



Norridgewock Historical Society

Newsletter  Spring 2023

News from NHS ...

Spring is very welcome here!

We are also looking forward to the first meeting of the season at the end of this month. Colby Professor Lydia Moland, author of *Lydia Maria Child: A Radical American Life*, will be our guest speaker. Save the date: Wednesday, April 26th @ 6:30 P.M. at the Museum.

We have good news to report for researchers:

- Deeds online: All Somerset County deeds are now online (you can still go to the Registry Office in Skowhegan if you prefer). Deeds from 1709 to 1809 (when we were part of Kennebec County) and deeds from 1956 onward have been online for some time, but now you can access deeds from 1810 to 1955 as well. If you need help, please let us know. Eastman has prepared a crib sheet which we can send to you.
- Edwards Funeral Home Records: Thanks to Laton Edwards NHS now has access to about 8500 funeral home records (including a name index) for individuals who died in Madison/nearby towns circa 1901-2012.

Help Wanted! We are reaching out for volunteers for a variety of "to do's". Please let us know if you can help. We have something for every skill set and amount of time able commit (hours/day or days/periodically/whatever) ! Tasks range from spring cleaning: inside and outside (yard work/garden), general office help, help related to digitization of photos/documents, and staffing help for our "Summer Saturdays at the Museum" and other events.

Thanks!

Becky Ketchum ("RFK") , President of NHS and Newsletter Editor

Contact: rketchum1@aol.com

SAVE THE DATE! SPECIAL PRESENTATION:

LYDIA MOLAND, Colby College Professor of Philosophy

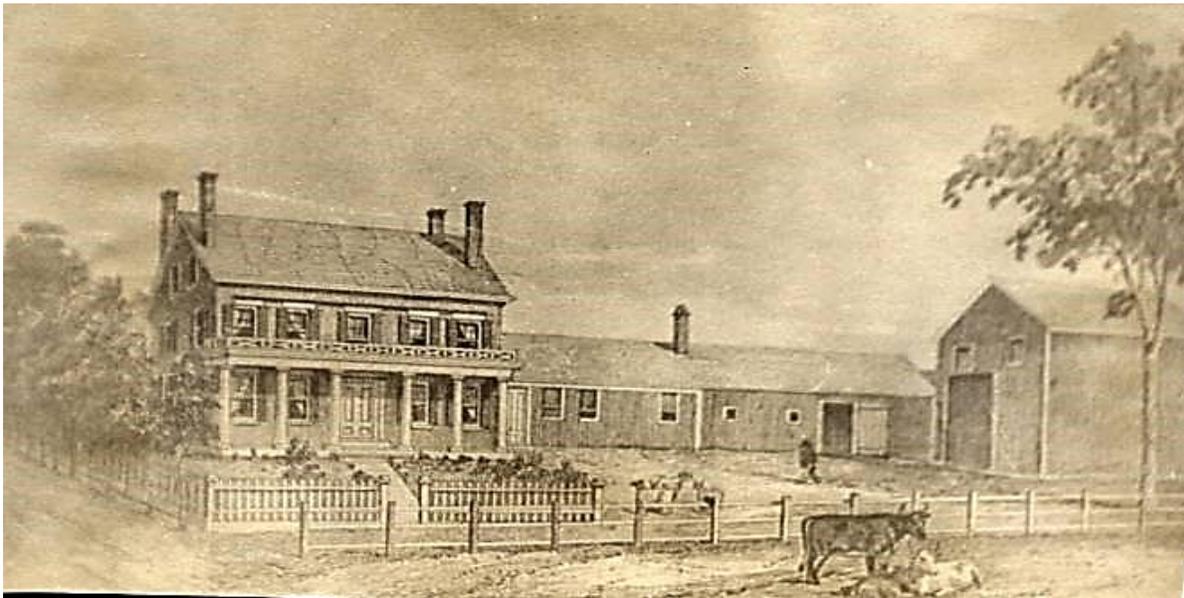
Discussing her new book: *Lydia Maria Child: A Radical American Life*

