

THE SHIRETOWN CONSERVER

The Dover-Foxcroft Historical Society Newsletter

Volume X, Number 1

Spring 2006

Tortured Genius By Jack Battick

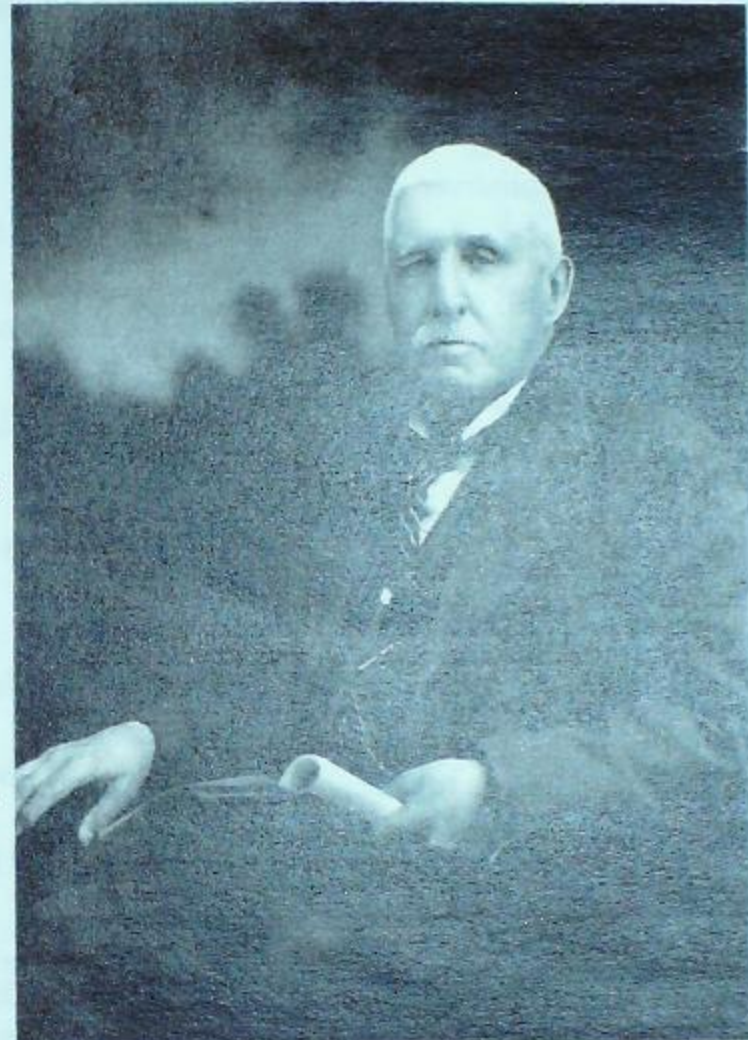
John Francis Sprague, attorney, writer, historian, editor, and naturalist, was late for lunch that noon of May 7, 1926. Reuben Devereaux, who lived in the apartment over Sprague's law office on Union Square in downtown Dover-Foxcroft, went looking for him. Devereaux's daughter Marguerite worked part time as Sprague's secretary and it was Sprague's custom to take lunch with the Devereaux family on most days. But this day Sprague had not appeared at the usual lunch time, so the worried Devereaux had gone to check.

John Francis Sprague, a bachelor, was a familiar sight in Dover-Foxcroft ever since he'd moved to the town in 1910. Born in the Brockway's Mills section of Sangerville on June 16, 1848, Sprague suffered from club feet and the resultant deformed legs so that his very appearance when walking was painful to watch and a trial to Sprague all his life.

Nevertheless, he refused to let his disabilities stand in the way of his mind and his life. His parents had been Millerites, members of a sect that believed in the imminent Second Coming. Consequently, they neglected their property, their physical and economic well-being as superfluous things that would be left behind when the Day of Elevation came. They also neglected the education of their only child. The butt of taunts from other children, John was largely self-taught. Working as a peddler from a wagon as a teenager, he sought to better himself through his mind

because his deformities gave little hope for manual employment.

