



# Norridgewock Historical Society

## Newsletter

Winter 2019

### President's Letter

**Becky Ketchum**

We closed out the 2018 NHS season with two holiday events at The Museum. The first was our *Second Annual Classic Christmas Tree Open House* which was held in conjunction with the *Town Holiday Stroll and Christmas Tree Lighting*. Over 100 visitors ranging in age from mere months to being contenders for the Town Cane came to The Museum. We served an array of sweets/baked goods, including DOZENS of whoopie pies made by Reta Theborge and Donna Mickewich. (Many thanks to them/all of our Christmas bakers!)

Our last seasonal event was the Christmas party for members. This was a nice evening of warm friendship and, of course, good food (finger food/baked goods/sweets/egg nog/etc.). Peter Drever shared memories drawn from the maternal, Swedish side of his family. [See insert page 5]

Fast forward—it is suddenly the end of January! While the museum is closed until spring the executive committee has been in and out of the building a number of times, working on plans for the 2019 season as well as re-arranging some of our work space (the office and sales rooms) so we now have a nice little “conference room” in the space that used to be Lucille’s office. An additional off-season activity has been hosting meetings of the Town Historic Panel Design Committee. This committee is working with Maine D.O.T. and the town manager to develop two historical information panels for visitors. Maine D.O.T. is funding the project, which is part of a promise made in 2011 when the new bridge opened.

I will take this opportunity to thank Dave Obert (Mike Obert’s son/ Brenda and David’s grandson) for plowing the driveway for us. For many years Bill Ferrand quietly did this task for NHS, as well as for the Grange. So many thanks to him, too for

all his help over the years. Thanks also to Steve Frederick who keeps our heating system chugging along!

January 1 marks the start of our new fiscal year. Annual dues are \$10 and “help fund us categories” for new members, old members and Life Members who wish to renew their commitment to The Museum are: \$25 Supporter/\$50 Patron/\$100 Conservator. [See Form on Page 6] We hope that everyone who is able to will make a contribution this year. Thank you for your support! It is greatly needed in order to keep The Museum operating (heat/utilities/insurance/security/repairs/etc.).

We are looking forward to the 2019 Season: mark your calendars now—6:30 PM on the 4<sup>th</sup> Wednesday of the month; first meeting: April 24.



Marilyn Dunlap checking out the Historical Society Christmas Tree.



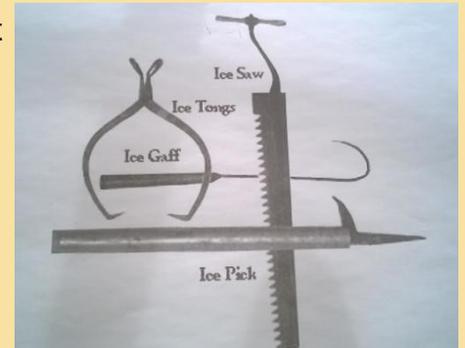
## Ice Harvesting on the Kennebec

Although the river froze early this year, a couple of very mild days in December resulted in a spring-like break-up of the ice. Huge slabs of ice broke up into big chunks as they slammed against the railroad trestle. It was so loud that I could hear the racket from inside the Sophie May House and went outside to see what was going on! Within hours the break-up was followed by a flash freeze. As a result the “smooth waters between the falls” are now anything but smooth! The solidly frozen river is a collage of assorted icy bumps, large/ sharp slivers of ice and a smattering of tree branches/other debris that stand straight up in the ice, frozen in time. Not a good year for skating or snowmobiling on the river.

The overall frosty look led me to think about an earlier time when folks harvested ice from the river. When I searched The Museum archives to learn more I found that two of the people included in Gerard Fogue's oral history research (*In Its Own Words: Norridgewock in the 1920's*) had provided first-hand looks at ice harvesting on the Kennebec back in the day, Harold Emmons and Phyllis Barstow. Here are some excerpts from Harold Emmons who was born and raised in town:

“My father was in the ice business from cutting to packing and selling. He bought the business in 1916, our last year in business was 1938. The ice house was located just below Miller's Saw and Grist Mill down the Kennebec River. The first thing that had to be done was to scrape the snow off the ice so it would get thick faster without the snow to insulate it. As soon as it was thick enough to hold up a team of horses we would go out on the river and scrape it for about a month. Once the ice was about eighteen inches thick the harvesting would begin. The first day was always the toughest. We cut grooves in the ice and cut

out channels to float the ice to the river bank where the ice house was located. Then a chisel was used to break the blocks. About six men worked in the house, one pushed the ice on, four were on the river getting it out, and one was driving the sled. Most of the hard labor was in the house as each cake weighed in at about 350 to 400 pounds. Our ice house was approximately fifty by one-hundred feet and we stacked the ice twenty-five feet high. We sold most of our ice to the Solon Creamery. When they closed in 1934 we lost most of our trade. The freshet of 1935 ended the bulk of our business.”



