



Newcastle Historical Society Newsletter

SPRING 2025 ISSUE

REVISITING LIFE IN SOUTH NEWCASTLE WITH THE MERRY FAMILY

By Mike Titus

South Newcastle is an oft-forgotten part of town that is closely associated with Edgcomb. Rural and isolated, there is not much of a reason to go there without a specific purpose. Heck, you have to pass through Edgcomb on Station or Cochran Road to even drive there! The railroad tracks of the former Knox and Lincoln Railroad pass through the area, but since the Dragon Cement plant closed not even the sound of the freight train whistle is a noted event. Sadly, the tracks are now rarely used. From the 1860s to the early 1930s however, there was a train station in South Newcastle that was a "flag stop". The station had a waiting room with a platform and a ticket office. A green and white flag was used to signal the train to stop to pick up a passenger. The station master's house still stands as a private residence, but the original train station is long gone. The post office that specifically served the area is also gone.

Sounds bleak, doesn't it? But it is not! This is a beautiful area of town, relatively sparsely dotted with houses, bounded by the Sheepscot River and where the Marsh River meanders its way around seemingly everywhere as part of the Sheepscot Watershed. Farms such as Straw's and Morning Dew work the land alongside Cochran Road and the artists of the Watershed Center for the Ceramic Arts utilize the excellent clay soil of the area as the raw material for their artistic and functional creations

There are many beautiful views of the tidal Marsh River. You cross over it on the Station Road and can follow it along its banks on

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REVISITING SOUTH NEWCASTLE *(cont. from cover)*

Island Road, where you eventually have to stop at the entrance of privately-owned Cunningham Island. You will often find sheep grazing on various meadows. They are moved around the neighborhood by Straw Farm depending on where “the grass is greener”.

Recently an interesting discovery was made at our Taniscott Museum that served to remind us that South Newcastle once hosted a large, thriving and vibrant farming community. This is how it happened!

Last winter, Newcastle Historical Society had been re-organizing the many photo albums displayed on the tables at the center of the museum. In the course of sorting and re-organizing the photos from the Dinsmore-Flye negative collection, one of our members recognized the name of a former South Newcastle neighbor’s ancestor in a photo of Beech Hill School students dated 1914. Beech Hill School was the one-room school house located in South Newcastle near the corner of Cochran and Station Road. The building still stands and is now a beautifully restored private residence. Then another photo of the same person was found as an adult and teaching at the North Newcastle School in 1925. Upon seeing the NHS photos, our member recalled that this neighborhood ancestor had written an autobiography of his young life growing up in South Newcastle. Luckily, the NHS member was able to locate the book in his aunt’s book collection and share it with us.

The book was *Neighborly Relations* written by Edwin Merry. Mr. Merry had grown up on the Merry farm at the corner of Station and Island Roads on the banks of the Marsh River. He was one of the Beech Hill School students pictured in 1914, and the teacher in the 1925 North Newcastle school photo. Edwin Merry graduated from Lincoln Academy (1922), Colby College (1929) and thirty years later received a Master’s Degree in English from Trinity College in Connecticut. For 43 years he taught in schools in Maine as well in Connecticut. Mr. Merry was also an editor and feature writer for the Wesleyan University Press in Middletown, Conn. He published short stories and poems based on his beloved Tidewater Farm in South Newcastle, Maine. His articles have appeared in *Yankee*, *Reader’s Digest*, *The Boston Post*, *The National Poetry Anthology* and numerous other highly respected and widely distributed periodicals.



Students at Beech Hill School 1914



North Newcastle School 1925

Neighborly Relations was printed by Thorndike Press in 1980 when Edwin was about 76 years old. In the introduction to the book, he described it as a “biography of two boys growing up on a tidewater farm in South Newcastle, Maine—the upper waters of the state’s cleanest river, the beautiful Sheepscot.” In his clear, thoughtful prose, he depicted the various childhood pranks and hijinks he and his brother got up to, as well as the challenging, but seemingly generally rewarding life

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REVISITING SOUTH NEWCASTLE *(cont. from page 2)*

of the farmers, neighbors, and traders living and working in the area in the second decade of the 20th century.

