

THE SHIRETOWN CONSERVER

The Dover-Foxcroft Historical Society Newsletter

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The Kimball Family and Their Store

by Louis E. Stevens

From the time that Charles Kimball opened his general store in Merrick Square in 1839 until Elizabeth Kimball closed it 135 years later in 1974, steady customers made it the longest running business in the town operated by members of the same family.

Today, the name Kimball in Dover-Foxcroft is still part of a business name in Chase & Kimball, 160 years after Charles began selling goods in 1839. The building in which his store was located is now the site of Cahill's Sporting Goods. The back of the building was also the Kimball home.

The obituary of the first Charles Kimball, who died November 5, 1878, at his home, did not say exactly when or where he was born, but he must have been in his early 60's anyway, for the report said he was clerk in Athens, Maine, before he was 21, and that he came to Dover from there in 1838. So add the 40 and the 21, and a guess makes him a bit over 60.

He began a co-partnership in 1838 with Danville Bryant, but Mr. Kimball became sole owner of the store in 1839. The obituary writer, maybe editor George Edes of *The Observer*, knew him well. He

said that Mr. Kimball was a "man of integrity," a "most prominent citizen," who has an "honorable business career."

When his son Frederick died March 31, 1926, the headline over his obituary in the *Observer* said:

ANOTHER OLD TIME
MERCHANT HAS DIED

F. L. Kimball
Had Longest Store Life
of Any Man in Town

This was all true as Frederick was 83 at the time and had been tending store for 60 straight years until just a few weeks before his death.

He was born on Christmas Day, December 25, 1843. When he was 17 he first started to clerk for his father in 1860, but four years later, now 21, he and two other Dover boys, Chauncey Cochrane and Ben Lovell, enlisted in the United States Navy and served until the end of the Civil War in 1865. The trio became separated and Frederick eventually was stationed on a gunboat patrolling the St. John River in Florida. His bookkeeping ability, obviously learned during his years of clerking, got him the job of being in charge of the ship's stores.

After his discharge, he returned to his father's store to

start his long career of 60 years in the building where he was born. He assumed ownership of the store when his father died in 1878. During his lifetime, he served the town of Dover as auditor, and when the Water District was incorporated in 1903, he was elected a member of the board, keeping that position until shortly before his death.

His brother Charles had died in 1862, and sister Annie in 1911; his wife, whom he married in 1879, died in 1924, and their one daughter had died in 1906. So, he was survived by his one son Charles. Frederick was buried in the family lot in Dover cemetery.

Charles Edwin Kimball, named for his grandfather, was born in Dover on January 25, 1886. He attended the local schools and was graduated from Hebron Academy before attending the University of Maine for a year. Then he began his store career with his father.

In 1815, when Charles was 29, he and Charles Chase formed the company of Chase & Kimball to sell Ford cars. It would be one of the oldest agencies in Maine for the Ford Motor Company. And starting in 1929,

Continued on next page

MESSAGE FROM MARY:

We are well into a new year. 1998!!! This should be a very busy year for the Dover-Foxcroft Historical Society as we look ahead to getting our new museum off and running.

This winter we had to cope with fuel bills, electrical bills, sewer bills, and telephone bills. These are expenses not incurred at the Blacksmith Shop Museum's simpler building. Your directors met several times in November, December and March to assess the needs of the Observer Building. Insulation and new windows would help control heating bills. Renovations are needed to the inside of the building. The insurance company says some of the electrical needs to be updated. Next summer the building should get a new coat of paint. We need to address grants for fundraising.

The Society is collecting items for display. We will be working toward a grand opening, tentatively scheduled for July 4th. Any and all volunteers would be welcome. Even if you can help with just one or two tasks, please let us know. We promise not to overburden you.

The Society is moving forward and we need your input and support.



In 1869, Dyer & Hughes built their first melodians, then organs and pianos. One order to Australia was for 40 organs, shipped in water tight boxes lined with tin.



Kimball's Store.

the firm acted as commission agents for the Texas Company for Piscataquis county and part of Penobscot.

Death came suddenly to Mr. Kimball at age 59 on November 30, 1944, while he and a group of friends were hunting in the Mooresville section of Katahdin Iron Works. He had returned from hunting for a time, and upon entering the camp remarked that he has never felt as tired and died instantly.

He was survived by his wife, the former Elizabeth Brown, and two children, Charles E. Kimball and Mary Cary Kimball.