As well as selling ice to the creamery, the Emmons had an ice home delivery route through town. Harold said that he started to deliver ice when he was 13 years old. Talking about that experience, Harold said: “You were wet from waist to the ankles handling that ice with tongs.... We sold very little ice to farmers as most farmers banded together in their neighborhoods during the winter and cut their own ice which they covered in sawdust and stored in their own small ice houses. On average, we would keep ice boxes in residential houses filled for \$3.00 per month, delivering every three days during the summer.”

From the oral history provided by Phyllis Barstow, who lived with her aunt and uncle, the Parkers, on a Beech Hill Road farm, we learned about the farmer co-ops that Harold mentioned. Phyllis reported:

Although some in the village bought ice from an ice man, the farmers in [our] neighborhood harvested ice together as a community activity. The local men would leave early in the morning in their horse-drawn wagons and head down to the Kennebec River, not far above where the Skowhegan Dam is today. It was a hard and dangerous job, mostly done by the men and boys and lasting all day. In the late afternoon, as the sun was setting she listened for the men returning from their work. Each team of horses, owned by the various farmers, had individual sounding bells on their harnesses, and so she would listen for the distinctive rings made by the bells and count them, thereby reassuring herself that all

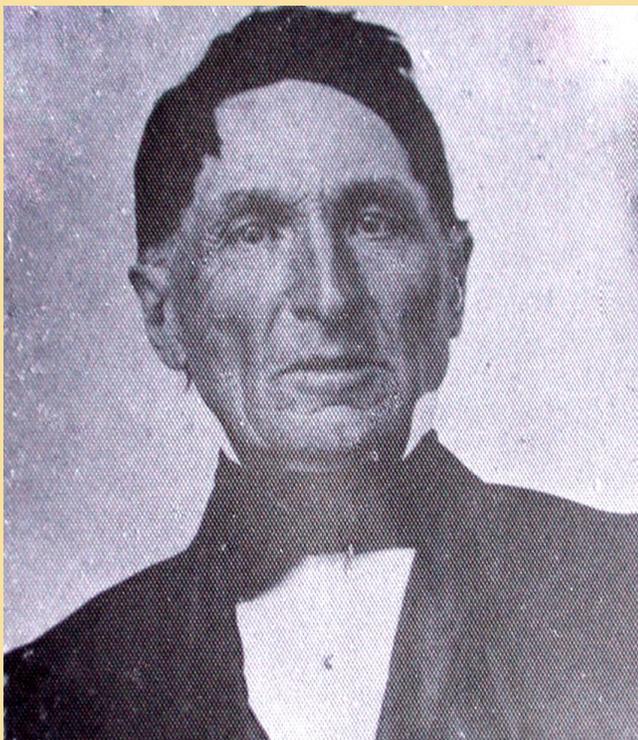
neighborhood farmers were returning safely from the day's harvest. [Gerard notes: Undoubtedly other farmers' families did the same when their men returned from working in the woods all day.]

The NHS Museum has a good collection of ice cutting tools which belonged to Lyman Dunlap, father of NHS LMs Marilyn and Harold Dunlap. Here are a few details that Marilyn provided about Lyman's work:

He usually cut ice on the Mill Stream down below Jewett's Corn Shop. Occasionally he harvested it from the Kennebec which he accessed at the point where the Oosoola Park boat launch is today. He cut ice not only for his family, but also for others in Norridgewock, including Walter Jones on Ross Hill Road and Arthur Kinney on Wilder Hill Road. These men would drive their horses with a large bobsled down the frozen Mill Stream, load the ice and then return up the Mill Stream. The ice was stored in "ice houses" which were small buildings sometimes with false walls to allow for circulation. The ground was covered with sawdust which was also placed on top, underneath and between each block of ice to prevent melting as much as possible. Ice harvesting was cold, hard physical work and quite dangerous as a slip might land a person—or horse! -- in the ice cold water.

