

ST. CROIX HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER



The Holmes Cottage



The Holmestead



Whitlock's Mill Lighthouse

Editor: Lura Jackson

Volume 28, Issue #1

Calais, Maine

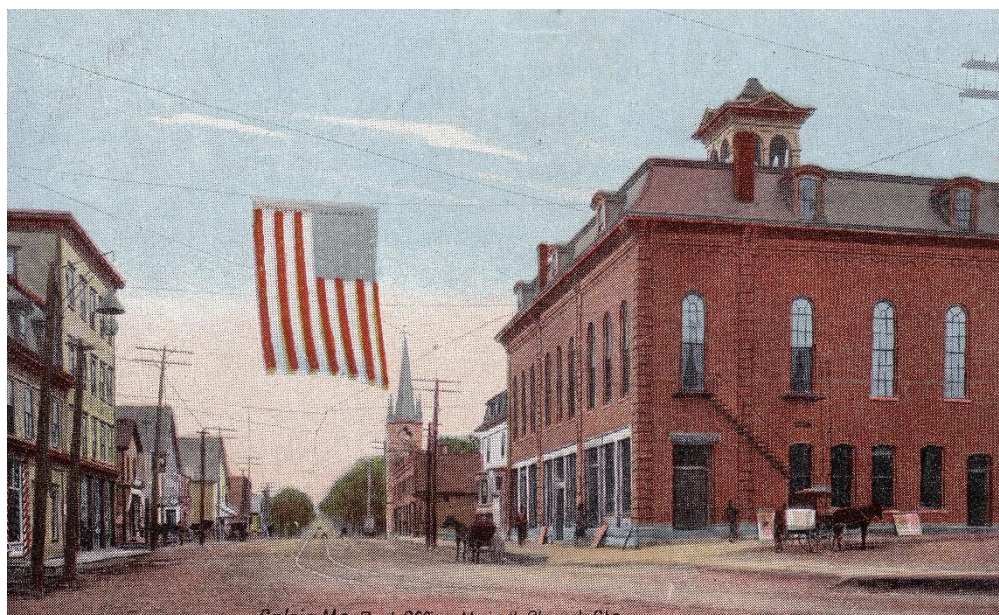
March 2017

Seeds of Rebirth in the St. Croix Valley

Spring has arrived early to the St. Croix Valley this year, with February rains melting the meager snow we've received. With the grass and grounds once again exposed and the daylight strengthening, those of us in the valley are encouraged to look around and survey our surroundings.

Winter has a way of making even the most spirited place seem drab and dormant, but with spring, we see the promise of new growth. In Calais, a recent measure to create a "TIF" (Tax Increment Financing) district downtown means that the historic buildings may have new life in them yet. One building in particular - the old Opera House - has recently been purchased with the goal of creating a new place for visitors and residents to mingle. The owner is delighted with the building's history and it goes without saying that we are delighted to have the building no longer unoccupied.

At the same time, the city's budget for buildings to be torn down in the coming year remains robust. While we can't know what places will meet the axe and which will find new life, we can be certain that the cycle of death and rebirth is ongoing in the St. Croix Valley.



The Opera House, which also housed the post office, can be seen on the right in this colorized postcard from around 1904. The flag that hangs in the center is the Roosevelt-Fairbanks flag, signifying the presidential ticket of the day.

Past Meetings and Events

Just like our leafy deciduous trees, your faithful historical society goes fairly dormant in the winter months, and so we haven't much to share for recent meetings and events. Since yours truly was not able to attend the Christmas party and take photos, alas, we have even less to share in that regard.

November 7th: Considering it was an election year, our November program showcased a program on elections and politics in the St. Croix Valley. Topics ranged from the raucous town meetings held in the early years when citizens sharpened their wits and tongues before important votes at Thompson's Tavern just down the street from the Town Hall, to the more orderly but hard fought battles of the years after 1851 when Calais adopted the City form of government.

Perhaps one of the more unusual political stories from the area is the time that Alderman Jim Rigley was symbolically buried after losing a bet on the presidential election to Mayor Jack Woodman. Ed Boyd has the story:

Mayor Jack Woodman and Alderman Jim Rigley bet on the result of the Presidential election between Alfred Smith, 'The Happy Warrior', and 'Chicken In Every Dinner Box' Herbert Hoover. Rigley, the Democrat, lost and was symbolically buried. Seated on the hearse, in the silk top hats are: Mayor Jack Woodman, Judge George Downes and standing left to right are their henchmen, Charlie Fenderson, Charlie McCoy and Charles (Pum) Rutherford. The men in the buggy are Jim's Pallbearers: Frank (Copper) Burgess, Bill Ryan, Mike Brogan and Judge Fred Pickard.