He learned the law by reading it and listening to others in the profession and was admitted to the bar in 1874, first hanging his shingle in the town of Abbot. In 1878 he moved to Monson. He may never have tried a court case but he (Story continues on Page 8)



John Francis Sprague, attorney and historian. DFHS Photo Collection

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The Dover-Foxcroft Historical Society

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Shiretown Conserver	Nancy Battick

The Shiretown Conserver is published quarterly by the Dover-Foxcroft Historical Society. Reprints available from the editor,

including those that the Society can accomplish fairly easily, those that will take more time, and those that will require grant funding to achieve.



Consultants and staff at work: front row: Jonathan Taggart, Mary Annis. Rear: l-r, Anne Witty, Teresa Myers, Nancy Battick. Photo by Jack Battick.

CAPS Consultant Visit

In 2005 the Dover-Foxcroft Historical Society received a CAPS Assessment Grant through Heritage Preservation and the Institute of Museums and Library Services, the only museum in Maine to receive one in 2005 and only one of three in northern New England.

Funds from the grant allowed us to retain the services of a certified CAPS assessor to evaluate our collections, building, and storage facilities.

Our consultant was Jonathan Taggart of Georgetown, nationally known conservator. Accompanying Jonathan was his wife, Anne Witty, herself a consultant and curator of the Arctic Museum at Bowdoin College. And, for good measure, Teresa Myers, conservation consultant in training for the CAPS program, was part of the team.

The consultants were with us for an intensive 2-1/2 day period in February. Their recommendations will be reported to the Society's board and divided into categories

A final copy of the report will be placed in the Society's library.

MHRAB

As reported earlier the Society also received a Maine Historical Records Advisory Board grant in 2005. Brenda Howitson Steeves, archival and library consultant, worked with the curators to recommend correct procedures for conserving the Society's extensive document and photo collection.

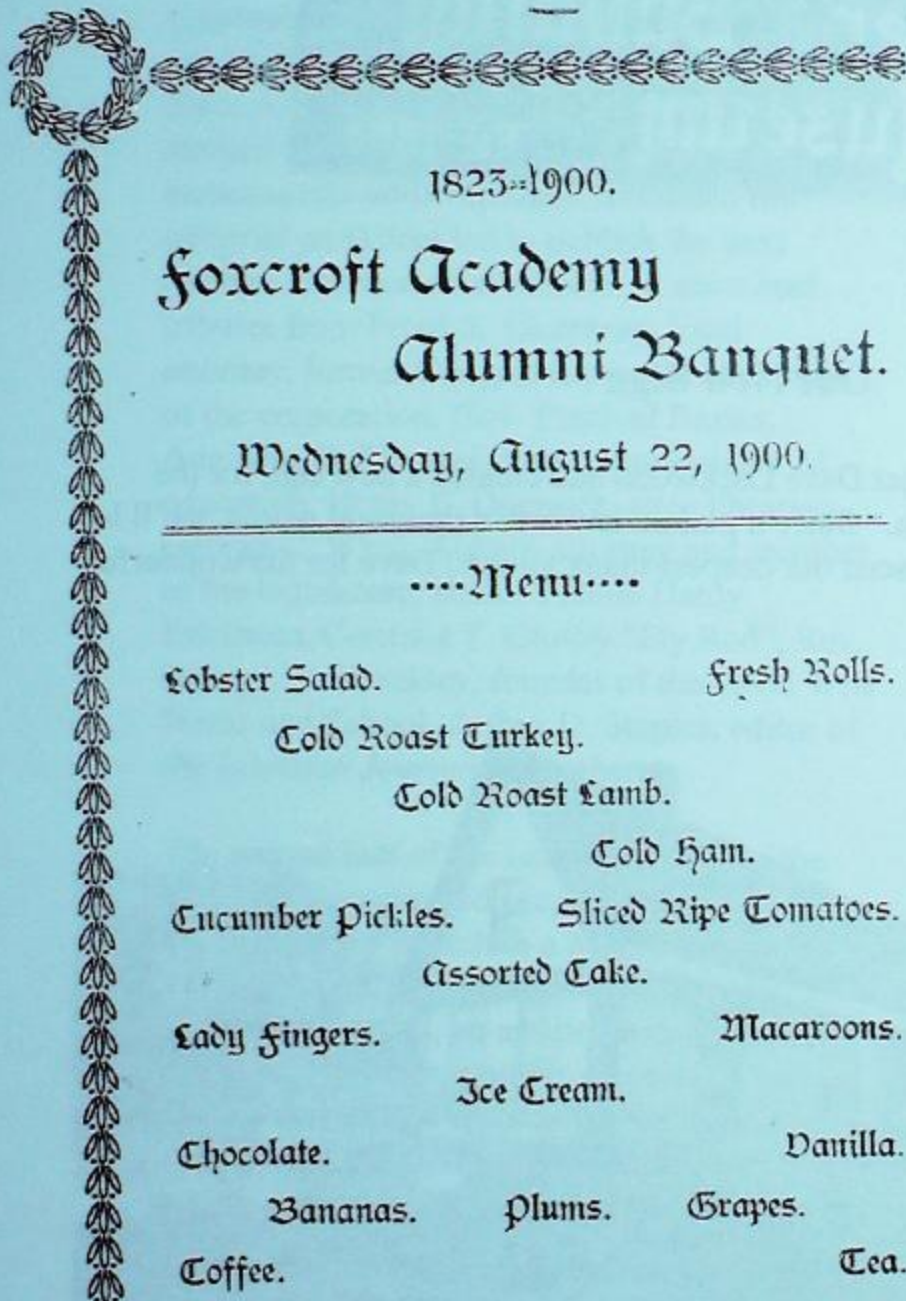
The work encompassed by that grant has been completed and a final report filed with MHRAB. However, ongoing conservation and cataloging of documents and photos is continuing and other grants will be sought.

