



# The SHIRETOWN CONSERVER

The Dover-Foxcroft Historical Society

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## Remembering Two Farms no longer in existence

By Louis Stevens



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In my much younger days and into my early teens, I was associated with two farms: one, in the summer, was the dairy of my uncle Clint and aunt "Jo" Bridges in West Dover; and the other was the fox ranch, all year, of my father and grandfather, Charles and Maurice Stevens, in Dover South Mills. Although it has been many years ago, about 70 now, since I milked a Jersey or Guernsey--no power line on the Sangerville Line Road then so no milking machines--and an equal number of long-ago years since I did a bit of helping to put a fox to sleep by an injection of strychnine, my mind can quickly recall those days of many memories as I'm doing now while typing.

First, come with me to the second floor of the house (where I spent my pre one-room school house days at Bear Hill) to get a panoramic view of the screen-enclosed fox ranch below us, both ahead and to the sides of us. Inside are small pens, again made of a wire screen. There was an overhang on the inside to prevent a fox from climbing up and over, and enough screen buried under the inside to prevent them from digging out. Each pen had a wooden structure that served as a winter home and protection from bad weather for a mother and her litter. Foxes could reach this home via a chute. To keep a fox inside, a board could be inserted into a slot so a fox could not escape.

It is nearing the end of winter so their furs were at their prime. Some of the best appearing would be carefully put asleep so not to hurt their pelts which would later be auctioned off in New York City to be used for neckpieces, jackets, or coats. How it was done will be told later. My small contribution to the swift death of the fox came this way: When grampy opened the roof of the fox's home, we could see the frightened fox cowering and often snarling in a corner.

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## The Dover-Foxcroft Historical Society

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Visit us on-line at  
[www.rootsweb.com/~medfhs](http://www.rootsweb.com/~medfhs)  
 and on Facebook

## 2014 Memberships

We have received hundreds of responses from our recent membership renewal. We now have almost 300 members in the Dover-Foxcroft Historical Society. Your contributions keep us going – not just financially, but in spirit as well.

While we are only open this winter by appointment, we are (almost) always here on Thursdays and would be glad to have you drop by at any time.



## Drop by Drop

The world grows older every day!  
 The same thing we are daily doing.  
 While some are born, some pass away.  
 Some wed, and some – well, they are wooing  
 Some in the shade of sunny day  
 Spend all their life in scented poesy,  
 Here dreaming pass their time away  
 In bowers sheltered, rich and rosy.  
 But “drop by drop the rain drops fall,”  
 Quick time flies past on minutes winging-  
 Smooth down the steep rolls on the ball,  
 While golden time away we're flinging.  
 Amazed we meet the gloomy day –  
 The day that all too sure is coming.  
 When we are called with life to pay  
 The long account we have been running.  
 The slow and sure, like swift and strong,  
 Will find the past an idle song.

*Observer, 1978*

**BROWN HARRY**

Will stand the ensuing season at the Farm of P. M. JEFFERDS, in Foxcroft. Terms—Leap, \$7.00. Season, \$12.00. Warrant, \$15.00.  
 Foxcroft, March 31, 1864. 33

**DR. H. A. ROBINSON,**  
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Office over N. Hopkins' Store, opposite Hill's Block, Dover; and Agent for J. Estey's (formerly Estey & Green)  
**PERFECT MELODEONS.**  
 March 17, 1864. 31

**Kerosene Oil**

Of the best quality, at  
**F. DEARBORN'S,**  
 Dover, Feb. 24, 1864. 28

(Two Farms, Continued from Page 1)

Grampy held a set of tongs in one hand and quickly closed it around its neck, and then grabbed the scruff of its back fur with the other hand. I was now able to search for the animal's pulsating heart in its chest. Although I had never been to medical or vet schools, I announced proudly, as my right hand could easily feel the strong, steady beat, "Here's his heart grampy," I said. Now my father easily and carefully injected the warm poison (if allowed to get cold it was not effective) into the fox's heart. Only seconds later, several death throes, then gone. Later, a method of asphyxiation was used, but the use of poison has remained very strong in my mind.

