

# NEWCASTLE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

P.O. Box 482  
Newcastle, Maine 04553

Winter 2019

E-mail: [nhsmaine@gmail.com](mailto:nhsmaine@gmail.com) Website: [www.nhsmaine.org](http://www.nhsmaine.org)

## Brick Making in Newcastle by Arlene Cole

Brick making was a common occupation along both the Damariscotta and Sheepscot Rivers in the early days. The Bryant brickyard was one of these early locations. According to Fannie Chase in her *Wiscasset in Pownalborough*, a great part of the land on the sea coast of Maine contains a large proportion of clay. The presence of iron oxide in the clay produces a red brick. The earliest settlers needed brick. With the clay for making the bricks, wood for burning them and navigable water on the rivers to transport them, the banks of the two rivers had every facility for making brick. Thus many people in former times pursued the industry and small brick yards sprang up all along both rivers. The heyday of brick making was considered to be the 1840s, but bricks were continued through the of the century.

According to William Henry Bunting in his *A Days' Work*, a machine called a Hobbs "plug mill" was set up near deposits of clay in an area where ships could dock to carry the produced bricks to market. Clay was shoveled into a wooden box in this "plug mill", where it

was mixed with water. A horse was used for the power of turning the knives to mix the clay and water. It was then pressed into a six-brick mold at the bottom of the box. In *Art of Brick making* by J. Edgar Ray, he writes that the six compartments were sanded before inserting them into the Hobbs machine to keep the clay from sticking to them. The filled molds were taken from the machine, the mixture removed from the molds and the soft bricks were then air dried.

Kilns were built under shed roofing, according to Alice D. Leavitt in her article in *The Lincoln County News* of January 17, 1946, to protect the "green brick" from rain. These kilns were about 14 feet high with an arch constructed from side to side. The green bricks were stacked first and the walls constructed around them. Ray writes that in all small yards such as those on the Sheepscot and Damariscotta Rivers, almost invariably, the brick was burned in up-draft kilns of the "scove" type. This means that the walls of the kiln were ordinarily constructed out of broken bricks,

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### MEETINGS

1st Wednesday  
of Each Month  
7:00 P.M.

### Newcastle Town office

Visitors Welcome

No Meetings in January,  
February & March

### Officers of NHS:

President:  
Tim Dinsmore  
207 380-2836

Vice-President:  
Christopher Rice

Secretary:  
Karen Campbell

Treasurer:  
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Genealogy Information  
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which were cemented together with mud. Early kilns used wood for fuel. Leavitt writes that large iron doors opened into the arches through which the wood was fed to keep fires burning night and day. After the bricks were fired, the "unburned" bricks were separated from those that were properly burned.

When weather permitted, according to Bunting, work began at dawn and was a hard job for both man and animals. Leavitt writes that brick making was a seasonal occupation and began in May. The men worked barefoot in mud clay. The average pay for men working 12 to 16 hours a day, including five meals daily at the "cook house", was forty dollars a month. Any "romance" came from burning the brick, not in the making. The burning took a week. Then the tops of the kiln emitted tongues of red fire which could be quite spectacular and a great attraction to local people. Bunting quotes from the *Damariscotta Herald* in the (Bangor) *Industrial Journal* of Sept. 21, 1894.: "The brickyard of Nathaniel Bryant has been a favorite resort this week. Saturday evening a jolly party roasted corn there, and again Monday evening a party visited there. The later party besides the corn roast, had quite a concert. It is a good place to go for an evening's good time."

