

ANDROSCOGGIN HISTORY

October, 2002 Newsletter of the Androscoggin Historical Society

No. 37

AUBREY B. "BOB" PALMER (1934-2002)

Our immediate past president, Bob Palmer, died at his home in Minot, July 22, 2002. He served the Society as vice-president (1984-1996) and as president (1996-2002). He was instrumental in our acquisition of the fire engine and in starting to move the Society into the age of computers. Bob also chaired the committees that recruited our succession of executive secretaries, including Bob Taylor, Dave Richards, and Michael Lord.

Bob pursued his historical interests also as a member of the Civil War Round Table and as chairman of the Minot Bicentennial Committee. Moreover, he served as selectman, school board member, town moderator, and other positions in the Town of Minot. He was a member of other civic organizations, as well.

Bob worked for most of his career at the Auburn Water and Sewage District and retired as assistant superintendent.

The Society and the community will miss this friendly, giving, and gentle man. We express our condolences to his widow, Alma, who also has been an active member of the Society.

Danville is having its Bicentennial! Morin Brick Company of Danville has kindly donated a number of custom-made bricks imprinted with "Danville 1802 - 2002." We have them at the Society for five dollars a brick, or six for twenty-five dollars, plus tax. Please drop by and help buy down our brick wall in the hall!

MEETING NOTICE

Speaker: Richard A. Hale of Orono, formerly of Lisbon Falls

Topic: "Holman F. Day, Auburn's Most Famous Writer"

Date: Tuesday, October 22, 2002, 7:00 P.M.

Place: County Building. We hope to see you there!

AUBURN'S FIRST BRASS BAND

Freeman Newall moved to Auburn about 1836 and became one of Auburn's well-known nineteenth-century musicians. He operated a store at which he sold melodeons and organs for more than forty years. In an interview about 1890, Newall described the establishment of Auburn's first brass band:

When I first came to Auburn, a few of us used to get together as a sort of orchestra. Jere Stinchfield, father of O. D. Stinchfield, played the clarinet, I played the bass viol, and we had a flute and fiddle. I led the band, and we used to play outdoors evenings, to the great amusement of the inhabitants. One night we serenaded Squire Little. The next day Little says to me: "Newell, you ought to have some brass instruments in your band." I told him if he would find the instruments I'd find the players. So, the next time the Squire went to Portland, he invited me to go with him, and under my direction he purchased a bass horn and, I think, a cornet, and I immediately set two fellows a-practicing on them, and before long we had a brass band organized, the first Auburn ever had.

Source: "The First Piano," *Lewiston Journal*, undated clipping at Androscoggin Historical Society, file "Maine Musicians (Local)."

SUMMER INTERNS

This summer, the Society benefited from the excellent work of three interns who have entered their first year at Lewiston High School this fall. **Peter MacArthur** volunteered for two weeks in July before going to music camp. **Krystal Carmichael** worked from the second week of July until the end of the month. **Luke Potter** assisted us from the second week of July until the second week of August. They boxed up our old computers ready for de-accessioning, transferred our hanging clothes to more supportive hangers, cleaned our display cases, and did many other jobs. The interns also sorted our blueprint and plan collections and put those relevant to our region in archival grade tubes. They then selected those concerning other parts of the State and prepared them for mailing to the appropriate historical societies. Finally, they extracted most of our rare documents that had been mixed with newspaper clippings in the files in order that they could be filed more safely. We greatly appreciate these students' contributions, and we hope that they learned a little bit about local history and about how a library/museum functions.

FRANK L. DINGLEY DIARY: AUBURN FIRE OF 1855

Frank L. Dingley, son of Nelson Dingley, Sr., and a future co-owner of the *Lewiston Journal* kept a diary in 1855 that is now filed in Box 322 in the Special Collections, Folger Library, University of Maine at Orono. We reproduce his account of the Auburn fire of 1855, its effects on his father's business, and progress reports on construction of the Phoenix Block on the east side of Main Street:

Saturday, Aug 18, 1855 A beautiful day.