"Rigley's Ride" was a spectacle for locals as it bore the loser of a bet, Jim Rigley, to a premature burial. The procession is passing the Methodist Church on Main Street.

Jim Rigley was the manager of the A & P Store, and on the day of his burial, Fenders, McCoy & Rutherford, went in the store and carried him out to the hearse with the glass sides, and shoved him in, and paraded him around the streets of Calais. This affair drew a large crowd and made the Boston paper. These fellows were very popular in Calais in the 20's and 30's, and are remembered very well today by Calais residents.

Jack Woodman, I would say, was the most influential politician ever in Calais. He started out as City Clerk and served as Mayor.

December 10th: Our holiday party at the Holmestead was well-attended as usual with about 25 guests coming to celebrate the season. A feast of refreshments was served, prepared in part by the unfailing Jerry LaPointe, and as usual a presentation of our collection of Christmas-themed postcards was on display.

Donations and contributions since our last newsletter

Upcoming Meetings and Events

Our April meeting will be held on Monday, April 4th, with a program that we haven't yet decided upon. Efforts to improve the presentation-capability of the Holmestead are underway, particularly in regards to showing films and material featuring audio. If you are in the St. Stephen area, you can tune in to Charlotte County TV on Sunday, May 7th to the Rob Patry Live show from 7:00-8:00 pm AST, when yours truly will be interviewed to celebrate and share the St. Croix Historical Society. If you aren't living locally but would still like to see the interview, the video will be available on YouTube.

The First Residents of the St. Croix Valley

Living in the St. Croix Valley, it is easy to feel surrounded by history. The skeletons of the old wharves reaching in to the river and the looming buildings from the turn of the 19th century are a constant reminder of yesteryear.

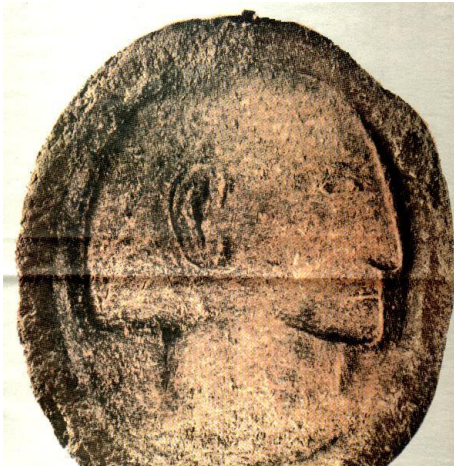
The history in this area goes back much further than that, however. The Passamaquoddy were the primary inhabitants of the region before Europeans came, and the tribe traces its history back for millennia as the Wabanaki people. 3,000-year old petroglyphs remain visible in Machiasport to this day, some of which depict animals and spiritual leaders. The most recent petroglyph, accompanied by a cross, shows European ships arriving.

Even before the oral and petroglyph-recorded history of the Passamaquoddy, there were Paleoindians in the St. Croix Valley. The first inhabitants are believed to have arrived not long after the Laurentide Ice Sheet receded over 10,000 years ago. The Red Paint people, so-called for their red ochre-colored ornaments, were among these early residents.



Passamaquoddy petroglyphs in Machiasport, some of which date back 3,000 years. Photo by Michael Rottersman.

In 1913, archeologist Warren Moorehead excavated several graves of the Red Paint people, finding that their tools were made differently than Passamaquoddy tools and noting that the graves were so old that the human remains were reduced to little more than bone fragments.



The “Laney stone”, a carved red granite relief that shows an individual with Native American features. Mystery surrounds the origin of the stone.

The Passamaquoddy are familiar with these strangely-made tools and artifacts. According to Mrs. W. Wallace Brown, the Passamaquoddy traditionally refer to them as being made by the Caansoos or Konsoos people (plural of Konsoosuk). The Passamaquoddy say that these people disappeared from the surface world and went to live in the underworld, leaving their stone implements behind.

Among the more unusual artifacts found in the area is a relief carved from red granite, found at Lake Utopia in New Brunswick. Known as the “Laney stone” for the man who recovered it in 1863, stonemason James Laney, the relief depicts a head with features identified as Native American. The stone has baffled those who have studied it, most of whom agree that metal tools would have been required to carve it.

