

THE SHIRETOWN CONSERVER

The Dover-Foxcroft Historical Society Newsletter

Volume IX, Number 1

Spring 2005

WED. AND THURS. JAN. 15 AND 16



HOOT GIBSON
in
The LONG LONG TRAIL

A TALKING WESTERN PICTURE

Here's Hoot riding his wildest; fighting his hardest; loving his grandest. Here's Hoot in the cyclonic center of the most whizzing world of action you ever saw... a rodeo with stunts that will raise your hair... a cross-country race that will have you shouting... a dramatic story that will make you gasp! Here's the Western with a WALLOP!

Don't Miss It!



SPECIAL CHILDREN'S MATINEE
WEDNESDAY AT 1:45 SHARP
10c. TO ALL CHILDREN

From the New Star News. DFHS Collection.

When The "Talkies" Came To Town By Jack Battick

"Movies," motion pictures, as a medium of popular entertainment, had a long history before the creation of successful sound accompaniment. As early as 1894, Thomas Edison's "kinetoscope" allowed a viewer to see figures moving upon a little projection screen while a phonograph record was supposed to provide voices to match the movements of the actors' lips. It wasn't very good, so the famed "Wizard of Menlo Park" kept working on it. He finally hit upon the "vitaphone" system, still using a phonograph disk but with a film projector throwing the pictures on a large screen, with better synchronization of image and sound. In late 1927, Warner Brothers, using this system, came out with the most famous "first" talking picture, "The Jazz Singer," starring Al Jolson. Other inventors developed the idea of placing a sound track right on the movie film so as the film was flashed on the screen, the voices would be in exact synch with the lip movements. This hit the streets in May 1927 under the name of "Movietone" news short films produced by William Fox and associates. It was the latter method that would triumph and is still in use today.

Moving pictures didn't reach the Dover-Foxcroft area until 1903 when a short silent film of the coronation of King Edward VII of Britain was shown at the Opera House. Five years later, silent movies became a common feature at several places in the towns, usually as added attractions to live stage presentations. Central Hall was one such venue, another was in the now long-gone upstairs hall in the Mayo Building (True Value Hardware). An outdoor outdoor theater was built on the present site of the Chase & Kimball Oil Company offices on Main and South Streets under the name of The Star Theatre. The owners moved into a totally remodeled building at the Dover end of the Foxcroft bridge in December 1909. Here, films could be viewed all year long, but still as accompaniments to live plays, vaudeville shows, (Continues on page 8).

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**The Dover-Foxcroft Historical Society
The Shiretown Conserver**

The Shiretown Conserver is published quarterly by the Dover-Foxcroft Historical Society which reserves all rights to its contents. Memberships in the Society which includes a subscription to the *Conserver* may be had by sending \$5.00 to: 28 Orchard Road, Dover-Foxcroft, Me 04426.

Submissions to the *Conserver* should be sent to the editor at 308 Foxcroft Center Road, Dover-Foxcroft, ME 04426. Photo submissions will be returned unharmed. You can reach editor Nancy Battick by e-mail at battick@midmaine.com

Officers of the Society, 2004-5

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David Lockwood	Blacksmith Shop Mus.
Jack & Nancy Battick	Observer Building Mus
Leilani Stites	Textiles & Costumes

The Shiretown Conserver

Nancy Battick	Editor
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Annual Dues Now Payable

It's that time again! If you haven't already renewed, it's time to send \$5 for another year of the *Shiretown Conserver*. You'll find the form on page 11. If you think you've paid for 2005 and aren't sure contact Nancy Battick at 564-3576, e-mail her at battick@midmaine.com for an update on your status. If you received a gift membership recently you are paid through 2005.

**The Burgess Family of Dover, Part II
By Ted Grant**

Note: This is the second part in a series. Part I was printed in the *Autumn Conserver*, Vol. VII, #4

Walter Burgess, farmer, blacksmith, inventor, businessman, selectman was truly a man of many talents.

