



## NORRIDGEWOCK HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER SUMMER 2023

### ***News from NHS ...***

Summer, which was off to a damp start in June, is moving along at a good clip now. However, vegetable gardens are struggling to make-up for the lost time in June.

We've enjoyed three excellent speakers thus far in the season including Lydia Moland (Colby professor and author of *Lydia Maria Child: A Radical American Life*), Kenny Wing (*Benedict Arnold's Expedition on the Kennebec to the Height of the Land*) and Amy Calder (reporter/columnist and author of *Comfort is an Old Barn: Stories from the Heart of Maine*).

Once again we hosted the Mill Stream School third grade field trip in June. Over 50 children are in the third grade this year and we thoroughly enjoyed spending the day with them. Many thanks to Janice Malek and Nathan Richards for the wonderful job they did leading the tours.

In July the University of Maine – Farmington/ Gold Leaf group attended a day long program @ NHS on the *Early History of Norridgewock*. Lecturers included Tom Michewich (Tom spoke about *the Early European Settlers*), Eastman Wilder (*Norridgewock as the Shire Town*), Rebecca Ketchum ( *Norridgewock Buildings on the National Register*) and Janice Malek ( *Weaving the History of Birch Bark Use with the Original Inhabitants of Norridgewock*). Following the afternoon talk some joined us for a visit to the Father Rasle Monument.

### **Coming up, mark your calendars now for our 2 major fund raisers of the year:**

1. Oosoola Days 50/50 Duck Drop Labor Day, September 4<sup>th</sup> . **If you can help with ticket sales between now and then, PLEASE let me know!**

2. Sixth Annual Fall Yard Sale on **Saturday, September 16<sup>th</sup>**.

**Donations are needed for the sale**(housewares/antiques/collectibles/tools/hard cover books/toys/puzzles/games/art/pictures, etc. No electronics, clothing, personal care/health care items) . **Contact me for drop-off arrangements! Thank you for your support!**

Becky Ketchum ("RFK"), President of NHS & Newsletter editor

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## ***The Old Willow Tree & a Memorial to Warren Balgooyen***

In the late 1700's Dr. Zebulon Gilman carried the first mail ever transported through this region, but soon gave it up to his brother Peter Gilman. When the mail route was first established no suitable roads existed for travel by carriage. Thus, Peter followed the course of the river for 45 miles from Norridgewock to Hallowell on horseback. He did this for over twenty years.

On one of Peter's return trips in 1800 his horse needed a little encouragement so Peter cut a twig off a black willow tree. At the end of the route, which was Sawtelle's trading post on the corner of what is now known as "Willow" Street and River Road, Peter stuck the twig in the ground. Unexpectedly (?) the twig took root and grew... and grew... and grew ... to an astonishing 9 foot diameter, 28 foot circumference and lived 128 years . Due to its size it became quite well known and was a popular subject matter on Norridgewock postcards for many years.

In 1880 two local newlyweds, Levi Robbins (who, incidentally, has ancestral connections to Peter Gilman) and Sara Gould listened to Horace Greeley and went west; in their case: Oregon. Among the treasures they took with them was a branch snipped off the popular willow tree. A wonderful memento of their shared home town. It survived the journey westward and they planted it on their farm,

Fastforward over 100 years later and while at a canoe campground on the lower Colorado River our own Eastman Wilder crossed paths with Mrs. Jack Thomas from Oregon. As happens when we Norridgewockians are out in the wide world, the conversation turned to Norridgewock and with that, the old willow tree. Mrs. Thomas turned out to be Louise Gould Thomas, granddaughter of Levi Robbins and Sara Gould. When Louise returned home from the camping trip she mailed six twigs from the old willow on her grandfather's farm to Eastman in an ordinary envelope. The twigs were turned over to nearby neighbor and local naturalist Warren Balgooyen who nurtured them and one successfully took root. After three years of care, in 2000 the second generation black willow was transplanted to its original spot on the corner of Willow Street and River Road where it has done well.

Warren Balgooyen died a couple of years ago and the idea was presented to make the willow tree site a memorial to Warren. David Turcotte , who was mentored by Warren, spearheaded the idea and was joined by NHS. Elias Monuments donated & installed the monument and the Congregational Church, on whose property the willow is located, granted use of the corner. Next time you are passing by this corner stop and take a look at Norridgewock's newest historical destination.

(RFK Note: The tale of Peter Gilman is based on an account in Henrietta D. Wood's book: *Early Days of Norridgewock* .

