

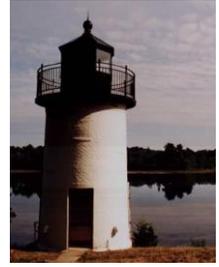
ST. CROIX HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER



Holmes Cottage



Dr. Job Holmes House 1850



Whitlock's Mill Lighthouse 1909

Editor: Lura Jackson

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Putting the Spring in your Step

“Only in the winter does the pine tree show its true strength,” Confucius would tell us, and his words ring as particularly insightful on the heels of the nigh-epic season we’ve just seen. With many eastern Washington County towns receiving more than 180” in the winter of 2014-15 (toppling records that have stood for more than century), residents have had their resilience soundly tested in the past few months. However, Maine isn’t known as the pine tree state for no reason: this is evergreen country, and the people are as stout as the trees thanks to generations of time-tested endurance.

Speaking personally, as an Oklahoman, I find the winters here to be frequently challenging in their cold temperatures and fierce storms. Even after a quarter century in Maine, it never ceases to amaze me how heartily residents bear it, young and old alike. The colder the wind blows, the hotter the wood stoves get. When you run out of wood, you can put on more soup, and when you run out of soup, you can head to a church supper or the house of a welcoming neighbor to get through the night. Just as a cluster of evergreens thrives in the warmth of its joined roots, the communities of Eastern Maine hold fast through even the most challenging of times.

However, as is the case in all cycles, darkness precedes the dawn, and now we have the pleasure of experiencing that most glorious occasion: the Maine spring. The early risers are already among us with day lilies sticking out of mud still wet from snow. Trees that lost limbs as the snow piled upon them are surrounded in a halo of young flowers as a result of their now-concentrated vitality. The birds have returned, and the first generations of the season’s insects are sluggishly scouting around in the still-chilled winds. The evergreens, like the residents, beam radiantly from their outer edges, rightfully reveling in the abundant sunshine.

“Rejoice”, the flora and fauna of Maine encourage us. *We’ve made it through the long night.*



Downtown Calais was fairly buried in snow for much of the winter season.

Past Meetings and Events

March 2nd: Calais During World War II During our first meeting of the year, President Al Churchill gave us an excellent impression of what life was like in Calais during the start and progression of the Second World War. Al provided slides of scanned images from the *Calais Advertiser* and other sources to illuminate how the war effort was portrayed by the media as well as advertisements from area businesses that used the colored ration stamp system.



Canadian soldiers march down Water Street in St. Stephen in 1940. Many Calais residents enlisted when Canada entered the war.

in those days. “My family would talk about it around the table. Gasoline was a big problem,” he said, saying his father wasn’t able to travel between his home and his job so he had to get an apartment closer to his work. By 1943, fuel was so scarce that if a household didn’t have wood or coal heat, it would be left on its own in the cold.

As the war continued, more and more amenities became limited in their availability. Goods like coffee, sugar, and cigarettes were gradually taken off the markets or restricted. In Calais, some items were under ration that had no such restrictions in Canada, and despite severe penalties, smuggling became rampant.

Air raids and saboteurs were regarded as a real threat during the war, and periodic air raid drills were staged. Mandatory lights out sessions were held with frequency, with flagrant violators at risk for visitation from uniformed officers. Outposts were set up in the highest places in the town (such as near Chandler and Pleasant Street) to monitor the skies for bombers 24/7.

The State Theater offered residents a chance to escape the concerns of the war (along with \$10 in war stamps as a door prize) with its latest Hollywood feature films. In

Unlike most areas of the country, Calais residents widely supported entering the war as soon as Britain became involved in it. With no real barrier perceived between the communities of Calais and St. Stephen, many townsfolk from Calais enlisted as soon as their Canadian brethren were called to arms. “The community was completely invested in the war,” Al said. “Hundreds of men and quite a few women signed up for the effort directly.” Even if one didn’t enlist and wasn’t eligible for the draft, the impact of the war became rapidly felt as the ration system was introduced.

“When rations started, everyone became a part of the war effort,” former SCHS President Brand Livingstone said. Brand was a little younger



USO dances were held frequently to entertain troops and their friends and families. This shot from 1944 has Jessie Baig in the lower left.

December of 1943, the theater was playing *Northern Pursuit* (with Errol Flynn), *Henry Aldrich Gets Glamour* (with Jimmy Lydon), and *Bar 20* (with Bill Boyd). Other forms of entertainment were offered by the United Service Organization, which held dances at the VFW hall on Lowell Street (in the building now owned by Bill McVicar) and at the Academy Street gym.