Mr. Merry is buried in the South Newcastle Cemetery which is located right across from where he grew up. His brother Irving (named Ike in the book) is buried in the same cemetery. Local resident family's burials in that cemetery date back to the early 19th century. Merry family roots run deep in the area, dating back almost 300 years. Joseph Merry (nee Merrow; this family surname was used interchangeably up until the mid 19th century), Edwin's quadruple-great grandfather on his father's side moved to the area from Exeter, New Hampshire with his wife Hannah Stimpson in 1730 and settled on the banks of the Damariscotta River in Edgecomb. Most Merry's in the area descend from this couple. The land Edwin's father Byron farmed in South Newcastle and upon which Edwin grew up had been in the family for at least three generations, dating back to the early 19th century. Edwin's upbringing was somewhat unique for a Merry in that of his father's many brothers, Byron was the only one who did not go to sea, but instead chose to spend his life working the land. Thus Edwin's upbringing was under the tutelage of a very hard-working and humble farmer, making his accomplishments in adulthood more laudable than they might otherwise appear to be, judged independent of his background.



Map of South Newcastle 1857

The life stories of Edwin, his immediate family and his relatives and ancestors in the area are filled with many accomplishments and many highly accomplished people. Amongst them are the accounts of sea captains, war heroes (some both!), ship builders, home builders, respected citizens as stewards of the land, school teachers (such was Edwin) and so on. This article is hoped to be an introduction and backdrop for future articles further documenting the life of Edwin and the adventures of this fascinating local family.

Neighborly Relations is out of print. NHS has obtained the rights to reprint it and it will be made available for purchase at the museum in the near future. It is a wonderful reminder of what life was like in rural Newcastle in earlier times! You are welcome to come by the Museum this summer and take a look at this wonderful little book.

References:

History Tales of Newcastle by Arlene Cole;

Personal Interview with Edwin's grandson;

Henry Merrow of Reading, Mass and his Descendants named Merrow, Marrow, and Merry by Oscar Merrow, published by the State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1954

FamilySearch.org; FindAGrave.com; LCN Newspaper



IN REMEMBRANCE: TOMLIN COGGESHALL

It is with great sadness that we report the death of a long-standing member of NHS, Tomlin Coggeshall who passed away January 7, 2025. Tomlin was the son of Susanna Wilson and C. Calvert Coggeshall, artist, and grandson of Frances Perkins, former Secretary of Labor and first woman to serve in a presidential cabinet. The Perkins family was one of the early founding families of Newcastle and the Perkins homestead is located on River Road.

Tomlin and his husband, Christopher Rice, also a member of NHS, resided in Newcastle for several years. Tomlin was a kind individual with an interest in art, history and historic preservation. He was the president of the Glidden Cemetery Association Board and he and Christopher helped NHS with program development, Dinsmore Flye negative preservation and event planning, giving generously of their time and resources.

Tomlin recognized the importance of learning from the past to help build a better future, and this resolve helped him begin the effort to create a tribute to his grandmother, and a resource to support social justice and economic security for all people. His dedication and hard work resulted in him standing by the side of the President of the United States as he signed the proclamation designating the family homestead on River Road the Francis Perkins National Monument.

Tomlin's energy and commitment to what he believed in has resulted in this legacy that honors his family's history and will also have a lasting impact on Newcastle and the visitors who come here to learn about the past and help to create a better future. He will be missed.

WHAT WAS IT LIKE BACK THEN?

