

St George Historical Society Newsletter

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An IRS 501(c)(3) non-profit organization

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(Photo from Andrew Robinson House collection)

Attendants Colony 3 No Grafton, Mass

In sorting through the many photos in the Andrew Robinson House, this picture was found with no identification except what is shown in the title of this article and printed on the photo in the lower left-hand corner. Who are these people? Are there any people from St George in it? What is Colony 3 at North Grafton, MA? No immediate answers, so it was set aside.

In looking over other photos from the Andrew Robinson House, trying to identify photos that are probably family or neighbors, the Kinney family members were considered as they were both neighbors and connected to the family. There is a picture of Austin Kinney, who died in World War I and whose name is part of the local American Legion Post, so if a photo of him was in the collection, we'd be able to identify it. Austin had a brother, Earl Kinney, and in checking him out it was found that he was in the 1910 census in Grafton, MA. A close look at the census record shows Earl as a farm laborer at the Insane Colony Farm in Grafton. An even closer look at others in the census at the Insane Colony Farm shows Thomas Robinson, Rodney Kinney and Frank Robinson, all natives of Wileys Corner! We're not sure yet if any of these are in the photo.

Grafton State Hospital was established in its present location in 1901 as a farm colony for chronic insane patients of the 'Insane Hospital' in Worcester. In 1912 it was administratively separated from Worcester. There were three separate colonies that served classes of patients with distinct needs. After 72 years of operation Grafton State Hospital was closed in 1973.

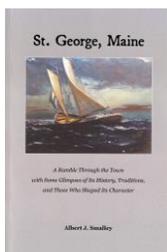
Cemetery Preservation Fund

In 2019 a special fund was created to help preserve some of the old stones in our local cemeteries. We are grateful for the \$800 in donations received.

So far in 2020 we have received \$250 to be added to this fund. We look forward to begin the restoration of some gravestones in 2021. If you would like to donate to this fund, please send donations earmarked for this fund to:

**St George Historical Society
P O Box 14
Tenants Harbor, ME 04860**

Reprint of History of St George NOW AVAILABLE



The Historical Society has reprinted Albert Smalley's "**History of St George, Maine**". It has many new old photos added to Smalley's "ramble through the town" and a more readable font. Copies are \$32 each. If you would like a copy, please contact us via email, or call and leave a message at 372-2231.

Membership Dues

Membership dues cover the calendar year and are \$10 / individual and \$15 / household.

To renew your membership for 2021, please send the appropriate amount to the address below.

An application form for a new membership can be found at the end of this newsletter. Please send dues and/or application form to:

**St George Historical Society
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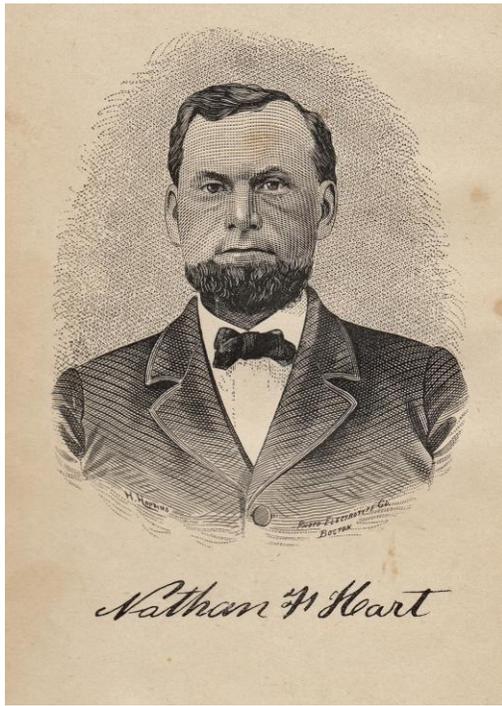
*(Bernard Robinson on left & Maynard Kinney on right
at Union Fair – 1909)*

Digital Library Collection

....We continue to build our digital collection of photos of people, places and things of St George. Each person or family allowing us to scan their photos has their images in a separate collection and so named according to its source. So far, we have 55 collections with thousands of images in all.

Mary Blenk, daughter of John & Betty Kinney, recently allowed us to scan her father's photo album. Because there is a family connection to the Andrew Robinson House, these photos allowed us to identify dozens of previously unidentified photos. The picture above is a tintype photo of Maynard Kinney (*John Kinney's father*) and his cousin, Bernard Robinson, taken at the Union Fair in 1909. Apparently, you got dressed up to go to the Fair in those days!

If you have an old album or photos of people, places and things of St George, please consider loaning them to the Historical Society for scanning and adding them to the digital collection. You may contact us at the phone number or email address located on the heading on the front page. Items borrowed in the morning will be returned the same day.



Nathan F Hart Did Kill Sarah H Meservey!

