulders, and be brought around the breast, and buttoned or buckled together as closely as a man buttons his overcoat when about to face a driving storm. Let the lungs of a horse be kept well protected with a heavy blanket, and he will seldom contract cold, even if the hindmost parts of his body are not covered.

Many of our best teamsters protect the breast of their horses by a piece of heavy cloth about two feet square, hanging down from the lower end of the collar. This is an excellent practice in cold weather, as the most important part of the animal is constantly sheltered from the cold wind, especially when traveling toward a strong current. The forward end of horse-blankets should be made to fit a closely around the breast of a horse as our garments fit our bodies. Most horses will contract a violent cold almost as soon as a man, if not blanketed while they stand still after having been exercised so violently as to produce profuse perspiration. So long as a horse is kept in motion there is little danger of his

suffering any inconvenience from cold winds. But allow him to stand still for a few minutes, while loading or unloading, without a heavy blanket to protect his shoulders and lungs, and he will take cold sooner than some men. — *Exchange*.

MERTON C. LEAVITT (1920-2000)

Merton C. Leavitt of Turner, a member of our board of directors, died 11 December 2000. He was also a member of the Turner Natural History Club and of the New England Tool Collectors Association. His other interests included photography, fishing, hunting, camping, and gardening. The Society will miss his contributions, and we extend our condolences to his family and friends.

MEETING NOTICE

The next meeting of Androscoggin Historical Society is Tuesday, February 27, 2001, at 7:00 P.M., in the County Building. Please note time change.

Topic: "A Busy Cradle: The Seven Famous Washburn Sons"

Presenter: Barbara Arsenault of Norlands, Livermore

DONATIONS

We have received corporate donations from the following businesses:

N D T Cleaning Services of Greene, Maine
Custom Masonry Inc. of Wales, Maine
The Cote Corporation (Crane & Rigging), Auburn

Please patronize them if you need the type of services that they provide.

HISTORY OF LEWISTON POST OFFICE

Newspaper articles in our files provide an outline of Lewiston postal service, which began 1799. From the *Lewiston Evening Journal*, February 4, 1939:

The story has been told, recently, of how Dan Read, the pioneer postmaster here, used for his first

“delivery truck” an old-fashioned wheel-barrow, such as was common on the farms for harvesting vegetables and fruit. But that probably was long after he began the postal service here.

For the first “office” was in his house . . . that stood near the river on a site near the present Broad street bridge and the Continental Mill.

For 38 years Dan Read was Uncle Sam’s representative in handling the Lewiston mails. . . .

No-one now knows the site of the building in which the post office next was located, beyond the fact that it was “under the hill,” meaning on lower Main street near the North bridge. It was moved from Read’s house to this new location in 1856. That was about the time the cotton mills were going up in Lewiston.

It could not have remained there long, for the next site was on the east bank of the canal, in a two-story wooden building that stood on what is now the gate-house lawn, between that structure and the present B. Peck block [now the L. L. Bean telemarketing center]. It must have been a convenient spot, facing Lisbon street, which was beginning to be developed for small shops and stores.

Then came a day when the townspeople turned out to watch an unusual episode, about 1861. For the post office building was hauled down Canal street to Ash and up the knoll, to take its place at the north-east corner of Lisbon and Ash [currently occupied by People’s Bank offices]. . . .

Benjamin I. Leeds, agent for the Franklin Company, who owned the building, at first leased this Lisbon and Ash street lot; then he bought it, about 1871, for the modest sum of \$3500.

For many years this three-story structure housed a clothing store on the ground floor. John Straw, civil engineer, had an office in the building; and Curtis & Ross, photographers, occupied the top floor. . . .

For a decade the early residents did their postal business at Lisbon and Ash; and then came another transfer, this time to the original city building on Pine street, which was put up about 1872. . . .

When that structure burned in 1892 the post office went up in flames. But temporary quarters were established across the street, in Savings Bank Block, on the southwest corner of Pine and Lisbon.

In the meantime, the first Federal post office structure to be erected here was started on the Ash street location, at the southeast corner of Park street. That was the granite building which was torn down . . . to give place to the present modern brick building.

A *Lewiston Journal Magazine Section* article of October 26, 1963, notes the following:

Lewiston’s former [granite] Post Office was the only one in the United States that was embellished with the Irish shamrock.

There were two of them – one on each side of the doorway arch on the Park St. entrance. They were fashioned from granite, about a foot in diameter, and handsome in design.

What makes them of historical and sentimental importance is that they were the only shamrocks ever placed on any Federal building in the United States.

As nearly as can be determined it was the fierce pride of an Irishman – Daniel J. McGillicuddy – that made this possible. Though he was later to represent Maine in Washington as a distinguished Congressman it was while he was Mayor of Lewiston that he brought about the miracle through influence in the Nation’s Capital. . . .