Visitors often come to the Museum seeking information about what the town was like when their grandparents lived here, where a specific house was located, or what did it look like back then? In an effort to get firsthand knowledge about how things used to be in Newcastle, we were able to convince Calvin Dodge, local historian and lifelong resident of the Twin Villages, to take a ride around Newcastle with 3 NHS members to share what he remembered about earlier days. We are transcribing his observations, and will share them once we get them organized!

Here is a summary of what we learned regarding traveling south from Newcastle before the 1950's. In order to go to Wiscasset at that time, you could go up Academy Hill Road, turn left at the 4 way intersection (a right turn would have taken you by the old gymnasium). You then could go over the wooden railroad bridge (not in existence anymore), and proceed on what becomes Hopkins Hill Road. Hopkins Hill Roadway/path eventually came out on River Road about 600 feet north of the site of the current fire station. A sloped hay field that stretched downhill from Hopkins Hill Road towards the Lincoln Home had been a great winter sledding spot. A longtime Newcastle resident reported that during World War II that hillside was also the site where people in Newcastle who were part of the Civilian Observer Corp., served as plane spotters, sitting at night with binoculars and a special telephone that allowed them to call into the Brunswick Naval Air Station to report the sighting of any enemy planes.



VOLUNTEERS IN ACTION; JOIN US!

NHS really needs VOLUNTEERS! As the local historical society, we have a variety of tasks to do, and we would welcome helping hands. Currently as we open the Museum for the summer we could use help with labelling folders and objects, or putting folders in order, replacing old faded identification tags with new ones, putting labels on books, creating an index for printed article. And if you have computer skills, we would love to hear from you. It is getting warm enough to start working at the Museum so if you could spare an hour or 2 on a weekend, or a weekday afternoon to help us re-organize and update it would be greatly appreciated.

It is also getting warm enough to do some work outside. Last year we participated in a variety of activities including cemetery stone cleaning, helping with an archaeology dig and organizing photographic displays. Email nhsmaine@gmail.com or leave a message at 207-563-7585 if you could help for a few hours. Come spend time with people who have an interest in local history, and in preserving the past while meeting new people. Hope to see you soon.



Volunteers prep historical photos for storage after the Skidompha Library display



Gravestone repair underway at the Glidden Street Cemetery



Left: A longtime volunteer helps ready the museum for its opening this summer

Right: Archaeological digs reveal much about Newcastle's history and volunteer assistance is always needed



GLIDDEN PAPERS DONATED TO NHS

Last year we were fortunate to receive from the descendants of Katherine Glidden Kennedy a collection of more than 450 documents saved by her grandfather, Captain Samuel G. Glidden of Newcastle and Brooklyn, NY. The collection – dating from 1844 to 1869 – contains many documents related to the shipping business but there are also 260 letters from family members discussing business and family matters.