The curators want to thank all of those who helped with this project: Mary Annis, Edie Hussey, David Dean, Miriam MacArthur, Leilani Stites, Sylvia Dean, Sharon Phillips, Jim Annis, Lois Bigelow, and Helen Taylor.

Our Attic Sale Will Be June 3!

In our last issue we told you that the Society will be holding a white elephant (now renamed Attic Sale) this spring as a fundraiser. The Sale will be June 3 at the Fire Station and the museum will be open that day as well.

To make our sale a success we need your help. Do you have items you can donate to the Society to help in our efforts? (No clothing or large appliances, please). For information, pickup of items, or to volunteer to help work at the sale please contact one of two co-chairs, Sylvia Dean, 876-3663 or Sharon Philips, 564-7251. Please help us make our first ever Attic Sale a huge success.



1823-1900.

Foxcroft Academy Alumni Banquet.

Wednesday, August 22, 1900.

....Menu....

Lobster Salad.	Fresh Rolls.
Cold Roast Turkey.	
Cold Roast Lamb.	
Cold Ham.	
Cucumber Pickles.	Sliced Ripe Tomatoes.
Assorted Cake.	
Lady Fingers.	Macaroons.
Ice Cream.	
Chocolate.	Vanilla.
Bananas.	Plums.
Grapes.	
Coffee.	Tea.

From Our Archives

On August 22, 1900, Foxcroft Academy held its alumni banquet. While we're used to the Academy's grads gathering in August and sitting down to a meal, we thought you'd like to know what was on the menu for those at the 1900 banquet. The entrees included lobster salad, and desserts ran from assorted cakes to macaroons and ice cream to fresh fruit. The affair was catered by Fox & Adams from Bangor.

2006 Dues

It's that time again. If you haven't already paid your 2006 dues please take a moment and send a check (\$5 per person, per year). There's a membership form on page 11 of this newsletter.

If you don't want to cut up your *Conserver*, just send a check with all the information on a plain piece of paper. If you're unsure if your dues are paid, please contact Nancy Battick at 564-3576 to check.

FOX & ADAMS, Caterers, Bangor, Me.



Photo by Jack Battick

Our New Sign

We mentioned in our last issue of the *Conserver* that Dave Lockwood had created a new sign for the Main Street side of the Observer Building Museum. Since a picture is worth a thousand words, we'll let these photos speak for themselves and once again send our deepest thank yous to Dave for his wonderful work.

