



Female Academy

# Norridgewock Historical Society Newsletter

## Volume 22 Number 3 Fall 2016



The following item was transcribed from a journal of William Allen held by the Maine Historical Society in Portland, Maine. It has been edited only slightly; Allen's diction and his run-on phrases and clauses have been retained.

William Allen was a leading citizen in Norridgewock for 60 years. He migrated at the age of 12 in 1792 with his family from Martha's Vineyard to what is now Farmington, Maine, and came to Norridgewock in 1812-13, where he served in many positions of responsibility over the next 50+ years. He was a delegate to the 1816 Brunswick Convention for the separation of Maine from Massachusetts and to the 1819 Portland Convention to draw up a constitution for the proposed new State of Maine. He died in 1873 at the age of 93.

### **1871 Fire**

On Saturday July 8 we were awaked in the morning with a high wind which blew furiously till near 6 PM.

When Moses Brown arose from dinner he saw his west barn enveloped in a flame of fire kindled by some unknown cause with the wind in a tornado the heat so great that he could not approach the adjoining barns to get out a single article and in a short time both barns and their contents, three tons of hay horse rake two ploughs and other things. A valuable sheeps cote & shed were consumed and the fences near set on fire. The whirlwind carried the burning boards and shingles over a broad space to the distance of a mile and fences were kindled in many places and the coals fell in showers.

In a short time Mr. Townsends house, the best built brick house in town standing 130 rods from the fire at Mr. Browns and not in the direct course of the wind was unexpectedly set on fire in the attic

over his kitchen & the store room in the L attached to the main building by fire brought by the wind and drop through an open sky light which soon spread to the main attic. The fire had made such progress when first discovered that but a few articles could be saved from the kitchen and store room which was well filled with family stores recently purchased to value of fifty dollars or more. The fire did not penetrate below the attic of the main building for some minutes and the beds and most of the other things therein were saved but some damaged. Two men stayed in the chambers throwing out goods til the fire cut off their retreat by the stairs and they jumped out of the chamber windows. The blinds were taken off and windows taken out and saved. For an hour or more my house was greatly exposed to showers of burnt and burning shingles brought by the wind from Townsends until the roof of his house fell in and his shed and stable fell. The whole village was alarmed on my account as soon as they were informed that T's house had been set on fire from the fire at B's 130 rods off and thought if my house should be burned in the high wind there would be a general conflagration and twenty men came running to my assistance and as many to Mrs. Clarks. Heald arrived first sprang up a ladder with a pail of water and with help to pass soon wet both sides of the roof over the kitchen store room and wood shed passing from end to end on the ridge on a run with a pail water in his hand. Another with the help of Fred\* my boy commenced wetting the roof of the house standing on the ridge of the L and throwing the water as far as they could being supplied with water by others. Heald and Fred soon went upon the roof of the each with a pail of water running about on the roof as on the ground and put out the fire instantly which had kindled to a blaze in the shingles near the cove at the east corner of the roof which if it had been delayed two minutes would have been beyond control. Heald was vigilant and persevering stayed on the roof two hours. But for him the house would have been burnt down. He has my thanks for his energetic efforts.

Butler arrived in about one minute after Heald and he and one other young man went upon the barn and did have their post till all danger was over. The scorching sun and heat of the fire and wind

dried the water as fast as they could put it on as the roof was steep and the water drained off. Mr. Butler a young man from N. York was present being used to fires called blankets to be wet and spread on the roof[. We let him have all we had which they wet in a tub and Butler soon had them spread on the roof to catch the coals as they fell. Butler and the 20 others have my sincere thanks for their vigilance and perseverance in saving my buildings. Burning shingles fell plentifully in my garden and although carefully watched kindled in the trunk of a large apple tree and by the fence back of the barn. The grass having been cut and taken off in front of the house and the bottom green although fire fell in every direction it did not kindle to a blaze. T's garden fence on all sides was burnt up or torn down to save it. My fence at the south end of the orchard and ten rods on the west and ten on the east side and on two sides of the garden was taken down to save from being burnt. An acre or more of grass ground was burnt over on the west corner of the orchard and men have been engaged to rebuild that which is most needed by pasture and gardens Monday.