Now for the last 30 years of its existence of 135 years, from 1839 to 1974, the F. L. Kimball store would be operated by a woman, Mrs. Elizabeth Kimball, who still found time to devote many years to outside interests. She was a trustee of Foxcroft Academy, being secretary of the board for 25 years; she was a member of the Executive Committee of the Thompson Free Library for 25 years; had served as clerk of the Universalist Church; and at her death was the oldest member of the Cosmopolitan Club, having been president and secretary.

Mrs. Kimball was born Elizabeth Brown on November 28, 1884, in Glenburn, but came to Dover later and attended schools here, then the Westbrook Seminary in Portland, from which she was graduated in 1903. After teaching school in Abbot, she was employed by the *Observer* for some years. She passed away on April 13, 1979, at the age of 94. Those who recall shopping at her store will remember the quietness of the shop, the displays of beautiful gifts, and how graciously customers were treated by the owner, for whom the word "gentlewoman" was a most apt description.

When the Kimball store closed, only the *Observer* had been in business longer of any concern in the town, and that by just a year. It is interesting to note that the newspaper, then called the Herald, first occupied the second floor of the Kimball building when George Edes started it in 1838. Folks named Patten owned the building then. ❀

Schedule of Events - 1998

April 1	Annual Meeting and a picture I.D. party.
May 6	"A River Unites Them" - Rusty Willette & Foxcroft Academy students report on the making of a video history.
June 3	"Dan Neal: canoe maker, hunter, trapper and guide from Rural Grove" by Madelyn Betts
July 4	Grand Opening of The Observer Building Museum (the date is tentative)
Aug. 2	D-F "Homecoming" Day Open House
Sept. 2	Cemetery Tour by Lou Stevens. Meet at 6 p.m.
Oct. 7	"The Making of Oral Histories and Genealogies"

Note: All meetings, unless otherwise noted, are held at 7 p.m., Wednesday, at the Central Maine Power building on the corner of Park Street and Mechanic Avenue.

Some Business Trades Established in 19th Century Dover and Foxcroft

- 1812 Saw mill, north of falls: produced clapboards & boards
- 1823 Eli Towne/East Dover: sawmill
Deacon Barker: clapboard mill
- 1826 Sawmill on South Street side of river
- 1837 Sawyer & Gifford: hardware & paints
- 1844 Foxcroft Slate Quarry: supplied the new Court House
- 1850 D.M. Whittredge: wallpaper & paints
- 1853 Harris Lumber Yard: pine boards, clear boards, doors, sashes, window frames, planed boards
- 1857 B.F. Sands/Foxcroft: 160,000 bricks for Mayo Hall
- 1886 Dr. C.C.Hall & H.J. & H.E. Dexter establish plant on Union Street: mfr. "finishing lumber & lumber of all dimensions"
- 1890 J.H. Steward & Sons/Foxcroft: hardware & building supplies
- 1895 H.K. Farnham: mfr. building materials

Community Trade Shows

Among the community's regular and lively entertainments in the last half of the 19th century were carnivals and trade shows. Mary Chandler Lowell describes, from her notes, the costumes at one such sprightly affair.

"At one, Ethel Knowles represented W.A. Pratt Groceries — dress of blue serge with cracker panel, clothes pin girdle, bracelets of coffee, necklace of cut sugar, cap of black trimmed with oyster crackers, pearl tapioca and pea beans, banner, U.S. Flag with broom as standard; Grace Buck, representing E.S. Favor, Stoves and Tinware — dress of white albatross, with panel decorations of elegant drawings of all kinds and silver knives, forks and spoons, epauletts (sic) of burnished wire and necklace of wire tea strainers, copper tea-kettle for a handbag, elegant turban hat of tin and tinfoil with plumes of burnished tin, banner of electric blue plush with tin letters, fringe of colored and white lamp pendants, burnished tin standard with elaborately decorated top; Ella Kittredge, National and Savings Bank — dress of light blue crepe trimmed on one side with bank checks, waist covered with coins, necklace and bracelets of checks, blue cap with fringe of coins and decorated with quills, pink sash tied on one side, in her belt a .38 caliber revolver. Banner, a thousand dollar bond, lined with plush, handsomely decorated with ornaments." ❀

Reprinted from Old Foxcroft by Dr. Mary Chandler Lowell, 1935.



19th Century Building Trade by Helen Streeter Kelly

Nathaniel Chamberlain, a bridge builder by trade famous for his beam work, built the first bridge over the Piscataquis River in 1820. Besides being influential in the incorporation of Foxcroft, "Chamberlain was a craftsman of impressive talents responsible for many of the sturdy and graceful homes in town."

