



# MEMORIES OF MAINE

FREE

KENNEBEC & ANDROSCOGGIN RIVER VALLEYS EDITION / SUMMER 2014



*Waterlilies* by Barbara Ernst Prey. See [About the Artist](#) on page 2.

## INSIDE

Pine Tree Camp

A Rose By  
Any Other  
Name

A Kennebec Karver

Oakland Axes

St. Jean Baptiste Day

A Gold Medal  
from Livermore

That Glorious Voice  
from Wayne

DEDICATED TO THE HISTORY OF MAINE AND TO THE PEOPLE AND PLACES THAT PRESERVE IT



## MEMORIES OF MAINE

207-797-9597

***Publisher & Editor***

David Branch  
dbranch@memoriesofmaine.net

***Photography***

Heather Branch  
hbranch@memoriesofmaine.net

***Sales Associate & Field Representative***

Dale Baker  
dbaker@memoriesofmaine.net

***Design & Layout***

Dependable Layout & Design  
Joline Violette Edwards 207-318-2042  
jolinevedwards@gmail.com

***Writers:***

Mike Kelley  
Mike Kimball  
Aimée Lanteigne  
Sue Melcher

***Contributors:***

Janet Adelberg  
Lloyd Clark  
Jane Davis  
Howard Hardy  
Elizabeth Humphrey  
Adam MacDonald  
James Myall  
Alberta Porter  
Barbara Prey  
Angie Stockwell  
Susan Wakefield

***Contributing Organizations:***

Cary Memorial Library  
Franco American Collection,  
University of Southern Maine,  
Lewiston-Auburn College  
General Mills  
Kennebec Karvers  
Margaret Chase Smith Library  
Oakland Historical Society  
Pine Tree Society

4

PINE TREE CAMP

*by Aimée N. Lanteigne*

9

ST. JEAN BAPTISTE DAY

*by Aimée N. Lanteigne*

13

THAT GLORIOUS VOICE FROM WAYNE

*by Sue Melcher*

14

A ROSE BY ANY OTHER NAME

*by Aimée N. Lanteigne*

17

A KENNEBEC KARVER

*by Mike Kimball*

19

A GOLD MEDAL FROM LIVERMORE

*by Sue Melcher*

25

OAKLAND AXES

*by Mike Kelley*

NO PART OF THIS PUBLICATION  
MAY BE REPRODUCED WITHOUT  
WRITTEN PERMISSION  
FROM THE PUBLISHERS OF  
MEMORIES OF MAINE MAGAZINE.  
©2014, MEMORIES OF MAINE MAGAZINE

# OAKLAND AXES

*by Mike Kelley*

Today Oakland, Maine is a quiet suburban community located between the Belgrade Lakes and Waterville;

just a short drive from the hustle and bustle of Augusta, Maine's capital, but several generations ago, Oakland

had a great deal of hustle and bustle of its own. The town was once considered the ax capital of the United States, if



*Photos of Howard Hardy and his collection by Heather Branch.*

**Linkletter & Sons, Inc.**  
Athens, Maine  
(207)654-2301






*Professional loggers for 35 years.*

**THE FRAMEMAKERS**  
For Extraordinary Custom Framing



**Local Art!**

Come share what makes this community great: fine art by talented local artists. Stop by to browse our gallery or for info on how to display in a future show. Gallery space is available for two-month rotations.

46 Main Street & The Concourse, Waterville, ME  
www.theframemakers.com 207.872.8927 

**Poor Bob's STORAGE**

SNOWMOBILES | BOATS | CARS | FURNITURE | ETC.

Over **385** Spaces  
AND  
**12** Different Sizes: 5x10 to 12x30

Call Anytime **453-7108**

4 miles from Waterville  
4 Poor Bob's Lane (just off Unity Rd.), Benton



Workers inside the Spiller Ax Company. Courtesy of Oakland Historical Society.

not the world.

Although there are not many people that remember Oakland in its axe-making heyday, the history is not lost, thanks to many people who have taken an interest in the industry and how it shaped Oakland for more than a century, stretching from the mid-1800s to the mid-1900s.

In 1965, filmmaker Peter Vogt created a film about the Emerson-Stevens Company, one of the longest-running axe manufacturers in Oakland. The film, shot shortly after Vogt had graduated from Colby College, documents step-by-step how the company made its famed axes.

