

# THE SHIRETOWN CONSERVER

*The Dover-Foxcroft Historical Society Newsletter*

Volume 3, Number 1

Spring, 1999

## Dyer & Hughes: Manufacturer of Organs and Pianos

*By Mary Annis*

Dyer & Hughes, a world renowned manufacturer of organs and pianos, had its beginnings in 1866 in Foxcroft, Maine, when Thomas F. Dyer and his nephew, Mr. Hughes, started a partnership that was to last many decades. They purchased a building on Lincoln Street where the A. W. Gilman Store would later be located. An ad appeared in the *Piscataquis Observer* on April 18, 1867, telling of their intent to manufacture organs and melodeons.

The company grew and they soon had to build a factory on Mechanic Street and had to further expand to cover more than three acres with eight separate buildings — all devoted to different facets of the industry. Over 50 workers were employed.

In the beginning, only the wooden cases for the organs were made at the factory with the mechanical insides being purchased and installed; however, this changed in 1884 with the addition of new machinery. Most materials came from the surrounding forests, but black walnut was brought from Tennessee and whitewood from the west.

The prices of the organs started at \$65 to \$400 for the

inexpensive models, with more elegant models ranging from \$1000 to \$1500. Sales were made in every state. Later, models were shipped to Burma, Australia, England, and Germany, just to mention a few destinations. Dyer & Hughes was growing rapidly and had agencies selling their products in Portland, Boston, and New York. By 1888 they had built 36,000 organs.

In 1890 Dyer & Hughes began to manufacture and ship pianos. In 1894 Mr. Hughes closed the organ business to concentrate his efforts on the pianos. The company was soon shipping seven units a week. As Mr. Dyer had left the company for health reasons, the piano business became "Hughes & Son."

The pianos had an excellent reputation to which this letter will attest:

*"I was called to tune a piano for Mr. Freese and was surprised to find that it came from the far Atlantic coast. Well, I must tell you something about this piano. It went through a big forest fire last summer, laid out in the woods two months, then in a barn for a long time.*

*How this happened was that the fire destroyed Mr. Freese's home and ten men rescued the piano,*

*carried it over logs, stumps, and through fire and smoke to a safe place, then after being left in the forest and a barn for three months, it was removed to Mr. Freese's temporary home.*

*In a short time, another move had to be made, as he is a locomotive engineer. The house was placed on a flat car, and in going around a curve, it toppled over and fell crashing to the ground, the piano tearing a hole through the roof and rolling out clear from the wreck but with only a corner of the case knocked off.*

*Mr. Freese expected the piano was ruined, but I went over it very carefully and found nothing out of place, and after cleaning out the forest leaves, I tuned it and found it was a thing divine, responding to my touch and giving such a tone as I had never heard before.*

*I have tuned all kinds of high grade pianos, but this one, this noble piece of workmanship, singing to me in such a tone, completely won my heart.*

*Kindly send me a catalogue.*

*Yours truly,*

*G. E. Demorest, 1895."*

The company continued until World War I, when they found it next to impossible to obtain needed wood. They closed the manufacturing business and

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## MESSAGE FROM MARY

The year 1998 saw good things happen to our society. The Observer Building is starting to look like a museum. It is nicely painted outside with a new sign on the front of the building that says "Dover-Foxcroft Historical Society."

Inside, the two front rooms have been painted a very light shade of tan and new carpeting will be installed this spring. We can then think about some display cabinets. The back room, where the newspaper was originally printed, will be a future project, the largest. It will take serious planning and work.

We did not forget the Blacksmith Shop Museum. Last year roof shingles were replaced and the chimney was repaired.

We hope you continue to enjoy your newsletter. We always have room for your memories and stories you would like to share. We hope you can find the time to write to us. This is your newsletter.



## A Civic Controversy

In March, 1917, the United States Postal Service favorably proposed moving Foxcroft Post Office in Monument Square and Dover Post Office in Merrick Square to a new location in a building on South Street, now the rear of the P.E. Ward building.

In a letter written by Caleb H. Cushing stating his protestations and sent to the *Bangor Weekly Commercial*, he said...

*The next thing the bewildered and affronted Doverite expects to see is the Dover Cemetery moved to the foot of Hinds Hill\* so that St. Peter may find it more convenient to take a look in when he goes for his mail at the new post office on South Street. About all this leaves the old residents is hope of heaven, and they are not over sanguine of retaining either of these very long the way things look at present." ❖*

\* Hinds Hill is Route 7 toward Dexter.

From The Piscataquis Observer, 1917.

## Workers with the Divining Rod

*Sprague's Journal of Maine History*

To the present generation, the best known worker with the divining rod was Seth Brawn of Foxcroft. He was noted the length and breadth of Piscataquis County, and a list of wells successfully located by him would number into the hundreds. He was born in Foxcroft, Jan. 30, 1824, the son of Reuben and Betsey (Weston) Brawn, and was the grandson of Peter Brawn, who settled in Dover in 1805...