The rest of the preparation to get the skin ready for sending it to be sold took place in a small building called "the shed" where a red hot stove kept it warm when in use, such as today when the three of us could spend hours there, a most welcome spot after being in the cold wood and a carcass kept the fire supplied with flammable material.

After the pelt was removed from the carcass, it was first turned inside-out, and then placed on a stand grampy had built and so fashioned that the pelt slid over it on a slant so he could take a piece of hickory to delicately clean the pelt of any fat left on the now clean inside. To make certain all traces of fat were gone from the fur, he put the again reversed pelt into a large burlap bag containing a large amount of very dry sawdust. The bag was shaken heavily, quickly, and thoroughly to absorb the last of the smallest bits of fat. Then to keep the pelt taut and unable to shrink, small brads, placed at the end with the tail, held it in shape. All this careful preparation was done so not to damage head, ears, toes, and eye sockets, which could hurt the pelt's value at auction.

Another reversal put the fur on the outside to be combed, again carefully, to remove any snarls, and if it was to be sold as a black pelt, any white hairs would be plucked out. Years later, pelts called silver blacks had a fine -scattering of white, and then platinum which were mostly all white due to inbreeding.

Several pelts would be put into a heavy cardboard box, labelled with a New York City address of a fur auction company. Soon a reply came back saying what pelts were purchased and for how much, and if not sold would be held for another day when the market for foxes was better. Sometimes grampy had other pelts of beavers, otters, and minks to send too that he had trapped in the winter. The auction company kept a commission for their sales.



"This panoramic photo shows the board fence, the overhang of the wire fence, and the posts of the individual pens and the winter homes (only the tip of two show a bit surrounded by the deep snow). Winter made the pelts more prime so more desirable to buyers at auctions in New York City to be used for coats or neck pieces. The tower, far left, was high enough to allow anyone a sight of the complete ranch.

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(Two Farms, from page 3)

My grandmother, Mabel Stevens, holds the earliest black fur fox, my grandfather, Maurice Stevens, raised; no white hairs wanted! Then came the so-called 'silver,' with a scattering of white hairs, and then came 'platinum' with more white than black. On the right she holds two from the litter of a black fur mother. (Luckily someone wrote "taken May 1930" on the back of the photo). Note the board fence that surrounded the ranch so the mother could not be frightened by animals she could see and hear that easily could make her afraid of danger to her little family members. The bar above the fence held a wire fence overhang so a fox that might have gotten out of its pen could not escape over the boards to freedom.



My grandfather or father Charles Stevens, puts food (horsemeat and grain) into a box on the side of a pen. This saved having to open the pen door and scaring the fox who soon knows where the 'table' was located as does any animal if hungry. On the right is a view down an alley of pens with the white winter home with straw to aid in giving warmth, and the chutes that led to the home if the chute hopefully was high enough so not to be filled with snow.

### **Working on Dairy Farm**

Now, my mind and typing fingers travel with the speed of a bullet about four miles from the fox farm in mid-winter in Dover South Mills to a dairy farm on a sweltering mid-summer afternoon in West Dover. It's a long hay day for us all at the large set of farm buildings of my uncle Clint Bridges and my aunt "Jo" (formal name is Beatrice) who is, of course, the sister of my father and daughter of my grampy, so readers can see how the two "farms" are tied together.

Males in the household include my uncle's elderly father nearing his late 70s, and who has spent his entire lifetime at this home; another nephew of my aunt and uncle, Hubert Weston, who is the son of my uncle's twin sister Calista; plus myself; and, of course, a collie dog. My father is helping hay today as he has the great knack of building a monstrous load of hay on a large wagon as the ricks of dried hay out in the field are pitched up to him.

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My part in haying came later when I tramped down the hay after it was lifted to a beam high above the hayloft by a system of ropes pulled to the top by an old horse led, usually by my aunt who has already cooked two hefty meals for us all, with another ready to be prepared on the wood burning kitchen stove.

I hope you noted that the words tractor and bailing machine are not mentioned as the work of pulling the loaded hay wagon is done by a pair of hefty work horses who, in the winter, will be dining on the hay they are hauling today. Fortunately, the large barn has two sets of doors so they can bring the load of hay in the back on flat ground, and exit down a slight decline from the front - smart planning on the part of my uncle's ancestors who built the barn many decades ago!