Walter, like his brother, Frank, had gone in the 1880's to Massachusetts to work in the mills. Apparently he learned among other things something about the workings of a "iron horse". On returning to Dover and the family farm, Walter achieved something of a reputation as a blacksmith and mechanic. According to family stories, supported by Walter's farm diary, area farmers would often avail themselves of his talents. I have in my possession a tool he forged for stripping out the leather "straps" used in harness making. He also invented and had patented an ice auger used in ice fishing.

In the late 1920's Walter wanted to replace his Delco system with conventional electric power so he proceeded to cut and then set the poles from Silvers Mills to the farm, an overland distance of about 1.5 to 2 miles. He then bought a 3 hp electric motor to run the milking machine. Not wanting to waste this power potential, he connected belts and shafts so that when the motor was running for milking he could also turn the churn, run the grindstone or provide auxiliary power to the water pump when the windmill was silent. This mammoth pumping machine pumped water into a large wooden tank he had constructed in the hay mow.

My father who grew up on that farm under the influence of his grandfather Walter, tells of the many tools and machines devised by Grampa. One of these was a drag-saw which he originally powered by a gasoline engine and later
(Continued on Page 7)

MY GRANDMOTHER AND JOHNNY

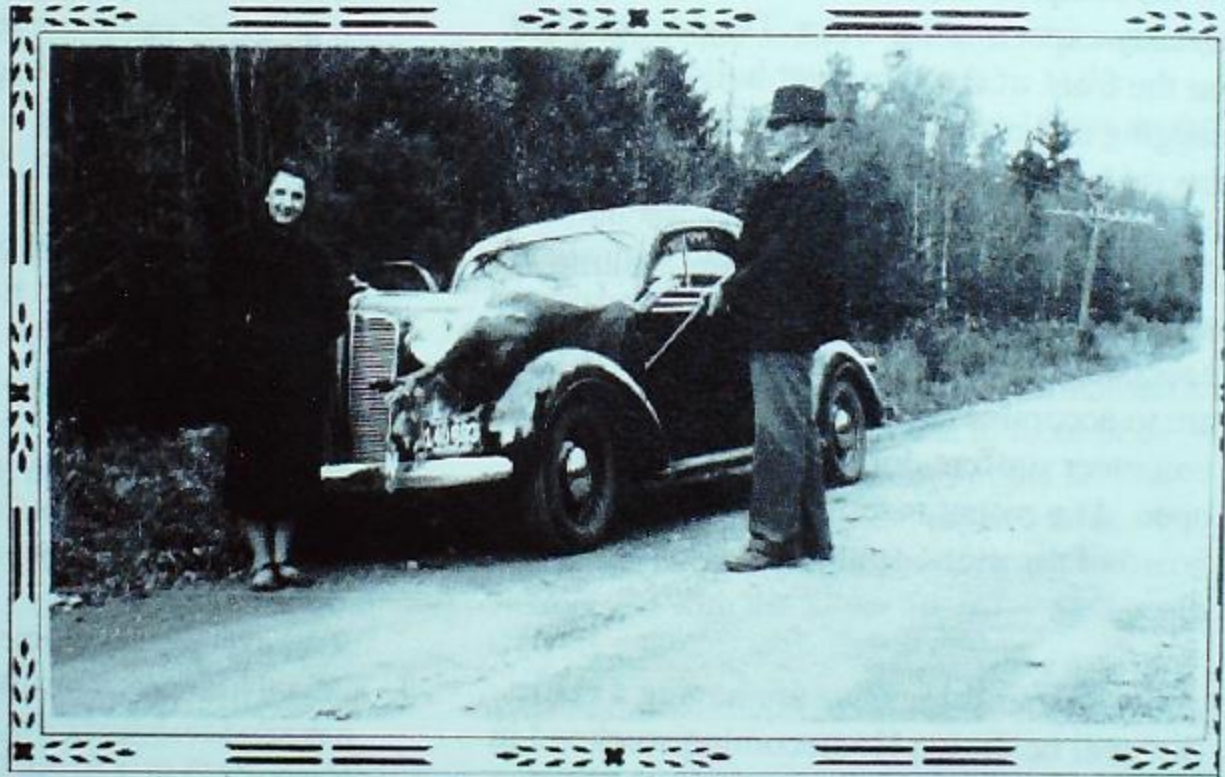
By Jim Annis

My grandmother was Grace Bush. Grammy Grace was the first college graduate in our family and spent many years as a reporter for *the Bangor Daily News*. She had divorced my grandfather Frank Annis and married Harry Bush years ago. Together they owned Bush's Lunch, later Annis' Lunch, which was located on the corner of Main Street and North Street underneath Laverdiere's Drugstore. The building is long gone now and the parking lot for the Shop and Save now occupies that space.

While working in the store one day, my grandmother served a customer from Massachusetts. He was a salesman and a brusque sort and was complaining about how many Mainers married their cousins and how most of their children were idiots and the state had to care for them. My grandmother Grace and Harry were very distant cousins and had married late in life. Not a problem there.

My grandmother always had a monkey called Johnny. Johnny was a small monkey and I'm not sure which breed, but certainly not as large as a chimpanzee. She kept Johnny in a cage at her home on West Main Street. Occasionally Grammy Grace, as we kids called her, would bring Johnny to the store and keep her in a cage out by the kitchen. Johnny and I got along real well and periodically I'd sit on the floor next to Johnny's cage in my grandmother's kitchen and Johnny would go through my hair looking for what only monkeys know what to look for. Johnny enjoyed her job and I thought having my hair stroked was kind of neat too. Felt good. Grammy also raised canaries and parakeets commercially. The sun porch in her home was covered with birdcages.