Seth Brawn was about 21 years of age when he discovered that he was possessed of the ability to use the divining rod. It was by accident. Royal Day (from Monson) was employed by his father to locate a well on the home place and Seth was an interested spectator. He asked permission to take the forked stick of the "water witch" in his own hands to see if there would be any evidence of attraction through him. To his astonishment the twig turned with even more force in his hands than when held by the professional worker. Thereafterward he experimented for himself, more from curiosity and fascination than for any other reason, yet always obtaining results. It was some years after that he commenced to locate wells and water veins as a profession.

...In the spring of 1880 the stream from which water was taken to supply the boilers of the spool factory in Foxcroft ran dry. Depending wholly upon steam power and the water from the small brook near the works as a source of supply, the works must shut down unless water was obtained at once. For a number of days teams were put on and water hauled from the river, half a mile distant. In their extremity the owners of the mill called upon Mr. Brawn to help them.

The lot on which the factory is located is but sparsely covered with soil, and on much of it the ledges are entirely exposed. It was not a place where hit-or-miss prospecting would be practical or profitable. Mr. Brawn went over the extensive lot and traced three veins of water, all of which converged to a point about 40 yards distant from the boiler house. He described the situation in detail, gave the comparative size of the veins, and gave the depth and character of the excavation. The well was completed in a brief space of time and his remarkable estimates proved correct in every particular. ❖

From Sprague's Journal, Vol. 3, 1915.

## Joshua Jordan's Woolen Mill

By Madelyn Betts

Joshua Jordan, fourth son of Nathaniel and Dorothy (Jordan) Jordan, was born Oct. 16, 1799 on the Old Plantation, Cape Elizabeth. He came by ox-team in 1825 from Cape Elizabeth to Dexter, then moved to Dover in March 1835, where he lived a few months in a little house on South Street, then bought of John Hale, on Oct. 24, 1836, the premises occupied in later years by his daughter, Mrs. Ober (later owned by Dana Anderson). In the deed, the brook that crosses Lincoln Street is mentioned as Oil Mill Brook.

On June 27, 1836, P. Brown conveyed to Joshua Jordan and Charles Crockett the fulling mill and machinery originally built by John Bradbury ten years earlier. Jordan and Crockett built a new mill there, 60 feet long by 28 feet wide, where they and their successors engaged in a carding and clothing (cloth manufacturing) business for many years. This building was later used as the first moving picture theater in town, and later remodeled into the

Chandler Block, which is now owned by Daniel Steinke, DDS.

Crockett remained in the business only about five years, but Jordan continued until his death in 1871. The wool was carded and rolled on the street floor; fulling, dyeing and pressing were done in the basement. A cloth called satinette, cotton warp and wool filling, was woven at two looms on the second floor. The frames for drying the cloth were on a platform from the second floor which stretched across the whole front of the building.

Mr. Jordan's first wife was Olive Ann Durgin who died in Dexter in 1831. His second wife was Martha Merrill, daughter of John and Betsey Doore) Merrill. Mr. and Mrs. Jordan were among the 13 charter members of the Baptist Church in Dover, which was organized June 20, 1818.

Thus another early building still stands to serve in today's business world. ✦



In 1855 Union Square was called West Market Square and Merrick Square was East Market Square. "Merrick Square" was adopted in the early 1870s when Dr. Henry A. Robinson was instrumental in having both village streets named and signs put up. Also in 1855, Curtis Hill who had a dry goods and grocery business in Dover, built the brick building known as Mayo's Hall, known in later years as the P.E. Ward building at the corner of Main and South Streets. ✦



The Dover-Foxcroft Historical Society's annual dues are still \$3.00 per person per year. We are holding the line despite a U.S. Postal Service increase in Third Class Non-Profit mail rates. Every membership household will receive a copy of *The Shiretown Conserver*, our newsletter, mailed four times each year. Any amount tendered above the \$3.00 membership fee 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

## 1999 – Calendar of Events – 1999

### Dyer & Hughes, con't.

opened a music store on Union Square.

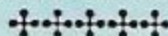
The Dover-Foxcroft Historical Society has three beautiful Dyer & Hughes organs in its possession. The latest was donated last summer by Mrs. Ruby C. Williams and is in perfect condition. Our secretary, Mrs. Madelyn Betts, played this lovely organ at an open house last summer. ✦

Portions reprinted with permission from *Dover-Foxcroft: A History*, by Louis E. Stevens, 1995.



1891 – The work of setting poles for electric lights is finished in December and wires were expected to be put up in a few days... Dyer & Hughes light their organ factory with a dynamo which furnishes a very satisfactory lighting system.

From *The Piscataquis Observer*, 1891



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| April 7 | Annual Meeting – Show and Tell: Bring your treasures and tell us about them. <i>Dues are due in April.</i> Meet at 7 p.m. at Thayer Parkway Community Center. |
| May 5   | Reviving Center Theater as a Community Cultural Center – The Center Theater Group. Meet at 7 p.m. at Central Maine Power building, Park Street.               |
| June 2  | Plans to Develop Heritage Tourism – Helen Kelly. Meet at 7 p.m. at Thayer Parkway Community Center.   |
| Sept. 1 | Tour of Gray Cemetery – Lou Stevens. Meet at 6 p.m. at the cemetery.  |
| Oct. 6  | Trace the History of Your Old House – Helen Kelly. Meet at 7 p.m. at Thayer Parkway Community Center.   |



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