Secret of Hart-Meservey Murder Revealed 50 Years Later

From a newspaper article of 1930 comes the following:

“The inside story of one of Maine’s greatest murder mysteries has, after a lapse of 50 years, been revealed. And the revelation is so extraordinary, the facts so entirely unlike what was ever suspected that old timers who remember the case are amazed. No queerer combination of circumstances could be imagined that this seemingly (at the time) simple murder case now reveals. It rivals the most thrilling of detective mysteries.

Fifty years ago, Sarah H Meservey was found dead in her home in St George’s Tenants Harbor. She was the wife of a prominent Rockland sea captain who, at the time, was away at sea. She had apparently been strangled to death by a long woolen scarf which she wrapped around her head and neck.

After a time, suspicion fell on one Nathan F Hart, who admitted he had been cutting wood in the rear of Mrs Meservey’s home about the time the murder was committed. He was a sailor who lived with his wife two houses away from the Meservey home. He knew the dead woman well. His reputation was fairly good, yet his alibi seemed not convincing as he stoutly denied going in the Meservey yard. He saw no strangers about and heard no disturbance though he was in a position to notice anyone

entering or leaving the house.

Gradually public sentiment turned against him. At the trial the evidence offered by the government was very scant. The defense was a flat and general denial. Hart stuck to his story that he was entirely innocent. The jury convicted him of murder in the first degree. He was sentenced to life imprisonment, Maine having abolished the death penalty for murder.

Soon after the conviction public sentiment shifted. There grew up a feeling that the evidence against him was slender and his powerful protestations of innocence made a profound impression. As time went by a real clamor for his release grew up. A prominent man named A R Dunton wrote a book entitled ‘**Nathan F. Hart, An Innocent Man in a Felon’s Cell.**’

This book circulated all over the country. It was a very effective plea for Hart, showed up the hollowness of the case against him and pleaded for justice. This resulted in an almost country-wide demand that Maine remove the stigma from an innocent man and set him free.

Hart’s friends soon numbered the vast majority of persons in the immediate counties. Yet, strangely his lawyers made no move for a new trial which apparently they could have obtained.

Some years after Hart died in prison asserting his absolute innocence. The general opinion was that a terrible mistake had been made and that the State had virtually killed, by severe imprisonment and humiliation, an innocent man.

Now comes the real story. It is made public by Hart’s counsel at the trial 50 years ago, Job H Montgomery of Camden, president of the Knox County Bar Association. He has kept the secret all these years in spite of the terrific agitation that went on for years. He believes the public is entitled to know the truth and he makes the Hart case a chapter in his life history which he has given to the Courier-Gazette.

Hart did kill Mrs Meservey. The story he told at the trial was a lie. His protestations of absolute innocence were false. His alibi was a fake.

BUT, he was not guilty of deliberate murder. The killing was a pure accident. Had he been in a position to tell the real story his punishment would have been a short term in jail. Why he was not in a position to tell the real story constitutes an amazing episode the truth of which was never suspected and could not have been guessed at by the shrewdest detective.

On his way home on the afternoon of the crime

Hart passed through the Meservey yard. He was a sneak thief at heart and when he went to the door to speak to Mrs Meservey he found no one at home. He conceived the idea of slipping into the house to see if he could pick up anything. He found the kitchen window unlocked, raised it and went in.

While Hart was peeking into the kitchen closet to see if he could lay hands on anything worth stealing Mrs Meservey returned. She came in so quietly that Hart did not realize she was in the room until she grabbed him by the throat from behind. She was a powerful, courageous woman nearly as strong as Hart.

The two engaged in a terrific struggle, knocking over the furniture and upsetting the kitchen table. Mrs Meservey was wearing a long woolen scarf about her head and throat. In some manner as the pair were wrestling about the scarf caught, suddenly tightened up and Mrs Meservey fell to the floor choking.

Hart stood watching her, fearful to aid her since she had recognized him. As she lay helpless on the floor he jumped out the window and ran away.

Hart's wife was one of the most prominent and best liked women in town. She was far above him in station, intelligent and well bred. When he got home, he told her the truth, adding that he must flee, since Mrs Meservey had recognized him.

Then came the development that no one had ever suspected. Hart told his wife that the only thing which could save him was the possibility that Mrs Meservey was dead. The two of them started out in the darkness to find out. When they reached a point where they could see the Meservey house they saw it was dark. That convinced them the woman was dead.

They then went to the rear of the house and climbed in the kitchen window. They found Mrs Meservey dead on the floor – the scarf had choked her to death.

Then they did a foolish thing. In order to make it appear that a burglar was responsible they turned the place upside down, opening bureau drawers and scattering the contents about.

Even that might have fooled the authorities if Mrs Hart had not proposed a crowning bit of folly.

She wrote a letter purporting to come from some person who had a grudge against Mrs Meservey threatening her. She crumpled this note up and left it beside the body.

It was this note that convinced the police that no burglar committed the crime. At the trial they tried to pin the note on Hart. No one ever dreamed that Mrs Hart knew anything about the case. Had they thought to secure a sample of her handwriting the solution of the case was right in their hands. But Mrs Hart's reputation was above reproach.