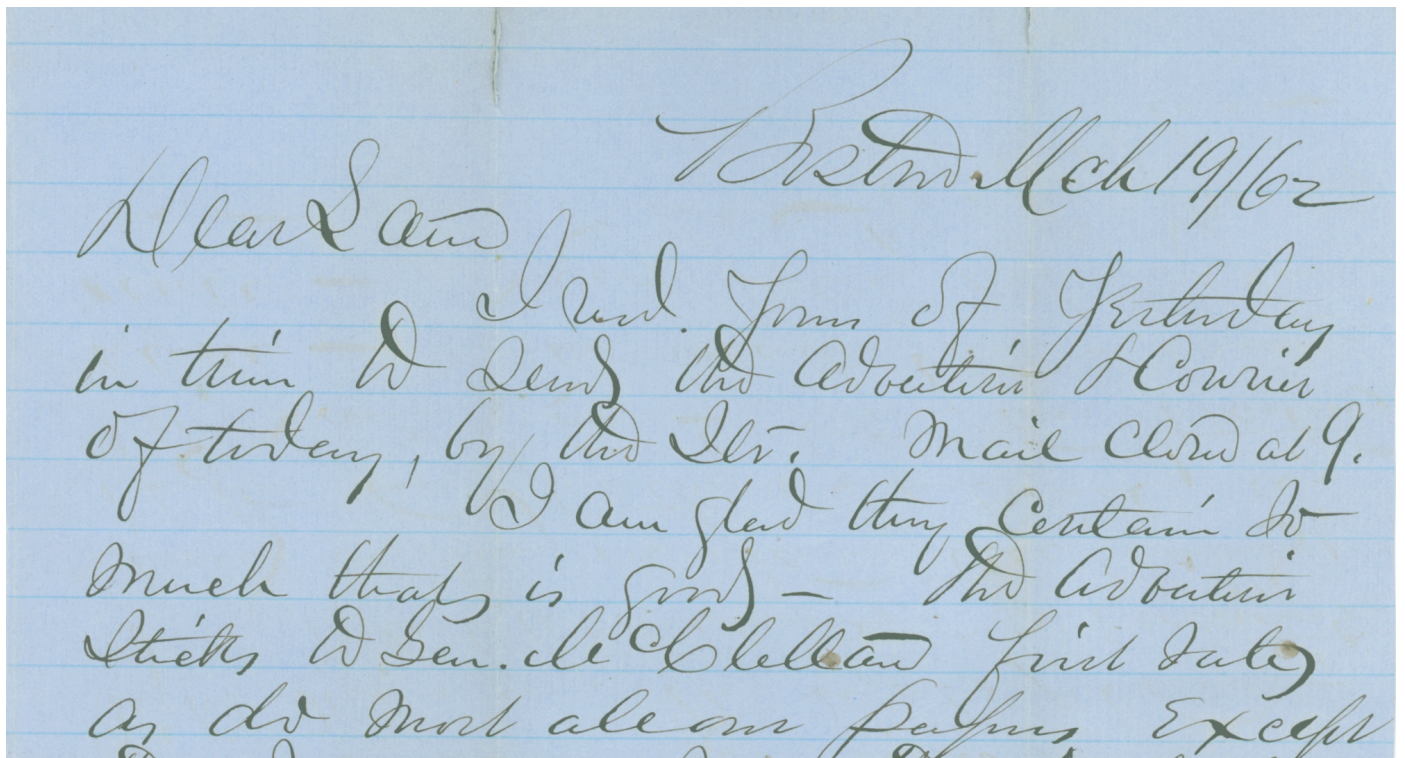
From one letter we finally discover the date and circumstances of the fire that destroyed Col. John Glidden's house where St. Andrews Church is now located.

In another we hear of the unfortunate circumstances of the 1855 suicide death of Lt. John Mooney aboard the U.S. ship *Independence* off the coast of Peru.

There are also frequent mentions of the adventures and mishaps of local friends and relatives. One is about Captain Farley Hopkins who, in 1851, accidentally left 10 men on the shores of western Mexico when he was captaining the *Powhattan* from San Francisco to Panama. Another is the sad tale of Sheepscot's Captain John Holmes who murdered one of his crew in 1858 on a voyage to Brazil aboard the *Therese*.

Only about 150 of these letters have been transcribed thus far so we expect many more stories to emerge as we progress through them.

Thank you very much to Samuel Glidden for holding onto these documents and thank you to the descendants of Katherine Glidden Kennedy for entrusting us with this treasure!



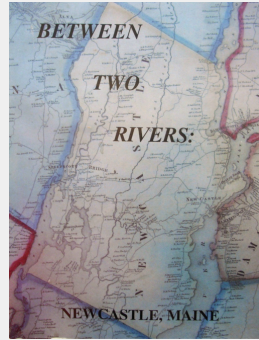
An excerpt from one of the many letters contained in the recent donation