## **NHS Visitor Prompts Array of Memories**

It is always delightful when someone “from away” stops by the Museum and even more so when the visitor has old ties to Norridgewock. Last week Steve Butler, a grandson of Glenys Everett who used to live in **The Samuel Tuck** house on Mechanic Street came by. ( For old timers: Glenys was Mont Stanley’s sister/ Elsie’s sister-in-law.) Steve shared many fond memories one of which was using his grandmother’s apple press to make cider. A surprise for Steve: that apple press is part of the NHS Museum collections (donated by Scott Henderson).

Steve gave us his recently published book of poetry which includes two poems about Norridgewock . One of the poems brought back memories for me. In the 1950’s my father had a small boat and one of the outings we often enjoyed was going down to the Mill Stream by the park , untying the boom (naughty) and then exploring this rather magical part of the stream: lily pads, frogs, good fishing (pickerel!) and at the foot of the falls we were always on the lookout for the big snapping turtle which generally could be found sitting on one of the rocks watching us with greater interest than we were sometimes comfortable with!

Steve ok’d publishing his poem “*The Old Snapping Turtle*” in our newsletter. (*Tossed Salad, Homegrown Rhymes, Gently Tossed* by Steve Butler; available on Amazon, too! The 2<sup>nd</sup> local poem in the book: is “Little Frog”.)

RFK

## THE OLD SNAPPING TURTLE

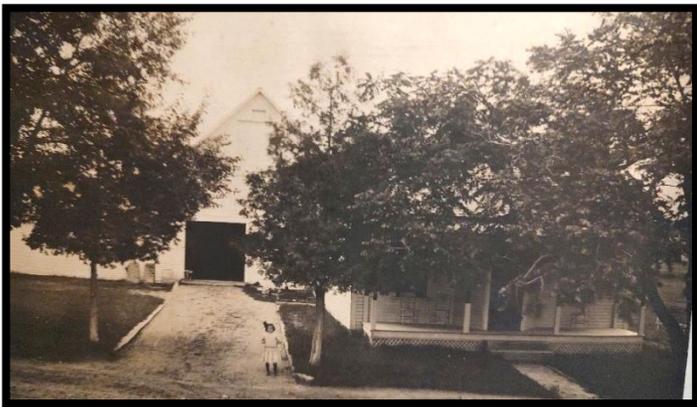
In a place that time has worn  
my father’s mother had been born.  
There, in youth, my dad would roam  
in woods and fields around their home.  
The road, the house, the barn, the shed,  
way down back, the wildflowers spread  
and there, a swath to the millstream led.  
A tethered leaf in the water sailed,  
held by a branch the willow trailed  
and where the lazy frogs grow fat,  
once, upon the bank I sat.  
A turtle, then, excited me  
for I could see quite well,  
the date of 1933  
was there upon its shell  
and I recalled a story  
my dad would sometimes tell.  
He told of skating on the pond,  
of fishing and winter trapping  
and once of boys who carved a date  
upon a turtle, snapping.  
When I went home and told the man  
it seemed a great surprise!  
I saw the boy that he once was  
gleam within his eyes.

I don’t expect the thing’s still there,  
so many years since then,  
I wonder though, if I passed by,  
would it surprise again?

## **Sidebars to the " Array of Memories" Article ...**

NHS does not have much information about Samuel Tuck. We do know that he bought the property in December, 1818 (\$100 / 50 acres) from his father-in-law Josiah Heald and built the house for his new bride soon after (circa 1820). Josiah Heald, a veteran of the Revolutionary War, was one of the town's early settlers . He was known as "the Miller" because he operated several of the local mills.

A picture of the "Samuel Tuck" house appeared in our last newsletter --unidentified as to name/location. Here is the house again, this time with Glenys Stanley Everett standing in the driveway.. Picture on the right :Steve Butler standing by the apple press.



## **Glenys Everett's Father & Brother : Allan & Ulmont**

Glenys Stanley was the daughter of Allan Stanley and as mentioned earlier the sister of Ulmont "Mont" Stanley. Allan Stanley operated "The Smithfield Stage" which ran between Norridgewock and Smithfield and was often seen at the railroad depot. After the Smithfield Stage passengers disembarked, Allan took the horses right into North Pond for a drink and to cool off. In the winter he transported passengers and carried the mail to/fro Smithfield in a horse-drawn sleigh.



Mont Stanley owned the first garage in town and was the first Pontiac dealer in the State of Maine. He was married to Elsie Dickinson Stanley, who for many years was our beloved librarian, as well as wearing many other town hats. Mont's first garage was at the corner of Welch and Main by the railroad tracks. When that building burned he re-located to Skowhegan where he had a sales showroom & garage. Later he moved the business back to Norridgewock (where the realty company is today).

