



THE SHIRETOWN CONSERVER

The Dover-Foxcroft Historical Society

Volume XII, Number 4

Winter 2008-9

Foxcroft Meets The World Via The Tin Can

by Jack Battick

Blame the French Revolution. In 1795 the government of revolutionary France offered a prize to anyone who could work out a way to preserve food for its rapidly growing and successful armies. Just in time for Napoleon to begin his conquests in Europe the prize was awarded to Nicholas Appert so while Napoleon's army marched upon its stomach that stomach was partly filled by foods put up in Appert's glass jars.

New England seafarers also needed food for their long voyages, so soon after the wars in Europe ended transplanted Englishmen in Boston began producing portable food put up in tinned iron cans. There were a lot of problems to work out - how to make and seal cans, how to treat the food so it wouldn't spoil, pick the right vegetables to can, and how to make them look and taste okay. A lot of Yankee ingenuity went into these tasks and a lot of that came from opposite ends of Maine. Around 1840 Isaac Winslow of Portland and Upman Treat of Eastport began to can corn and lobsters respectively. Isaac persuaded his brother Nathan to make cans for corn in his tinshop on Front Street in Portland in 1842. The next year Isaac first cooked his corn in a crude steam cooker. Earliest attempts were to cook the corn on the cob and then can it. Next, the corn was cut by hand from the cob using a straight knife. The result was whole kernels, bits of kernels and silk, and lots of juice, what came to be called "cream-style corn" that in the trade was known as "Maine-style." Isaac's nephew, John Winslow Jones of Portland, invented a knife to cut the kernels off the cob neatly and to extract the silk to make a more palatable product. Isaac and Nathan signed over their rights in the inventions and processes to Jones and soon he became "King of Canned Corn" by winning a couple of patent suits in court in 1873.

Inside This Issue	
Tribute to Jim Brown & Bob Pomeroy	2
Emma B. Memorial	3
Great Xmas Gifts	5
Central Hall	6
Historic Zoning Ordinance	6
A Peek Inside the Blacksmith Shop	9



The Foxcroft Corn Factory. A horse and wagon make a delivery of fresh corn; the yard is covered with shucked husks. DFHS Photo Collection.

Meanwhile the Civil War was fought and food canning went quite a way in meeting the needs of the troops in the field. While armies still wore out their teeth on hardtack and ate beef that went from live animal to tin plate often within an hour, sutlers made fortunes selling canned fruit, peas, and corn to soldiers hankering for a change of diet. Spurred by wartime demand, many technical problems in canning food were worked out. Hand soldering of seams and tops of cans was replaced by semi-mechanized methods.

(Continues on Page 8)

In Memoriam

Society Bids A Sad Farewell To Two Good Friends



James A. Brown
October 6, 1951-
November 8, 2008.



Robert L. Pomeroy
July 19, 1952-
November 8, 2008.

On November 8 the Society was saddened to learn of the loss of these two very special men who drowned in Buttermilk Pond in Bowerbank.

The lifelong friends shared a strong interest in the history of Dover-Foxcroft and the Society. Vice-President of the Society, Jim Brown was the Department Chair of the English Department at Foxcroft Academy. Whenever anything had to be done at the Historical Society Jim was always there to organize or to help. Bob Pomeroy, owner of Rowell's Garage, was an extremely generous sponsor who immediately started reading the latest issue of the *Conservator* when it was delivered to the garage.

The Society mourns the loss of two good friends and sends our thoughts and prayers to their families and friends.

It was the wish of the family of Jim Brown that donations be made in his memory to Foxcroft Academy, the Thompson Free Library, and the Historical Society. The Board of Directors of the Society voted to establish a James A. Brown Memorial Fund which, with annual additions, will be used for major repairs to the Society's two museums.

If you wish to contribute to the Brown Memorial Fund please send checks, marked Brown Fund, to Treasurer James Annis, 28 Orchard Road, Dover-Foxcroft, ME 04426.

There is a link on the Society's website (www.rootsweb.com/~medfhs) to the full obituaries of both men with color photos.

Memorial to Emma B. at Blacksmith Shop



Inside the door of the Blacksmith shop hang two reprints of Emma B. Currier & Ives prints. Photo by Nancy Battick.

