

THE SHIRETOWN CONSERVER

The Dover-Foxcroft Historical Society Newsletter

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Mural, Mural, On the Wall By Jack Battick

Most people who visit the Dover-Foxcroft Post Office do so to post or pick up mail. They may stop to chat with acquaintances but for most it is a quick in-and-out proposition. Some few may pause to look at the mural above the door marked "POSTMASTER" and perhaps to wonder how it got there, and fewer still will be able to read the signature at the lower right corner of the painting, now somewhat darkened with age. The signature is that of Barrie Barstow Greenbie, and this is a brief sketch of his life and how the mural came to be in Dover-Foxcroft.

Barstow Greenbie (he added the "Barrie" in his teen years) was born March 29, 1920 in New York City, the first child of author, traveler and lecturer Sydney Greenbie and his wife Marjorie Barstow, Ph.D., also an author but in addition a sometime college faculty member. With their young children (sister Alison was born in 1922) the Greenbies moved in the periphery of the writers' and artists' set of the 1920s that included Eugene O'Neill, Mabel Dodge, John Reed, Louise Bryant, Marsden Hartley and William Zorach. They spent a couple of summers in Provincetown on Cape Cod and winters in Greenwich Village in New York City where the artistic group hung out, but never became a real part of it. Eventually, they moved into an old farm in Castine, Maine, because in the great Depression, it was a cheaper place to live when Marjorie was not teaching at some womens' college.



Is this the knee in question?

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The Depression

was a hard time for America. The great cities suffered in proportion to their size, but the small towns were not spared. Though predominantly Republican Maine disapproved of Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal (in the 1936 election, Roosevelt lost only in Maine and Vermont), when the WPA (Works Project Administration) decided to build a central post office in Dover-Foxcroft to replace the several sub-stations which the towns had, there was some (Continued on page 8)

Isaac Royal: Dover's Naval Hero?

By Madelyn C. Betts

Isaac Royal was born March 10, 1765, probably in New Hampshire, and enlisted in the Continental Navy at the age of 13 as a cabin boy under the command of John Paul Jones. He was therefore not required to do duty as a sailor. Stories told by his sons relate that Isaac was in several engagements in which his ship was victorious, capturing a number of vessels and taking many prisoners. Isaac reported that among these was a battle between the Continental Navy's Ship *Bon Homme Richard* and the British man of war, *Serapis*. Research over the years by several people has not been able to substantiate his enlistment in the Continental Navy nor his service on the *Bon Homme Richard*. However, he may have been aboard the vessel *Ranger* whose records did not survive. It is therefore only family legend and local tradition that has documented this Naval service during the Revolutionary War.

Mr. Royal was married about 1786 to his wife Tabitha and lived for a while in Yarmouth, Hebron, and Paris. In 1805 he moved to Frankfort (now Winterport) with a family consisting of himself, his wife, and nine children - four boys and five girls. During his residence in Frankfort, two sons were added to the family, making eleven children in all (Olive, Mitchell, Jacob, Isaac, Ephraim, Dorcas, Eunice, Lucy, Esther, John, and Richard). With his family he moved to Plantation #3, Lot 12, 10th Range in Dover, in the year 1811, and located on the farm on the East Dover to Atkinson road later owned by Josiah Dow and Harland Towne. At that time, the farm was covered with a heavy growth of wood.

Hard labor and hard fare were for years his inheritance as five of his children were at one time sick with typhoid fever. Daughter Dorcas, aged 16, died in April 1814. Mr. Royal lived only a few years after his move to Dover, dying

of typhoid fever on November 20, 1816. He was buried next to his daughter in one corner of his lot as there was no burying-ground in the town at that time. These graves, unmarked by stone or monument for many years, have been kept untouched by a succession of the farm owners. In recent years, Boy Scouts have reclaimed the area and a marker has been added nearby which can be seen from the road.

In 1886 the only remaining son, John Royal, was nearly 80 years old and lived near Dover South Mills. The only surviving daughter resided in St. Louis, Missouri.

Thus the legend continues unsubstantiated but the town continues to commemorate Isaac Royal as a Revolutionary Patriot.

Editor's Note: Isaac Royal's gravesite on the family farm is listed in *Abstract of Graves of Revolutionary Patriots, Vol. 3*.

Goodbye to Old Friends

We regret to announce the deaths of three of our members: Evelyn Hall Spaulding, Florence Sanford, and Alfred Peakes. The officers of the Society extend our deepest sympathy to their families.