According to *Images of America: Oakland*, Emerson-Stevens Company was founded in 1870 by Luther Dorr Emerson, Joseph E. Stevens, W.R. Pinkham and George W. Stevens. The facility was located next to the School Street Bridge, near Lord's Dam, which was named for Daniel B. Lord, an owner and operator of an axe manufacturing facility in the 1850s. The Emerson-Stevens facility created several axe varieties, including Pioneer, Diamond, Lumberman's Pride, Pine Tree and Cock of the Woods.

"There was a time when Oakland was filled with thriving industry,"

Vogt said in the film's introduction. "Its industry produced a variety of hardwoods and gained, perhaps its greatest fame with the manufacturing of axes. It was a craftsman centered industry and at the turn of the (20th) century almost a dozen shops were manufacturing axes along the banks of Messalonskee Stream."

The shops didn't stop with axe production. They also made other tools, such as scythes, knives and hay forks.

The shops began to dwindle, Vogt pointed out, due to the "ravages of mass production and foreign importation."

"The Dunn Edge Tool Company has, at times produced 180,000 scythes and 120,000 axes per year. Its layout was considered to be among the finest in the world. It was the largest such manufacturer in New England and it produced per year more scythes than any other facility in the world," Michael J. Denis wrote in his book *Some Notes on Industry and Manufacturing on the Messalonskee River*.

The Dunn Edge Tool Company, established in 1857, operated until 1920, when it was sold to Seymour Manufacturing Company. Shortly thereafter, in 1923, Seymour sold the business to North Wayne Tool

Company, which operated until 1967. It was the last operating axe facility in Oakland. During the Civil War, North Wayne Tool Company was thought to have made swords for the Union Army.

While the Emerson-Stevens Company also annually turned out tens of thousands of axes, in his film Vogt noted, all of them were hand-made and put together by man-power.

"Not once in the creation of these axes has a precision measuring device been used. The craftsman's eye and muscle have determined the size, shape and quality of these fine axes, a product of the hands of men," Vogt said.

Vogt's film, which can be seen on YouTube or on the Oakland Historical Society's website, was done right in the nick of time. The Emerson-Stevens Company closed shortly after the film was completed.

Howard Hardy, a member of the Oakland Historical Society and a dedicated axe collector, said "it was the need for the axe" and other quality made tools that led to so many axe companies setting up in Oakland in the mid-1800s.

In the mid-1800s, Oakland began transforming from a quiet agricultural society to a manufacturing one.

"What started as a farm community in the 1700s, eventually, in the 1800s, turned to manufacturing," Denis wrote in *Images of America: Oakland*. "The first factory was set up in 1842, when the town was still part of Waterville."

The town broke off from Waterville in 1873 and a decade later became known as Oakland. It was around this time that the Messalonskee Stream was eyed as a source of commerce and not just a natural resource passing through town.

"Portions of the town's main water course, the Messalonskee Stream (sometimes called Emerson Stream) were dammed, producing abundant water power for many small factories," Denis wrote. "It was said

the Messalonskee, though significantly smaller than the Kennebec River, produced nearly as much water power because of its waterfalls. Of particular importance was Cascade, a 100-foot waterfall located just outside the downtown area.”

Axe factories were not the only industry that took advantage of the water power of the Messalonskee Stream.

“Axe factories were joined by woolen mills, and by the 1870s, there were nearly as many people working in the industry as there were on the farms,” Denis wrote.