I recall a perfect example of how folks in the neighborhood would help each other. I vividly recall how a group of men appeared one morning--as soon as they had finished their chores--all loaded down with scaffolding, ladders, and aprons with pockets to hold nails to be used to put new cedar shingles on the north side of the roof that badly needed them. Also appearing were their wives with food, and children to help as they could, but mainly to help serve dinner as we called the meal at noon then. All went very well, of course, and the old shingles collected from the ground would make exceptional kindling wood for the wood fires. The day, with all its many "homey" aspects come to me now as if it were yesterday!

I must not forget the herd of cows that could be shown to be smart in many ways: they learned not to touch the electric barbed wire fence that got its power from a clicking battery in the tie-up (I found it interesting to run a blade of grass up the wire to get a throb to make sure it was working): cows soon found the tree in the pasture that provided the most shade and so gathered there on high degree days; but if one found a way to escape out the pasture, her fellow females, so to speak, would soon join her, which could mean a long time finding them and driving them back to the barn; they often gathered at the barn in the afternoon as their biological clock told them they would soon be allowed into the barn for milking.

Freight trains were still running on the tracks on land adjoining the farm, and if the engineer spotted us working, he often said "HI" with a couple of toots of his whistle."

How quickly the time has passed in my mind from the days of the fox farm and dairy farm. Both places had animals producing incomes, one in the winter and the other in the summer, but now, not a trace of either place remains as trees cover the areas once filled with fox pens and a large barn area for cows. But what a benefit it was for a young kid to have lived a short time with both and to be able to write about them many years later.

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For a number of summers in my teens, I worked on the dairy/potato/hay/grain farm of my uncle Clinton Bridges (left photo, right) and aunt Beatrice (often called Jo or Bea) (right photo), in West Dover on the homestead of Clint's father (left photo, left) for many years during his lifetime of 86 years (the dates of Willis Bridges were 1869-1947).



The pair of horses seen here could have been just unhitched from the now empty hay wagon. They had entered the barn through the large back doors, and taken now around back to their stalls. Much of the time I worked there we did not have power lines so lots of farm work was done by hand, literally!

All three photos show the length and steepness of the north side of the large barn that was connected to a long shed in back of which there was a huge ice house filled each winter with large cakes used in the water tank (next to the tie-up for cows) to keep the milk cold, and also in the summer, garden grown cucumbers and tomatoes being ice cold.

My aunt was a very hard working housewife. She often helped me rogue potatoes, left the horse in pitching off a hay load, and preserve jars of vegetables for winter eating, sometimes interrupting preparing a meal for 5 of us, or maybe frosting a cake for a grange supper at East Sangerville.

## The Dover-Foxcroft Historical Society Turns 50!

For many years George Dunham (1910-1991) watched as the blacksmith shop, located on Dawes Road, fell into disrepair. George was born and raised in a home just below it – now the home of Dr. and Mrs. Richard Swett. The shop was built in the early 1860's and was an integral part of the Foxcroft neighborhood for 60 years. George wanted to save this old building. He began to talk to citizens about starting a historical society as a way to preserve the old shop.



The question may be asked: Why attempt to preserve the old blacksmith shop on Outer Park Street? For years the shop had been used to store potatoes and neglect was beginning to show. The shop contained many articles of interest.

Many have seen oxen shod; many more have not. Many have never seen the equipment necessary to do such a job. Most of the children in school today have a vague idea about horse shoeing but have never seen a blacksmith shoe an animal. It was in this neighborhood that many Foxcroft “firsts” took place. The Samuel Chamberlain place nearby, was occupied in 1809 and is one of the earliest buildings in town. The Nathan Carpenter place was occupied in 1811 and is where the first school in Foxcroft was held. People from all over the country were becoming interested in historical objects and places. Where could one go to see a blacksmith shop typical of the old days? The shop in question could attract tourists and give future generations a better conception and appreciation of their present advantages. This building could be preserved for about \$500. With the passing of another year it would have collapsed or have been torn down.