With resources scarce and a tense mood hanging over the nation, the birth rate was low and prospects for the future seemed increasingly slim. Accordingly, F.L. Stewart Furniture Co. of Calais sold all its baby carriages at up to 40% off in January, 1944—no doubt a regrettable choice when demand skyrocketed during the postwar baby boom a few years later.

During the March meeting, the society held its annual officer election. The incumbent officers remain in each position. Al Churchill will continue to direct us as president, Jerry LaPointe will offer his assistance as vice president, John Wood will continue to mind the monies as treasurer, and yours truly will endeavor to perform as secretary.

April 6th: Diary of a Gravedigger While most of our primary materials are from the prominent and wealthy citizens of Calais, we do occasionally obtain pieces from the less well-heeled residents that have called this fine hamlet a home over the past few centuries. When Al came across the transcript of a diary of a gravedigger in Calais beginning in the year 1843, it struck him as the perfect opportunity to highlight the life of a “common” person. Though we don’t know the gravedigger’s precise identity as of yet, his faithful entries did provide from a number of insights into his daily life. He also records the names of each person he buries, and mentions several known citizens and events (including the construction of the Knight Memorial Baptist Church). The following samples illustrate his writing style:



Early photos of Calais show it to be a bustling place.

Dec. 15 and 16: I did the chores about hous and went up to town several times. We had Tailor Watson 2 days and he made me a coat. Paid him \$2.00 in full at C. Perkinses.

Dec. 17: SUNDAY to meeting forenoon. PM I got Thomas Johnson's hors and sley and went to Millton and tuck Mrs. Sherlys child to the Methodes vestry and from that to the burying ground and buried it. I paid Johnson 57 cents in full.

To see more of the diary, contact us for a transcript of the first year, or visit <http://stcroixhistorical.com/?p=453> to download a copy. The full original transcript is in the bottom room of the Calais Free Library. The original diary was in personal possession in Palermo as of the late 1970s and its present location is unknown.

Upcoming Events and Meetings

Our next meeting will be held on Monday, May 4th. Jerry will be giving a presentation on the historic homes of Main Street. Stop by and enjoy a virtual tour back in time from the comfort of the parlor!

The cottage will be opening for visitors beginning on July 1st, and we are in need of docents that are willing to mind it during its open hours (1-4 pm, Mon-Sat). Jerry will fill you in on any questions you might have, and a guidebook is available to reference for the items on display. To volunteer, please contact Al.

On July 12th we will hold our annual picnic at the Stone House. All members and guests are welcome to attend; please bring a dish to share and we'll have a merry feast.

We will be holding Tea and Treasures again this year, though the date is not yet set. Tentatively we are looking at August 4th. The cemetery tour will be held on Sunday, August 9th. Also, we are planning to have a yard sale to raise funds for the cottage roof replacement. If you have any donations to contribute, please bring them by the Holmestead.

The Chimney Swifts of Spring (by Ned Lamb)

With the arrival of spring, many birds have returned to Calais. Ned Lamb, reporter for the Calais Advertiser and founding member of the SCHS, was among those that took great pleasure in its wildlife and landscape. Here he recounts one of his favorite species, the chimney swift, in an article published on 04/19/1944 (-ed).

It is nearly time for the swifts to return to their summer home in the Pumping House chimney and begin their helpful work in destroying mosquitoes. Because of the wonderful sight of watching these birds going to their nests in the chimney last year I was asked to write something about these friends of ours.



Illustration by N. John Schmitt for
National Geographic.

Do not call them “Chimney Swal-lows” any more as their proper name is “Chimney Swifts”.

The swifts are a separate class of birds and strange as may seem, their nearest relative is the humming bird, according to ornithologists. Of course they got their name from the swiftness of their flight which is also very smooth, while the swallows is undulation, like a nervous driver stepping on the gas and then taking his foot off, in rapid succession.

The endurance of the swift is almost beyond belief. Very seldom does a swift light on anything during the day but keeps on the wing all day long. It gathers its food on the wing, and the material for its nest, it even mates while flying. There may be swifter flyers, but unless it is the arctic tern, there can be but few birds with more endurance.

My good friend, the late Prof. Ora Knight of Orono and Bangor, in his exhaustive book on the *Birds of Maine* tells how he watched a swift fly against a dead twig a number of times until it broke off and carried it away to help build the nest. The swift does not build its nest of mud like swallows, but of twigs and its own saliva. The twigs are carried to its nesting place and stuck into place with saliva which is very glutinous, and when one bird exhausts its supply the mate will carry on. Once specie of this bird in South-western Asia furnishes the material for the famed “bird’s nest soup” of the Chinese.