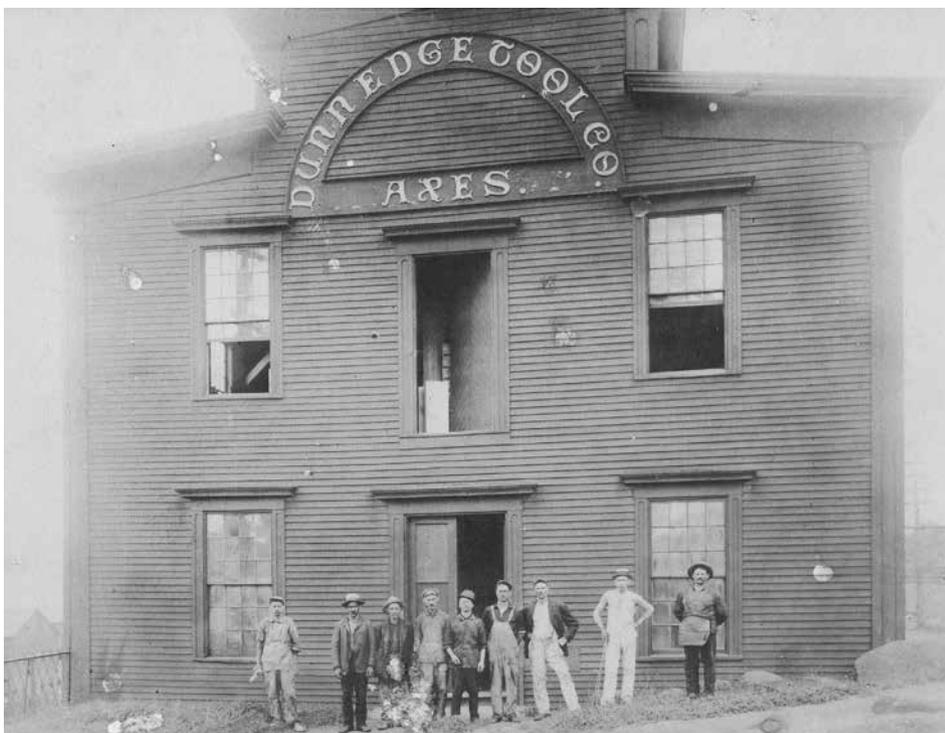
The water also caught the attention of Walter Wyman, the founder of Central Maine Power. Hardy said Wyman, an Oakland native whose father worked in an axe factory in town, “saw the power of the water” and teamed up with Waterville attorney Harvey Eaton in 1899 to purchase the Oakland Electric Company. The company, which adopted the Central Maine Power name in 1910, initially provided power for approximately 100 customers in Oakland.

According to the Maine Historical Society, “Wyman began absorbing nearby companies, combining their electrical output, and selling it to downstream textile mills.”

Today, according to its website, Central Maine Power “delivers over 9 billion kilowatt hours of electricity to more than 600,000 retail customers in central and southern Maine. Central Maine Power’s 11,000 square mile coverage area is bigger than both Massachusetts and Rhode Island combined.

“The axe factories were important,” Hardy said. “They were a nucleus for a lot a business in town. One of the owners started the oldest woolen mill in Oakland, the Cascade Woolen Mill.”

The railroad came to Oakland just when the industrial era in town was beginning. The introduction of the railroad in 1849, Denis wrote, meant



Workers stand in front of the entrance to the Dunn Edge Tool Co., circa 1900. *Courtesy of Oakland Historical Society.*

“the village’s products could now be sent toward Bangor and south to Portland and Boston.”

The industry kept on growing and becoming more and more the epicenter of axe production in the state.

“The early 1900s through the end of World War II, Oakland produced more axes, scythes and edge tools than any town on Earth. The constant sound of the trip hammers pounding hot model into axe heads could be heard, and hundreds of workers grinding edges, painting handles, stoking coal or charcoal furnaces and boxing and labeling the final product

made Oakland a bustling industrial community,” Denis wrote.

After the war, however, demand fell due to new technologies and the fact overseas factories could make axes, scythes and edge tools for substantially less.

“With chainsaws coming out and with the new manufacturing, people were finding more mechanical ways to do lumbering,” Hardy said.

During peak production years the axe industry not only fueled Oakland’s economy, but benefitted nearby communities as well. Hardy said early on some of the wood used to make

**Lakeview Lumber Co.** 

**Complete Building Materials & Hardware for the Homeowner and Contractor**

~ Great Arts & Crafts Department ~

**Come & Visit Our Bargain Warehouse**

**968-2498**

Route 202, P.O. Box 6344  
China Village, Maine 04926

**FAIRFIELD ANTIQUES MALL**

Route 201 • Fairfield, Maine  
**(207) 453-4100**

2.5 miles north of I-95, exit 133  
on Route 201, Skowhegan Road

---

**FIVE FLOORS** of  
Great Antiques & Collectibles displayed  
by the **FINEST ANTIQUE DEALERS**  
in the State of Maine

**fairfieldantiquesmall.com**

axes came from the western Maine communities of Norway, South Paris and Oxford. In the 1930s and 1940s, axe companies began using wood from out of state, including wood sourced in Tennessee. Some of the steel used, he said, came from the Katahdin Steel Company, but much of it came from Pennsylvania.