New Member

Helen N. Taylor

Dover-Foxcroft

The Society's Unknown

This charming portrait of what is presumably a mother and son (or as Lou Stevens says, the greatest May-December romance in history!) remains unidentified. Do you know who they are?



So far none of our unknowns have been identified, but we'll keep trying and if one is we'll share the information with you.

Another Great Season for the Blacksmith Shop Museum By Dave Lockwood

The shop which was open from Memorial weekend to October 31 had about 150 visitors, the majority Maine natives who contributed \$135.75.

There were several improvements made to the building. First, the south side of the shop roof was covered with sheathing and clear cedar shingles were applied. This was a priority task completed in June at a cost of \$2,200. Second, the black cherry tree at the front corner of the shop was removed at a cost of \$159. Although there was nothing wrong with the tree itself, it was a major contributor to the deterioration of the old roof and had reached a size and age where decline would soon begin. This was one of those cases where "an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure". There was a secondary benefit in that it made the sign more visible to approaching motorists.

Third, in September the building was adjusted to make it as level as possible. In effect, it was lowered in the middle and raised at both ends. Although it will take a year for the building to completely settle, I saw an immediate improvement in the appearance of the roof line. Lastly, we now have an updated version of the BSM brochure redesigned by a Penquis CAP program giving youths involvement with non-profits. It looks great and will be at appropriate places this year.

All work was done using local contractors: Tom Sands for the roof, Steve Larrabee for tree removal, and Joe Auger for the leveling. This year the priority is to fix the shop windows (casings and sills) and replace the shop sign. Down the road we will need to replace sills, and re-roof the shed portion and the north side.

Editor's Note: If you want to help at the Blacksmith Shop Museum, contact Dave.



The Champs of Piscataquis, Aroostook, and Penobscot Counties, 1936-37. Team members: H. Leon Andrews (coach), Jack Anderson (Right Front), Harold Roberts (Left Front), Russell Dow (Right Guard), Lawrence Harvey (Left Guard), and Clifford Wiley (Center). Photo Courtesy of Cliff Wiley.

Editor's Corner

It's the time of year when we know spring is coming, but it seems to be taking forever. I want to thank those of you who have written or called with comments on the *Conserver*. It's always a pleasure to hear from you. I'm always looking for material for articles, historic letters, photos, etc. If you have anything you'd be willing to share with us, please let me know. If you live in D-F we can make a copy of any item or scan a photo and have the original back to you the same day. Remember, the *Conserver* is your newsletter and I value your input.

For this spring edition I want to give a tip of the editor's hat to the following who helped with this issue: *Mary Annis, Madelyn C. Betts, Louis Stevens, Dave Lockwood, Jack Battick, and Cliff Wiley.*

You can contact me online at battick@midmaine.com, call 207-564-3576, or write me at 308 Foxcroft Center Road, Dover-Foxcroft, ME 04426.

Nancy Battick, Editor

Alonzo Z. Parsons,



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

*Camp Rappahannock Station
April the 30th 1864
Dear Father—*

The following is an excerpt from a letter written to Deacon William Parsons of Foxcroft from his son, Alonzo Zephaniah, serving in Company B of the 20th Maine Regiment. The spelling and punctuation have not been altered. The original is in the D-F Historical Society collection.

Thinking perhapes you would like to hear a word from me before we leave, I will try to pen you a few lines for I cant tell when I shall get a chance to write you again, for I don't know whare 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 Father I am in good spirets, I have suffered a good deal form my country, and I am willing to suffer more, and that has been my prayer this spring, to feel wiling to suffer all that is required of me to suffer even if it is death, O I hope I shall meet it with joy and not with greafe, that I mite feel willing to give my life cheerfully if it so to be, yet life is sweet and we seem to cling to it, yet God knows best tis he that giveth and tis he that takeith away, we little know what is for the best

. . . . rember me in your prayer and and rember 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 enemys, and may peace soon be restored to our now distracted Nation. . .
. . . .but if it should be my lot to fall upon the battle field and to give my life for my country cause don't morn for me dear Father & Mother but thank God you had a Son to give in so good an noble a cause as the one we are engaged in but rember my dear wife and children, may God bless them and be with them. O God spare my life for their sakes if it can please thee, but if not I hope soon to meet them in heaven and meet you all whare parting 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 happiest.