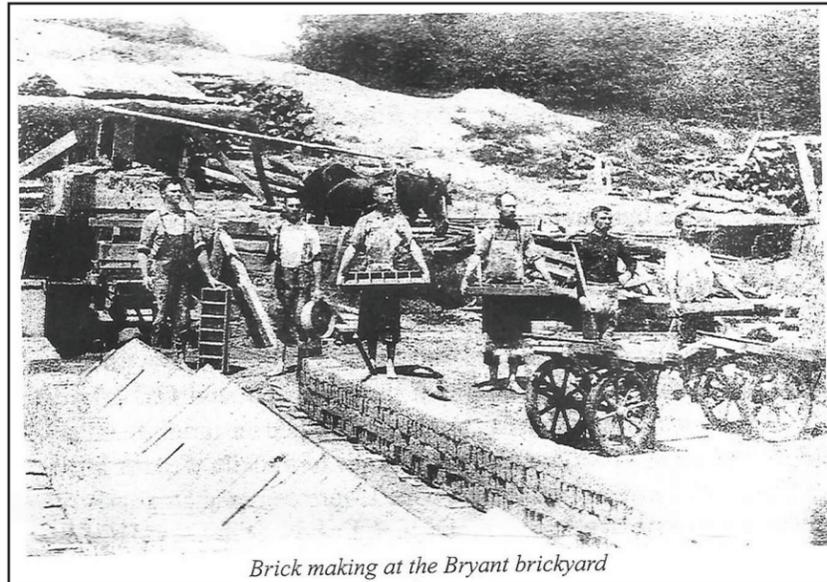
*The Newcastle Historical Sketch* of 1953 claims that "hundreds of brick yards sprang up" on the rivers. Bunting quotes from the *Bangor Industrial Jour-*

*nal* of May 23, 1890 that 22 yards were in operation on the Damariscotta River. Chase, in speaking of Wiscasset, writes that the largest brickyard there had a kiln house "capacious enough to hold a million bricks and wood to complete the burning."

Although Wiscasset had more and larger brick yards on the Sheepscot than Newcastle, Newcastle had its share. Perhaps the best known was the one owned by Wilmot G. Shattuck on Marsh River.

Once the bricks had been made, it was necessary to transport them to places that used them. Both the Damariscotta and Sheepscot Rivers made this easy. Bunting quotes from the (Bangor) *Industrial Journal* of May 23, 1890 that the brick making on the Damariscotta for the season would "require 180 schooners to transport the brick to market."

Many of the brick buildings in the Twin Villages were built of local brick and the *Historical Sketch* continues to say that many city buildings along the eastern seaboard, including a large number in Boston, were built of bricks from here. Eventually the local brickyards were combined by a group headed in Boston. Halifax, Nova Scotia was being built and thousands upon thousands of local bricks were shipped there but were never paid for. This bankrupted the local yards and many never overcame this loss. Today, brick making on the rivers is no more. Scattered brick shards are about the only reminder that this was once an important business in Newcastle.



Brick making at the Bryant brickyard

**JOIN TODAY**

Membership in the Newcastle Historical Society is open to all who want to help preserve the history of the town of Newcastle. To renew, upgrade or begin your membership, please mail this form and your check payable to the "Newcastle Historical Society" at P. O. Box 482, Newcastle, ME 04553.

**MEMBERSHIP FORM**

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YEAR ROUND \_\_\_\_\_ or SEASONAL \_\_\_\_\_ PHONE NUMBER (\_\_\_\_) \_\_\_\_\_

SEASONAL ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_

SEASONAL CITY \_\_\_\_\_ STATE \_\_\_\_\_ ZIP CODE \_\_\_\_\_

EMAIL ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_ SEASONAL EMAIL \_\_\_\_\_

 **Your privacy is important to us. We do not share your email and personal information with other groups.**

**DUES:** Student \$10 Individual \$15 Family \$25 Lifetime \$150

**The Newcastle Historical Society Book Store**

**Between Two Rivers**

by Arlene Cole

A softcover history of Newcastle with maps and photographs

Cost: \$20.00

**Cemeteries of Newcastle**

by Geraldine Hanley & Nancy Hartley

A softcover book of burials in Newcastle from 1758-2004.

Cost: \$20.00

**Damariscotta Lake Book**

by Edmee Dejean, Julia McLeod, Mary Sheldon & Marilyn Speckman

A softcover pictorial and written history of Damariscotta Lake people, culture and traditions.

Cost: \$20.00

**History Tales of Newcastle**

by Arlene Cole

A softcover book containing 130 articles on aspects of Newcastle's history.

Cost: \$20.00

**More History Tales of Newcastle**

by Arlene Cole

A softcover book containing more stories of Newcastle's history.