On a perfect October afternoon a group gathered at the Blacksmith Shop to witness the dedication ceremony of a memorial stone to Emma B. a noted trotting mare bred in Foxcroft. The grey mare was famous and her efforts on the track earned her the distinction of being the subject of three Currier & Ives prints. A print of Bayard, Emma B.'s sire, was also on display courtesy of Steve Rainsford.

Society President Mary Annis welcomed visitors and introduced Lou Stevens, the featured speaker. Lou gave the history of Emma B.'s breeders, Phineas C. & Clara Jefferds. Their farm in Gray Valley, which no longer exists, was near the site of the Blacksmith Shop. Emma might even have been shod there. Her success on the trotting tracks led to her sale to the owners of the sensationalist periodical *The Police Gazette*, a magazine featuring murder, sex, and mayhem. The *Gazette's* owners changed Emma B.'s name to Police Gazette. She continued racing for many years.

The memorial stone, donated by Clark Thompson, was unveiled and dedicated by Dave Lockwood and Jim Annis. It will remain at the Blacksmith Shop in memory of a fine racing mare whose origins were in Foxcroft.

Visitors also got a chance to visit the newly revamped Blacksmith Shop (a work in progress).

Our thanks to all who made the day possible: Carmen Smith, Dave Lockwood, Mary & Jim Annis, Lou Stevens, and Steve Rainsford.



The memorial stone is near the Blacksmith Shop door and was donated by Clark Thompson and the Friends of the Standardbred Horse. Photo by Nancy Battick.



The dedication party, l-r: Mary Annis, Dave Lockwood, Steve Rainsford, Lou Stevens, Town Manager Jack Clukey, Jim Annis. Photo by Nancy Battick.

The Dover-Foxcroft Historical Society

President	Mary Annis
V. President	
Secretary	Susan Burleigh
Treasurer	Jim Annis
Directors	Sylvia Dean Carmen Smith Jack Battick Steve Rainsford Chris Maas Bob Ladd Nancy Battick
Webmaster	Dale Mower
Curator, Blacksmith Shop Museum	Dave Lockwood
Curator, Observer Bldg. Museum	Jack Battick
Conservator Editor	Nancy Battick
Membership Secretary	Chris Maas
Publicity	Carmen Smith
Cataloging	Chris Maas; Mary Annis, Susan Burleigh

The Society is on the web at
www.rootsweb.com/~medfhs. E-mail us at
dfhistory@yahoo.com.

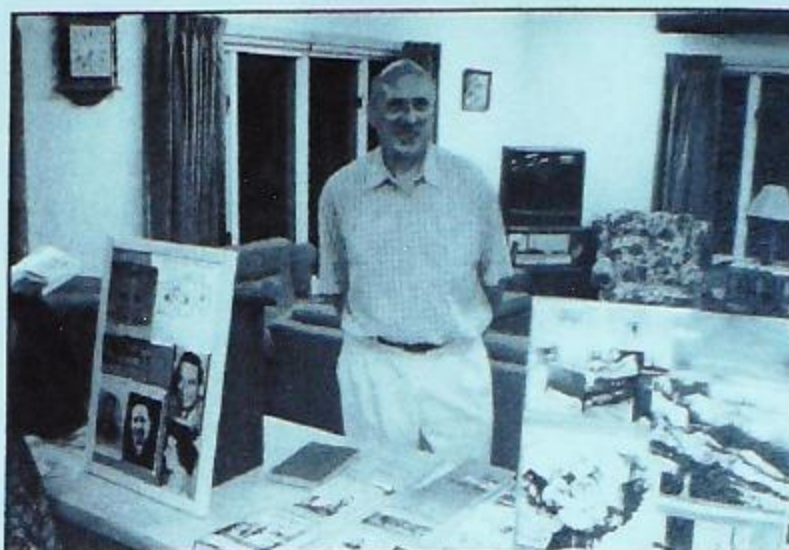
Volunteers Needed

Want to help your Society? We have openings for several volunteer positions. If any of these interest you or you'd like to know please get in touch with us for information:

Assistant Publicity Director
Research Assistant
Programs Assistant
Work with the *Conservator* Editor
Assistant Photographer
Interview Assistant

To learn more please contact Nancy at 564-3576 or Mary at 564-0820.