This is from your dear Son,
Alonzo Z. Parsons

Editor's Note: Alonzo Parsons was killed on May 6, 1864 at the Battle of the Wilderness in Virginia one week after this letter was written. He was born April 16, 1836 to William and Eliza Robinson Parsons of Foxcroft. He was a farmer and enlisted in the 20th Maine in August 1862. In addition to his parents, he left a young wife, Lydia M. (Hall) Parsons, and two sons, Hiram aged 5 and Augustus aged 3.

Central Hall

(continued from page 2)

Crackle! Crackle! Crackle!

As leaping flames of red and yellow shoot into the black sky on a June night in 1930 when an old unused ice house behind the Hall mysteriously catches fire and quickly scorches the back, and the water used to battle the blaze soaks the stage and scenery, but the building is saved as the warm summer night fades into a bitterly cold March day when we hear -

"Mr. Moderator! Mr. Moderator! Mr. Moderator!"

As one of the many hundreds of Dover residents who have packed the floor during this momentous town meeting in 1921 calls for a secret vote on whether to finally join Foxcroft to create one town, and for the first time, nearly 300 women will no longer be restricted to seats in the balcony while men conduct the town's business below them, as they now have the right to vote. They will overwhelmingly choose to join the town across the River to end the history of two villages, and start a new one of a united town which, but now this historic scene vanishes along with the roar of approval when the vote is announced and we hear -

Thump! Thump! Thump!

As we see some men who seem to be dressed in some sort of underwear playing a totally new game, something called basket ball, two words then, in 1902, as they bounce a big ball on the floor and try to toss it through some baskets in the first game ever seen in the two towns whose residents will later make the balcony rock 'n roll many times as the Academy teams play here for half a century when, but now the air is filled with -

"Hurrah! Hurrah! Hurrah!"

As the rays of the sun on this September afternoon in 1898 light up the balcony jammed with school children and the main floor packed with adults who have all risen as one to give these three tremendous cheers for an elderly doctor with white wisps of hair and a smartly trimmed goatee who has just presented to the town of Dover the keys to the building that 106 years later still bears his name of Thompson Free Library, where, but this joyous scene fades and is replaced and another, and now the cheers are -

"Foxcroft! Foxcroft! Foxcroft!"

As the large crowd that has just finished an oyster stew supper on a rainy October night a century ago in 1894 stands to honor a group of mud-caked Academy football boys for their great effort in holding Bangor High scoreless in a 0-0 game down there, and so were escorted to the Hall by a band and fans upon their return by train, and then treated to this spontaneous celebration which gradually disappears to be replaced by a somber observance that ends with -

Ta-Ta-Ta

Which are the first three notes of taps as the ever-diminishing number of Civil War veterans and others stand for the conclusion of a Memorial Day program which had started hours before when wreaths and bouquets of flowers were placed on the graves of the comrades of those who upheld the cause of the Union, but now we hear -

Plink! Plank! Plunk!

Which are the first piano chords struck for so many years by Corinne Johnson as the opening number of the annual Kiwanis Club show is about to be performed by the grade children under the direction of Martha Green and Dot

Dow, with the second half of the program featuring the uproarious minstrel show with end men, outrageous jokes, and songs and dances which are applauded wildly by the standing-room-only crowds which pack the Hall for two nights each March in the late 1930's and early 1940's before TV came and, but listen -

Creak! Creak! Creak!

That's the sounds of the ropes slowly lifting the old curtain with the painted Mediterranean scene to reveal the staging of another FA senior play, another touring minstrel show with the hit song, "Come Kiss Your Honey Boy", another animal show with miniature horses performing tricks, a group of midgets led by Mrs. Tom Thumb in a western melodrama, and band concerts when the outside summer weather forced the musicians inside rather than playing at their stands in Monument or Merrick Squares, but what's that new sound of -

Tramp! Tramp! Tramp!

