

# THE SHIRETOWN CONSERVER

*The Dover-Foxcroft Historical Society Newsletter*

Volume 2, Number 4

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## DAILY LIFE WAS A STRUGGLE FOR FIRST SETTLERS

*by Jim Annis*

Having been an 18th century reenactor since 1975, I look at Dover-Foxcroft in a different way than most people do. I like to envision the town with the eyes of a visitor who lived 200 years ago.

Of course, Dover and Foxcroft weren't settled until 1803 and then only by one family, Eli Towne, his wife and their 13 month old son.

Like me, most people are curious: What did they eat? What did they wear? What did they live in? Why did they do it? What did they gain?

These are very real questions and only by research into 18th century documents dealing with colonial life can we gather some facts to obtain the answers. This kind of documentation is rare, because any individual who kept a diary or log about their daily life during that period didn't consider the above questions important enough to document. It would use up precious ink, pen and paper, and time. Their logs usually dealt with everyday occurrences.

In Lou Stevens book *Dover-Foxcroft: A History*, he reports that Eli Towne raised corn and potatoes in East Dover. These staples, along with game taken from the surrounding forests,

could easily provide sustenance for his family. The potatoes would be stored in a root cellar, the corn dried, and the game dried or salted in barrels. This was the only form of food storage recognized in the 18th century. Canning didn't come along until the 19th century.

Living quarters for the first year would, more likely than not, be nothing more than a large area dug into the ground with a roof of timbers and sod to keep out the weather. Later on, a more substantial building of logs, wood rafters and wooden shingles would be built.

Generally in the center of the building there would be a very large stump which served as a table — and with the constant insistence of his "dear wife," a man could build a floor of wooden planks or half-round logs, which would replace the dirt floor she had to endure for so long. This addition would make sweeping the floor more productive, as you can plainly see.

Keeping in mind that clothing of the period didn't come from a local department store, we wonder how the settlers made the clothing they brought with them last. If a person were lucky, he or she had replacement

clothing, but very little more. Clothing of the period was made from linen or wool, spun on spinning wheels and loomed into fabric. This was a long and tedious process requiring many hours of labor and the time spent was fit into and around other necessary work.

Despite the many demands of farm life and unrelenting, tedious chores, families who traveled into the heart of Maine found the freedom to determine their own futures unbounded by communal urban life.



## WANTED!

❖ A very generous member willing to donate money to allow the Historical Society to carpet the first two rooms in The Observer Building. The carpet there is in sad, sad repair; its seams are held down by tape.

We have received a quote of approximately \$850 required to install new commercial carpet ❖

## Can You Help?



## MESSAGE FROM MARY

Things are looking great at The Observer Building. It now has a new coat of paint outside — white with green trim. The building certainly looks nice and stands out at the head of Union Square. We have given the second room inside two coats of paint, a neutral creamy beige, thanks to volunteer labor. This winter we are planning to set up permanent displays.

Last summer, The Observer Building was officially listed on The National Register of Historic Places. The nomination went through quickly and without a hitch. The Register must feel our building deserves this honor.

We now wind down our activities for 1998 and will spend this quiet time working in the museum, organizing and cataloging. Many wonderful items came our way this year.

We would love to hear from all our members with ideas, stories and articles for our newsletter, *The Shiretown Conserver*. Your input makes the newsletter interesting. ❖



### Nathaniel Hopkin's Brick Store

by Madelyn C. Betts

According to the deeds recorded at the Piscataquis County Court House, on August 14, 1834, John Bradbury purchased land "partly in Dover and partly in Foxcroft" — the Piscataquis River is *not* the boundary between the two towns — with the stipulation that if Stevens paid Mr. Bradbury for three notes totaling \$320 plus interest "this deed would be void." There was no mention of a building in this deed.

Obviously Mr. Bradbury retained possession, for on March 14, 1839, he sold the property to Nathaniel Hopkins, who had begun business the previous year. This was a "half acre more or less together with the store and shop thereon standing."

It is said of Mr. Hopkins that if as many as three customers were in his store at the same time, he was so disturbed and nervous that he would tell one or two of them to go to Frank Dearborn's store across the street. But in spite of that handicap he did a successful business and became well off. He retired from business in 1871 when W.T. Elliott advertised in *The Piscataquis Observer*, in March of that year, that he had taken the store.

On December 12, 1870, in view of his retirement, Mr. Hopkin sold the property to George Meder for \$2,575, "reserving to said Mr. Hopkins the use of his garden for cultivation without rent so long as he occupied his present homestead." Possibly this was the rent over the store.