From 1895 until 1934, 39 years, the office was at it’s [sic] present location, but was much too small to handle the needs of the community.

The Post Office was housed in the Wade & Dunton building at the corner of Park and Oak Sts. as temporary quarters while the old building was demolished and the new office erected. Feb. 4, 1935 it opened in it’s [sic] present quarters. . . .

An article in the *Journal*, December 31, 1900, notes early politics of the postmastership:

It is recorded that in August, 1799, when, after many delays [official appointment was July 15, 1799], the mail from Washington brought a long-delayed document [recording his appointment] to Dan Read, esq., in the newly-incorporated town. Mrs. Dan Read said, “Children! Keep still. Me and your pa is postmaster.” . . .

Dan Read opened shop at home. He was postmaster undisturbed for 38 years, or until 1837. Little Van was President in that year, and Dan Read came into notice of the spoilsmen and was summarily “fired” after almost two score years of service. . . . William R. Frye succeeded Dan Read, and he held the office four years, until “Tippecanoe” came in and Mark Lowell was appointed. Mr. Lowell held it four years and on the return of the democracy to power and the election of Polk he resigned in order to avoid being turned out. N. B. Reynolds followed him, and he resigned when Taylor was elected

WING-BENJAMIN TRUST FUND

The Wing-Benjamin Trust Fund of Augusta awarded the Society a grant of \$500 in June, 2000, for use in our computerization of our holdings. We thank them for their generosity.

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

ACQUISITIONS

- *Cultural Resource Laws & Practice*, by Thomas F. King
- “Visitors Guide” and “Relocation Guide,” by Androscoggin Chamber of Commerce
- “Narratives Serially Constructed and Lived: Ethnicity in Cross-Gender Strikes 1887-1903,” by Prof. Ileen A. DeVault, Cornell University
- Auburn Board of Trade report, 1911, given by Attorney John Griffin
- *HOME: The Story of Maine*, a four volume video set produced in 2000 by Maine Public Broadcasting
- “A Biographical Dictionary of Architects in Maine,” from the website of the Society of Architectural Historians, written by Earle G. Shuttleworth Jr. & Roger G. Reed
- *The McKenney Story*, by O. Herbert McKenney Jr. (Gateway Press, 1989)
- Heritage Books Archives Maine Volume II, by David C. Young et al.
- *History of Lewiston*, by J. G. Elder, an 1882 edition donated by the Public Library of New Sharon, Maine
- Wedding dress and veil from W. E. Wight estate, donated by Marian Wight Conklin
- Wedding dress and World War II Army uniform of the Croteau family, donated by a daughter.
- Photocopies of original compositions of E. W. (Ned) Hanscom, the organist at the High Street Congregational Church for a quarter century in the late 1800's. He studied with Tchaikovsky. They were donated by Carol May of North Hills, CA.
- Geography book written by Alexis Frye, son of William P. Frye, donated by Lillian Guerra, Assistant Professor of History, Bates College
- Three Evans Rifles manufactured in Mechanic Falls, Maine, anonymous donor.

- Box of Lewiston and Auburn postcards from ca. 1930's-1940's, donated by Ruth Leavitt
- *Lewiston Historic Preservation Design Manual*, 1999, Russell Wright, consultant; donated by City of Lewiston.
- *Memories of World War II*, a collection of newspaper clippings of local military personnel published by the Leo Begin Chapter of the American - Canadian Genealogical Society in Auburn.
- Turner, Maine; Two Centuries of History, Trivia and Observations, by Rufus Prince, brought here and kindly signed by the author. Donated by the Town of Turner.
- An unpublished biography of Horace Munroe, shoe magnate of Auburn, by John F. Hartley, donated by the author.

Calendar Year 2000 Statistics of Society Business: telephone - 679; museum visits - 221; library visits - 352; letters - 1401 (includes Clearing Legal Title Project letters and forms, compilation of the Cultural Organizations List, and the lecture series programs); meeting notices sent - 568; meeting attendance - est. 209; business meeting attendance - 17; newsletters sent - est. 423; Balloon Festival attendance - 39; annual dinner attendance - est. 39.

The 30th Great TV Auction on Maine PBS: We are participating through the donation of a set of Lewiston-Auburn postcards – the same set we have for sale.

Possible Cause of Our Secretary's Death: Debra Chadbourne's family and I have theorized that her death may have been caused by the chemical PPA, a compound commonly found in some cold remedies and in greater concentrations in some diet drugs. Ephedra is another similar chemical. These chemicals were in the news last fall. If you have any medicines with these in them, I urge you to flush them.

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