Astounding intelligence -- West side in ruins \$100,000 worth of property destroyed -- At about 12 O'C last night fire was discovered proceeding from the tannery near Davis' Hotel and when discovered had run so far over the building that notwithstanding the strenuous efforts of the firemen the flames spread rapidly carrying with them about thirty buildings Stores & dwelling Houses so that the business portion of our town is completely demolished -- Father's Store was burned with the rest -- his loss will probably be considerable though he was insured \$5800. Yet he had been hauling in goods nearly all of the preceding day. So that the stock on hand must have been some \$10,000 -- We saved some of the goods though not as many as we might had we imagined when we first got on the Grounds that the fire would cross the streets. There are many families turned out of doors, and many houses made desolate -- Miller, Randall, & Co have lost nearly all -- as have also a number of others. Mr Duxalls - Leather Bean & some others -- and our village is indeed a desolate and gloomy place -- The Auburn Bank came pretty near suffering some, but the papers &c were saved by the Cashier and the loss will mostly be only in the office fixtures Safe & C -- The Union Block is all in ruins & all the streets north as is also all the other street as far as to the Auburn Hall, which by the way came very near being burned -- There are many other important events in regard to the fire but I can not spend time now to write them but will defer to another time. Suffice it to say that it is the saddest thing that ever happened to Androscoggin County or almost in any other in the state of Maine

Two or three thousand dollars worth of goods were probably stolen last night by the Irish & others, and I think something could be gained by searching their shanties --

Sunday Aug 19th 1855 Another pleasant day. I go to Church this afternoon. The ruins of the business part are still smoking, and watchmen are watching day & night Stopping the fires, and the Irish from stealing what few goods there are remaining which the fire has not destroyed

Monday Aug 20th A pleasant day. The excitement of the fire though in a measure Subsided, is still very great -- There is a citizens meeting this Eve to adopt Some

measures for rebuilding, ascertaining the origin of the fire, &c &c. We can not procure a Store on this Side yet and it is very doubtfull if we do. ... We shall commence taking account of what goods are remaining to-morrow, as the Insurance Co desire a Schedule of goods Saved & burned There is \$5800 -- insurance on store & stock

Wednesday Aug 22 Another pleasant & warm day. We finished taking acct of goods to day. The result was as follows -- goods saved in damaged state \$2500 -- per centage off about \$1800--. I hope we shall get to trading soon -- for we are fast losing our old customers

Thursday Aug 23 -- 1855 A pleasant day. There is considerable talk in regard to building a brick block over the whole now burned on the side upon which our store was. I have been writing most all this week, making schedules of the goods burned saved, & C -- the Insurance folks are very particular as regards this

Friday Aug 24th A rainy day. The ruins which the fire has spared are still smoking to some extent -- though. This rain will probably put the fire mostly out

Monday Aug 27th They are commencing to dig the cellars to the new Brick Block to day.

Friday Aug 31 A pleasant day. We have moved our goods Saved into one side of the Brick Store occupied by Mr Bose . . .

Monday Sept 3d 1855 A pleasant day. Business of all kinds has been very slack since the fire -- They have commenced the Stone work on the Brick Block to day --

Monday Oct 8th Father is to have the whole of the Brick Store now that Mr Rose has moved out They are driving along the new brick block pretty fast now, and if they have good weather will probably finish the Brick work in a few weeks.

Tuesday Nov 6 Cloudy -- They are getting along finely now with the new "Phoenix Block." It promises to be one of the best blocks in Maine Six weeks will probably finish it

Thursday Nov 15 -- 1855 They are putting the Roofs on the new Block now -- the brick work will soon be finished

Saturday Nov 24th They cannot work much on the Block now, in consequence of the cold weather . . .

Monday Nov 26 They are putting the roofing on the new block now -- and if they have good weather the outside will soon be finished.