Cost: \$25.00

**1816 Map of Newcastle**

Laminated: \$20.00

Not laminated: \$15.00

**1878 Drawing Map of Newcastle and Damariscotta**

Cost: \$5.00

**To order** send check or money order and mailing instructions to: Newcastle Historical Society P.O. Box 482, Newcastle, Maine 04553

Please add \$5.50 for shipping and handling charges.

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## It's Winter and It's Cold Inside

by Louise Miller

Sleeping warm in Colonial times required plenty of bed coverings. Colonial fireplaces were fed constantly to bring warmth into the various rooms of the house during the Winter months. Not all families had a fireplace in the bed chamber. Having the bed chambers on the second floor, which was very common, would help take advantage of rising heat. The 17th Century custom of having the living space, cooking area and bedstead all in one room was very practical from the stand point of keeping warm in the Winter. The custom continued well into the 18th Century in a number of areas.

Bed hangings enclosed the bedstead when drawn, helping to keep in some of the warmth generated by those sleeping in the bed. There were no less than five separate items (note, I didn't say pieces, as the curtains alone made up six pieces): curtains, valence, head cloth, tester and base cloth. Of these five, the valence and the base cloth added nothing to the warmth factor. For bedsteads that were not four poster beds, curtains could still be hung by suspending rods from the ceiling by means of hooks. Wool was a common fabric for bed curtains well into the 18th Century.

A "cover," as mentioned above, referred to a some type of bed covering. But exactly what this

inventory listing was describing is up for discussion. One can also find the terms coverlid, and coverlet, in the early inventories; these terms also refer to a article that covers the bed in the manner one would think of as a bed spread today.

Rugs (ruggs) are well known to be part of the bed furniture (the textiles used on beds in the Colonial era were referred to as "furniture) in Colonial households. During the Colonial period rugs were for beds, carpets were for floors. Bed rugs are found in inventories from New England to Virginia. Edward Wharton was a merchant in 1677 Massachusetts, he took in 30 bed rugs on consignment to sell. The 1660 inventory of William Paine, a Boston merchant, listed in his house: 3 rugs, 5 coverlets, and 13 blankets (Dow, p.261)" Margaret Howland of Plymouth, Mass., whose estate in 1683 only totaled £33, owned three bed rugs ([histarch.uiuc.edu](http://histarch.uiuc.edu)).

Another bed covering that would hold in the warmth on cold Winter nights was the quilt. Quilts of the 17th Century through the mid-18th Century are definable as two or three layers of cloth, or two layers of cloth and one of batting, joined by stitching through all the layers. This type of quilt is often referred to as a whole cloth quilt by today's textile historians. The quilting stitching offered

the skilled needlewomen of the Colonial period a wonderful venue for artistic and creative expression. The finished piece is a maze of little pockets which hold the body heat for better insulation. Quilts offered for sale by merchants were sometimes cut and fashioned into ladies' petticoats, and waistcoats for both men and women for cold weather attire. A variety of garments made in the home have survived that were quilted.

Patch-work quilts are rarely seen from the Colonial period; they became popular during the 19th Century. Signature quilts were a patch-work quilt made by the friends of a bride-to-be. Each would make and sign a square for the quilt. Signature quilts became popular in the mid-19th Century.

The Newcastle Historical Society Museum has a lovely signature quilt in its collection. Please come and view it next Summer! This type of quilt provided more than just warmth, it was also a tribute to friendship.

### Bibliography:

*The Plymouth Colony Archive Project* – [www.histarch.uiuc.edu/plymouth/index.html](http://www.histarch.uiuc.edu/plymouth/index.html)

Dow, George F., *Every Day Life in the Massachusetts Bay Colony*, NY: Dover Publications, 1988.

## In Memoriam

On Friday, June 9, 2019 the Newcastle Historical Society lost a dedicated member and active supporter when Morrison McKelvy Bonpasse lost his courageous battle with Glioblastoma Multiforme IV. He was 71 years old. Morrison, born in Massachusetts, was a graduate of Phillips Academy Andover and Yale University. He held advanced degrees from Boston University School of Law, as well as Northeastern University and Babson College.

