



# Norridgewock Historical Society

## Newsletter

Summer 2019

### President's Letter      Becky Ketchum

We are at the mid-point of our season program-wise. We've had some wonderful speakers, starting in May with Colin Quinn of Quinn Bats who took us through the history of baseball equipment and also regaled us with some regional lore about the game. Next up to bat, beloved "Doc Baker" spoke to us in June about his 40 years in rural medicine and then in July NHS member John Hilton thoroughly engaged us in the world of the Maine Antique Tractor Club. Club members Charlie Dickinson (NHS member) and David Obert (grandson of David & Brenda) brought their pride & joy tractors and parked them in front of the museum for all to enjoy. Dave may be one of the youngest members of the club, but he owns one of the club's oldest (if not the oldest) tractors. He had to hand crank it to get it going!



### UPCOMING NHS PROGRAMS

(6:30 at The Museum)

- Aug. 28 Jeff McAllister-Antique Bottles & Marbles: how to identify age, value, etc.
- Sep. 25 Richard Witham & Mel Croft- History & Memory Lane: The Smithfield Roller Rink
- Oct. 23- Al Barlow- Treasures/relics from Old Foundations

Thanks again to speakers Colin, Ken and John!  
Your talks were a great pleasure for all of us!



**NHS Yard Sale**  
**SATURDAY, OCT. 5<sup>th</sup>**  
**PLEASE DONATE:**



Housewares/furniture/toys/ books/games/  
antiques & collectibles/tools/etc. NO  
clothes or electronics.  
Questions? Contact: Becky

## A LOOK AT SOPHIE MAY Birthplace vs. Home

While people generally think of Sophie May as having lived in the “Sophie May Home “ on Sophie May Lane, her birthplace is actually down the road on Maple Street (last house on the corner of Maple and River Road).



In her book *Early Days of Norridgewock* Henrietta Wood wrote that the Maple Street house was “a very pretty home over which tall elms spread protecting arms and a yard full of blossoming shrubs and flowers, particularly roses, a perfect riot of color, helped make the place charming.” This property with its neighboring fields and rolling hills above the banks of the Kennebec was where Sophie May spent her childhood. She was a young adult when she moved to what is known today as “the Sophie May Home”. Thus, while she wrote her books in the Sophie May Home (she often sat at a desk in the west parlor with a window view of the Kennebec, which is where I sit as I write this article) it is Maple Street that provides many of the settings and childhood memories described in her books. Some of her books include tales about a ferry that crossed the river. Her grandfather, who wore many hats, owned the first ferry and it was located in that neighborhood.

The Maple Street house, which was built in the late 1790’s, is currently owned by NHS member Charlie Dickinson and his wife Carmen. Another NHS member, Emma Swanson, who currently lives in Nevada, has ties to the home as well. Emma was born in the Maple Street home on February 22, 1933, which happens to be 100 years to the day after Sophie May was born there ( February 22, 1833).



## The Sophie May Home

The Sophie May Home, which is on the banks of the Kennebec about a quarter of a mile upstream from Sophie May’s birthplace, was built in 1845 by Cullen Sawtelle, one of early settler Richard Sawtelle’s sons. Richard purchased the land from John Ware for \$300 in 1814 and he deeded it to Cullen in 1833 (the year Sophie May was born). Prior to becoming a land owner/home builder Cullen had graduated from Bowdoin (class of 1825 with classmates Longfellow, Hawthorne, John Abbott, etc.), after which he borrowed \$100 from his father and headed south to Virginia where he secured a job as a tutor on a large plantation. He returned to Maine after a year or so (also returned the \$100 to his father). Cullen was greatly impressed with the architecture of the southern mansions and this influenced his design of [the Sophie May House]. The easy access inherent in having an in-town granite quarry coupled with the fact that Cullen and his brother were in the brick manufacturing and lumber business resulted in the construction of a house that has stood the test of time very well!

While impressive from the front and appearing larger than it really is because of the columns (3” thick southern Cyprus), from the side view the house is typically Maine. There is a large front part, smaller middle and still smaller woodshed all running together as one building.