And so it was decided to put forth a call for a meeting. All interested parties were invited to a meeting held on October 14, 1963 at 7 pm at Central Hall. The town manager, Laurence Peabody, officiated. Considerable interest was shown to establish a historical society to help preserve points and articles of interest. Madelyn Betts, the first secretary, remembers that about 15 people were at that original meeting and those people were adamant about saving the blacksmith shop. This was to become the first project of the Dover-Foxcroft Historical Society. The Parson's Blacksmith Shop, owned by Francis and Vergie Nelson, was constructed in 1863 during the Civil War. It was built as a community project for the convenience of the neighbors for shoeing oxen and horses and for making items of iron. The shop was built by Nicholas Chandler, who bred and trained horses and used the shop to shoe animals and make other items needed on the nearby farms. Later, the shop passed on to Henry L. Parsons, who carried on the day to day operations from 1881 until his death in 1906. The meeting discussed the feasibility of establishing a historical society – how to go about it and future projects.

The first official meeting of the fledgling society was held in November 1963, once again at Central Hall. Election of officers was held. George L. Dunham was named president, Charles L. Glover named vice-president, Madelyn C. Betts named secretary and Barbara Klimavicz named treasurer. Serving on the Board of Trustees was Ora L. Evans, Edgar Boardway, Laurence A. Peabody, Stuart E. Hayes and Louise Chapman. By-laws were adopted in view of possible future incorporation.

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## History of the Dover-Foxcroft Historical Society (continued from page 7)

It was voted that the immediate project of the society was to undertake the restoration and preservation of the Parsons Blacksmith Shop. Plans were made for the purchase of the shop from owners Francis and Vergie Nelson. A committee was formed to undertake a survey of the shop and address the immediate needs. This committee consisted of John A. Glover, Robert Shapleigh, Mr. Peabody and Mr. Dunham.

An advertising window display was arranged by Ralph and Louise Chapman and Mrs. Flora H. Mayo at the former Western Auto Store. Several items of historic significance were displayed in the window, with the articles being changed from time to time.

The objectives of the society were to collect and preserve whatever will tend to illustrate any civil, military, ecclesiastical and natural item of history, especially to the Town of Dover-Foxcroft, the county and the state.

An invitation went out to any interested citizen to join the society. The dues were set at \$2.00 a year. Meetings would be held on the first Tuesday of each month at Central Hall.

On June 15, 1964, a deed was signed by all parties: The Dover-Foxcroft Historical Society, J. Francis Nelson and Vergie A. Nelson, and the Bangor Savings Bank, passing the ownership of the blacksmith shop to the Society.



In September of 1964, fundraising for the shop began in earnest as the Dover-Foxcroft Historical Society launched its “hammer and tongs” fund drive to secure finances for the purchase and restoration of the Parsons Blacksmith Shop. A small bank loan of \$400 was obtained. Negotiations were ongoing with the Nelsons and the deed executed.

Immediate repairs were necessary before the onset of winter. Now the “fire” of enthusiasm must be “kindled in the old forge” – but currency and not coal is the needed fuel!

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Donations started to arrive. Besides the dollars needed many items were given. In October, work began on the old building. The work of straightening beams and making the building plumb was done under the supervision of Albert Pennington. Weathered boards donated by the Rev. Wilson Hickham were used to repair the roof and Robert Weymouth and son applied cedar wood shingles.

A former resident of the neighborhood, Alonzo Pfundtner of Guilford, offered to build a door for the shop. There were donations of 9 x 13 glass for the windows but there was still need of six over six window frames. The windows were temporarily boarded up for the winter as volunteers set and glazed the glass and painted the frames.

An ox sling, used for shoeing unruly oxen, originally made in this same Parsons Shop was donated by Willis Gilman and conveyed back to the premises through the kindness of George Meade. This ox-lifter was patented in 1858 by Joseph M. Bachelor. A newspaper advertisement of that year states that by the use of the lifter "any ox, however stubborn, can be shod, without any of the hard labor usually attending the raising of the feet, as the worst cases can be handled by the shoer with perfect ease and without injury to the ox". Mrs. Elizabeth Kimball gave the Society an old-time pung (a low box sled pulled by one horse) and several small articles for display at the shop. Other tools, plows and harrows of early origin were shown. "Billheads" of the Cooperative Blacksmith Company of 1883 were found on the premises and were put on display.