The swifts arrive here about April 27 and sometimes stay as late as September 16 when they leave for their winter homes in either Mexico or Central America. These American swifts are quite wide spread as in summer they are found from Florida to Labrador. There are four or five different kinds in different parts of the world. Their natural nesting places are hollow trees or caves but when man began to build chimneys and abandon them even for a summer, the swifts found ideal nesting places and many a “ghost” has been traced to these birds in an old chimney, and many a chimney fire is started from the dry material from these nests.

The swifts are small birds with very small feet and their tail feathers have the shaft extending beyond the soft edge and the shaft is split, thus, with their small feet, affording them a three point contact with the side of the chimney.

The chimney of the pumping station is about 90 feet high and affords a nesting place for these birds whose numbers seem to run into the thousands, especially In late summer, when they have their young with them, their food consists of any fly that they can catch on the wing, mosquitoes, moths and flies of all kinds. It must take an immense number of insects to feed these birds every day and they do a big work in keeping the number at these pests down in this neighborhood. They must range widely during the day.



The Milltown pumping station was an ideal nesting place for chimney swifts with its 90' high chimney.

The birds are not noticed during the day but when the sun drops toward Todd Mountain and the dimming daylight betokens the coming of the night they seem to appear out of nowhere and as you watch there is a cloud of them flying in circles around the chimney top. Around and around they go, seemingly without any purpose, but suddenly a hundred, perhaps, will break away and pour down the chimney like water into a bottle. The others keep flying around and around. They seem to be waiting for the first lot to get to their nests so as not to jam the traffic. Around and around they fly until another bunch breaks off and goes down. The number diminishes until just before sunset the remainder will dive down as though they were afraid they would be caught out in the dark. How do they find their nests in that black hole? That is one of the mysteries of nature but find them they do and they raise their young, and live their lives, and fulfill their destinies, and who will deny but what they enjoy life with its swift flight, its hard work to make their living and raise their families, even more than men do, who seem to think they have to kill a lot of other men for glory.

The Star-Struck Early Doctors of Calais (from *Annals of Calais*)

In his robust account of the early history of Calais, the Annals of Calais, I.C. Knowlton provides details on the practice and occasional misfortunes of those who aimed to provide medical care in the St. Croix Valley's earliest days (-ed).

Before any regular doctor had located on either side of the river, and for some time after, Mrs. Ananiah Bohannon of Calais performed the duties of a ladies' physician, in all the families of the vicinity. She is said to have been very skillful and energetic; and her services were ever highly prized.

One of the earliest physicians on the river, Dr. Vance, came to a sad end. He went to the West Indies and enlisted as a surgeon, on what he supposed an English armed ship, but which in reality was a piratical craft. Not long after, she was captured by a government vessel, and her officers and crew were tried, condemned and executed as pirates. Dr. Vance, though innocent, was hanged for the crime of having been found in bad company.

Louis Weston, M.D. one of the first, best, and most esteemed doctors of St. Stephen, also came to an untimely end. All his children, twelve in number, having died of consumption, he became entirely disheartened; and while the last one lay a corpse in his house, he went out in the evening, and by accident or

otherwise fell into a cistern of rain water near his door, and drowned. Dr. Gill was also drowned while attempting to cross the river at Milltown, to visit a patient, about the year 1824.

Memories of the Gem Restaurant (by Al Churchill)

The Gem Restaurant first opened its doors at the corner of North and Main in the 1920s. It was a very popular place for several decades before closing down in the 1950s. The following memories were compiled by Al Churchill and originally sent out via the weekly mailing list.

I have no memory of the Gem even though I was 11 when Diconzo's demolished it. Artie Hinton, a classmate of mine, does remember going there for French fries but most of the folks who remember the Gem well were born during or before World War 2.

Teresa McLean's mother, Margaret Kelly, worked here in the early 50's as a waitress, as did her aunt Mary Kelly (cook) and several other family members. It was then owned by Berla Decosta and her boyfriend Piper Lynch. Laura Nixon and Grace Cottrell were also cooks. Teresa's recalls washing dishes at the Gem a few times. She was very young and had to stand on a stool to do the dishes. She and her friends often went to the Gem for cheeseburgers, fries and Coke.

Many people remember the Gem from the late 30's and the war years when romance was apparently always on the menu. Eugenia Townsend's mother, Anne Carter Townsend, worked at the Gem from 1937-39. Her future husband Norman, an employee at the Merrill Bank, began coming in daily. He apparently found attractions in the Gem other than its cheeseburgers, a Gem specialty. Dolph Lentz met his wife Winifred at the Gem during his first military leave in 1944. They married the next year, a marriage that lasted until Winifred passed away 59 years later.