As the store customer continued to rave about Mainers marrying cousins and their subsequent lunatic offspring, Grammy slipped into the back of the store to retrieve Johnny from her cage. Carrying Johnny to the front of the store where the customer was sitting, Grammy remarked, "Harry Bush, the co owner of this store, is my cousin and we are married. And," she said with delight, "this is our daughter!" With not another word the customer paid his bill and immediately left the store. And, the story goes, he never came back.



The two cousins, October 1, 1937. Photo courtesy of the author.

A Plea For Help

The sky is falling! The sky is falling!" cried Chicken Little! Right about now, that's the way I feel as treasurer of the Dover-Foxcroft Historical Society. With so many repairs that need doing to both the Observer building and the Blacksmith Shop, I feel like the sky is falling. Time and weather can do awful things to buildings, as we all know. The problem is that in spite of the financial help we receive in dues and donations, it just about covers the costs of running the museums and sending out the *Conserver* newsletter. Electricity is taking another 10% jump and fuel oil has skyrocketed. The roofs on both the Observer building and the Blacksmith shop need replacing. Fortunately, the south side of the Blacksmith shop was replaced with cedar shingling during the past summer. However, the north side of the roof is in pretty bad shape, according to the insurance adjuster, and must be replaced in order to maintain our insurance policy. The Observer building roof needs complete replacement, as we are already experiencing leaks. The bay window on the front of the Observer building is sagging and needs to be corrected along with the replacement of many missing clapboards. The bathroom on the second floor is inoperable due to age and leaking and should be replaced with a handicapped accessible bathroom on the first floor if we are to accommodate visitors as well as those volunteer staffers during the times we are open. At a recent meeting of the Society's board of directors, sources of revenue were discussed.

Among other things, we are having a raffle that will be drawn Homecoming weekend in August. Other fundraisers suggested were

pursuing grants, and we'll be accepting donations at our special Civil War Day Festival in July.

Basically, folks, we need your help. We realize that many of you have been very generous in the past and we certainly appreciate your giving. However, perhaps sometime during the year you can see your way to further help in preserving this most important part of Dover and Foxcroft's history. Thank you for listening to us in our hour of need.