“Iron was imported from Pennsylvania because they had a lot of good iron and steel coming out of there,” Hardy said.

Although they were in the same market, Hardy said the axe manufacturers in Oakland had a good rapport with each other. Hardy said he recalled hearing a story about the owner of the Emerson-Stevens Company buying stock in the North Wayne Tool Company when Emerson-Stevens profits were shrinking. Furthermore, it was not uncommon for companies to swap workers when one was short on manpower.

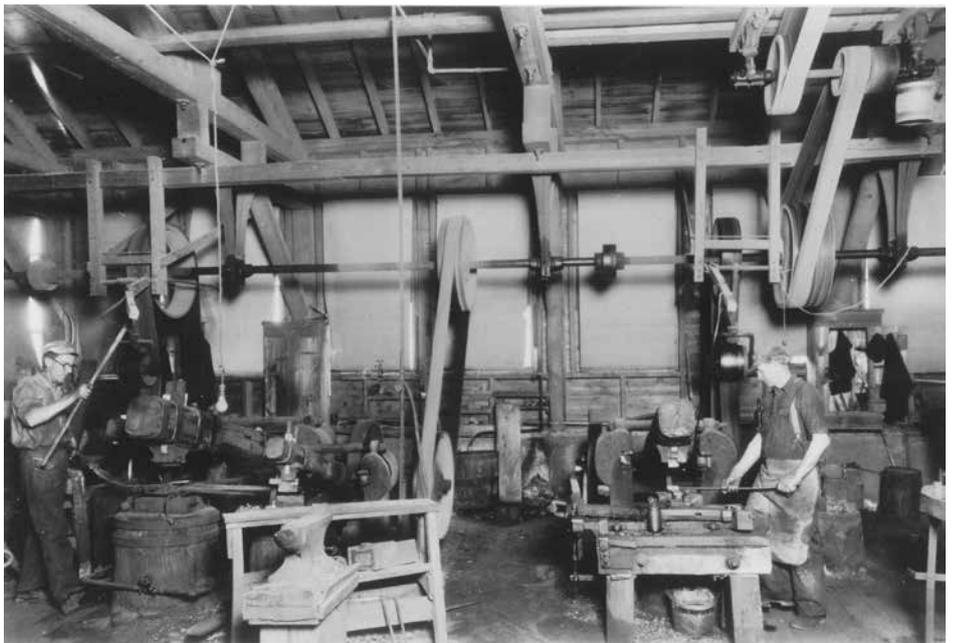
Around the turn of the 20th century, Oakland axes caught the attention of President Theodore Roosevelt. In 1902 Roosevelt stopped in Oakland while visiting Maine and was given a special hunting axe with a knife hidden in the handle by John King, of the King Axe and Tool Company. For years, Hardy said, the company advertised itself as the makers of the “President’s Axe.”

According to a Sept. 30, 1902 article in the Pittsburgh Press, “King, who is an expert at the making of edge tools, knew that the President was a great hunter, and weeks before President Roosevelt arrived in Maine, the Oakland smith was hammering industriously away on what was intended to be, and is, the handsomest fashioned and best tempered blade that ever left his shop.”

Hardy, who has been collecting axes for 20 years, owns a similarly constructed axe. He said only a handful still exist. Hardy began collecting axes in the 1980s after seeing an Oakland-made axe at the home of an elderly friend. Hardy said he did not know



The workers of the Dunn Edge Tool Co., 1900. *Courtesy of Oakland Historical Society.*



Workers inside the Spiller Ax Company. *Courtesy of Oakland Historical Society.*

about this part of Oakland’s history and the more he found out, the more fascinated he became.

“They each have their own character. They are a piece of art,” Hardy said.

His collection, which numbers upwards of 200 axes, represents 14 of the 18 different axe companies that

were in existence in Oakland between the 1830s and the 1970s.

Hardy said he always keeps his eyes open for an Oakland axe because he never knows where he is going to find one.

“I get them if I clean out a house, get them through an auction or buy, sell or trade them,” he said. 🌿