George Meder conveyed title to Olney Higgins on June 13, 1907. At that time, the store was occupied by L.B. Poole, a clothing merchant. On May 19, 1911, Mr. Higgins sold the property to George Babson, and in 1920 the building passed to the ownership of Wilbur E. Barney "by right of dower title by decent" from William C. Woodbury and Mrs. Mary Whittredge.

From that time on to 1951, the building was occupied by the grocery store of Wilbur E. Barney and Company. Then George Stacy purchased the grocery, continuing the business. R. J. Koritsky purchased it in 1961. In 1983, Harold Preble bought the building for his radio shop, and so ownership came eventually to Charles Fitzgerald. Today, it houses the Dover House of Pizza.

What would Mr. Nathaniel Hopkins think today? ❖



### EAST END RESTAURANT,

—AND—

### OYSTER SALOON,

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DOVER, MAINE.

Meals, lunches, and Oysters, served at all  
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N. B. OYSTERS by Plat or Qt.

CHAS. J. BOYNTON, Prop'r.  
Dover, Dec. 25, 1873.



ALONZO Z. PARSONS,



Camp Wapahank Station

April the 30<sup>th</sup> 1864

Co. B, 20th Regt. Me. Vols.

Dear Mother

Thinking perhaps

you would like to hear a word from me before  
we leave, I will try to find you a few lines

for I can't tell when I shall get a chance  
to write you again for I don't know where.

we shall be in a few days from now, or what  
we have got to go through, we little can tell  
or know, what we may have to suffer, but

whether I am in good spirits, I have suffered a good  
deal for my country and I am willing to

suffer more, and that has been my prayer

this spring, to feel willing to suffer all  
that is required of me to suffer even if it  
is death, & I hope I shall meet it with  
joy and not with grief, that I will feel  
willing to give my life cheerfully if it be  
to be get life is sweet and we seem to try  
to it yet God knows best tis he that giveth

I am sorry to say, there is a great deal of wickedness  
carried on in the army, there is a great deal of sin  
I we need your prayers at home let my child  
of God pray for us, and pray in faith, as you  
cannot be with us, to comfort, and support us in  
the remaining struggle that is soon to come  
off, yet you can pray for us and pray for our  
country, daily, dear Mother I feel to go forth  
to battle, putting my trust in God and give  
deed fit to spare my life and bring me out  
safe thanks to his great and holy name, but if  
~~it should be my lot to fall upon the battle~~  
field and to give my life for my country can  
I don't mean for me dear Mother & Mother, but  
thank God you had a son to give in so good  
an noble a cause as <sup>our</sup> ~~the~~ we are engaged in  
but remember my dear wife and children, may God  
bless them and be with them, & God spare my  
life for their sakes if it can please them, but  
if not I hope soon to meet them in heaven  
and meet you all, where fasting is no more.  
So may the blessings of God ever rest  
upon you all, and may you last days  
upon earth prove to be your happiness.

Yours is from your dear son

ALONZO Z. PARSONS.

and that he that taketh away, we little know what is for the best, but there is one that submitteth all things, and if we put our trust in him all will be well; dear Father I enjoy my mind first rate this spring, I have tried to live near God and serve him as I had opportunity, but it is a hard trying place for a Christian surrounded with evils and sins of all kinds. ~~There is no Chaplain yet with us, but we should~~ our little prayer meetings every evening and there is quite a interest felt, there is some I think met with a change and quite a number that was going astray have been brought back unto the fold of Christy we should be glad to have a Chaplain to help us on in this little work, but as we cannot we must try and do something ourselves and with Gods help I hope our little meetings will be the means of doing some good, which I feel to hope and trust they have, pray for us dear Father, and tell the Church to remember us in their prayers. Tell them they are not forgotten, I should like to be with them, but as I cannot they

will ever be remembered in my prayers, and I hope and pray they may ever prosper and grow in grace and in the strength and knowledge of Jesus Christ, remember me in your prayer and remember us all, who are far away from our homes a fighting the battles of our beloved Country and pray for our bleeding Country that God may crown us with success and give us the victory over our enemies, and may peace soon be restored to our now distracted Nation. we feel the need of your prayers at the present time, as we are about now to go into battle O may the God of battles go with us, and may we put our trust in him, and look to him for help, for we know not what we may have to pass through, for some must fall and we know not who it may be, how many there are in the full enjoyment of health now will soon be cut down in a moments time, and their dear homes made desolate by this cruel war, but O are we prepared to meet death, that is the question, O I fear there are many that are not; there are some living very wicked in the army

## SOUTH DOVER MEETING HOUSE

The first church was organized June 20, 1818, then the only church organization in the town of Dover, and consisted of only six members. The first settled pastor of the church was Elder Nathaniel Robinson in 1822. Under his care, the church grew very rapidly. At one time, the members numbered more than seventy. The church was connected with the Penobscot Baptist Association, and members held meetings in Isaac Lambert's barn.