Sincerely,
Jim Annis, Treasurer
The Dover-Foxcroft Historical Society

Editor's Corner

As I put this issue together in February there's a hint of spring in the air. Certainly there's more than spring underway at the Society. There's so much happening that I've added a page just with Society News to keep all our members posted on what's going on.

I hope all of you enjoy the lead story on talking pictures and will share some of your favorite memories of watching the movies whether at the Star or Center Theatre (see story page 1).

Once again I send a tip of the editor's hat to those who contributed to this edition of the *Conserver*: Jack Battick, Ted Grant, and Mary & Jim Annis.

And, I would remind you that your annual dues are now payable. Don't miss an issue of the *Conserver*. Please renew today.

Nancy Klimavicz Battick, Editor
Submissions, comments, and criticisms can be e-mailed to: battick@midmaine.com or 308 Foxcroft Center Road, D-F, 04426.

The Society's Unknown



The photo above, almost surely taken in 1910 of the student body of Foxcroft Academy, was recently donated to the Society. Do you know any of the students pictured?

New Members

We welcome the following new members to the Society & hope they enjoy their membership:

Mr. & Mrs. Gary Ferguson	Connecticut
Malcolm Burgess	Connecticut
James Burgess	Maine
Bill Burgess	Arizona
Jonathan Allen	Maine
Stanley Clifford	Maine
Charlotte Sanborn	Maine
Joyce Bean	Maine
Iris Buzzell	Maine
David Hamlin	Arizona

Bruce Grant	Maine
Richard Grant	Maine
Ken Grant	Maine
Scott Grant	Maine
Mark Grant	Maine
Jeffrey Grant	Maine
Julie Knowlton	Maine
Duane Crabtree	Massachusetts

Deceased Members

We were saddened to learn of the demise of our member, Rowena Meisner Hinds in January and send our condolences to her family.

Historical Society News

Civil War Day Planned: On July 2, Little Roundtop Day, the Observer Building Museum will host a day long special program on the Civil War. Plans are still ongoing but at this time we are planning a rededication of the Civil War monument, special exhibits, a chance to research your Dover or Foxcroft Civil War ancestor, visits from reenactors, lineage societies, cemetery maps with the burial sites of Civil War veterans marked, an evening concert, and other surprises. If you have Civil War items you would be willing to allow us to exhibit for this special program please contact Nancy Battick (564-3576). Also, if you can volunteer time to help us on the 2nd please let us know. We'll have a full program of the events in the June *Conserver*.

Are You A Quality Crafter? As part of the Society's fundraising efforts we will offer a limited number of quality crafts for sale at the Observer Building Museum on a consignment basis this season. If you're a crafter and think you might be interested in this program please contact Nancy Battick at 564-3576.

Observer Building Opening In June:

This year the Observer Building Museum's season will expand by opening one month earlier than usual. Leilani Stites has agreed to chair the exhibits committee. If you'd like to help Leilani please contact her at 564-8739. We're always looking for hosts for the Museum (we'll be open Fridays and Sundays this season plus special events on July 2 and August 7).

This year all hosts will be asked to attend a training session held before the season opens.

If you can donate some time please let Mary Annis know (564-0820).

Booksale: Our annual booksale at Homecoming has proved popular and we intend to hold another one this year. If you have books, videos, or similar items you'd be willing to donate you can drop them off at the Observer Building in June or call for pickup, 564-3576. Funds from the booksale benefit both our

museums..

Blacksmith Shop Memory Windows:

To date the Society has "sold" six memory windows at the Blacksmith Shop. Purchasers so far are: Madelyn Betts, Helen Zilinsky, the Piscataquis Observer, the children of Fred Washburn, Mary & Jim Annis, Edie Hussey & Jack & Nancy Battick. Funds will be used to restore the windows in the shop. There are still 7 windows available at a cost of \$300 each (or you may share a window with others).

Memorial plaques will be placed naming the donor(s) and the names in whose honor the windows were purchased. If you are interested in honoring your loved ones in this manner, please contact either Dave Lockwood (564-8618) or Mary Annis (564-0820). Funds are tax deductible.