Saturday Dec 1 1855 They have finished the brick work of the new Block

Thursday Dec 6 -- 1855 They have finished the roofs of the new Block. . . .

Thursday April 24 [1856] The work on the new County building is progressing rapidly. ...

ACQUISITIONS

We have acquired the following items during the past few months:

Donations

- Group photograph of the Edward Little Band Trip to represent Maine at the Cherry Blossom Festival in Washington, DC, in 1952. By Mrs. Susan (Spearin) Leach of Gilford, NH.
- A current 3' x 4' map of Androscoggin County, Maine. By the Androscoggin Valley Council of Governments, Auburn, ME.
- An updated transcript of the 1852 & 1860 Lewiston & Auburn directories on CD-ROM. By Anonymous.
- Photos of Lake Street School and teachers, plus three small rolls of fourth grader photos of same, 1950. By John E. Merrill III of Casco, ME.
- A ball point writing pen from the campaign of Rosaire J. Martel for Sheriff of Androscoggin County, ca. 1950's. By Anonymous.
- Carrie Ella Miller, *Birds of Lewiston - Auburn and Vicinity*, 1918. By Douglas I. Hodgkin.
- *Photographic History of the Civil War*, 10 Vols., 1911; *Report of the Maine Andersonville Monument Commissioners*, 1904; *Treatise on Military Surgery*, 1865; *Historical Sketch 32nd Maine Regiment*, 1903; *Historic Record 21st Maine Regiment Volunteers*, 1862-1907; *Adjutant Generals Report - Maine*, eight various volumes, 1861-1866; *Gettysburg - What They Did Here*, 1924; one U. S. cartridge case half full of blanks. By Judith Andrews for the Estate of Dr. Warren Andrews.
- *Alan Simpson's Windows XP Bible & Master Visually Windows XP*, and a computer microphone. By Anonymous.
- A box of photographs and genealogy from Danville families. From Mrs. Jane Gilbert of Danville.
- *Currier Family Records of U. S. A. and Canada*, Vols. V - VII, by Philip Joseph Currier. Published by the author, 2002.
- Bliss College of Business Alumni records. By Laura Hodgkin of Lewiston, ME.
- Blanket made in the Libbey Mill in Lewiston, ca. 1938, and given as a wedding present by Helen C. Libbey to Ruth Bickford. By Ruth I. Bickford.
- Three original diaries of Patience Ingalls Crafts and the transcriptions thereof; memoirs of Agnes Prince Hutchinson; history of the Zibeon Crafts house in West Auburn; and a short genealogy of the Bradford family containing Prince & Crafts families. By Dr. & Mrs. Albert Cushman Parker of Old Greenwich, CT.

Purchased

- Four videos from Northeast Historic Film: A) *The Sins of Our Mothers*, 1988, by the PBS series "The American Experience," featuring Billie Gammon, about a woman from Lisbon, ME, who worked in the mills in Lowell, MA. B) *All But Forgotten*, about Auburn writer and cinematographer Holman Francis Day. C) *Anchor of the Soul*, 1995, about the African-American experience in Northern New England, especially the Portland area. D) *From Dreamland Sent*, 1995, about the Maine State Building at Poland Spring.
- Kenneth L. Smith, *Genealogical Dates: A User-Friendly Guide*, 1994.
- Wayne E. Reilly, editor, *Sarah Jane Foster - Teacher of the Freedmen: The Diary and Letters of a Maine Woman in the South After the Civil War*.
- DeLorme, *Fishing Depth Maps - Maine Lakes & Ponds*, Vol. 3, *Androscoggin, Sagadahoc & Lincoln Counties*, 1999.
- Will Anderson, *Those Were the Days! Drive-Ins, Dance Halls, Fried Clams, Summer & Maine*, 2002.
- Appalachian Mountain Club, *Androscoggin River Map and Guide*, 2001. 2 copies.
- Jayne E. Bickford, comp. & ed., with Bowdoin Historical Society, *Early Bowdoin, Maine, Families and Some of Their Descendants*, 2002.
- Eve Anderson, *A Breach of Privilege: Cilley Family Letters, 1820-1867*, 2002.