I am imprest with the obligation I am under to praise God for his protection.

July 10

\* Charles Frederick Allen was 55 in 1871. He was a graduate of Bowdoin College (1839), an influential Methodist minister for many years, and from 1871-1879 President of the Maine State College (now the University of Maine in Orono). He died in 1899.

Submitted by: Tom Mickewich

## NORRIDGEWOCK'S POUND

In ancient Britain and continuing in early New England, most communities had a Pound, a pen where stray animals could be held until claimed. It was a rugged enclosure typically 20 to 40 feet square with a gate and a strong lock. It was mainly to keep domestic animals under control, but it could also protect them from thieves, wolves, or in some cases marauding Indians. Even without damaging property an animal's droppings could foul up the neighborhood so a Pound was considered necessary. The Pound was usually in the village for convenience, often on the town common. It was managed by the town's "Pound Keeper".

If someone discovered a pig doing damage to their garden, they could drive the pig over to the Pound. The Keeper would lock up the pig until its owner came looking for it. To settle any damage done by the pig, some Keepers would cut notches in a stick and split the stick, giving half to the gardener. The gardener would go to the pig's owner to collect on his damage. When paid, he'd give the half stick to the pig's owner who would take it back to the Keeper to show that the damage had been paid. Then the owner would have to pay the Keeper's fee for holding the pig. If the pig wasn't worth all the costs the owner might not admit the pig was his. If he abandoned it the Keeper might dispose of the pig by auction.

Before fence wire was available some Pounds were made of stone walls; a few Maine towns still boast of such relics. But most Pounds were made of wood, often just good enough to keep the animals in. Most homes had at least one horse and a cow of some sort, maybe a bull, animals that got to know their fence weaknesses pretty well. Sheep and pigs could get loose, geese and even hens might be impounded. The Pound could keep its Keeper fairly busy in addition to managing his own home or farm.

Smith's History of Mercer says in 1829 that town voted to raise money for a Pound. It was to be 35 feet square and 7 feet high, with plank walls 3 ½ inches thick. It was to be within 100 yards of the mills in Mercer Village. The Pound was built, then for some reason sold in 1836 for \$5.75. After that the Thomas Atkinson barnyard was used as a Pound with Atkinson acting as Keeper.

Winslow's History of Larone says until 1903 every Maine town was required by law to have a Pound. In 1790 the Larone neighborhood voted to build one 40 feet square and 6 ½ feet high "at the end of the lane". Today near the east end of Pirate Lane there's a row of large ox-hauled stones about 40 feet long, which Winslow thought was the remains of the Pound. Maybe the idea of using stone was given up on realizing all the work needed for such high stone walls.