Marilyn's older brother Malcolm often helped with the harvest after school. One day he ran down to the site and as he arrived he saw the men struggling to help a horse that had just fallen through the ice get out. His father yelled to him: Go to Dr. Brown's and get a (unknown pill-- Marilyn thinks it may have been a stimulant)! Malcolm ran to Dr. Brown's (Dr. Brown's office at that time was where the Chinese restaurant is today) as fast as he could and returned at an even faster clip! The horse was given the pill and the men were able to pull him out of the water. They covered him with a blanket and ran him all the way back home to get his body temp back up. The horse survived without a sniffle, but Malcolm never got over the dire situation!





## Lucius Alden Packard (1810-1880)

Wayne Libby recently made a wonderful donation to NHS, the diary of his ancestor (and kin to the Wilder family, too) Lucius Alden Packard. Tom Mickewich transcribed the diary and I selected a few passages to share in this newsletter. We hope you will be inspired to visit the museum this spring and delve into the whole book!

First, here is some background information about Lucius provided by Eastman Wilder.

Lucius was born in 1800 to Barnabas and Melatiah Packard in Sidney, Maine. The family moved to Clinton where he married Cynthia Burrill of Canaan in 1821. Their first children were born in Saco (southern Maine) and Blanchard (far north of Clinton) where Lucius was baptized and converted to the Baptist religion in 1825.

He was a deacon in the Clinton church in 1831 and active in the Maine Baptist Association, becoming licensed to preach in 1836. He was ordained as an evangelist in 1837 by which time 8 of their eventually 13 children had been born. His preaching took him to many towns in central Maine, one of which was the small Baptist church on Oak Hill in Norridgewock.

A minister's family was very poor, so poor that Cynthia opposed his becoming a minister until one of them dreamed of a stairway to heaven with a loaf of bread on every step. To help support his large family Lucius was a part-time farmer. He bought a farm on Mercer Road in Norridgewock and settled there

in 1856. Still he continued itinerant preaching until 1862 when he mostly retired because of poor health. In 1864 he wrote to his daughter Martha: "Some times for days together I am not able to write a letter on account of my head, either aching or confused."

In 1863 he sold his farm and moved to a smaller one also on the Mercer Road, probably to raise money so his oldest daughter Emily Wilder and family could move to Norridgewock. In exchange for a \$700 mortgage, the Wilders promised to provide care for Lucius and Cynthia as long as they needed it. For a time they lived with the Wilders but by 1870 when this diary ends they were back home again. By then 5 children had died and 5 others had moved far away. In 1877 he wrote "Grandma and I are all alone this winter, so far." He died in March 1880, less than a year after Cynthia died. They are buried in Riverview Cemetery, Norridgewock. The Wilder family retains his leather-bound Bible, commentaries and a few other artifacts.

## THE DIARY

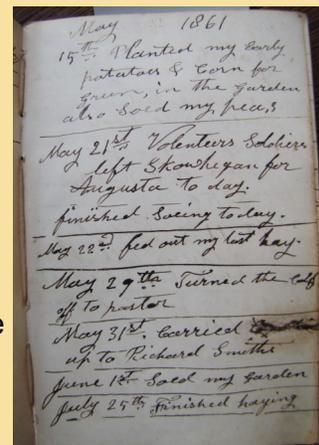
The diary, which Lucius kept from May 15, 1861 to September 1, 1870, provides wonderful glimpses (all entries are only one or two lines) of everyday life/ concerns on the farm in the 1860's. While far away the Civil War raged on, life on the farm went on pretty much as it always had. There are only a few references to the war, mostly about local deployments. Some examples:

May 21, 1861: Volunteer soldiers left Skowhegan for Augusta. Finished sowing today.

August 22: This day Robert enlisted for three years or during the war.

September 24: 9<sup>th</sup> Regiment left Augusta for the seat of war. (The entry for the day before is: "Finished digging potatoes" and the entry the day after the regiment departed: "Plowed new ground".)