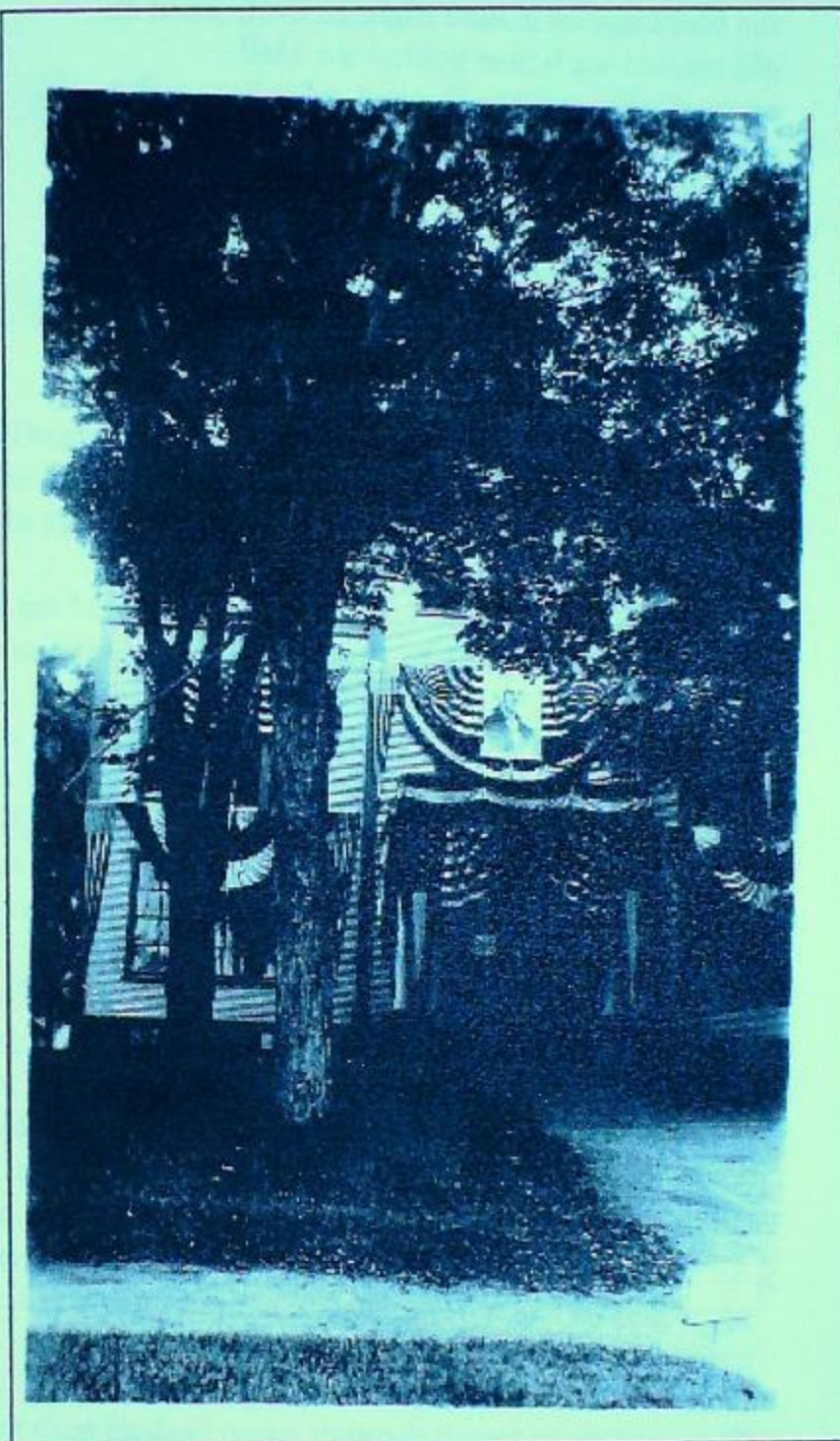
That's the 3,000 persons coming upstairs during the 3 nights of the Grand Fair held to dedicate the building in early March 1882 when dancing, various entertainments, oyster stew suppers, door prizes were given, and the money raised would be used to further equip the stage with scenery and curtains, which, yet, all these scenes disappear and we hear only these numbers -

"310-233! 310-233! 310-233!"

Being shouted by the moderator 65 years ago when the town residents vote in favor of keeping the old Central Hall by those 77 FOR votes rather than spending the money to construct a new building on the same lot, otherwise there would be no place for all the musicians, actors, actresses, students, voters, horses, bloodhounds, midgets, athletes, dancers, and others to come now for their nightly performances which slowly vanish into the stillness and the darkness of the now early morning light as the town clock

would once again boom out the last stroke of midnight.

Editor's Note: This article is reprinted through the courtesy of the *Eastern Gazette*.



This undated photo of Central Hall shows it decorated with a patriotic theme (that's George Washington's portrait). D-F Historical Society Collection.

Madelyn Betts Resigning As Secretary

The Society will meet in April to elect officers, directors, etc. *Madelyn C. Betts* the Society's first (and only to date) secretary is regretfully stepping down after 40 years of service. We'll be saying thank you to Madelyn for her hard work, perseverance, and efforts. We hope you'll be able to join us that evening.