We'd also like to thank the following members of the Dover-Foxcroft Fire Department who mounted the sign: Joe Guyotte, Mark Young, Matt Branco, and Jason Durgin.

Dave has also refurbished the front entrance sign and that will be remounted in the near future.



Photo by Dave Lockwood



Photo contributed by Elizabeth Warren Hewett

The Society's Unknown

Society member, Elizabeth Warren Hewett is asking for help in identifying these members of the Warren family, all members of the Masons in Dover. She'd also like to know if anyone knows the date of the photo. Two individuals have been identified: in the front row, second from the left, is Arthur Warren, and third one from the left is Elizabeth's father, Stanley Warren. Do any of you know any of the other men?

Our Sponsors

Once again it's time to thank our business sponsors for their generous financial help:

The Green Door Gallery

Finest Kind Tree Farms

Webber's Hardware

Rowell's Garage

Lary Funeral Home

Northeast Publishing

Blacksmith Shop Cataloging

The Society is calling for volunteers to help catalog the artifacts at the Blacksmith Shop Museum. Since this is a warm weather project, the work will be done from late spring through early fall.

Cataloging is an easy job and volunteers will fill out a form for each artifact, number it, and mark it. We'll also try to photograph the various artifacts as well.

Can you help us with this project? If so, please contact Dave Lockwood at 564-8618 or Mary Annis at 564-0820. Cataloging is a fairly easy task, but a very important one. If you can help us, it will be greatly appreciated.

Much Needed Thank Yous

Go out to the following:

Judy Raymond & Probate court for donation of
filing cabinets
Eric Annis for donation of a desk
Chris Almy & county commissioners for
a fax machine
Sharon Philips for readying the Conserver
for mailing
Rich Stites for clearing the museum steps
of snow and ice
Jim & Mary Annis for hosting our CAPS
consultants during their visit
Jim Brown, Dave Lockwood, and Jack Battick
for moving the desk & cabinets

Corinth Historical Society Project

We're happy to assist a sister Society with the following announcement:

The Corinth Historical Society is researching

and writing the history of Corinth, a job which has not been done since 1883. The Society is interested in collecting artifacts and data on the history of Corinth: old letters, farm journals, and receipts, town reports, diaries, photos, school memorabilia, anecdotes you care to share, etc. They are able to copy and return materials, if you don't wish to donate items.

They are also interested in genealogical information on any present or former resident of the town and especially interested in haring from descendants of some of the earlier settlers of the place.

If you have any information that you could contribute, contact them at jamesrwilson@charter.net or by writing Corinth Historical Society, P.O. Box 541, Corinth, Maine 04427.

Editor's Corner

In this issue *The Conserver* is pleased to bring you the story of John Francis Sprague. While many people have heard of *Sprague's Journal of Maine History*, not all know the tragic story of the man who created it and did so much to preserve the history of Piscataquis County.