Cullen served in the Maine State Legislature and U.S. Congress before moving to New Jersey for a U.S. Government job in 1852. It is at this point that the Asa Clark family moved from Maple Street and began the journey that eventually led to the house being called “The Sophie May Home”. Interestingly, although she lived in the house from about 1858 until her death in 1906 the deed chain shows that it was awhile before the deed was in Sophie May’s (Rebecca Clark) name (1881). For some time it was in the name of her older sister Harriet and brother-in-law Horatio Wheeler. We know they did not live in the house. The name on the deed being an older, married sister is probably a reflection of the times. By 1881 Sophie May was a successful author who had travelled to Europe several times and cross country almost a dozen times. For those interested in deed chains, from Sophie May the house went to her sister Penn Shirley, from Penn Shirley to a niece, from the niece to Hattie Lunt (1929) and to the Ketchum family in 1951.



NHS member Gwen Knight recently donated this space heater that originally belonged to Sophie May.



Sophie May, in black, with friends, in front of her home.



The famous tree house in the willows at the Sophie May Home. Sophie May often sat out there to write.

Some folks in town today remember playing there when growing up.



Sophie May, with her sister Penn Shirley

Old Quinnebassett Hotel, featured in some of Sophie May's stories.





A key addition to the garden this year is the Magnolia Stellata Centennial. It was planted in the front yard. It was given in memory of Margaret Stickney Undari by her sister Gail Stickney Melkonian.



Many thanks to our gardeners Marilyn and Valerie who have turned the NHS property into a floral showcase. It is the talk of the town! People are stopping to take pictures and one day I spotted a man sitting on the Eaton bench reading as if in the comfort of his own backyard. A lot of thought went into the plant selections and placement and Valerie and Marilyn have spent MANY hours maintaining the garden over this hot and dry summer. Many thanks!

At maturity a 'Star Magnolia' looks like this:



Special thanks also to Donna Mickewich who contributed the signs that identify each plant. (Fun to not only enjoy strolling along the garden, but to learn as we go!)



## Some Early Pictures of Norridgewock.



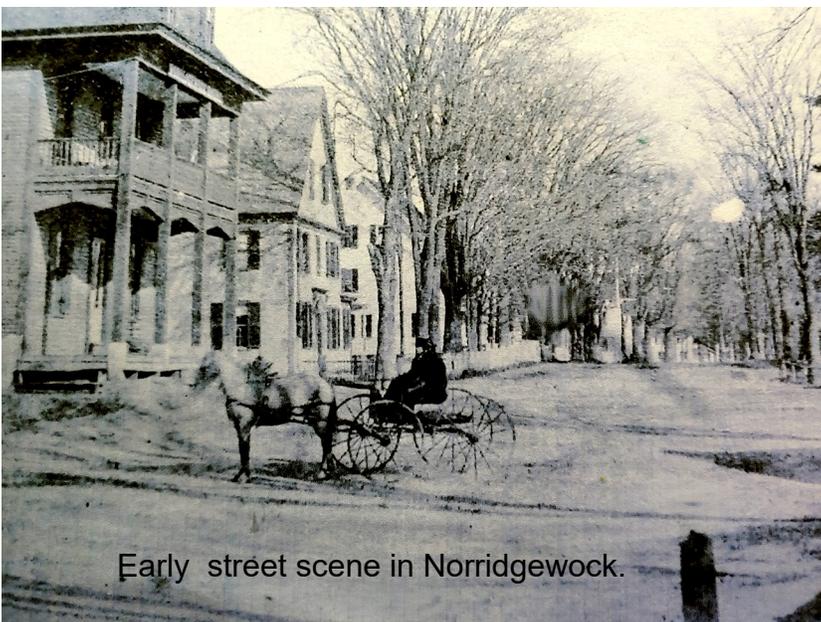
Another view of the tree house



Photo of an early ferry on the river (circa 1905). W.G. Sawyer, M.D. crossing the Sandy River between Starks and Norridgewock.



Looking up River Road. Dole House on the right and Ware house on the left.



Early street scene in Norridgewock.

### River Road vs River Street?

Some historians in the past have referred to what we know today as "River Road" as "River Street". Hence, the variation in reference herein.

Note: Dar-I-Whip ad on next page refers to 52 years of service. In fact this is their 55th season! Congratulations!

Norridgewock Historical Society  
PO Box 903  
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# Frederick Heating

Stephen Frederick  
592 Mercer Road, Norridgewock, ME 04957  
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**Fifty - Two** Years of Great Success  
Because Our Customers Are The Best"

# 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 \_\_\_\_\_

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Basic Membership: \$10

Supporter: \$25

Patron: \$50 or more

Conservator: \$100 or more

Business Ad: \$75