In an article published by the Smithsonian Institution in 1881, I. Allen Jack concluded that the stone is a genuine relic dating to before British occupation. He said it was probably from the French occupation era, and that the carving marked the grave of a deceased Native. Others maintain that the relief is from an earlier era altogether, though for now we will have to be content with not knowing the precise origin of the unusual find.

Memories from the Passamaquoddy Tribe

Continuing the theme, we are pleased to share these memories from Delia Carle, as originally recorded in the ---? They reveal some of the early customs and beliefs of the Passamaquoddy people.

Delia’s grandmother was named Julianne Francis Mell. She took care of Delia after her mother was married for the second time. They lived at the Reed Place where Julianne was cook for several years. As Delia was growing up, her grandmother told her many stores about the old days of the tribe.

One thing that she told Delia was about the wedding customs in the early days before there was a priest to marry an Indian couple. The young brave would take wampum (a necklace made of beads or shells) to the girl he had chosen for his bride. If she accepted his gift, then they were married by the Chief. The ceremony consisted of the chief taking his knife and making small cuts in each of the couples’ arms. He

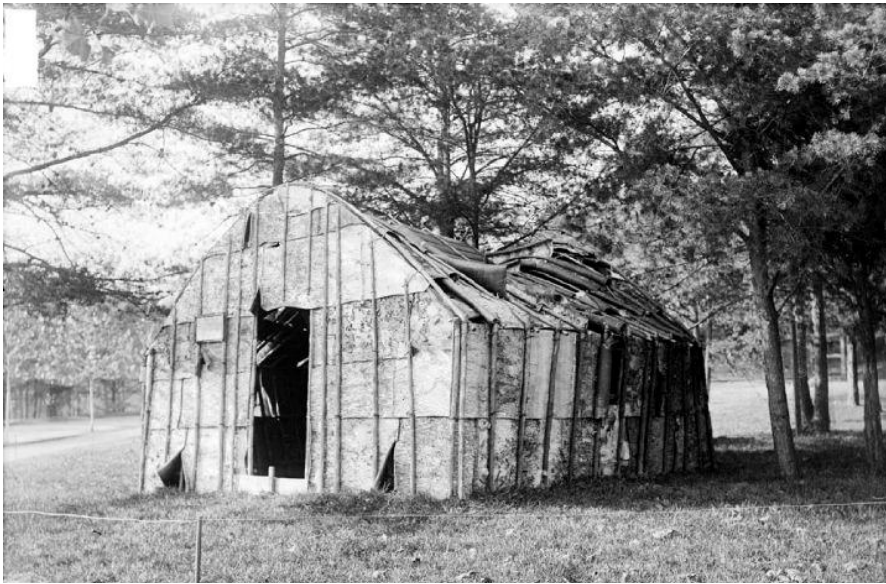


A Passamaquoddy woman in 1910 (photo from Maine Historical Society)

then tied their hands together, mixing their blood, signifying that they had become one. After this the whole tribe had a “Pow-wow” with much singing and dancing to celebrate the new marriage.

Another thing that she taught Delia was the significance of the Totem Pole. On the Totem for the Passamaquoddies were carved many different animals, each standing for a different clan or family. The very top animal is a bear and this represents the Bear Clan who lived on the island in Big Lake that we know as Gordon Island. This clan was wiped out by smallpox as we will relate in another part of our story.

Also on the totem are carved a frog (Delia says that this is her clan because her great-grandmother was French) a deer, a porpoise, a mink, a crow and a polly-wog. Each stood for a different clan or family. Her grandmother told her that on ancient totems there was a cavity carved inside each animal for the particular clan to keep their “values” or their most prized possessions.



A birchbark dwelling built by the Passamaquoddy in 1899. The dwellings were temporary structures that blended seamlessly into their environments.

Another group of stories handed down concerned the so-called “little people” that the old-timers of the tribe believed in. Many stories of them being sighted were told and re-told. Delia’s god-mother Louise Neptune told her of looking out her window at daylight at Peter Dana Point and seeing these tiny people all in Indian ceremonial dress dancing and singing ceremonial songs. Legend had it that when there was to be a wedding they would appear singing wedding songs, and if some member of the tribe were near death, they would appear and sing old Indian hymns.