Date/Time: Wednesday, April 26 @ 6:30 PM

Where: NHS Museum 11 Mercer Rd. Norridgewock

Follow-up on Prescott-Morgan Home Article in Winter 2023 Newsletter (RFK)

The Winter 2023 Newsletter included references to John Abbott who owned the Prescott-Morgan home at one time and built an office next door (now the Sophie May Library). The article mentioned that Abbott also built a home further up on Sophie May Lane where Fairmont Housing is today. This lot was above William Allen's house; Mrs. Abbott was Allen's daughter. We think the family lived in the Prescott-Morgan home while this new house was being built. The house that he built was quite dramatic and is mentioned in several of our history sources, including Henrietta Danforth Wood: *The Early Days of Norridgewock*. In describing the home Wood wrote: "It was a handsome, large 2-story building surrounded by wide piazzas. Leading up the hill was a broad sidewalk bordered on each side by tall lilies (some of which remain today, 2023). Many trees were set out and a white picket fence surrounded the whole. The house was handsomely furnished with mahogany furniture.



After Mrs. Abbott died, the family moved to Massachusetts. The Townsend family subsequently owned the property and it became known as "the Townsend house". For those who like to keep track of our early families: William Allen is the author of one of our most important reference books: *The History of Norridgewock* (published 1849). He also wrote a number of essays on various topics of that era. (He died in 1873 at age 93.)

Dr. Amos Townsend was a very popular doctor in those early days. It was his second son, Benjamin Townsend, who became the owner of the Abbott house. Benjamin was married to Ann Brown, daughter of another important early settler: Moses Brown. Moses Brown lived one lot up from the Townsend house.

So, armed with this background, here is an **unedited** transcript from a piece William Allen wrote about the fire in 1871 that destroyed the Townsend home and almost took out the Allen home and threatened the Sophie May Home (both houses still standing today). Allen was 91 when he wrote the piece.

1871 Fire

(Unedited Essay by Wm. Allen)

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 sheep's cote and 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 buildings and coals fell in showers.

In a short time, Mr. Townsend's house, the best built brick house in town standing 130 rods from the fire at Mr. Brown's 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 till 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 of burnt and burning shingles brought by the wind from Townsend's 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 fires 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 20 men came running to my assistance and as many to Mrs. Clark's.



(Wm. Allen House Built in 1814)



("Mrs. Clark's home/ Sophie May House. Built 1845)

Heald arrived first, sprang up a with 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 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 impressed with the obligation I am under to praise God for his protection.

(William Allen July 10, 1871)

SAVE THE DATE !

AMY CALDER,

award -winning newspaper reporter and columnist will be the guest speaker at our June Meeting.

June 28 @ 6:30 at NHS

Amy will talk about her new book:

COMFORT IS AN OLD BARN
Stories from the Heart of Maine

SAVE THE DATE !

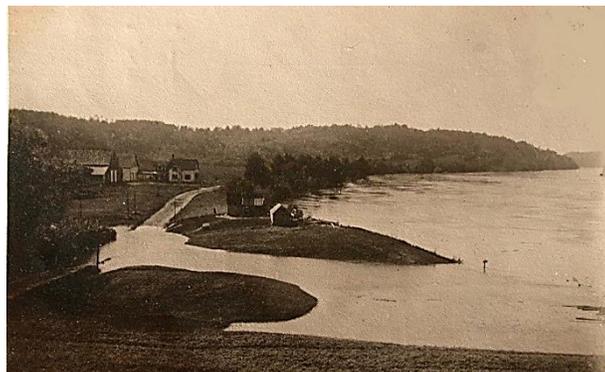
NHS FALL YARD SALE !
Saturday, September 16

Donations Needed !

