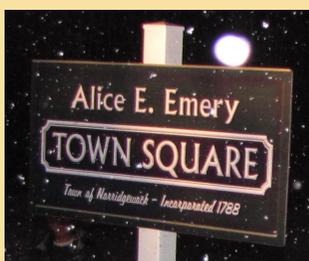




## President's Letter

Spring is finally here, at least that is what the calendar tells us! With spring comes the official launch of the 2018 NHS season. The first regular meeting will be held on Wednesday evening, April 25<sup>th</sup> (7PM) at the Museum. Throughout the season regular meetings are always held on the 4<sup>th</sup> Wednesday of the month, so while you have your calendar out, please note NHS meetings on: 5/23, 6/27, 7/25, 8/22, 9/26 and 10/24 and, on a real roll of efficiency, note: "NHS yard sale", Saturday, June 2!

I apologize for not publishing a winter newsletter. However, I am happy to report that we ended the 2017 season by launching our first annual Classic Christmas Tree Open House, which was held at the museum in December in conjunction with the Norridgewock Area Chamber of Commerce's Christmas Stroll and Tree Lighting. Over 75 people visited the museum open house. The Christmas Stroll ended at The Alice E. Emery



Town Square on Main Street. After officially dedicating the square in Alice's name, the town's tree lights were turned on. Alice is a longtime supporter and life member of NHS.

Just as 2017 ended on a fun note, 2018 started on a high note, too. The executive committee was honored to host a visit in March from Gretchen Bersch who is a descendent of William Allen, one of the favorite sons of Norridgewock, (best known as the author of *The History of Norridgewock*), and John Stevens Abbott

(William Allen's son-in-law), who ran a very successful law practice working out of the brick law office that he built on the river and which we now know as "The Sophie May Library", (Next time you go by the building, look at the plaque above the door for more details about John Abbott.) Gretchen lives in Alaska where she is professor emerita @ University of Alaska Anchorage and runs a summer retreat for research and education on the Abbott family's private island, Yukon Island. ([www.YukonIsland.com](http://www.YukonIsland.com))



Gretchen standing in front of the William Allen House.



Plaque above the door at the  
Sophie May Library

We hope that 2018 proves to be a banner year for NHS. One of the critical elements in our ability to thrive and flourish going forward is to increase community engagement with NHS. To this end, one of the first official events of the season will be a program that is being developed for Mill Stream School third graders by local author and NHS member Barbara Winslow. The NHS meeting room will be staged to look like a class room of an 1850's one room school house. Students will attend a mock class session which will focus on early life in Norridgewock. The class will be followed by a tour of the museum led by curator Nathan Richards. Nathan has been conducting these tours for a number of years now and through word of mouth from older classmates/siblings students look forward to it. We hope that the addition of a mock classroom will further help make history come alive for

these young people.

Start gathering things for the June 2 yard sale, too! (Furniture/housewares/toys/ antiques & collectibles/ books, etcetera. **No clothes or electronics**; drop-off dates TBD). Thanks!

That's all for now. Happy spring!

Becky Ketchum, President of NHS

## PROGRAMS 2018

Remember to check the website for updates on meetings and events.

[www.norridgewockhistoricalsociety.org](http://www.norridgewockhistoricalsociety.org)

April 25: Meet and greet to launch the season.

May 23: Barbara Winslow, local children's author who spent many years teaching in Alaska and Norridgewock, will talk about the differences/similarities of village life in 1970 Alaska vs. turn of the century Norridgewock.

June 27: "Salute to Those Who have Served". Elwin Mathews, Commander of Norridgewock VFW Post will answer questions about the VFW-its past , present and future. Bring your questions and stories!

July 25: Cheryl Patten: "Carved in Stone: Gravestones and Genealogy".