Who Killed Sir Harry Oakes?



Carlson and some of the displays regarding Sir Harry Oakes' murder and the suspects. Photo by Jack Battick.

At the Society's September meeting Carlson Williams presented a program on the murder of Sir Harry Oakes and the possible murderer(s).

Sir Harry was born in Sangerville; his quest to earn a fortune led him to Canada and a gold strike. Harry became a Canadian citizen for tax reasons and eventually moved to the Bahamas. He was knighted by Britain's King George VI in 1939 for philanthropic charities.

While in the Bahamas Sir Harry moved in the highest circle including the Duke and Duchess of Windsor's until his brutal murder. Carlson gave a detailed roundup of the usual and not so usual suspects and the literature that has dealt with the murder throughout the years. Suspects ranged from the son-in-law, the disgruntled businessman, the mafia, and others.

Carlson declined to share with us his own theory of who the guilty party might be.

Sir Harry Oakes and his wife, Eunice, Lady Oakes, are buried in the Dover Cemetery in a substantial tomb.

Christmas Gifts

This year more than ever people are looking for Christmas gifts that don't bankrupt the budget. The Society offers several inexpensive ways to remember that special person.

Membership: A gift membership in the Society costs \$10 per year, beginning in January 2009. If the person you're giving to is a senior their membership is \$7. Members receive *The Shiretown Conserver* delivered to their homes quarterly. Send the name of the person you are gifting and a check made out to the Society for the correct amount (multiple year gifts are acceptable) and mail it to our Membership Secretary Chris Maas, 874 West Main Street, DF 04426. We'll notify the recipient of your gift.

DVD: The Society's DVD of over 170 images of old Dover & Foxcroft costs just \$10 plus \$3 shipping and handling (or you can pick one up at Mister Paperback). The DVD, created by Carlson Williams with music by Randy Wald, makes a wonderful gift. You can order a DVD from Mary Annis, 28 Orchard Rd., DF 04426.

Ornament: The Society's first ever Christmas ornament (only 100 were made) is a great



collectible costing only \$6 plus \$4 for shipping and handling. The silver glass ball features a portrait of the Blacksmith Shop museum and is dated 2008. We apologize that the photo doesn't do it justice. You can see it in color on our website, www.rootsweb.com/~medfhs. These are nearly gone. Be sure to pick up one for yourself soon. You can order ornaments from Mary Annis, 28 Orchard Rd., DF 04426.

Throw: Many of you are familiar with the Society's throw of Dover & Foxcroft in traditional FA colors with thread portraits of historic buildings. The Society has a few left at \$38 each plus \$8 shipping and handling. This is a terrific gift for all FA alumni.

Dues, Dues, Dues

Beginning January 1st the Society will shift to a calendar fiscal year. Your membership will now run from January to December 31st. The membership secretary, Chris Maas, will be sending reminder letters to all members who haven't already paid their dues for 2009.

We don't want you to miss a moment of the Society's news in the *Conserver* so please send your dues checks as soon as you can.

Shaw's & Igive

The Society is still collecting Shaw's receipts (a percentage comes back to us in cash). Please send your Shaw's register receipts (OSCO counts, too) to Mary Annis, 28 Orchard Rd., DF 04426.

Also, if you purchase online please take a moment to register at igive.com designating the Society as your charity. A portion of your purchase price at hundreds of websites will be sent to the Society - it doesn't cost you anything to do this, so please help support us by registering today.

Historic Zoning Ordinance

A committee of your Society consisting of Jack Battick, Dave Lockwood, Chris Maas, and Steve Rainsford has been developing guidelines for the town government to implement in a revision of the zoning ordinance with the goal of preserving buildings of an historic character in the town. Their report will be submitted to the town government in January 2009. So far, the committee has defined three "historic districts" in the center of the town and is working to refine a list of structures which, for historic or architectural values, deserve to be preserved for posterity. A gallery of photographs and a chart of locations, past and present owners, and criteria for preservation is being compiled and will be refined.

Preservation of historic buildings will be a matter of voluntary commitment on the part of the property owners as the town does not envision setting compulsory rules in this regard. It is the hope of the committee that some means of encouraging owners to preserve the historic character of their buildings can be found. At some point in the future, the committee will prepare a set of self-guided walking tours of the town based on this work.