Before the trial Hart told the real story to his lawyer, Mr Montgomery. Mrs Hart confessed to her part also.

Hart's lawyer advised him to plead guilty, tell the real story and promised that he could be convicted only of involuntary manslaughter with a sentence of perhaps two or three years. But, of course, Mrs Hart would have to stand trial as an accessory after the fact and probably get a light sentence. Mrs Hart was terrified and pleaded with her husband to save her since he had pulled her into the terrible business.

Hart yielded to her plea and decided to go on trial with a flat denial of any knowledge of the crime. He felt the evidence against him was not sufficient to convict. His attorney, while still urging him to tell the truth, felt bound to follow his client's wishes.

Conviction followed.

The reason his attorney never pressed for a new trial was this. The year after Hart's conviction the Maine Legislature restored capital punishment. Hart was greatly frightened of hanging. He asked his attorney to give absolute assurance that he wouldn't be hanged if he should be convicted again. His attorney told him he felt the new law could not apply to his case but Hart, still fearful, would not sanction the plea for another trial.

Mrs Hart was also vehemently against a new trial. She felt she had a narrow escape at the first trial and did not want to take another chance, though not a breath of suspicion had rested on her.

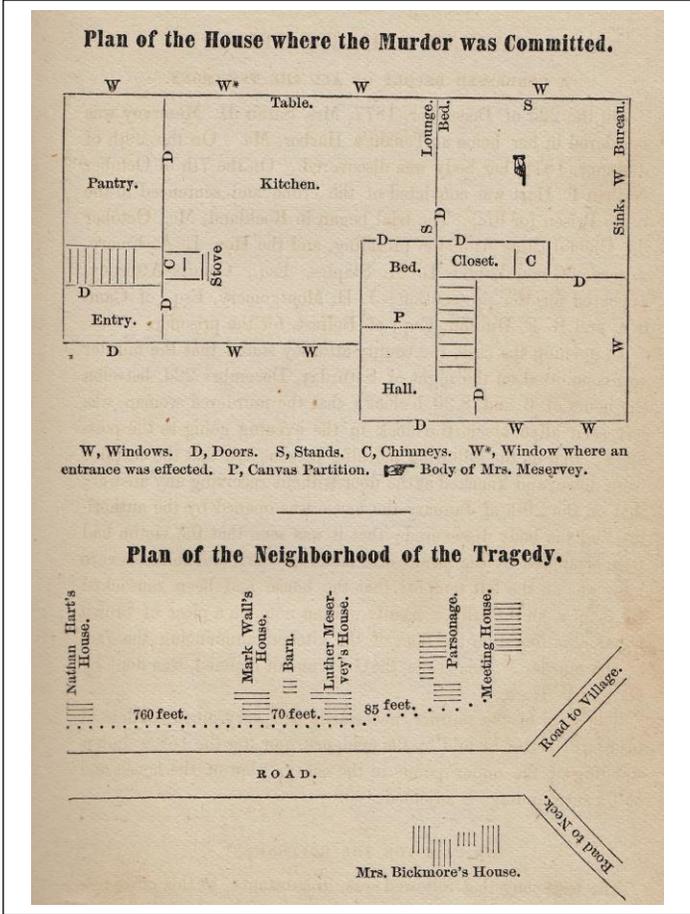
Then Hart died in jail with a plea of innocence on his lips.

Mrs Hart remained in the town honored as a brave and faithful woman. She received the sympathy of everyone. She was more popular and respected than before because of her heavy affliction. No one would have dared to suspect her of any knowledge of her husband's crime – even those who felt him guilty.

All the time her husband was in jail Mrs Hart had been terrified by the fear that he would make a confession which would reveal her part in the case.

His death relieved her of that awful suspense. She had years of comparative happiness afterward unless she was tortured with remorse for her part in the affair. If she was, she never told her husband's lawyer about it. When she died, she was honored by all the townspeople as a gallant woman who had suffered for her husband.

And so, thanks to Mr Montgomery, this strange crime is a mystery no longer."



Sarah H Meservey was murdered in her home on the evening of December 22, 1877, but the fact was not discovered until January 29, 1878. The house in which the murder occurred is located on Wallston Road and is currently owned by Debbie Wheelock and Chuck Paine. It is the second house west of the Tenants Harbor Baptist Church.

There is some speculation that Mrs Hart poisoned her husband to keep him silent. She supposedly visited him the day before he died, bringing him a home baked pie.

There are numerous magazine articles and chapters in mystery books that mention this murder mystery of coastal Maine. It has also been said that the book by Professor Dunton – **Nathan F Hart, An Innocent Man in a Felon’s Cell**, has been used in law classes because it was the first case where someone was convicted based solely on handwriting evidence.

St George Historical Society, Inc.

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stgeorgemainehistory@gmail.com

MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

Name _____

Address _____ State _____ Zip Code _____

Email address _____ Phone (optional) _____

Type of Membership: Individual / \$10 _____ Household / \$15 _____

Areas of interest _____