## Norridgewock Historic Homes Registry: Is your home eligible?



One of our curator's pet projects is the Norridgewock Historic Homes Registry. There are only two requirements to have your home registered. The home must be 100 years or older and the homeowner must agree to pay for the registry name plaque that goes on the house after the research has been completed. The plaque is purchased at the manufacturer's cost, which is currently \$60. After completing the NHS Registry Information form a decision is made as to the name which will be displayed on the plaque (most homeowners use the name of the original owner/builder). NHS/Nathan handles the research (deed search, etc. / donating his own time and effort—thanks, Nathan!) and a copy of this information is given to the homeowners for their records. A picture of the newly designated home is added to the display of historic homes that hangs in the museum's meeting room.

If you want more information, please contact us!

## One of Norridgewock's Favorite Sons:

### WILLIAM ALLEN (1780-1873)

William Allen, oldest son of Captain William Allen and Love Coffin Allen, was born on April 16, 1780 in Chilmark, Massachusetts. In 1792 he moved with his father to Farmington and then to Industry in what was then known as “the District of Maine”. A hard worker, by his early twenties William had cleared a farm for his father and another for himself, been an instructor at Hebron Academy and had saved enough money to attend Hallowell Academy, where he later served as assistant principal. He returned to the farm and in 1807 married Hannah Titcomb, who was the daughter of Stephen Titcomb, one of the first settlers of Farmington.

William and Hannah had five children, four sons and one daughter (William, Albert, Steven, Charles, and Elizabeth).

He served as a Justice of the Peace and had more cases brought before him than all others in the county. He was also a Justice of the Court of Common Pleas. In 1813, when he was appointed Clerk of Courts in Somerset County, he moved to Norridgewock which at that time was the county seat. He became so well-versed in legal work that he was called “Squire Allen”.

The Allens built their homestead (1814) at the crest of the hill on what is now known as Sophie May Lane. (Charlie and Paula Sawyer currently live in “The Allen House “and have done a wonderful job of preserving the property.)

William wore a number of hats during his years in Norridgewock including: Town Selectman (17 years), writer, surveyor, President of Skowhegan Bank, and Register of Probate (he wrote wills, settled estates and helped widows and orphans secure their rights). He represented the Town in the 1816 Brunswick Convention where the separation of Maine from Massachusetts was discussed and the 1819 Portland Convention when the separation became final and he helped write the Constitution of Maine. He was twice a representative to the State Legislature.

As a writer, he furnished many historical sketches and other valuable communications. He wrote *The History of Norridgewock* in 1849. The title page of the book reads: “The History of Norridgewock: comprising memorials of the Aboriginal inhabitants and Jesuit missionaries, hardships of the early settlers, and ecclesiastical sketches”. Among his other works are: *A Genealogy of the Allen Family from 1568 to 1882* and histories of Industry, Starks and Mercer. He was a member of the Methodist Church. William lived a long and useful life and died July 1, 1873 at the age of 93. He was laid to rest next to his wife Hannah in the Old Oak Cemetery on River Road in Norridgewock.

(Note: The primary source of this article and the one that follows on Stephen Abbott is Gretchen T. Bersch who included as her sources family documents/photos/scrapbooks, *Men and Rivers*, and *1568 to 1882 Allen Genealogy*. Additionally, the research draws from *Early Days of Norridgewock* and information provided by Tom Mickewich, Past President of NHS. In future issues we will be sharing some of Tom’s transcriptions of William Allen’s journals and memoirs held by the Maine Historical Society in Portland...)

## John Stevens Abbott (1807-1881), the Man Who Built the Sophie May Library

John Abbott, the son of Benjamin and Phebe Abbot (John added the second “t” to the name Abbot), was born January 6, 1807 in the cabin on his father’s farm in Temple, Maine. He was the seventh child, a small frail baby. His mother Phebe used a platter for a cradle!

He attended Phillips Exeter Academy and then entered Bowdoin College (the famous class of 1825), where he graduated at the head of his class. Attending Bowdoin at the same time as John were: Nathaniel Hawthorne, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow and Franklin Pierce. He was admitted to the bar in 1831. In 1835, he married Elizabeth Titcomb Allen, William Allen’s only daughter and in 1841 the couple and their three small children moved to Norridgewock. In addition to being a very successful lawyer, John did some lumbering and had a farm. He learned that using limestone to spread on the land produced more crops, so he built kilns on the property to burn the lime. He produced so much that it filled his barn.