(Housewares/furnishings,
antiques/collectibles, toys, puzzles, games,
tools, sporting goods, art/pictures, etc.

NO : electronics/clothes/textiles/personal
care/health care items/shoes/suitcases)

*Contact us for drop-off
arrangements . Thanks!*
Rketchum1@aol.com



Quiz: Flooding many years ago—where?

First Organized Fire Company in Norridgewock

by Becky Ketchum

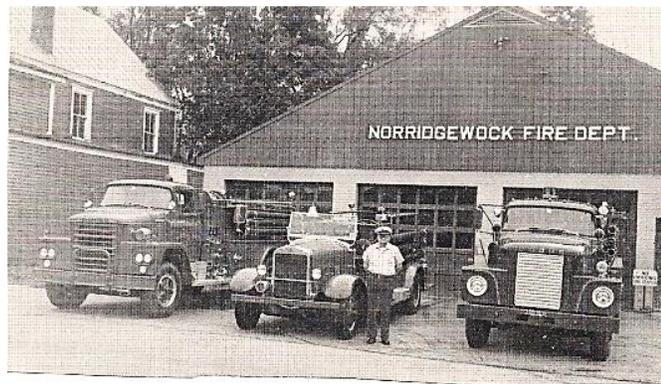
The story of the 1871 Fire prompts the question: when was the first official fire company formed in Norridgewock? The answer, 1911. The men met in Edward Hilton's store (corner of Main and Mechanic) in what was known as "the band hall " on the second floor above the store. Money was raised through "private subscription funding" and town support to build a fire station. In 1916 the fire station was built close to the store. Per a paper given by town historian Betty Miller some years ago, "the ground floor housed the equipment and the second floor was a fine hall where the men could meet for oyster stew or a round of cards".



(Photo on left: Hilton Store corner of Main/Mechanic, fire dept. met upstairs Photo on right: 1916 firehouse a few doors away from Hilton Store)

Having the equipment on the wooden ground floor led to a disastrous situation eight years later (1924) . A fire broke out and the equipment was destroyed along with the rest to the building and many neighboring businesses. So, although right on the Mill Stream , the fire could not be fought using our own pumper, other towns had to be called in.

A new station was built in 1925 and was used until 1960 , when a bigger station (now Everett's Tires) was built across the street. The old station was re-purposed a number of times, including a stint as "The Fire House Bakery". Today it is an apartment building. At one point there was even a warrant item for the town meeting to see if it should be converted into a town office! (1964)



(Photo on left: 1925 fire station, now apt. bldg. Photo on right: 1960 station; Chief Winton Keene standing by truck)

Norridgewock's Undertakers

by Eastman Wilder

Through the kindness of Laton Edwards NHS now has access to the records of the Edwards Funeral Home of Madison. This prompted us to look into not only the Edwards family history in this business but also our local Hiltons.

Laton Edwards great-grandfather born in 1835 started the Edwards Funeral Home in the late 1800s. His son took over the business in 1899, then a grandson studied for a Funeral Director/Embalmer license and came into the business in 1947. After similar study in Boston Laton joined the business in 1963.

Undertaking as now practiced was unknown 150 years ago. Until then families or neighbors took care of their own deceased. Last rites or funerals have probably always been practiced, but the social and religious customs around death have changed a lot over time, as a Google search can reveal. Embalming for preservation wasn't practiced much until the Civil War. Then when many bodies had to be shipped long distances, baggage handlers were aggravated by bodies bursting open. So, embalming became widespread, practiced by specialists who "undertook" many of the trying tasks families had always had to deal with. Undertakers today are licensed state by state.

The Edwards family saga got us wondering about our local Hiltons. Edward A. Hilton born in Norridgewock in 1848 attended Eaton School. He was a popular, jovial man into many town affairs, even on the town school committee in 1907. He had a furniture business on Mechanic Street selling carpeting, crockery, wall paper AND caskets .A picture of his store was shown on the previous page related to the NFD story. The photo below provides a second view to highlight the advertising on the side of the store which leads with "Caskets", (Caskets,furniture, picture frames,wallpaper).