There are many fun entries in the book. I found one entry about Dr. Brown who ran his practice out of the museum room that we recently converted into a



conference room. The entry reads:  
September 3, 1866 "Tooth pulled. Paid Dr. Brown 8.00". It is not known whether Lucius found this fee steep or not, but several months later this entry appeared:

March 11, 1867: "I pulled my tooth." (Sidebar: I found the dentistry tidbit interesting as very recently, while working in the dentist/conference room at the museum I unearthed literally—a receipt for Dr. Brown from another patient. "Received for upper and lower sets of teeth, \$25.")

Here are a few other random entries from the diary:

10/23/63 Enos began to haul apples to Skowhegan  
10/25/63 Finished hauling apples. 32 barrels

2/1/64 Elisha sold his half of the buck to Enos for 3.75

1/17/65 Mare kicked me

5/3/67 Got my pig from Barkers three weeks and 1 day old.

12/18/67: Went to Bigalows and Contracted for 10 cords of wood at 2.25.  
Bigalow hauled first load

12/20/67: Bigalow finished hauling wood, ten Cords 22.50 (Apparently no fee for delivery!)

3/16/68 Town voted \$80,000 for railroad

5/30/68 Cow not so well; gave her thurrer wort tea with hogs lard and molasses

5/31/68 Put camphor in cow's horns

6/1/68 Cow better, chewed cud



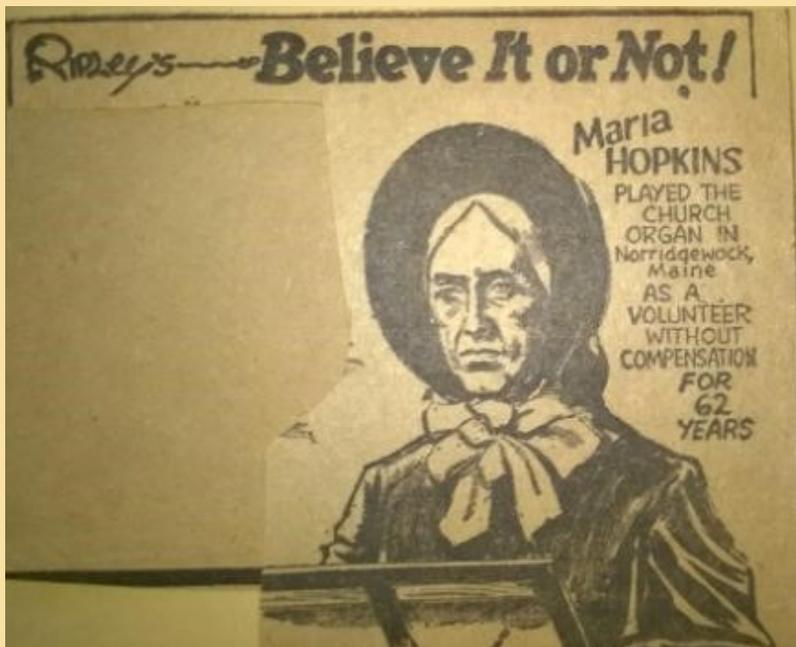
## Peter Drever's Talk at the Christmas Party



Peter showed us a family heirloom that was passed down to him from his maternal, Swedish side : a cane that is passed from generation to generation to the eldest male heir. The nob of the cane is made out of petrified snake and carved on the top of the nob is the date "1792" . Peter believes this to be the age of the cane! He also shared a Swedish Christmas tradition with us. By December Sweden has very few daylight hours. The days start to get lighter when the Soltice arrives 12/21. For encouragement that Christmas-- and lighter days--are coming, every Sunday in Advent a candle is lit (and blown out after a while)



until all four candles are alight for Christmas.



Norridgewock Historical Society  
PO Box 903  
Norridgewock, Maine 04957

# Frederick Heating

Stephen Frederick  
592 Mercer Road, Norridgewock, ME 04957  
207-634-3550 work 24 Hour Service 207-431-2120 cell

# DMO LANDSCAPING

FULL SITE WORK  
GRAVEL – SAND – LOAM  
SEPTIC SYSTEMS

-----  
Dues/Contribution Form (Make check payable to NHS. Send to: NHS PO Box 903 Norridgewock, Me 04957 ) All donations are tax deductible..

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

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

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

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

Basic Membership: \$10

Supporter: \$25

Patron: \$50 or more

Conservator: \$100 or more