The brick law office that he built on the banks of the Kennebec now serves as The Sophie May Library. His practice grew beyond the county to Portland, Massachusetts and Connecticut. Reportedly, John was in the habit of using two secretaries at once, dictating a sentence of the first letter to one secretary and a sentence for the second letter to another secretary.

In 1854 he was elected as a representative to the state legislature and the next year became Attorney General of Maine. In 1858, when their youngest child was only three, Elizabeth died suddenly, leaving John with nine children. He never remarried and moved to the Boston area in 1860. He died in 1881 and is buried in the Newton Cemetery in Newton, MA. (Elizabeth is buried with her parents in Norridgewock in the Old Oak Cemetery)



**Gretchen standing in front of the Sophie May Library.  
(Note the plaque above the door.)**

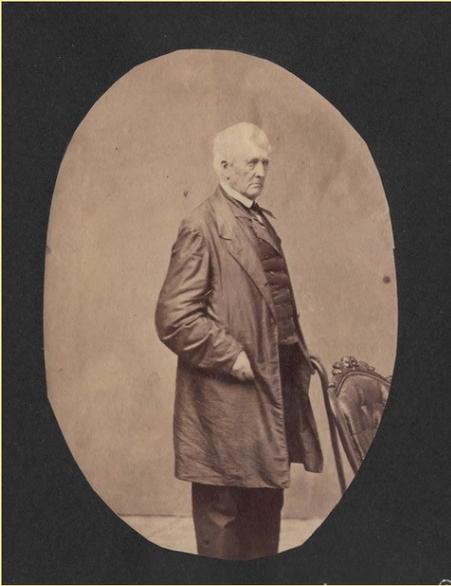


### SIDEBAR

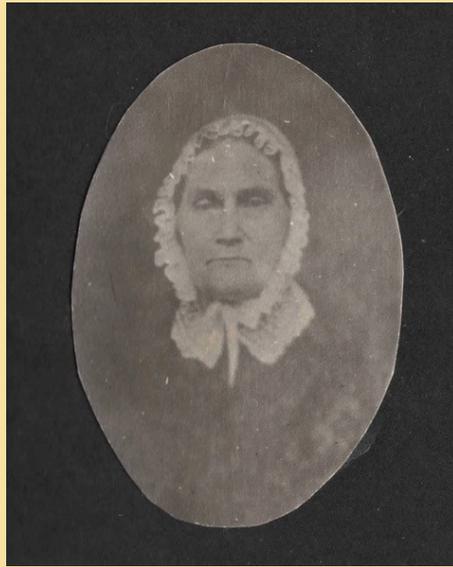
A passage from an article (“*Maine in Congress*”) written by Florence Waugh Danforth) and included in a book published in 1915 by Maine Federation of Women’s Clubs (*Maine in History and Romance*) shows us that reunions close to 150 years ago offered the same classmate recognition challenges as our reunions do today—as well as the same warmth and fondness once the connection is made.

Another Norridgewock member of Bowdoin’s famous Class of 1825 was Cullen Sawtelle (who went on to become a lawyer, a U.S. Congressman representing our district and was the builder of the Sophie May House). Quoting directly from Sawtelle’s *Memoirs*, Danforth shares this story about Sawtelle’s train travel to his 50<sup>th</sup> college reunion at Bowdoin.