When Edward went blind around 1915 his son Henry took over the business. Henry E. Hilton (1891-1951) didn't go to college, but he attended an undertaker's institute in Boston, probably the same one mentioned above, and in 1920 was an undertaker in Norridgewock with his own shop. In 1930 he called himself a funeral director. The Hilton Funeral Home in the 1940's was just off of Monument Square, visible from Clark Street but accessed from the road that runs between the old "Ann's Motel" site and the gas station/store. There Henry conducted funerals using his long brown hearse for conveyances. In the late 1940's he took on the younger and stronger Henry Parkman as partner. After Henry died in 1951 (ironically, during a funeral) his wife Marita and Parkman kept the business

going for a while. Then about 1960 they closed it and Marita moved to California along with the Parkmans.

Henry Hilton's nickname was "Pooch"; we'd like to know why. He was also owner and manager of the Ben Franklin 5-and-10 store on Main Street near the Mill Stream. He bought this business from Harry Carr in 1936. Some of us remember Pooch in his store, always munching peanuts, padding up and down the aisles probably on the watch for shoplifting.

About when the Hilton businesses were closing, two established undertakers from Skowhegan opened competing branches in town. Harold Lord bought the Jay Pierce/Douglass house on Perkins Street in 1961 and made it a funeral parlor until about 1974 when he died. Nelson Smart bought Dan Jones's house on Waterville Hill in 1956 for a funeral home, and also lived there until about 1983 when he died.

Note: Back to the Madison Edwards. In 1974 the Edwards family bought the entire Lord business. The records we've acquired include some Lord records, but most of the old records were ruined in a flood; they'd been kept in a safe that wasn't waterproof. In 1995 Laton Edwards merged his business with the Smart Funeral Home in Skowhegan forming the Smart and Edwards Funeral Home, now owned by a foreign funeral service business. Records of Smart undertaking in Norridgewock may still be in Skowhegan.

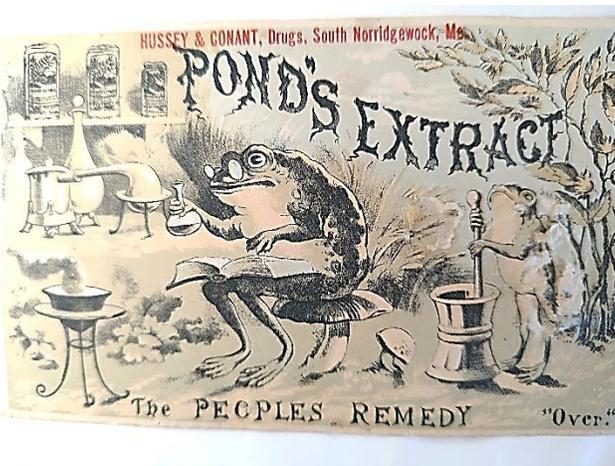
PHOTOS FROM THE ARCHIVES



Log Jam!



Early scene on Mechanic Street.



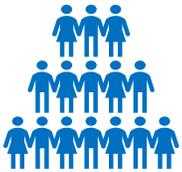
Advertising for one of our early retail stores.



Henry Hilton in his Ben Franklin Store. Madelyn Kinney standing next to him.

Norridgewock Historical Society
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Norridgewock, Maine 04957

TO:



Dues/Contribution/Subscription Form

Please make check payable to NHS. Send to: NHS PO Box 903 Norridgewock, ME 04957
All donations are tax deductible. Many thanks for your support!

Name: _____

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Basic Membership: \$ 10

Supporter: \$25

Patron: \$ 50

Conservator: \$100 +

Business Ad: \$ 100 (include business
Card w/ your check; ad
will appear in next 4
issues)

To contact newsletter editor: rketchum1@aol.com