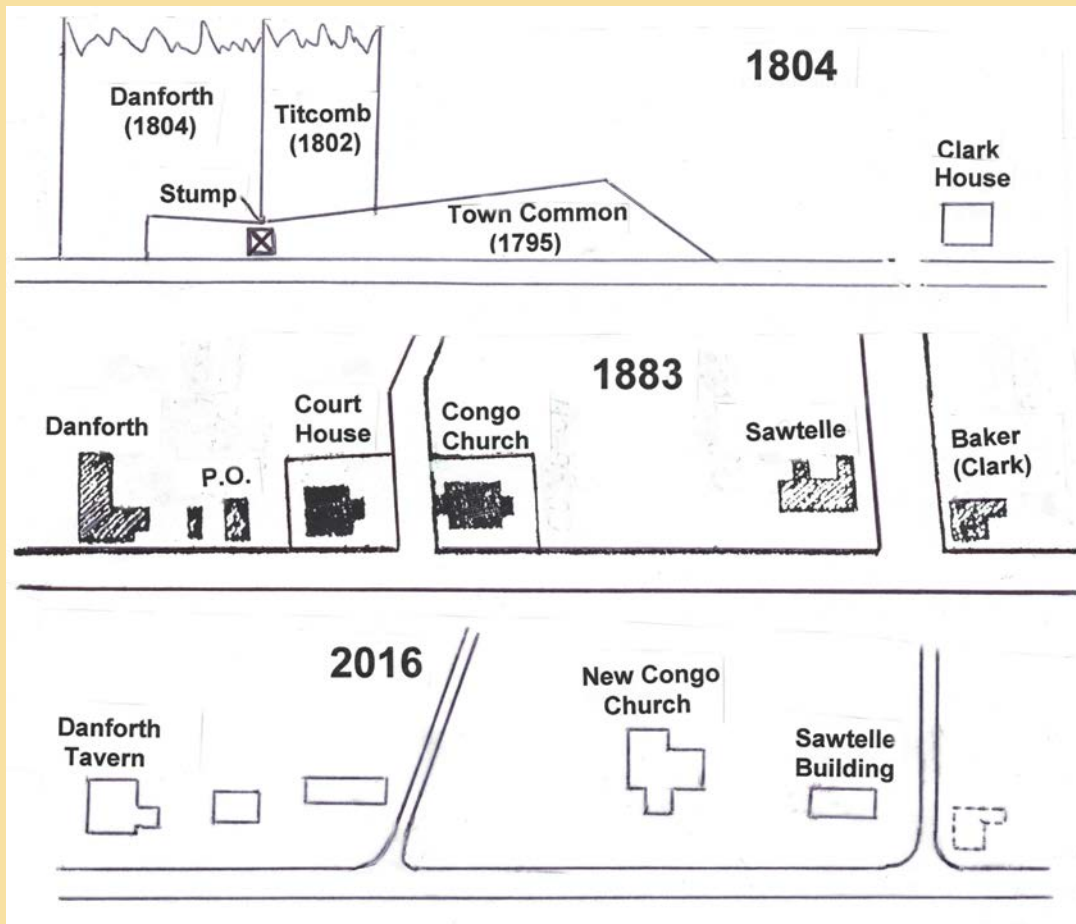
But what about Norridgewock's Pound? None of our histories mention a Pound. But John Clark "the Father of Norridgewock" mentioned "the town Pound" in two of his deeds. In 1795 he had sold land for both a town Common and a 1 acre cemetery to the town of Norridgewock, all for 6 shillings. (K6/128, ie Kennebec County Registry of Deeds Book 6, Page 128, readable on line if one's computer has the right software.) The 1794 town meetinghouse was already sitting on the new Common. In 1802 Clark sold land to Joseph Titcomb saying in his deed "Beginning at a large stump in the north line of the Meetinghouse Common and *nigh to the town pound...*". (K6/92) And in 1804 in a land sale to Israel Danforth, Clark said "... Beginning on (River Road) at a stake and stones, then running N 19

deg. E 3 rods on the Meetinghouse Common land to a stake, then N 65 deg. E 8 rods to a stump *near the pound* to Joseph Titcomb's corner.....". (K7/119) It was Danforth who soon built his tavern on the same lot.

Those descriptions should tell us where our Pound was, except that a small discrepancy in one deed keeps us from being exact. Shown below is the area at three different times, 1804 after the sale to Titcomb, 1883 when the old Somerset County court house was still standing, and today when houses have replaced the court house. We can locate Clark's large stump, and the nearby Pound must have been on the Common, between the stump and the road.

Close to that spot Somerset County built its brick court house in 1820. Also a building holding the North Norridgewock Post Office was close by in 1883. If either building displaced the Pound, maybe our ~1849 historians William Allen and John Hanson never knew about the Pound. Possibly the old town records would show that another Pound was set up somewhere else, and maybe kept in use until 1903 or so.

Was our Pound made of stone walls or wood? Probably wood, because stone is scarce in that part of town. After the court house burned in the 1880s houses were built in its place along River Road. The house now at 20 River Road is very close to where our original Pound was. It would be fun to be able to dig there and maybe find an old gate hinge or a horse or ox shoe, buried some 200 years ago.




Submitted by: Eastman Wilder

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*Next Meetings: September 28 - Showing of NHS's collection of glass plate negatives.  
October 26 - Sandy River and Rangeley Lakes Railroad Museum presentation.*