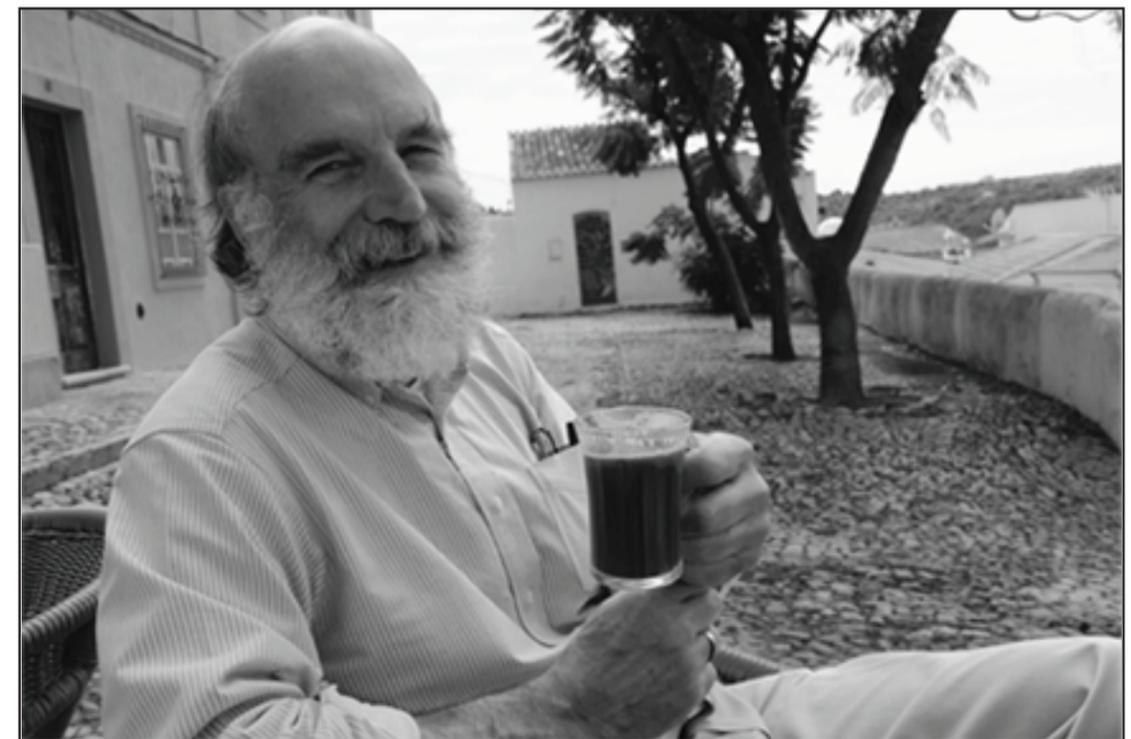
Raised in Duxbury, Massachusetts, on Boston's South Shore, Morrison grew up on the saltwater, which probably accounts for his immediate attraction to Midcoast Maine when he first visited in

1985. After that there were frequent weekend and vacation visits until 1999 when he and his wife Leah Sprague moved to Sheepscot Village full-time. Both Morrison and Leah found tremendous satisfaction in the life and community of historic Sheepscot. Morrison enjoyed spending his spare time nurturing the fields and woodlands of their eighteenth century farmstead and took pride in knocking on the doors of new neighbors to welcome them to this special place. He was committed to maintaining a vital community and preserving its historic and environmental significance. Upon moving to Newcastle, he became a life time member of the Newcastle Historical Society and served as its President from 2014-2015.

Having grown up in a historic place, Morrison was by avocation an historian and a writer. He spent several years researching the life and work of William Palmer and his fleet of five-masted schooners built in Waldoboro. Based upon his research, he developed a "one man performance" of Palmer's life that he presented at various maritime history venues. It was in retirement that his lifelong intellectual quests found fruition, and he wrote half a dozen books on subjects he held dear.

Morrison is survived by his wife of 41 years, a stepson and stepdaughter and several grandchildren.

He is buried in the Mayflower Cemetery in Duxbury.