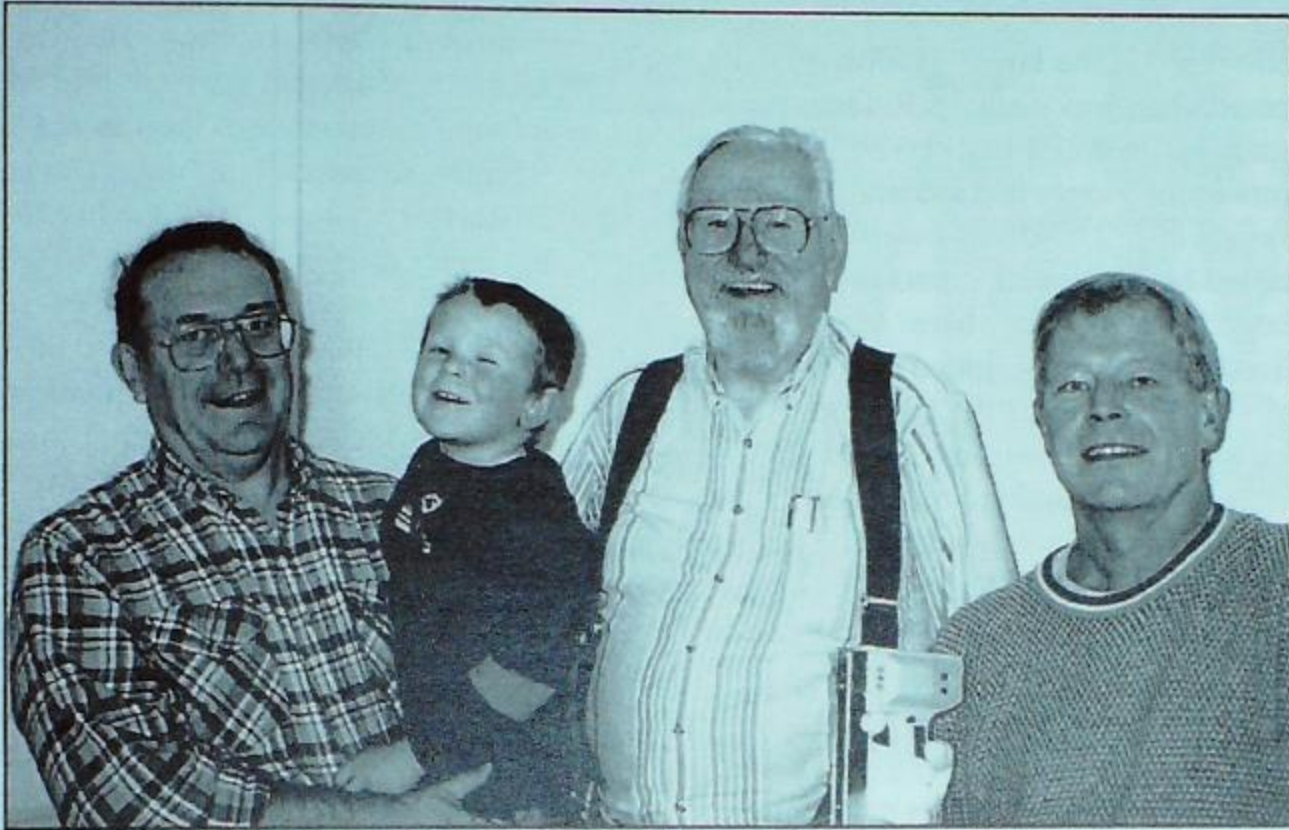
I've also tried to update you on the various projects underway at the Historical Society and those planned for the upcoming months. I hope you can be part of some of our projects, even a few hours of volunteer time is a tremendous help to the Society. No experience required!

Finally, a tip of the editor's hat for those who helped with this issue and getting it ready to mail to each of you: Jack Battick, Dave Lockwood, Mary Annis, Sharon Philips.

Please send articles, suggestions, and comments to me! I value your input.

Nancy Klimavicz Battick

Work on Our Library



A group of volunteers at work on the library ceiling, l-r: Wayne Bennett "Supervisor" Eric Bennett, Jack Battick, and Jim Brown. Photo by N. Battick

Work on the upstairs library at the Observer Building museum continues. As of the date of this issue the walls have been painted and ceiling tiles are installed. Once an electrician has installed the overhead lights and outlets, a rug donated by Rich and Leilani Stites will be installed, and metal shelving moved in. We want to thank the following who've worked on this project to date: Jack Battick, Jim Brown, Dave Lockwood, and Wayne Bennett. Also, our thanks to Moosehead Manufacturing for a library table, Rich and Leilani Stites for carpeting, Mary and Jim Annis for a computer system, and Jack and Nancy Battick for a tv and VCR.

If you'd be interested in helping to set up the library, stack books or file research materials, please contact Jack Battick at 564-3576.

The Society's Most Needed

Do you have any of the following items you could donate to the Society:

- chairs (folding and regular)
- sturdy stepstool for the Library
- sheets for dustcovers
- computer work station
- desk lamps
- smoke alarms (we need 4)

Do You Remember?