In the year 1838, a meeting house was erected and finished on the outside, completed the next year, and dedicated in September 1839.

In 1826, a Free Baptist Church was organized in the same neighborhood, having bought one-half of the meeting house and the congregations used it alternately, each having preaching one-half the time.

Information was compiled by the late Mary Averill, librarian at Thompson Free Library. ❖

## TEST YOUR MAINE LINGO

Can you match these words to their correct meanings?

- |           |  |
|-----------|--|
| 1. shrub  | a. Metal pin used to shorten a chain.  |
| 2. drover | b. Also called a "withe" — the knotty birch sprout used to lick unruly young scholars.                                   |
| 3. jag    | c. Cattle buyer who bought herds of cattle and flocks of sheep from farmers and drove them over the highways to market.  |
| 4. pistol | d. Small wooden pail; might hold just enough blueberries to make a pie.  |
| 5. ferule | e. Load of firewood packed so tightly in the wagon that one more piece would slide off.                                  |
| 6. piggin | f. Thick flour pudding full of raisens or plums and steamed or boiled; also means something extra or a little different. |
| 7. loom   | g. Small child's sled, sometimes a barrel stave rigged with a seat.  |
| 8. fid    | h. Temperance drink, usually from raspberries, sugar, vinegar and cool spring water.                                     |
| 9. jumper | i. Lobster that has lost its claw, or both its claws.  |
| 10. duff  | j. Loam. It's that rich top-soil you spread on your lawn.  |



### ❖❖❖ Dedication ❖❖❖

Greeley's new hotel will be open to the public on Wednesday evening next. There will be a grand ball in the evening to which the proprietor invites all dancers and the public to attend. The name of the hotel will be known as The American House, the landlord Mr. H.N. Greeley.

This announcement appeared in *The Piscataquis Observer*, October 27, 1870. Today, Rowell's Garage stands on The American House site.

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## ORDER YOUR 1999 HISTORICAL TOWN CALENDARS TODAY!

- ✓ All new *OLD* photos of downtown and in-town Dover-Foxcroft.
- ✓ Features annotated dates important to the town's historic past.
- ✓ Space for your own notes, appointments, and family birthdays.
- ✓ Third annual issue of an historic collector's item supports society projects.

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The Dover-Foxcroft Historical Society, Inc.  
10 Orchard Road  
Dover-Foxcroft, ME 04426

Also available in Dover-Foxcroft at the Chamber of Commerce, Dave's World, Mr. Paperback, and Thompson Free Library.

## A LETTER TO FATHER — 1864

On April 30, 1864, Alonzo Z. Parsons wrote to his father from Camp Rappahannock Station, Virginia. Records show Parsons belonged to the 12th Regiment Maine Volunteers. This past summer, Clarence and Barbara Herrick of Guilford donated Parson's original letter to the historical society. We want to share it with you.

Of the spring of 1864, Civil War historian Geoffrey C. Ward has written, "Beginning on the old Chancellorsville battlefield on May 5, and continuing without a break for the six bloodiest weeks of the war, Grant tried again and again to get around the right flank of Lee's army, destroy it, then move on to Richmond and end the

war. And again and again, Lee saw what he was trying to do and managed to thwart him. The struggle continued along a 100 mile crescent before the two exhausted armies settled in for a siege at Petersburg, southeast of (Richmond)... When Grant reached Spotsylvania (on May 5), Lee was waiting for him."

One Union veteran remembered May 11 simply as "the most terrible day I have ever lived."

General Horace Porter wrote: "Trees over a foot and a half in diameter were cut completely in two by the incessant musketry... We had not only shot down an army, we had shot down a forest." The two armies lost 12,000 men at Spotsylvania.

Alonzo was killed on May 17, 1864, just 17 days after writing the letter. He was 28 years old.



### Check Your Checkbook!

Does your check register show payment of your 1998-99 dues to the Dover-Foxcroft Historical Society? If not, you are now *overdue*. On April 1, 1999, \$3 membership dues for 1999-2000 will be due.



*Lingo answers: 1.-h., 2.-c., 3.-e., 4.-i, 5.-b., 6.-d., 7.-j., 8.-a., 9.-g., 10.-f. ◆*

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