Another local craftsman, Ira Whittier started building when very young and was considered a "most excellent workman in the field of carpentry and cabinet making" as well as a successful farmer. He built homes at the rate of three or four each year.

Only 29 new homes were built in town between 1832 and 1842, and many of those belonged to sons of the pioneer families. In fact, the national tax assessment shows that in 1800, there were close to 600 thousand dwellings in the United States. By 1850, the national assessment showed well over 3 million, statistics that parallel the growth of central Maine. A hundred and fifty years ago, most Piscataquis County homes weren't created by scholarly professionals or ordinary householders, but by a number of local skilled craftsmen. Contracts simply read "to be constructed in a workmanlike manner." A workmanlike manner implied the use of skill learned through some sort of apprenticeship or indenture.

Although Dover and Foxcroft had at least two skilled builders in 1850, many local builders were country carpenters who worked mostly at trades and built a house or two each year, men who combined the work with farming, cabinet making, or coopering, and built only a few structures in a lifetime. ❀

George Babson, Businessman and Philanthropist

by Louis E. Stevens

Readers who borrow lots of books at the Thompson Free Library have surely noticed that many volumes contain the information on the bookplate that the "Babson Fund" provided the money to purchase them. But who was "Babson?" A Miss, Mrs. or Mr.?

He was George J. Babson, who like so many other men whose financial success here in Dover and Foxcroft enabled them to bequeath considerable sums of money to worthy causes such as the library, churches, the hospital, and Foxcroft Academy, were not native sons, but moved here from their birthplaces to acquire wealth.

At the time of his death on June 13, 1922, he was about 67 (no exact date of birth was given in his obituary in *The Observer*), having been born in Brooksville in April of 1855. He came to Foxcroft at age 32 in 1887, to open a shoe and boot store on Lincoln Street. When the railroad extension from Dexter to Foxcroft was completed two years later in 1889, making the shipping of goods easy to and from this town and to and from the rest of New England as they didn't need to go via the way of Bangor anymore, Mr. Babson's sharp business instincts told him to establish a coal and wood yard by the tracks on North Street. The wood shelter held 150 cords and the coal yard 687 tons.

This business proved to be such a success that five years later in 1894, he quit the shoe store to concentrate on the pulp wood business which had grown from 2,000 cords a year to nearly 20,000 with much of it being cut on timberlands he had acquired.

Other harvested timber from his own lands and what he purchased from other men included wood for railroad ties, posts, and telegraph poles. In 1894, he shipped 1,000 cords of poplar, until then a worthless tree, to excelsior plants which made curled shreds of wood for stuffing for furniture and mattresses.

He was injured in a railroad accident in 1895, so took Augustus Gilman, owner of a large farm on outer Park Street, into Babson & Company as co-partner. Later, in 1904, Lyman Lee, former principal at Foxcroft Academy, became treasurer of the newly formed Dover & Foxcroft Fuel Co., with Babson as president. Their costs of shipping lumber and having coal brought here

amounts to hundreds of dollars a month for freight charges by the local railroad, and their payroll to farmers and their teams was equally enormous. One ad in *The Observer* said the company wanted 5,000 cords of just poplar.

The writer of his obituary in *The Observer*, probably Liston Evans, said, "Mr. Babson's business success can be attributed to at least three things — his keen insight into the value of property, the habit of thinking his business moves out carefully, and a methodical way of keeping his affairs well in hand."

But unfortunately, in 1912 at about age 57, it was necessary for him to seek warmer weather in the winter due to bronchial problems. So he bought a home in Leesburg, Va., where he passed the winters with his wife (the former Jessie Oakes, sister of Louis, Myrtice, Sir. Harry, and Gertrude Oakes) and their children.

Long before he left the library money in a trust fund, he helped it for many years delivering a year's supply of coal starting in 1904. Five years after his death, the library received a fund of \$10,000 from his estate with the income to be used to purchase works of fiction. His will stipulated that ". . . purchases with this Fund shall have the usual or special label, and in addition to that, the word 'Fiction' and also 'Babson Fund'. . ."

He also left a fund from which boys who graduated from Foxcroft Academy could borrow money for their college education, paying only the interest each year until they started working when repaying the principal started. This fund is still available and is utilized yearly by boys. It is administered by the town.