The popular Gem restaurant can be seen here on the left in 1931.

During the war the Gem was a favorite hangout of the Seabees from Quoddy Village, airmen from St. Stephen and anyone else wearing a uniform. It was on the regular circuit of dance halls, clubs and cafes that catered to servicemen on leave in Calais which may explain the comment by one person that "it was quite a drinking place" although I'm sure it was no worse than most. There were a lot of servicemen in town during the war, especially Seabees. Busloads of Calais girls went to dances in Quoddy Village and the Seabees came to Calais by the hundreds to dance at the USO on Lowell Street.

Grace Meader has a nice memory of the Gem. She was a friend Leta Matthews who lived in Milltown in an apartment over Clark's store during the war. Leta was going out with Bob Gillis who was in the military. One day Grace and Leta were walking down Main Street when Leo Phelan, the mailman, called to Leta, "Hey Leta, I've got a package for you," and handed Leta a package from Bob. They went into the Gem

where Leta opened the package and found it contained an engagement ring. They were married within the year.

By the mid 50's the Gem had become run down, especially the rooms, for the Gem in later years was also a hotel. In March of 1958 Diconzo's tore it down.

Connecting with the Society Online

In addition to a standard website viewable at <http://stcroixhistorical.com>, the Society maintains an ever-growing Facebook page at www.facebook.com/stcroixhs with photos of the Calais area uploaded on a weekly basis. Past and present community members comment on the photos, providing a window into personal memories and contributing immensely to the shared nostalgia of past days. Our page now has 734 "likes" or regular visitors, up from 543 in the last issue.

The most far-reaching post that we've put up has been this one on the history of the Baring Bridge, which was seen by 5,856 people as a result of 75 people sharing it.



Al gives us the details:

Not many today remember Baring in the days when it was a vibrant community connected by this bridge to the village of Upper Mills in New Brunswick. The folks in this small international community were probably closer than even those downriver in Calais and St. Stephen. The two small towns shared everything: the churches where they married, international civic organizations and what was effectively a free trade zone overseen by very understanding customs officers at either end of the bridge. Both communities were devastated when the bridge closed in the late 40's. Good friends and relatives were thereafter separated by an hour's drive rather than a two minute walk across the bridge. The closing of the bridge marked the end of a very unique St Croix community.

Al sends out a weekly e-mail to a mailing list that anyone is welcome to join. Each week he features an interesting fact, relevant story, or intriguing photo for folks to enjoy. To sign up, send an e-mail to Al at jaclaw1@gmail.com.

Contact the SCHS:

Do you have questions about local history, suggestions for events or presentations, or comments or concerns regarding the newsletter? Let us know!

President: Al Churchill jaclaw1@gmail.com

Vice President and Assistant Editor: Jerry LaPointe

Treasurer: John Wood

Editor: Lura Jackson luraejackson@gmail.com

Honorable Mention: Fred Becker

We wish to apologize for the delay in sending out this issue of the newsletter. The editor experienced personal bereavement and travels both domestic and abroad were the order of the day for each of us. Our next issue will be sent out in September. See you at the summer events!

New and Renewing Members from the Last Quarter

The Society is supported through membership dues and donations. If you haven't yet paid your 2015 dues, please remember to do so. To make a donation via credit, debit, or Paypal, visit http://stcroixhistorical.com/?page_id=400 and click "Donate".

Financial Update

The checkbook balance is \$5,531.96. The savings account balance is \$1576.64. The value of the 100 shares of Qualcomm stock has increased to \$7644.00.

GIFT SUGGESTIONS:

Available by mail from SCHS, prices include postage

Note Cards:

**4 Views of St. Croix Island (8 cards & envelopes total) –
Paintings by Mary Livingstone - \$15**

Books:

Champlain's Journal - translated from French - \$8

- “Washington County, Maine in the Civil War 1861-66” by Ken Ross - \$32**
- Ganong's, "Champlain's Island" - \$12**
- “Beginnings” (A reprint of the 1875 “Annals of Calais” by Rev. Knowlton) - \$16**
- “Pork, Molasses, & Timber” by Eaton - \$14**
- Around Town by Rail - \$11**
- Nellie’s Diary - \$29**
- The Way We Were 1908 - \$19**
- Keene on Red Beach - \$29**
- Calais Fair 1914 - \$14**
- Ned’s Valley - \$29**
- The Valley Cookbook - \$14**
- Charlie’s Civil War - \$24**
- Calais Centennial - \$14**

Picture Books:

- “Calais 1896” - 52 views - \$8**
- “St. Andrews 1896” - 30 views - \$8**
- “Old Friends” - 49 old area photos - \$6**
- “Scenes of St. Stephen, 1895” - \$9**
- “Scenes of Campobello, Eastport, & Lubec, 1895” - \$10**

Maps:

- Red Beach Birdseye view map, 11x17, laminated - \$15**
- Calais, St. Stephen, & Milltown Birdseye view map 1879, 11x17, laminated - \$15**
- Wharfs of Calais & St. Stephen map 1856, 11x17, laminated - \$15**

DVD:

- Calais First Town Meeting Reenactment - \$19**

Order at St. Croix Historical Society, P. O. Box 242, Calais, ME 04619

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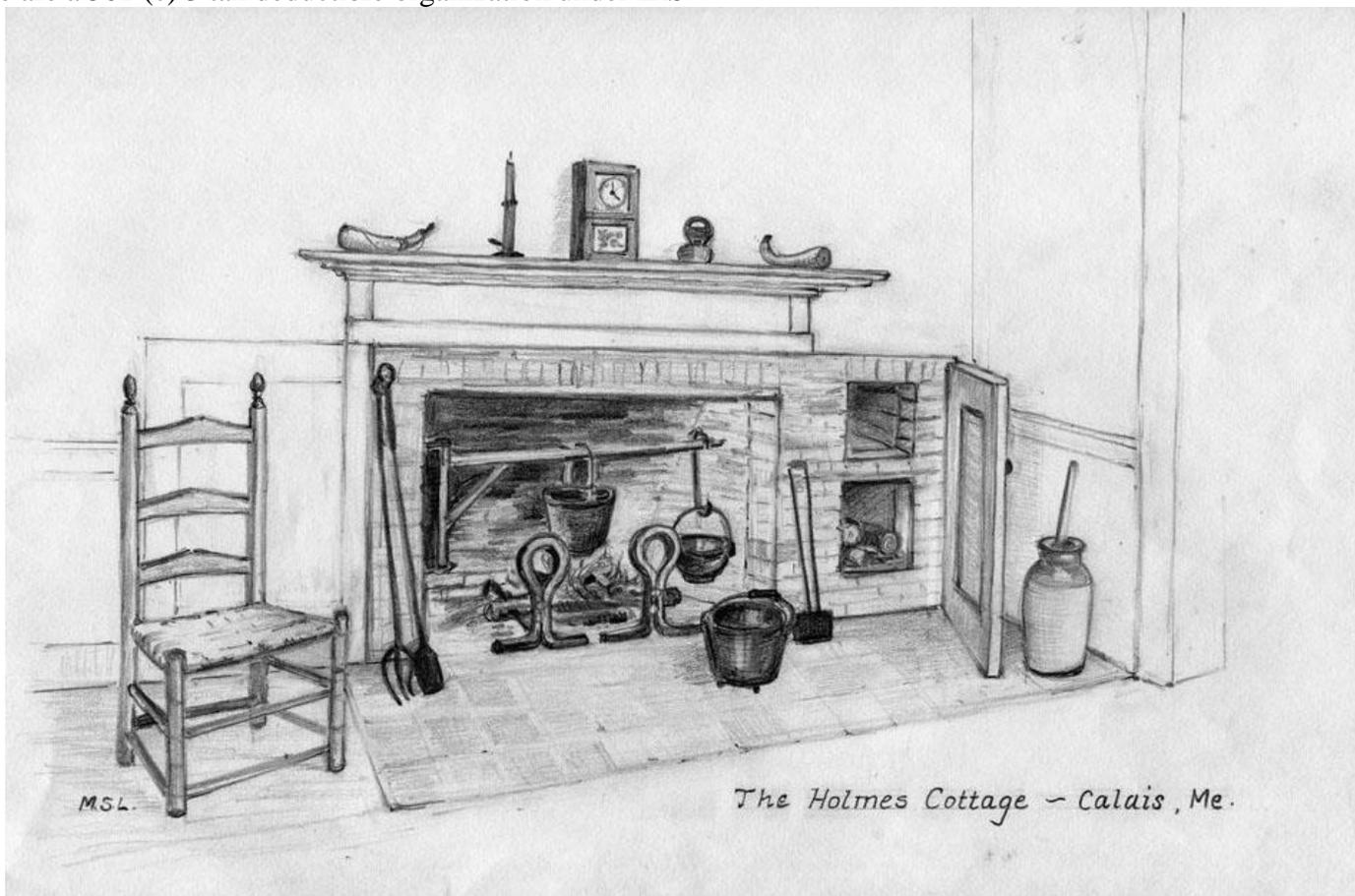
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- Life \$500

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