Library Underway: Work is in progress to create a research library upstairs at the Observer Building. Jack Battick and FA student Josh have scraped, taped, sanded, and will soon be painting the room. Jim Brown has generously donated acoustic ceiling tiles for the room; Moosehead Furniture a maple table, and Webber Hardware has discounted paint for the walls. We still need chairs. Do you have any you might care to donate?

Chance to win: The DFHS has joined with area museums to offer visitors a chance to win a Moosehead end table. To qualify visitors will need to pick up a special trifold map at a participating society, and have it stamped at each museum. The drawing will take place in December. Pick up your trifold at the Observer Building in June.

On the Society's Wanted List: We're in great need of the following items: a clothes steamer, mannequins or dressmaker's forms, hat stands, wooden coat hangers, a couple of sturdy folding tables, and chairs for the library. If you have anything you could donate (all donations are tax deductible) please contact the Society at 564-3576.

The Burgess Family, II

(Continued from page 2)



Walter H Burgess



Eva (Pratt) Burgess

converted to the power of a 5 hp electric motor.

A farmer had to be versatile, to be adept at many trades, and Walter Burgess fit this bill to a tee. Typically, much of the trade of the day was done through the barter system. I can still hear my grandmother saying on Saturday morning, "Gramp and I are going to the *village* to do some *trading*, do you want to come along?"

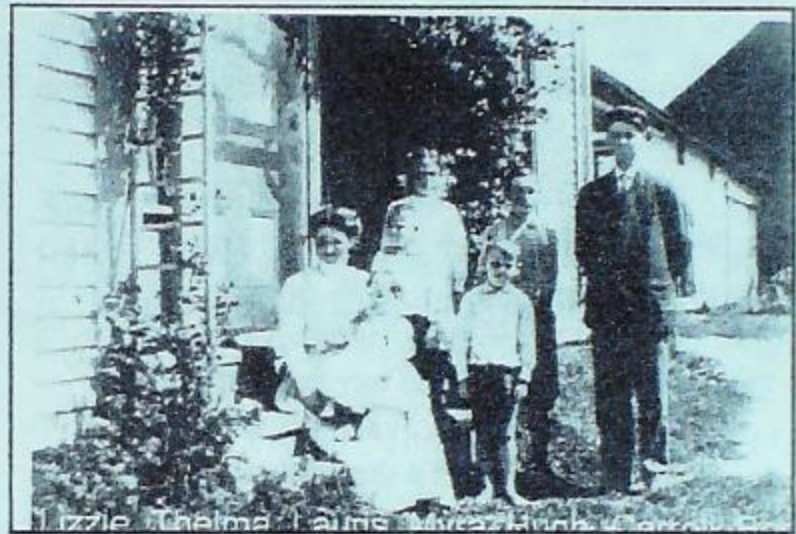
The income from this single farm consisted of proceeds from the sale of eggs, butter, wool, beef, pork, milk, potatoes, apples, and not least of all, wood. Working the wood lot to advantage was the winter activity and many of the transactions in Walter's farm diary involve the trading of firewood for products and services. More than one transaction mentions the trading of firewood for boarding my grandmother and her siblings in Dover while they attended Foxcroft Academy.

Walter didn't actually get a deed to the farm until about 1914. An account in the *Piscataquis Observer* from December 25, 1914 reports: "The farm buildings of J.O. & Walter H Burgess were entirely destroyed by fire Tuesday afternoon." The *Observer* of January 8, 1914 reported "... the farm was the best equipped farm in this county, being one of the pleasantest

and most convenient homes."

It was at this time that the deed was signed over to Walter. Walter, undaunted at age 47, undertook the task of rebuilding. His parents, John and Betsey, now without a home, and in their 80's, moved to Sangerville with daughter Minnie, and Walter moved his family into his "converted" blacksmith shop where they would spend the rest of the winter.