Joe Mell told a story of being in the woods hunting for an ash tree to cut for basket making. He said that he didn’t actually see the “little people” but found tiny strips of ash bound together as if ready to make a little basket. Not far from there, he found just the perfect ash tree for which he had been looking.

George Soctomah told Delia a story of when he was cooking in a woods camp down the river. In the morning very early when he went to the spring for a pail of water he saw some tiny figurines—little dolls made of clay around the edge of the spring. He didn’t touch them, but one day a non-Indian went, saw them and brought one back to the camp. George made him put it back where he had found it, but after that there were no more ever seen.

The Indian names for Julianne and Joe were Sulyan and Susap; for grandmother and grandfather were Nokmis and Mosoms.

The Story of John Gardner, Boat Builder (pt. 1)

Returning to our European ancestors, we are glad to share this piece about the life of boat builder John Gardner, written by former SCHS President Brand Livingstone. It will be continued in the following issue.

Bog Brook was a self-sufficient subdivision of Calais, Maine consisting of mostly farms that provided a pastoral way of life which included a church, grocery store, blacksmith, and school where the lifestyle included helping each other with the heavy farm chores like haying and wood cutting. On a farm of his father and grandfather, about south/west of the former Taylor furniture building, John was born in 1905. This area is on the St. Croix River estuary connected to Passamaquoddy Bay that separates Maine and New Brunswick, Canada.

John was brought up on this farm, located about 3 miles east of Calais, which ran down to the river's edge and a mile back. There were 26-28 foot tides and the river was about one mile wide at flood and 1/2 mile of mud flats at low water.

"We [John and his father] built boats and used boats. My grandfather before my time had a pinky [double ended sailboat usually around 25 to 30 feet long with single or double mast and no power] which he used a great deal, and even when I was small he still went down river in the fall to catch fish for the winter.

"We cut our own boat lumber from our wood lot at the same time we cut our firewood for the winter. We saved the good sawlogs and hauled them to a mill and brought the lumber home. My grandfather made everything. He made boats, he made hay racks and cart wheels, he built buildings and shingled roofs. He had been a carver's apprentice in Charlestown, Massachusetts and was an accomplished woodcarver. I learned woodworking from him and my father as part of growing up."

John grew up in Bog Brook, Calais, Maine in the early 20th century, developing basic skills in building boats for transportation on the St. Croix River. One interesting aspect of his development was his

desire to learn from other local boat builders. "When I was young I used to spend quite a good deal of time at a nearby boat shop owned by the Whelan boys, so called, although they were still called the Whelan 'boys' when they were long past 70. Jim and George were their names though they were locally known as Pete and RePete because they always repeated each other when they talked. They were Irish, Catholic and Democrats, which put them apart to some extent in that area. They built all types of boats up to 50' or 60' for commercial or pleasure use, and all by hand. The shop had no power at all. Pieces were ripped out of rough-sawn lumber with hand saws and then planed. They used adzes and broad axes. I was



The Whelan boys: "Pete" and "RePete" Whelan in 1936, next to a boat recently completed for "Chick" Livingstone

influenced by these men. I was also influenced by a very skilled carpenter by the name of Tommy Webster, who lived up the road. He built my father's house with my father's assistance without plans. The shelves and pantries were finished just like the interior of a vessel."

They lived and made boats on a historic place where the first St. Croix Island light house keeper lived, and many enjoyed the picnics on Barbers Beach, a 200-acre wooded expanse with spacious green fields that looked down on the St. Croix River at Red Beach.

John continues: "I never apprenticed as a carpenter boat builder, but I picked up the skills as I went along. My first attempt to rig my own boat came early when I took one of my great grandfather's Sea Chest from the barn down to the brook and tried to sail it like a boat. From there I became a pretty good boat builder and built several craft before I got out of high school - rowboats sailboats, nothing too difficult. Once I decided to build a dory and sent to the Maine State Library for a book with lines of a pretty dory. I scaled it down proportionally with the result that it was too tender [tippy]. So, to remedy, I built two air tight sponsons shaped like crescent moons and attached them to the sides. The boat became very stable and rowed nicely but looked odd. I took it down to the Whelans' who scratched their heads but admitted the arrangement worked pretty good."

[John's story will be concluded in the following issue.]

Remembering "Doc" Foster



Malcolm "Doc" Foster

It was in March of 1959 that the Calais community experienced a terrible tragedy that took the life of Malcolm "Doc" Foster. A locally well-known survivor of the Bataan Death March, Doc Foster returned from his time in service to the Calais area to become a mail carrier. As Carol Allen writes: "I thought that was a bit ironic.... I always wondered what thoughts he must have had while 'walking' in his job...he was very quiet..."