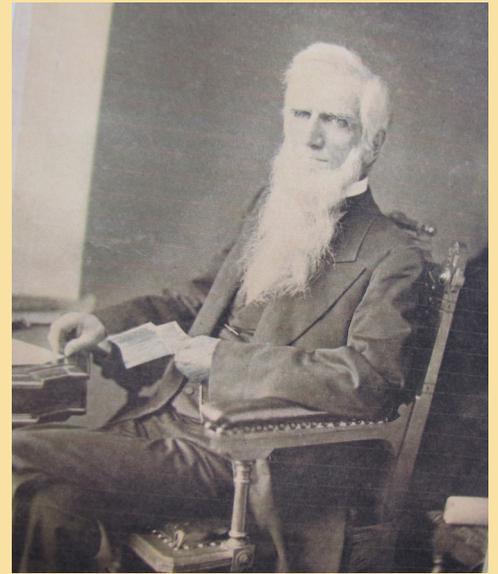
“Hardly was I comfortably seated in the car, bound for Brunswick, when an elderly gentleman with white hair, flowing beard and placid countenance entered the car and attracted my attention. He gracefully bowed to me and I returned the salutation, as he took the vacant seat next to my own. The stranger proved to be of a social turn of mind as well as myself, and as the train moved on we grew more confidential and I remarked: “I am going to Bowdoin College to attend the semi-centennial anniversary of my class of 1825. Our class numbered 38, but only a third of that number now survive. We who still live are old men now. I shall meet there Henry W. Longfellow, John S. C. Abbott, Horatio Bridge and others, all of whom I knew so well and loved so much. I wonder if we shall know each other after so long a separation.’ To my astonishment my travelling companion replied: ‘Friend, look me in the eye and see if you know who I am. I, too am going on the same mission, but I have not the slightest idea who you may be, although the intonations of your voice carry me back 50 years and I am struggling to place you.’ In perfect silence we sat face to face more than a full minute; then I said to him, I cannot for my life name or place you.’ Finally my companion said hesitatingly: ‘I think [you] must be Cullen Sawtelle,’ and as I assented, he grasped my hand, exclaiming aloud: ‘John S.C. Abbott has met again the dear old friend of his youth.’”



William Allen



Hannah Titcomb Allen



John S. C. Abbott

## CALLING ALL LOCAL BUSINESSES: PLEASE "HELP FUND NHS"!

We are appealing to all local businesses to "Help Fund NHS" by advertising your business in the NHS newsletter. If you are a business owner (or know of a business owner who might be interested), send a copy of your business card to us along with a check for \$75 made out to "NHS". Mail the card and the check to: NHS /Att. Becky Ketchum / PO Box 903 / Norridgewock, ME 04957. Your advertisement will run in the next four issues of the newsletter. **THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT!**

Ad below was used by a Norridgewock business owner over 100 years ago. (Atkinson is an ancestor of mine.)



## CALLING ALL NHS Members: DUES & SUPPORT NEWS

We are thankful to The Town of Norridgewock who for the second year in a row voted at the annual meeting to allocate \$600 in funds for NHS. We greatly appreciate the support!

As reported in the last newsletter, NHS lives close to the edge in terms of revenue vs. expenses. The revenue from dues does not put a significant dent in meeting our expenses. Not only are dues relatively low (and we are fully committed to keeping them @ \$10), but the vast majority of our membership, having been awarded life membership ("LM") status a number of years ago, are exempt from paying dues. (Some LMs still send in contributions from time to time and we are thankful for their renewed support!)

In order to keep the museum up and running we need to increase our membership roll and increase our annual revenue (yard sales/support from local businesses/renewed financial support from LM who are able to do so/merchandise & book sales).

"HELP FUND US" categories (renewable annually/includes the basic \$10 membership fee/

**tax deductible, too!):** Supporter \$25 Patron \$50 Conservator \$100 or more

### Volunteer Help Wanted!

Hardy and handy helper to repair and install NHS sign that came down in the Oct. wind storm. Contact Becky.

Some help mowing lawn. Contact Donna and Tom.

Norridgewock Historical Society

PO Box 903

Norridgewock, Maine 04957

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Membership/Donation Form (Make check payable to NHS. Send to: NHS PO Box 903 Norridgewock, Me 04957)

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Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City/State: \_\_\_\_\_

Zip code \_\_\_\_\_

E Mail : \_\_\_\_\_

Basic Membership: \$10

Supporter: \$25

Patron: \$50 or more

Conservator: \$100 or more

Business Ad: \$75