The barn would go up first. C.B. Brann of Dover was contracted to build a 110' gambrel roof structure with a baker. It was said to be the largest barn in the county at the time. The



The children of Walter & Eva Burgess, about 1909.
Photo courtesy of the author.

stable tied up 3 teams and the tie-up held 38 cows. I think it was my grandfather who told me that the barn floor was made from planking from a single elm tree which was sledded to Silvers Mills for sawing out.

In May 1914 the *Piscataquis Observer* reported that "Brann & Sands are working at South Dover building a house for Walter Burgess."

What a show place it was. It had southern hard pine floors throughout, build-in laundry tubs, inside/outside passthrough woodbox, two sinks in the kitchen area (one for the menfolks to

wash up and the other for dishes), a pass through cupboard with sliding glass doors from kitchen to diningroom (with a jar full of cookies on the counter underneath), pocket door to the parlor, dumbwaiter, swingout flour barrel, built-in flouring board, 6 bedrooms, and a beautiful wrap around columned porch. It wasn't your typical old New England farmhouse, but it was, and is, a real piece of workmanship.

Editor's Note: The history of the Burgess Family of Dover will conclude in the summer issue of the *Conserver*. Author and Burgess descendant, Ted Grant is a resident of Dover-Foxcroft, a member of the Dover-Foxcroft Historical Society, and an avid genealogist. You can contact Ted at 207-564-7242.

MAC Computer System Donated

The Society is grateful to the family of Dr. David Swett for their generous donation of a Mac computer with scanner, printer, and accessories. The computer is set up in our front office upstairs and is proving a valuable addition. Eventually, it will hold a complete copy of our catalog of artifacts, documents, etc. as well as being used for Society business. Thank you, Dr. & Mrs. Swett and family.

The Society also would like a Windows based PC system to hold a copy of our catalog for Windows users. Do you have one you no longer need? Please contact us at 564-3576 and remember donations are tax deductible.

The Talkies Came to Town (continued from page 1)

and musical entertainment.

Not everyone in town was happy with the advent of movies. Theater operators had to stress in their newspaper ads that the films were good, wholesome entertainment suitable for all ages. They even enlisted support from local

women's clubs to help break down prejudice. Besides, the films normally appeared for one showing a week, and never on Sunday, so the chance of citizens being corrupted by films was limited. The appearance of D.W. Griffith's epic "Birth of a Nation" was lauded by the Piscataquis Observer in its June 12, 1919 edition. The column stressed "the charming romance of the little Southern colonel . . . with the Northern girl," and the reciprocal love story between a Union captain and a southern girl, passing over in silence the harassment and lynching of blacks by the Ku Klux Klan also featured in the film.

But when did "talkies" first show up in town? Louis Stevens, in his *Dover-Foxcroft: A History* states that the first sound film was shown in July 1913. It was probably a version of Edison's vitaphone system which provided a short interlude film, but as the equipment was expensive and films in that medium were few, the show may have only been a single shot affair with film and equipment moving on to another venue the next day. Besides, since several sound-film systems were in development, independent theater operators were loathe to invest in equipment that might soon prove obsolescent, much as rival home video systems VHS and Beta were for a time in competition some years ago.