Update on Central Hall

Earlier this fall an application to place Central Hall on the National Register of Historic Places was rejected at the state level because of extensive additions made to the original structure. As of the moment the building is slated to be emptied in December as the municipal offices are moved to the former Morton Street Elementary School building. Central Hall will then be placed on the market and covenants are being planned to preserve it when it is sold to a developer.

Editor's Corner

All too soon summer has given way to a glorious fall and now the rapid onslaught of winter. Eager volunteers at the Observer Building are now hard at work cataloging (this is a job that never ends), winterizing the building, and planning future events and exhibits. Please consider joining our efforts.

This issue of the *Conserver* brings you up to date on what is happening in the Society's two museums, the ongoing work to keep the Society moving ahead, a look at the Corn Canning Factory in Foxcroft, and the dedication of Emma B.'s memorial stone among other stories.

We also honor the memory of Jim Brown and Bob Pomeroy two men who gave generously of time and money to the Society. We will miss both of them and are saddened by their passing.

The editor, as always, is open to ideas for future articles and submissions of any length: an historic letter is just as welcome as a two part article so please send your memories and thoughts to me for future publication. Please be patient. I can only fit so many articles into one issue so it may be some time before your piece is published and I may have to edit it for space requirements.

And, I'd like to give a tip of the editor's hat to the following who contributed to this issue: Jack Battick and Mary Annis (president's message). And a thank you to Chris Maas for printing the labels and keeping the membership and mailing lists up to date among other tasks.

I wish all of you a most happy holiday season, no matter which holiday you celebrate.

Nancy Klimavicz Battick, Editor
308 Foxcroft Center Rd, Dover-Foxcroft, 04426
nbattick@roadrunner.com or 207- 564-3576.

Cataloging Project Underway We Need Your Help

Does time drag for you during the winter months? We may have the answer to help you and the Society at the same time.

The Society now has Past Perfect museum cataloging software and volunteers are busy entering information on artifacts in our collection into the software program. Over the winter months we'll need people who are willing to keyboard (you do not have to be fast or an expert), take photographs of artifacts, scan some things into the computer (again, we'll teach you how), and help with filing and other tasks associated with this project.

We stress again that you don't need to be an expert, just willing to try something new and give us some of your time.

To volunteer for this project please call Nancy at 564-3576.

Our Business Sponsors

Every issue we're pleased to acknowledge those local merchants who support the Historical Society with services and money. We couldn't accomplish what we do without your generous support:

Friends, Services

Mister Paperback
Bob's Hardware
Bigelow Travel
Nor'easter Restaurant

Patrons (Donations \$50-\$99)

Brothers Chevrolet
Dover Auto Parts

Sponsors (\$100 plus)

Rowell's Garage
Lary's Funeral Home

Drs. Steinke & Caruso
Dr. Ellen Anderson
Foxcroft Veterinary Services
Howard Insurance Agency
Maine Highlands Credit Union
The Green Door Gallery
The Piscataquis Observer
Dr. Sean Stitham
Dr. Mark Stitham

Please be sure to thank these generous merchants and professionals when you patronize their businesses.

Winterizing the Museums

Like everyone else the Society is trying to conserve fuel. Our Blacksmith Shop museum isn't heated over the winter months and thanks to Curator Dave Lockwood and his crew the Shop is nicely tightened up for the upcoming cold weather. (For some sneak preview photos of the "new" Blacksmith shop interior see page 10 and we'll have more in color on our website).

The Observer Building Museum is used year round since it houses our offices, catalog, artifacts, archives, and meeting room. In order to try to reduce the high cost of fuel oil a group of volunteers has been winterizing the museum. We've insulated outside wall light switches and outlets, covered most of the windows with plastic, made sure the doors are as airtight as possible, etc. Next year we hope to work at cleaning and insulating the attic and the back entry.

A thousand thanks to those who helped with this work: Carmen Smith, Chris Maas, Susan & Tim Burleigh, Jim Annis, and Nancy Battick. Hopefully all our hard work will show some reductions in the amount of oil used for the building and thus benefit the Society's budget.

Canning Factory. Learning what to mix with fruits and vegetables to make them not only look nice but tasty and how to prevent them from “going bad” in the can were slowly and painfully developed.