We the undersigned agree to pay the amount set against our several names for the purpose of raising a sufficient sum to defray the expenses which must be incurred to prevent the removal of the Shiretown from Dover to Dexter.

J. G. Mayo	\$2.00	J. W. Loud	.50
J. S. Wiley	1.00	E. S. Wade	1.00
S. W. Hall	1.00	McCombs	1.00
C. S. Lougee	.50	F. G. Parsons	.50
Blethen Bros.	.50	Sam Edes	1.00
Davis & Roberts	1.00	S. & C. Norton	1.00

EVEN GUARDIAN ANGELS NEED TO KNOW THE DATE

We are asking for your help. Our only fund raiser, at this time, is the Historical Society calendar. If you haven't already purchased one for yourself, or given one as a gift, please consider it. You will contribute greatly toward providing your hometown with a showplace sheltering the artifacts and memorabilia of its history.

A lot of work requiring funding is necessary to put the museum into acceptable condition for the public opening we've tentatively set for July 4th.

Our insurance holder demands this before we can open to the public. The cost of up-keeping the Observer Building is draining our funds. Membership dues are just not keeping up with the bills. If every member were to purchase only one of the society's calendars, this would help immeasurably toward our goals.

We want to provide Dover-Foxcroft and its visitors with a secure place for the town's history. Until the society's Directors can obtain grants or other means of funding, your most welcome membership dues — along with our historical calendar — are the only source of revenue .

✍ Please send me _____ calendars @ \$5.00 each.

Add \$1.24 to cover postage.

✍ Enclosed is my payment in the amount of \$_____.

Send calendar requests to:

Jim Annis

10 Orchard Road

Dover-Foxcroft, ME 04426

These calendars are annotated with local past events and the old photos perforated so you can mail the pictures later as postcards. It's fun to look back to the days when *all* the roads were muddy, to a time when ox carts and horses and feet were the only means of transportation. Imagine mud season!

Thank you so much for your help.

Jim Annis, Treasurer



Your editor is feeling a bit like the White Rabbit in *Alice in Wonderland*, running late — very late indeed. **Dues are due April 1**, and I haven't allowed you much time to respond. We'll accept dues anytime you would like to send them, but it would be especially helpful if you would mail your check today.

The Dover-Foxcroft Historical Society's annual dues remain at \$3.00 per person per year and are a continuing bargain at that price. Every membership household will receive a copy of our newsletter, *The Shiretown Conserver*, mailed four times a year. Any amount tendered above the \$3.00 will be considered a donation and is tax deductible. Please accept our thanks!

My check payable to *The Dover-Foxcroft Historical Society, Inc.*, in the amount of \$_____ is enclosed.

MEMBER'S NAME _____

MAILING ADDRESS _____

CITY/STATE _____ ZIPCODE _____

Please mail ✉ to: Dover-Foxcroft Historical Society, Inc.
c/o Madelyn Betts, Secretary
11 Harrison Avenue
Dover-Foxcroft, ME 04426

Our History is Almost "In the Can"

Did you live in Dover-Foxcroft before 1930? Do you know an old-timer who lived in the times or remembers parents' or grandparents' stories of life along the Piscataquis River in town during the years from 1890 to 1930? We would like to know his or her name. It is important to capture their stories on our history video.

Three social studies and computer technology classes at Foxcroft Academy are working on "A River Unites Them," a video project we co-sponsor with FA and Thompson Free Library, under the auspices of the Maine Humanities Council's *Century Project*. Rusty Willette, head of FA's Social Studies department,

works with Jeff Valence, the school's technology coordinator, to direct and edit student effort. He says the student historians have nearly completed their research and have taped five interviews now "in the can." The next step is the video script. They are working toward "a wrap."

Old photographs, diaries, letters, or interesting items to use as background illustration for the story tellers' tales are needed. Video-shy folk might consider letting the students tape their remembrances on cassette to complement the still picture portions of the video tape.

Are you an out-of-towner who would like to participate? Call Helen Kelly at 207-564-8508, or Rusty Willette at 207-564-8351. Time is of the essence.

Century Project Honor Roll

At a Century Project Honor Roll ceremony and exhibition held February 10 in Augusta, the Historical Society and co-sponsors FA and Thompson Free Library were recognized, along with 40 other organizations, for our participation in the Community History Grant Program.

The Century Project: Modern Times in Maine and America, 1890-1930 was created, with special funds from the National Endowment for the Humanities, to provide Maine people with an opportunity to look back and take stock on the eve of the 21st century. ❀

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