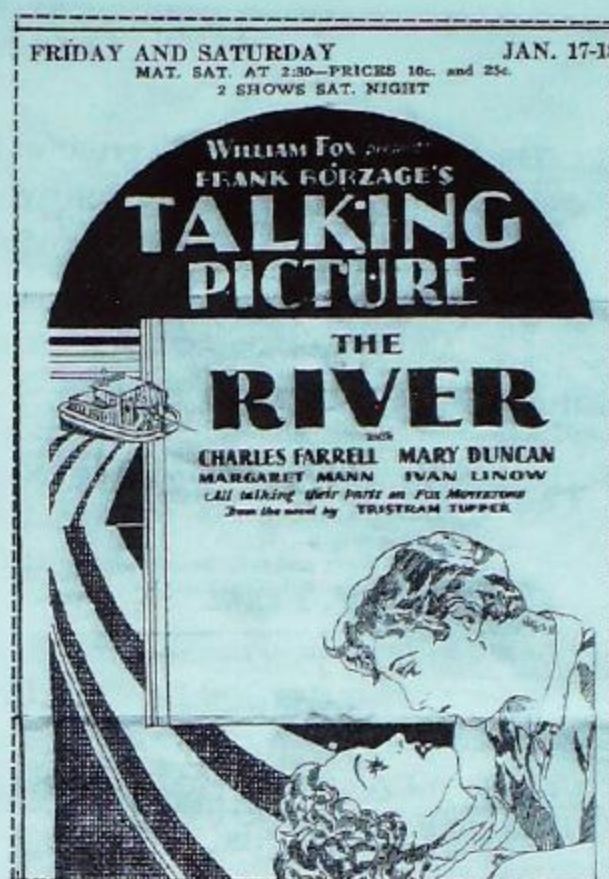
In 1919, the Star Theater was bought by Charles Stern of Bangor whose Graphic Theaters chain also operated movie houses in Milo and Dexter. With large capital resources, a theater chain could afford to invest in expensive sound equipment when improved and proven sound film systems came along. By 1929, Fox's Movietone system was the winner and the now-labeled Graphic Circuit Co. of Bangor brought the first feature-length talkie to the Shiretown. For several days in October 1929, experts in talking picture technology worked with local electrician A.R. Pierce and carpenters from P.E. Washburn Company installing and testing the new gear. Then theater manager George

Crockett announced the opening on Friday and Saturday nights, November 1 and 2, of the film "Syncopation" featuring Fred Warring and his Pennsylvanians Orchestra in a conjunction of music and dialogue "which has played to capacity business in all the large cities". Crockett warned that people had better buy their tickets at the box office between 2-4 p.m. on show dates in order to avoid having to stand in line in the evenings.

Phyllis Jones Pelosi recalls that she and her younger sister went to the first talking picture and her sister fainted. The girls' grandmother was certain the "newfangled" talking picture was too shocking and caused her faint.

Curiously, for all the fanfare given by the Observer prior to the screening, there is not one word of follow-up after the appearance of "Syncopation". Instead, for the rest of 1929 and into early 1930, the paper carried ads for live appearances of touring theater companies at Central Hall featuring comedy plays with orchestral accompaniment, for silent films such as "King of Kings" at the Sangerville Town Hall, for a mystery drama put on by the Central Grange, and for the appearance of a "well-known mind-reader and psychic marvel" Miss Fay Del Rio at the Star Theater in addition to "the regular picture show". Whether the picture show was silent or sound isn't mentioned. And the Percolator Club of Dover-Foxcroft put on a comic play, The Womanless Wedding, with men doing all the parts, both male and female, at Central Hall.

But Talkies had arrived in a big way. By August of 1930, the New Star Theater in Dover-Foxcroft was competing for business with the Guilford Theater in bringing talking pictures to the area. You could choose which of 8 films between them to see any week and take the train to the appropriate town for 2 shows every night and a matinee on Saturday (not on Sunday until 1940). The New Star burned down on January 17, 1940, but its owners re-built on the opposite



From the New Star Theater News, DFHS Collection.

side of Main Street next to Newberry Store and called the new edifice The Center Theater. The last films were screened there in November 1971.

For a brief time in 2001-2003, movies were back in town, with two screening rooms at the entertainment complex, Northern Lights on the Milo Road before the operator shut down. There is talk once more of movies coming back. In the meantime the Center Theater is being re-furbished and will be providing entertainment, though without movies. Television and video recording, on tape or DVD, have diminished the market for movie theaters, but to those of us who grew up in the great days of the motion picture theater, nothing can replace those darkened halls of magic and enchantment associated with the Silver Screen.