The Bataan Death March took place after the surrender of U.S. forces to the Japanese on the Bataan Peninsula in the Philippines on April 9th, 1942. Approximately 75,000 Filipinos and American soldiers – including Doc Foster – were forced to walk 65 miles over difficult terrain and in intense heat to prison camps, all the while being subject to brutal treatment from Japanese guards. Thousands did not survive the trek, though, as noted, Doc Foster did. Once returned to Calais, Doc Foster settled in with the postal service, soon having three children with his wife, Mary.

Over time, Doc Foster came to be a regular at the St. Croix Club, which President Al writes "was actually a quite fancy and upscale sort of place in the late 1800's and early 1900's. It had a billiard room, card room, reading room, dining room, etc." It was there that Doc Foster lost his life. Al continues:

Gordon Lord recalls bowling at the club the night of the fire but he went home early in the evening, leaving a number of men at the club, including Doc Foster. Bunny Robb, Gary Frost, George Breen and Bernard Rigley were also at the club and all had gone upstairs to the club room. According to the newspaper report, at about 11:30 the men realized smoke was coming up the stairway from the bowling alley. Bernard Rigley ran down the stairs and looked into the bowling alley through the glass door and

saw flames. He opened the door onto the street just as the front windows of the building blew out in a terrific explosion and the entire building was engulfed in flames. Bernard and Tony Pisani, who owned the store across the street, ran to the outside fire escape in an attempt to help those on the second floor. Bunny Robb and Gary Frost were just then barreling down the fire escape and George Breen had jumped from the second story window into the alley next to the club, seriously injuring his back. Bernard and Tony Pisani ran up the fire



Firemen survey the remains of the bowling club, struck by a fire that claimed the life of Malcolm “Doc” Foster on March 23rd, 1959

escape calling Doc Foster’s name and heard Doc respond “I can’t make it” and Doc, who had made it through the Bataan Death March, was right, the fire was just too intense. He died, according to the death certificate, in two minutes of the outbreak of the fire from smoke inhalation and second degree burns. An investigation found the fire had started in a broom closet under the stairs, the same broom closet in which a fire had begun fifty years earlier which gutted the inside of the club.

Doc Foster was survived by three sons.

Connecting with the Society Online

The SCHS Facebook page (www.facebook.com/Stcroixhs) continues to be the primary point of contact for many of our fans and members. Likes have increased to 1,854 from 1,790 in the last newsletter, indicating we may be nearing a saturation point for local fans. As has been the trend, our largest source of fans is St. Stephen, followed by Calais and surrounding locales. International fans are steadily increasing with a total of 20 countries represented in our list.

Work on the website has been continuing with a growing selection of articles viewable at http://stcroixhistorical.com/?page_id=466. President Al’s year-by-year history of the area is arranged chronologically with more on the way and eventual plans to compile them into a book.

Shane DelMonaco’s website about the Cemetery Tour is nearly completed. Stay tuned to the Facebook page or the main website itself for a link as soon as it is live. Shane’s site will feature all of the scripts (written by Jerry LaPointe) from past tours in addition to photos and links to our previously-posted videos of the performances. Jerry is already hard at work in formulating scripts for the coming year’s tour.

The most popular post on Facebook in the past few months was an article President Al wrote about Salmon Falls. The article included many photos and an excellent history of the importance of the falls to Passamaquoddies and later to Europeans, and it reached 4,227 people through shares.

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 and Secretary: Lura Jackson
luraejackson@gmail.com

Cottage News

With summer approaching, we are preparing to open the Holmes Cottage once again as a museum for residents and visitors alike to tour at no cost. The cottage holds many relics from the area including several originals to the Holmes estate as well as items contributed from the community.

We are looking to recruit five additional docents this year to ensure that the cottage can remain open. Jerry LaPointe would provide training and support to anyone wishing to join our staff of docents. We can work around your schedule and it would be possible to serve one day a week or on a more flexible schedule, if necessary. Please let Jerry or Al know if you are interested and if you would be able to serve as a docent for the 2017 season. Thank you so much.

New and Renewing Members for 2017

The Society is supported through membership dues and donations. If you haven't yet paid your 2017 dues, please remember to do so. A green mark on your address label denotes unpaid dues for 2016. 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 \$1,446.50. The savings account balance is \$1,576.19. The value of the 100 shares of Qualcomm stock has decreased to \$5,947.55.