NEWCASTLE HISTORICAL SOCIETY BOOKSTORE

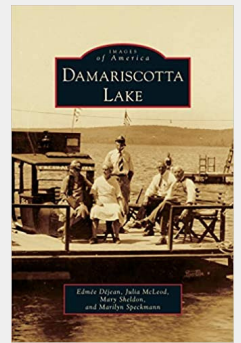
Between Two Rivers

by Arlene Cole
A softcover history of
Newcastle with maps and
photos
\$20



Damariscotta Lake

by Edmee Dejean, Julia
McLeod, Mary Sheldon &
Marilyn Speckman
A softcover pictorial and
written history of
Damariscotta Lake's people,
culture and traditions
\$20



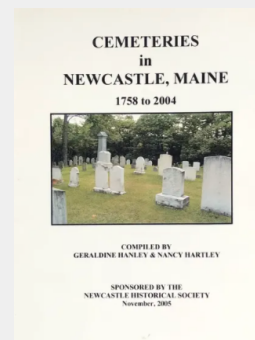
HISTORY TALES
OF NEWCASTLE, MAINE



BY
ARLENE McCURDA COLE

History Tales of Newcastle

by Arlene Cole
A softcover book containing
130 articles on Newcastle
history
\$20

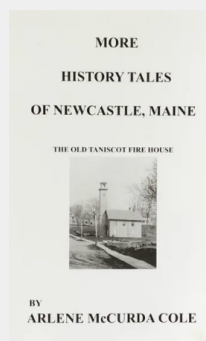


Cemeteries of Newcastle

by Geraldine Hanley &
Nancy Hartley
A softcover book of
burials in Newcastle from
1758 to 2004
\$20

More History Tales of Newcastle

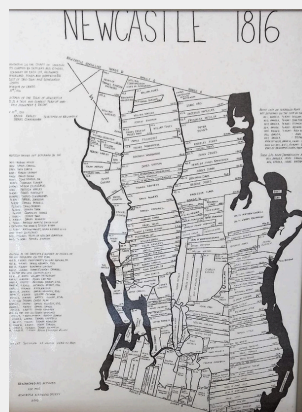
by Arlene Cole
A softcover book containing
more stories of Newcastle's
history
\$25



HISTORICAL MAPS



**1878 Newcastle &
Damariscotta
Panorama Map (18" x 12")
\$5**



**1816 Map of Newcastle
(36" x 24")
Laminated: \$20
Non-laminated: \$15**

To order, send check or money order (including \$5.50
for shipping and handling) and mailing instructions to:
Newcastle Historical Society
P.O. Box 482
Newcastle, Maine 04553

JOIN, RENEW OR UPGRADE TODAY



Membership in the Newcastle Historical Society is open to all who want to help preserve the history of the town of Newcastle.

To begin, renew or upgrade your membership, please mail this form and your check payable to the Newcastle Historical Society at P.O. Box 482, Newcastle, ME 04553. You can also join online at nhsmaine.org

Membership Levels

<i>Lifetime:</i>	<i>\$150</i>
<i>Business:</i>	<i>\$50</i>
<i>Family:</i>	<i>\$25</i>
<i>Individual:</i>	<i>\$15</i>
<i>Student:</i>	<i>\$10</i>

Name(s): _____

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E-Mail: _____

OUR MISSION

- To collect and preserve historical memorabilia and important records relating to the area and Town of Newcastle
- To encourage and promote interest in Newcastle history among local schools and the general public through exhibits, lectures and other special events
- To maintain and operate an historical reference center for the public



OUR ACCOMPLISHMENTS

We are proud of the many accomplishments achieved by our society members, including:

- Creation of a museum that houses thousands of artifacts and records about Newcastle's history
- Formation of an extensive genealogy collection
- Scanning and maintaining a database of the Dinsmore-Flye Negative Collection, consisting of more than 80,000 historical negatives of Newcastle and the surrounding area
- Serving as financial representative of archaeological projects in Newcastle
- Funding of annual Lincoln Academy Scholarship
- Presentation of lectures on various historical topics
- Publication/sponsorship of history books focused on Newcastle