Our Business Sponsors

The Society is extremely grateful to the following business sponsors whose generous support helps us maintain our two museums. When you patronize these local merchants please tell them thank you for continuing to support the efforts of the Dover-Foxcroft Historical Society:

Bangor Savings Bank

Webber's Hardware & Building Supply

The Green Door Gallery


Rowell's Garage

Dr. David P. Frasz

Lary Funeral Home




Drs. Daniel L. Steinke & Hillary F. Caruso

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**CC. W. & H.M. Hayes,
P.A.**

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Mary's Message

I hope everyone had a good holiday and that the New Year is treating you well. This time of year we are still working hard for the Society but in the background. Cataloging continues and a new library is being constructed upstairs. We are busy setting up programs for our meetings this summer and putting together some very special events. New displays are also in the works. We look forward to seeing you at our meetings and at the museums this year.

Mary Annis, President

Program Schedule 2005

- April 6: Annual Meeting. Program: Video "Hard Work, Maine Women's Voices, 1888"
- May 11: Program: Leilani Stites, "What's In That Old Trunk?"
- June 1: Program: Carlson Williams, "First Murder in Piscataquis County"
- Sept. 7: TBA
- Oct. 5: Program: Roxanne Moore Saucier, "Cousins"

All programs are held at 6:30 p.m. at Thayer Parkway Meeting Center. Call for Directions, 564-0820.

The Dover-Foxcroft Historical Society Membership Application

Name: _____

Mailing Address: _____

Town/City: _____

Phone: _____ e-mail: _____

Annual Dues (\$5.00 per person):\$ _____ Donation: \$ _____ (tax deductible)

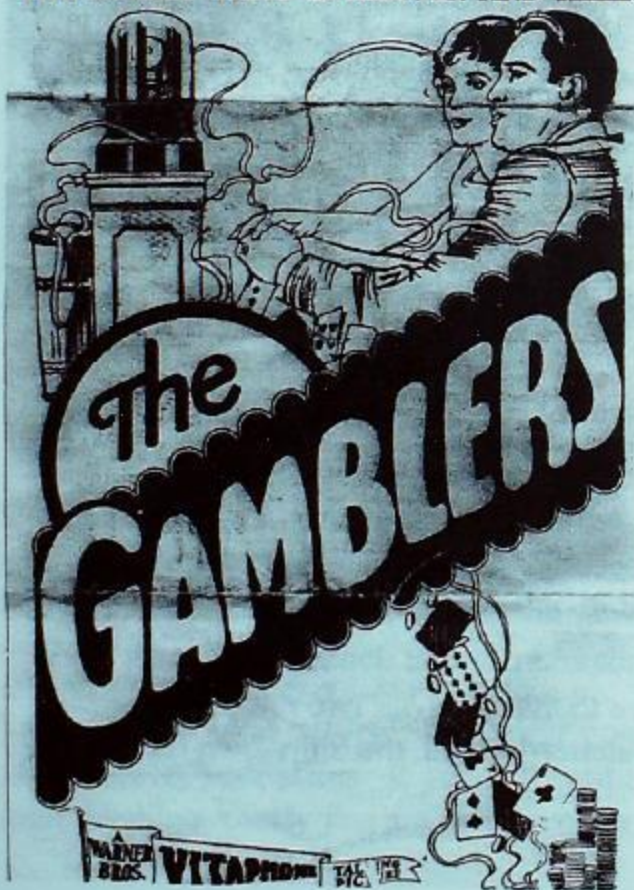
Please make checks payable to: Dover-Foxcroft Historical Society. Mail to: 308 Foxcroft Center Road, Dover-Foxcroft, ME 04426. Dues cover April 2005-2006. Please enclose a list of gift memberships and we'll notify your recipients. The Society is a non-profit organization and all donations are tax deductible. Your membership and/or gift will help us continue to maintain our two museums (the Blacksmith Shop and the Observer Building, publish our newsletter/journal, the Shiretown Conserver, and continue our outreach efforts. Thank you.

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MONDAY-TUESDAY, JAN. 13-14

THE STREET THAT IS HEAVEN AND HELL.



They were miraculous

They were revolutionary

They were condemned

And they were here!

Read the Talkies Came to Town

starting on page 1