LITTLEFIELD'S TAVERN, DANVILLE (PART II)

Travelers by stagecoach were likely to find plenty of companionship at Littlefield's Tavern. It was a good stopping-off place for travelers by ox-cart or other vehicles less spectacular than the stagecoach. Drivers on their way to Brighton with herds of cattle and sheep found Littlefield's a convenient place to spend the night, the drivers indoors and the hundreds of livestock in an enclosure outside. The two granite hitching-posts, one on either side of the front door, were for the use of local farmers who were in the habit of resting their horses a bit while they, themselves, just stepped into the bar for rum.

Rum flowed freely in the heyday of Littlefield's and no stigma was attached to the names of the men who drank it. Omar Merrow of Littlefield's Corner retells a story of his grandfather, one of the boys of the neighborhood who went along to help carry the three 100-foot chains and the jugs of rum when the distance (30 miles) was being measured from the front door of Littlefield's Tavern to the front door of the Preble House in Portland. The jugs grew speedily lighter. The five gallons of rum provided at Littlefield's Tavern were all gone by the time the surveyors reached Gray Corner!

Source: Mary Louise Stetson, "Stagecoaching in Western Maine Offered Travel Thrills for All," unidentified clipping in our "Stagecoach" file.

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

- An anonymous donor has given our Society a **new 360-gigabyte computer** that gives us excellent capabilities, including the capacity to host our website, should we so choose.
- On July 18, The Androscoggin Round Table met to hear James Henderson of the Maine State Archive concerning their free **Collections Management Software**. This software is intended to be a standard for historical and cultural organizations throughout the State.
- Our Annual Fund Drive continues. Mr. Daniel Gagne' of the **Cote Corporation (Crane-Rigging)** in Auburn has donated \$100 and Ms. Linda B. Gustus of **Custom Masonry, Inc.**, in Wales has donated \$150. Our total is now \$1000. We thank our donors for their continued generosity.
- On September 25th, I attended a meeting of the **Lewiston-Auburn Historic Records Committee**. Lewiston has received a large grant to hire a full-time archivist to work on the Bates Manufacturing Company papers.
- We are in the process of organizing the writing and publication of a **pictorial history of Androscoggin County**. Persons have committed to the production of a chapter on each town except Sabattus. Can a reader suggest an author for that town? The publisher will be Donning Company of Virginia and Missouri.

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

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LEWISTON'S MUSIC HALL

[Arthur G. Staples said,] "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 to New York."

Music Hall was built about 1876. It was part of the brick block named for [William P.] Frye. There were six stores, each section of the structure being owned independently.

For many years Charles Horbury was manager of Music Hall. He was a distinctly individual type, who had come from England and who had brought with him his cockney speech. He always dropped his "h" when he spoke and when he wrote.

Traveling stock companies prevailed in that early period. Often they brought excellent actors with them, as when John Murray came. Minstrels, drama and melodrama delighted Lewiston audiences. Troupers and barnstormers became more than a name in this neck o' the woods. Sometimes there were two, maybe three, shows in a week. Sometimes there were none, as at Christmas.

Horbury came to own one or two sections in Frye Block and controlled the policy of the theatre. He worked hard, posted his own bills about the city, was honest and just in his dealings, albeit he was shrewd. He flared at a word, but was generally liked and he had something of the grand manner. It is to his credit that when he died he gave his money where he specifically felt its benefit might be likely to reach most of the people who had helped him make such fortune as he had -- the hospital.

It was due to Horbury that Lewiston saw so many of the great actors and shows over a considerable period before competition arrived in other theatres and with the advent of the moving pictures.

Source: Alice Frost Lord, "'A. G. S.' Recalls Early Days in Lewiston Theatres," *Lewiston Evening Journal*, Mar. 16, 1938, p. 24.