In an issue later this year we'll be writing about the elevator accident at Brown's Mills in December 1947. Do you remember this accident or have a relative or friend injured or killed? Could you share any memories, photos, or other items concerning the accident with us? All items will be safely returned. Please contact the editor, Nancy Battick, at 564-3576, e-mail battick@midmaine.com.

Tortured Genius, continued from Page 1

was well-versed in the laws of property, wills, and contracts and was named a Referee in Bankruptcy in 1898. He had served in the state legislature in the House in 1885 and 1893, then in the Senate in 1921. He was well-known in Augusta and his oratorical talents much appreciated there and elsewhere. He was a Republican, but a broad-minded one. He believed women deserved the vote and that education should be provided to uplift all children, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds, like himself. In later life he supported the Good Will Home (now Good Will Hinckley) and School in Fairfield, sending small cash contributions from the meager earnings of his law practice.

Among his other avocations was nature, its preservation and enjoyment. Long before Percival Baxter set out to create a nature preserve in Piscataquis County, Sprague sought to place Mount Katahdin in public trust. He was active in many groups devoted to conserving the fishing and hunting resources of Maine and though the latter was prohibited him because of his handicaps, he enjoyed the quiet sport of fishing. To gain easy access to the water, he purchased a lot at Indian Point on Lake Hebron in Monson, one within easy hobbling distance from the boat landing where he built a small camp. Among his friends and admirers in the piscatory world was Cornelia T. Crosby (a/k/a "Fly Rod") of the Rangeley Lakes region who referred to him affectionately as "Uncle John".

But it was history, especially the history of Maine, that was his true love. From 1913 on he single-handedly published his most enduring monument, *Sprague's Journal of Maine History*. The colonial period of New England was his special interest. He had earlier published a balanced and neutral account of the murder of the French missionary Father

Sebastian Rale at Norridgewock in 1724 by Protestant English colonists during a phase of the war between the English and French for control of North America. He also published histories of several towns in mid-Maine and was a founding member of the Piscataquis Historical Society, an antecedent of the Dover-Foxcroft Historical Society. But it is his *Journal* that is his major monument.

Sprague's declared goal was to provide good, sound, well-researched information on the history of his state in a manner that would appeal to the widest audience. His research in early documents was assiduous, his writing style attractive. He talked neither down to or over the heads of his audience, an all too frequent failing of academic historians, though he did publish in the *Journal* some fruits of academic inquiry. And he devoted a portion of each quarterly issue to genealogy, both in the form of family lineages and queries received from readers.

But where was Uncle John that May afternoon in 1926? He had been visited in his law office earlier that day but when Reuben Devereaux looked into the front office facing the square, he could not see Sprague. He noticed that the door to the back office and living quarters was open and so he ventured to the open door. There he found Sprague seated in his chair, a revolver at his feet and a bullet hole in his temple.

Devereaux quickly summoned the medical examiner who declared the death a suicide. In a coat pocket was found a folded envelope and inside in Sprague's familiar handwriting the following note:

I am tired of life. I am alone, awfully alone. God knows, he will forgive me. Sorry to leave so many old friends in Maine. I must pass out. Remember the marks on my grave stone.

No one had any inkling that Sprague had been contemplating suicide. He had only recently accepted the position of Historian offered by the

Maine Society of the Sons of the American Revolution. The latest number of the *Journal* (Vol. XIV, No. 3, April-June 1926) had recently been mailed and material for about half of the next issue was piled on his desk. And although he had mentioned in passing how alone he felt with so many old friends dying, his spirits seemed unaltered to many who had seen him in the past weeks. The community and the state were shocked at the tragedy.

Though he may not have realized, he was not really alone. At his funeral and for many weeks thereafter, tributes poured forth from all parts of the state. The directors of the *Journal* corporation (as Sprague could not afford to publish the quarterly out of his own pocket, those who strongly supported his purpose had formed a corporation in 1924 to handle the business end while Sprague continued the editorial part) decided to publish the next number as a memorial edition. It contained tributes from Frank E. Guernsey, local attorney, former Congressman, and chairman of the corporation, Gov. Percival Baxter, Augustus O. Thomas, state commissioner of education, Henry E. Dunnock, state librarian, George C. Wing, Auburn attorney and member of the legislature, author Fannie Hardy Eckstrom, Cornelia T. Crosby "Fly Rod", Rev. George W. Hinckley, founder of the Good Will Home and School, Arthur D. Staples, editor of the *Lewiston Journal*, and others.