Many hours were given by Robert Shapleigh as he sorted through the old iron and salvaged that which was pertinent to the project. A crew from Foxcroft Academy attacked the yard armed with brush cutters to clear the grounds for spring landscaping.

By July 4<sup>th</sup> 1966, the Dover-Foxcroft Historical Society was ready for an open house. Richard E. Boone, Sr., local blacksmith, demonstrated the techniques of forge work on the old forge and made souvenir horseshoes which were available for a nominal fee. This was an opportunity for people to view the shop and relive a bit of the past and observe some of the activity of the early trade of blacksmithing. Harold Ruksznis donated the large horseshoe which for many years hung outside the Charles M. Deyone blacksmith shop on Summer Street to hang in front of the museum. The open house was deemed a success as over 200 persons attended.

These are the early years of the Dover-Foxcroft Historical Society. I thank Madelyn Betts who shared her memories with me on a very cold Tuesday afternoon. At 101 years of age, her mind is amazing!

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## Annual Dues

Many thanks to all those who have sent in their Historical Society dues for 2014. We really appreciate having you as a member. If you haven't sent in your dues yet, please do so now so you can continue to enjoy all of the benefits of membership in the Historical Society, including receiving copies of the *Conserver*.

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### The Dover-Foxcroft Historical Society – Membership Application Form

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

Street: \_\_\_\_\_ City/State/Zip \_\_\_\_\_

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

Annual dues are \$10 per person and \$7.00 for senior memberships. Please make checks payable to: Dover-Foxcroft Historical Society, 874 West Main Street, Dover-Foxcroft, ME 04426. Dues cover January to December. If you are giving a gift membership, please include the name and address and we'll gladly notify the recipient of your gift.

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History of Dover-Foxcroft (Continued from Page 9)

We will continue the saga of the Dover-Foxcroft Historical Society in the next couple of issues.

We plan to celebrate our 50<sup>th</sup> birthday on July 4<sup>th</sup> at the Blacksmith Shop Museum. Presently under construction is a small building next to the shop which will enable us to invite blacksmiths to come and share their trade. It will be the grand opening for the building which will be named "Dunham Forge". We hope you put the date on your calendar and can join us for the festivities.



The Interior of the Blacksmith Shop

### Message from Mary

Our first issue of 2014! We are still in the middle of Winter – lots of snow and cold temperatures – but the sun seems warmer and the days longer. Maybe there WILL be Spring eventually.

This is the quiet time of year. The faithful group of volunteers still appear at the Observer Building each Thursday. We have taken down the Civil War exhibit in the back room and will be replacing it with a WWI exhibit. If anyone has photos of family members in WWI uniforms, we would love a copy. We would like to do a “wall of honor” like we did for our WWII soldiers. Stay warm and safe. I am looking forward to crocuses and daffodils!

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#### Our Corporate Sponsors

A grateful thank you to the following businesses whose funds support the Society and its efforts to preserve our history. When you shop or see these folks, please tell them ‘thank you’ for their support!

Ellen Anderson, D.P.M.

Family Eyecare

Green Door Gallery

Lary Funeral Home

Maine Highlands Federal C/U

Mallett Real Estate

Pleasant River Lumber

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#### Items Available

We thank Bob’s Home and Garden on Lincoln Street for stocking our ornaments and DVD’s. Please stop by their store and support this local business.

Glass Christmas ornaments: \$6.00 each (add \$4.00 for shipping)

2008 – Blacksmith Shop

2009 – Observer Building

2010 – Central Hall

2011 – Thompson Free Library

2012 – Foxcroft Academy

2013 – The Blethen House

2014 – Pleasant Street School

DVD’s :

Glimpses of Dover and Foxcroft - \$10.00 (add \$3.00 for shipping)

Memories of Central Hall/Lou Stevens - \$15.00 (add \$3.00 for shipping)

Dover-Foxcroft throws: \$40.00 (add \$8.00 for shipping)

**Thank you all!**

#### Work Day at the Historical Society

Thursdays are almost always work days at the Historical Society. We generally start work at about 10:00 and work from two to four or five hours. If you are interested in joining us for an interesting and enjoyable day working with good friends, contact Mary for more information.

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