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 - \$22

“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:

“In Days Past: Calais 1896” - 52 views - \$8

“In Days Past: 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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If a gift membership, please include name and address to whom the gift membership goes.

Amount Paid: _____

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Historian **\$15**

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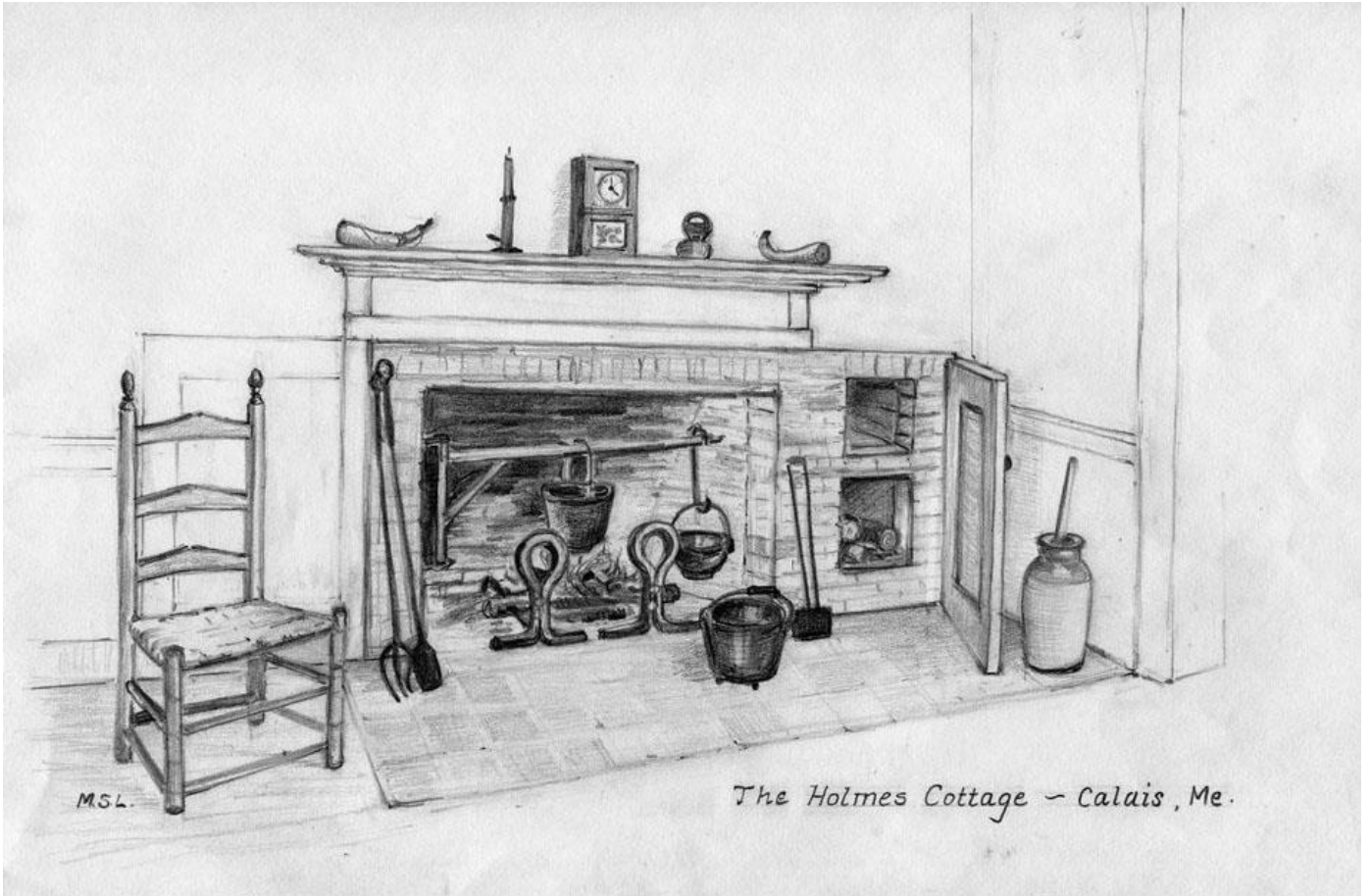
Corp/Bus **\$60**

Patron **\$150 (includes one free 3 hour rental of Holmestead meeting room)**

Life **\$500**

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