The second half of the issue consisted of the materials Sprague had prepared before his death: a poem "March in a Maine Pasture", a note on the family of early colonial; preacher Jonathan Edwards, an article on the importance of forestry in Maine, others on prohibition in Maine, on Modern spiritualism in the Kennebec Region, the genealogy of Abraham Somes, first settler of Mt. Desert, and a number of letters.

Sprague was buried in Gray Cemetery in Dover-Foxcroft. His parents are memorialized

on the reverse of the stone. In his will, he left his papers, documents, scrap books and manuscripts to the Piscataquis Historical Society, \$1,500 to Colby College for a scholarship in his name, and the remainder of his estate to the Good Will Home. He left nothing to the *Journal* corporation, however, and the publication of Sprague's most enduring monument ended with the October-December issue (Vol. XIV, No. 4) of 1926.

In the words of Marius B. Peladeau, Sprague's biographer, "It [*Sprague's Journal of Maine History*] was his own personal creation, and without his driving energy it was ordained to die. His heart kept the magazine's blood flowing and when his life ceased so did the *Journal of Maine History*."¹

The complete run of the *Journal* is now available on CD-ROM and collectors still seek original copies of the various issues. Though many of the items printed in the *Journal* lack footnotes or sources, it is still a worthwhile body of work on that which was closest to the heart of John Francis Sprague, the history of his beloved Pine Tree State.

NOTE: Sources used in writing this article include *John Francis Sprague, Chronicler of Maine History* by Marius B. Peladeau, *The Piscataquis Observer (accounts of Sprague's death and funeral)*, *Sprague's Journal of Maine History*, the Memorial edition, *200 Years of Dover-Foxcroft History* by Louis Stevens, and the Dover-Foxcroft Cemetery Records (Gray Cemetery).

¹*John Francis Sprague, Chronicler of Maine History*, by Marius B. Peladeau (Hinckley, Maine: L.C. Bates Museum: 1998), 62.

Remember These Prices?

Koritsky's Shoe Department

Shoes are an important part of your Thanksgiving costume. Your new clothes cannot appear to the best advantage unless your feet are neatly shod. Our shoe stocks are now complete for the winter season. Styles for men, women and children are in variety of styles and lasts.

EVANGELINE

One strap patent and vici kid pumps, military and low heels, all goodyear welts. \$6.00 grade Thanksgiving Special \$4.95. Sizes 2½ to 8. Widths B to E.
Patent Gore Pumps with nickel buckles, military heel, goodyear welt. Thanksgiving Special \$4.95
Black Satin pumps in low and military heels \$3.95 to \$4.95

SPECIAL

One lot of pumps and oxfords, Louis, military and low heels, value to \$6.50 to close \$3.95
Dorothy Dodd Shoes for Women
Dorothy Dodd pumps in patent and vici kid, military and low heels, step in and strap pumps \$5.95 to \$6.95. A to D.

SPECIAL

One lot of Evangeline and Dorothy Dodd oxfords in black and brown calf and vici kid leathers. Low and military heels. Sizes 2½ to 8. AA to E \$4.95

Triangle Brand Shoes for Women
In pumps, boots and oxfords, all sizes, patent gun metal and vici leathers \$2.95
One lot of ladies boots to close \$1.98

Ye Old Tyme Comfort Shoes for Women
Carried in stock at all times, width D and EEE \$2.45 to \$4.45

Co-operative Shoes for Men
All one price \$8.45
Special one lot of men's Co-operative Shoes to close \$4.95

FELT SLIPPERS

Men's felt slippers 98c
Ladies' 79c
Children's Booties 89c
Boys' 89c



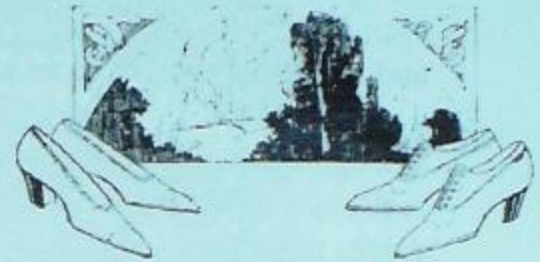
Triangle Brand Oxfords and Boots for Men.
Goodyear welts in black and brown, sizes 6 to 10. \$3.45 to \$4.95
Guaranteed all solid leather.