Below: Mont Stanley's first garage. Bottom photo: Mont (wearing cap) is standing by the driver's side of his car. Others in the picture include Hamlin Hale (sitting on the running board of Mont's car; Hale's car is the car on the left), Alton Hodgkins is leaning against the building and on the right Fred Jewett is standing by the driver's side of his car.





## ***Some Photos from our Archives***



The Old Willow Tree



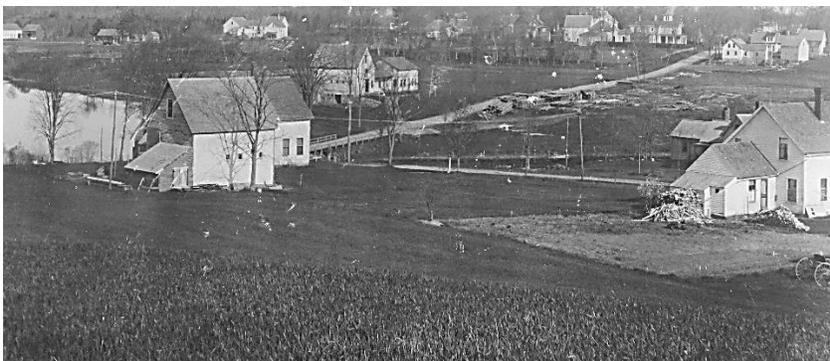
The 2<sup>nd</sup> Generation Willow /Warren  
Balgooyen Memorial



Mechanic Street



Allan & Glenys (taxi ?) @ depot.



Looking at the property & lay of the land between Perkins  
Street and (not shown) Mechanic Street. Mill Stream on left.



## ***Fiftieth Anniversary of Oosoola Days 1973-2023***

This headline gives new meaning to the expression “time flies” !

The Town Manager and Committee Reports in the Town Reports for the 1970's provide an early history of Oosoola Park and the fall festivities associated with it.

**1972 Town Manager's Report (“TMR”) the TM wrote:** Scott Paper Company is donating a parcel of land located off Ferry Street to the Town for a public park and recreational area if the citizens see fit to accept proposal at our town meeting.

**1973 TMR:** A contest was sponsored to name the park. Numerous names were suggested and the name Oosoola Park was decided upon. The opening of the park was held on October 8, 1973 with a “Fun Day” which included horse show, firemen's muster, frog races and games for the children. This should be an annual affair. Picnic tables have been donated by interested persons, but much more work needs to be done to the park in general and the boat launch.

**1974 Article 24 for Town Meeting :** vote to raise an approximate \$1,000 for maintenance and improvement of the Park.

**1975 Park Committee (excerpts):** Over 1,000 people attended the 3<sup>rd</sup> annual Fun Fair...There were over 118 entrants in the “Central Maine Frog Race” .

**1976 Report:** No mention of the Fun Fair (4<sup>th</sup> Annual). The Bicentennial was the bigger event that year, held July 4 (parade/park picnic and more).

**1977 TMR:** The Town of Norridgewock has recently received a deed to the park through the courtesy of Scott Paper Company... The Park Commission has received the prints and necessary papers for installation of a boat ramp to the Kennebec River to be done by the Bureau of Parks and Outdoor Recreation Department of the State of Maine.

**1977 Park Committee Report (some excerpts):**The year 1977 has been a very special one for the Town. Scott Paper Co. has deeded the land known as Oosoola Park to the town. This will eliminate yearly leasing of the land...

The fifth annual Oosoola Park Fun Fair was very well-attended....

Paul McKechnie's frog won first prize and was pictured in *Sports Illustrated*. (NHS editor note: I found the *SI* article online. The article reported that the frog, a two pound bull frog which had been plucked from the Mill Stream, won the 20 foot contest over 152 other frogs. Paul's coaching from the sidelines – racers are not allowed to touch their frogs—was “Go froggie, go!!!!”.)

The 1977 Committee Report also mentioned that the Village Improvement Society provided the park with toilet facilities this past summer and that a boat landing ramp will be constructed in the spring and the barbecue pit extended.

**1978 TMR:**The reality of boating on the Kennebec River has been accomplished by the installation of a boat ramp and dock...total reimbursement by the State. The Park Committee Report included mention of the installation of the totem pole and that participation in the Frog Race reached a record high with 200 participants.

RFK

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TO:



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