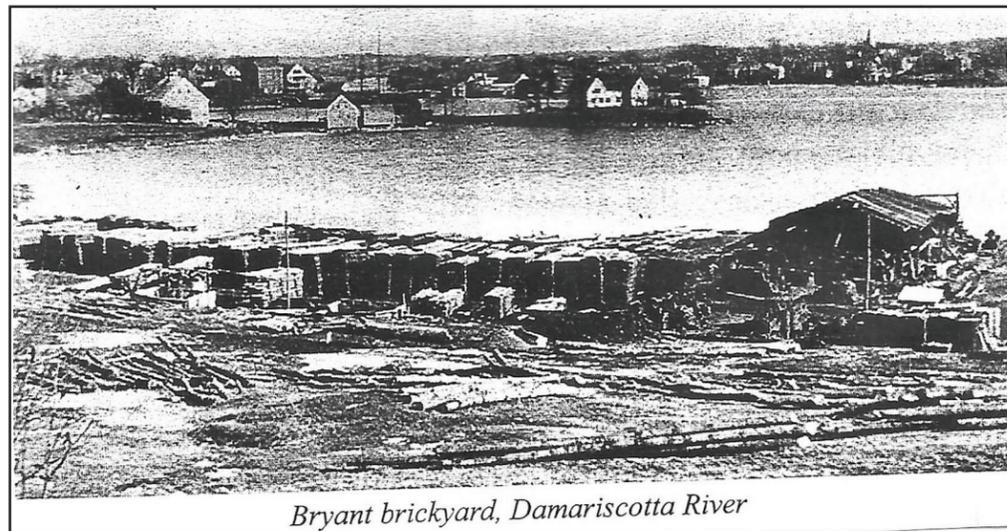


### Loading Bricks by Jorgen G. Cleemann

In 1955 Lillian Hale interviewed 90 year old Alonzo Dodge who began working in the brickyards in 1880. He described the process of loading bricks into scows or schooners:

“A half round log 14 inches wide went from wharf to vessel. The vessel was often lying in the mud. The log was 50 feet long. Pay for wheeling bricks aboard was 1 cent a load. I could wheel in a day 50,000 bricks or 500 trips or \$5.00. There were 100 bricks to a load, 10 boards to a barrow. The wheeler just picked up the barrow, others loaded and unloaded it. Wheeling was one of the hardest jobs. “

The Kiln in the Garden: Damariscotta River Brick Making and the Traces of Maine’s Agro-Industrial Past” page 86, A Historic Preservation Thesis by Jorgen G. Cleemann , June 20, 2012



*Bryant brickyard, Damariscotta River*

### NHS and Amazon Smiles

You can support the Newcastle Historical Society while you shop! We are now a listed non-profit with AmazonSmile.

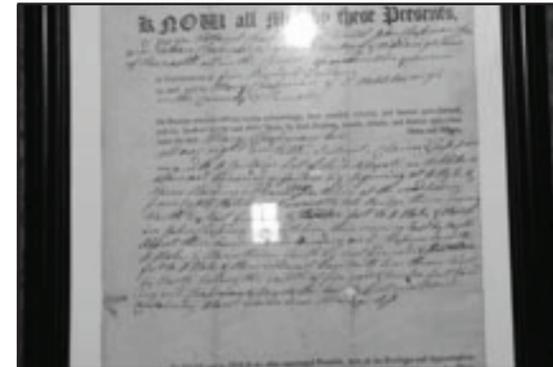
AmazonSmile is operated by Amazon with the same products, prices and shopping features as Amazon.com. The difference is that when you shop on smile.amazon.com the Amazon Smile Foundation will donate 0.5% of the purchase price of eligible products to the charity of your choice.

To shop on Amazon and have your charitable donations go to the Newcastle Historical Society, use this link( also found on our website nhsmaine.org): <https://smile.amazon.com/ch/01-0522226>, then every time you go to smile.amazon.com your purchases will generate donations which benefit the Newcastle Historical Society. Thank you!!!

### Newcastle His. Society Wish List

If you are one of the lucky people who get a new lap top for Christmas, please consider donating your older one to the Newcastle Historical Society. We are in need of a laptop that doesn't have to have a lot of fancy features. It just needs to allow us to word process and keep our records on line. If you have a lap top you are able to part with, please contact us at [nhsmaine@gmail.com](mailto:nhsmaine@gmail.com). Thank you!!!

## Some Projects and Events from 2019



*Newcastle Papers*



*Pleasant Street Cemetery*



*Found Grave Marker*



*Old Fire Station*