J. P. S. Shoes for Boys and Girls
Bull Dog wear in every pair. All solid leather \$2.45 to \$3.45
Stitch downs at \$1.95 to \$2.45
Herman Police Shoes, Thanksgiving Price \$6.45

Men's Work Moccasins
Made of dark elk leather composition sole. Every pair guaranteed \$3.45



Barker Hunting Shoes 10" \$5.00
Ball Band Rubber Department



Ball Band 10" black duck leather top rubbers \$3.95. 8" \$3.45
Ball Band lace hurons \$2.25

One lot of men's 10 inch crepe sole rubbers, tan tops. Bean and Hood make \$3.89
12" \$4.39



RUBBER BOOTS

Ball Band and Goodrich knee boots \$5.00
Value \$3.95

SPECIAL

One lot of crepe sole bottoms for leather tops. Bullseye & Bean make.
One lot of boys' 8 and 10" leather top rubbers \$1.48

One lot of boys' 10" leather top rubbers, red bottoms, tan tops \$2.89
One lot of men's rubber bottoms for leather tops \$1.95
\$5.00 Rubbers \$3.48
Hood Bullseye 10" rubbers, sport last, grey sole, half heel \$3.45



SPECIAL

One lot of men's 16" leather top rubbers broken sizes. Value to \$7.00 Price \$3.95
One lot of Ladies', Boys' and Youths' light top rubbers, Ball Band goodyear and Hub Mark Makes to close 50c

Zipper Overshoes for the Entire Family
Ladies' Hub Mark four buckle \$4.50 Jersey overshoes \$3.48
Children's four buckle \$2.45 to \$2.95

CASH SHOE STORE

Dover-Foxcroft, Maine

Wanted!

Volunteer to paint our Observer Building bathroom & door. When we had the bathroom installed we didn't have time to do much except have a new floor installed. Now, we're about to add lights and hot water. If you have the time and inclination to help us out, the bathroom could use a fresh coat of paint and the door as well.

If you're interested in helping please contact Mary Annis at 564-0820.

Mary's Message

Here we are beginning another year at the Dover-Foxcroft Historical Society. We have a full year planned with our regular meetings and some special events, too!

We have been very busy at the museum this winter cataloging - especially the Observer photos which number in the thousands. Many volunteers have come to help and the progress is outstanding. We are planning new exhibits in our cases this summer and will soon be looking for hosts as we open up to the public.

I am looking forward to seeing many of you at our annual meeting on April 5th.

Mary Annis, President, DFHS

Program Schedule

All meetings held at Thayer Parkway Community Center at 7 p.m.

- April 5** Annual Meeting. Program: Wayne Bennett will speak on Company F, 103rd Infantry, WWI.
- May 10** Program: David Dean on the Henry Caleb Prentiss diaries in the Society's archival collection.
- June 7** Program: Leilani Stites will tell us about the Society's wedding gown collection
- September 6** Program: Clark Thompson on "Emma B" a most famous racehorse
- October 4** Program: Jim & Mary Annis, "Big House, Little House, Back House, Barn"

The Dover-Foxcroft Historical Society Membership Application & Donation Form

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 2006-April 2007

The Dover-Foxcroft Historical Society, Inc.
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Dover-Foxcroft, ME 04426-3706

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July August September

**SPRAGUE'S
JOURNAL
of
MAINE HISTORY**

**In Memoriam
John Francis Sprague
June 16, 1848-May 7, 1926**

**Attorney
Naturalist
Writer
Speaker
Historian
Editor**

Handicapped

The Story of John Francis Sprague

begins on Page 1