Mural, Mural (Continued from page 1)

sense of relief at the jobs the construction created. In December 1938 the new post office was completed and suitably dedicated with speeches and the ceremonious dispatch of the first piece of mail to be handled at the edifice. (See Louis E. Stevens, *Dover-Foxcroft: A History*, pp. 540-541)

The following year, the Federal Works Administration announced a competition for artists for the purpose of placing a mural in one post office in each of the forty-eight states of the Union. A recent New Deal law required that a small sum of each appropriation for a federal office building be spent on artistic decoration. Sydney and Marjorie Greenbie's son Barrie, by this time nineteen years old and a protege of renowned Maine painter Waldo Peirce, was encouraged by his mentor to enter the competition. Peirce himself had earlier won such a competition and believed the experience would be good for young Barrie.

Barrie Greenbie had just finished reading Kenneth Roberts' novel *Arundell* and so chose for his entry in the contest an imagined scene in the famous march of Benedict Arnold's troops up the Kennebec River for the purpose of seizing Montreal from the British. To the surprise and delight of family and friends, the fledgling artist won the competition for a post office mural in Maine. The commission for the mural was \$790, in 1939 a not inconsiderable sum and Greenbie proceeded to turn his earlier

sketch into a full-size work to fit the sixteen by six feet three inch space on the North wall of the Dover-Foxcroft Post Office. But when word of the subject matter of the painting reached the local public there was an immediate outcry. Arnold's march had been up the Kennebec, not the Piscataquis, and besides, Arnold was more renowned for his betrayal of the Revolution than for his earlier exemplary service in the fighting against the British, and the citizens of the Shiretown would have none of him on their post office wall! Postmistress Blanche Brown conveyed the complaints to her supervisors in Washington.

The Federal Administration recognized the validity of the first argument and acceded to the mood of the town on the second and so in January 1940, Barrie Greenbie had to recast his thinking about his mural. Though without any historical proof, he conceived that there must have been revolutionary scouts sent up the Piscataquis in conjunction with Arnold's march, or at least some settlers in the 1770s, and so converted the figures into buckskin-clad rangers, ala Kenneth Roberts' novels, with several Native Americans in company. He finished the oil-on-canvas work in Yellow Springs, Ohio (he had planned to take some art classes at Antioch College there, but never did), then rolled it up, placed it in the rumble seat of his Ford roadster and drove to Washington, DC, for final approval. Then he drove to Maine virtually non-stop. He had been advised to ask Waldo Peirce for assistance on a few details of the painting, particularly on some of the human figures including the knee on one, which the older man readily provided, actually touching up parts of the canvas. (Slight though they might be, those final touches ensure that the Shiretown has some of the work of the great Waldo Peirce.) In late July, with the assistance of Peirce's young cousin Alice Handforth, Greenbie spent two days preparing the wall surface and then attaching the canvas to the wall where it stands today, the paint a little darkened but the canvas as unwrinkled, the surface as uncracked as it

was the day it was installed.

Though some may have sniffed at federal "boondoggling", the majority of the citizens of Dover-Foxcroft were proud to have the work come to their town. The winning (though not final designs) had been on display at the Corcoran Gallery in Washington where Greenbie was introduced to Eleanor Roosevelt, and had also appeared in the pages of *Life* magazine.

Dozens of people stopped by the Post Office to watch the work in progress and the young artist was pleased to hear their comments and to talk with them. A little later, the chandeliers in the post office lobby were ordered to be raised so as not to obstruct the viewing of the mural. The Federal Works Agency directed that the post office custodian do the work himself if possible, or hire the work done, but to spend no more than \$20 for material and labor! Happily, the work was performed by the custodian without any additional expense.

Barrie Barstow Greenbie did not achieve success as a painter. His talent was channeled into other pursuits such as writing and architecture and he eventually he was appointed a Professor of Landscape Architecture and Regional Planning at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, from whence he retired in 1989. In the Second World War, he served in the Army artillery in the Pacific, ending up as a journalist in occupied Japan.

He wrote an important book, *Spaces: Dimensions of the Human Landscape* which has influenced regional and building site planning and a work on Japan, *Space and Spirit in Modern Japan*. He also did an online slide show of the length of the Connecticut River Valley which can be found at www.arbeer.demon.co.uk/MAPweb/river.htm), as well as several portions of books relating human needs to the landscape.

Author's Note: Barrie Barstow Greenbie's autobiography, *The Hole In the Heartland* is touching and well worth reading.



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Do you recognize this mural? Do you know where it is, who did it, or the controversy it engendered? And do you know which famous Maine artist contributed anonymously to it? For answers, see story on Page 1.