At first a filling hole was left in the top of the can and the cooked corn was poured in. Next a cap was soldered over the hole. The cans were then placed in boiling water for an hour, removed and wiped dry and a small hole pierced in the cap to let out air. A drop of solder was next applied over the hole creating a slight vacuum and the cans boiled another hour, cooled, and cooked another hour, a technique patented by the Portland Packing Company. It didn't always work. Exploding cans not only made a mess, but the most nauseating smells were released and sometimes botulism was a hidden menace. In 1869 the “retort,” a pressurized steam heated device, was invented by a Mr. McLellan of Gorham, Maine. It is the retort that is the life-saver by raising the temperature in the cans high enough to kill any bacteria in the contents.

John Winslow Jones days as “King” ended in 1878 when some of his patent decisions were reversed, but in the meantime Volney Barker from Denmark, Maine invented machines to speed up the process. One stripped the kernels neatly from the cob, one separated the silk from the cut corn, and a third could fill 60 cans with cooked corn in 1 minute.

All this ingenuity came to Foxcroft in 1892 when the Portland Packing Company, which had bought out Jones' interests, persuaded area farmers to devote 300 acres to the growing of sweet corn from seed provided by the company. With those contracts in hand, Portland Packing appealed to the town for assistance in setting up a cannery. At town meeting the citizens voted to grant the company tax freedom for 5 years and in less than 2 months a large, two story wooden structure some 210 feet long by 35 feet wide was constructed next to the Maine Central Railroad tracks in Foxcroft. A rail siding was



While bosses stand and watch, workers including women and young children husk corn and fill bushel baskets. The pole barn is in the rear of this photo. DFHS Photo Collection.

laid next to the building with a loading platform just at car sill height. The site was probably just east of Forest Street between Dwelley Avenue and the present bike path. Adjacent were the creamery, a sawmill, and the spool mill. There was a pole barn erected just east of the main building to shelter huskers in inclement weather and to store cases of canned corn prior to shipping.

In the spring of 1893 many acres of sweet corn were sown in the Dover & Foxcroft area while equipment was installed in the new “corn factory” as it was locally known. This was the most northerly of the many such canneries built in the state in the 19th century. Its closest rival was in Dexter. Come fall, the first wagon loads of freshly picked sweet corn were brought to the factory where there waited over a hundred folks aiming to earn extra cash. About half were employed as huskers at the rate of 4 cents a bushel of husked ears. All this was done by hand and there really were no limits on who might do it - women, young boys and girls and a few men seeking to supplement their incomes. Since speed was the clue in earnings, a handy husker might earn as much as 20 cents an hour at the rate of 5 bushels of ears. Not much by today's standards, but 20 cents could buy more in the 1890s. By pooling hands a mother and 2



A wheelbarrow man wheels a load of bushel baskets of husked corn into the factory. DFHS Photo Collection.

children could earn a couple of dollars a day.

Of course the work was not steady. It depended on how many wagon loads were on hand during the day. The huskers, if there were many, could get ahead of the cutters inside the building and the husker boss would call a halt until the bins inside were drawn down or the cookers emptied or the can fillers caught up, or the retorts emptied. It was stop and go work. About as many hands were employed inside as outside with a gang of wheelbarrow men hustling filled bushel baskets through the large sliding doors of the cannery and boys at the other end tossing empty ears into wagons to be trucked back to the farms for cattle feed. The empty husks littered the ground around the factory until at the end of the workday when these were hauled off to be siloed to feed cows.

That first year of work the cannery may have shipped out about 25 freight car loads of canned corn, 24 cans to the case or around 330,000 cans. Women pasted labels on the cans as orders were filled. While Portland Packing Co. ran the plant, its output bore whatever labels the packing company's customers dictated. Some was shipped later as far south as Alabama. By 1900 over 50 carloads were being shipped.

The canning period ran 8-10 weeks in September and October. Some years were less productive than others due to the weather, so workers had little security when it came to

seasonal income. But it all paid bills. Until cans were brought in from "away" there was always work for can makers in town. In peak years over half a million cans had to be ready to be filled when picking started. Mechanization changed that. Box makers built wooden cases from locally grown and sawed lumber as well. Toward the end machines even took over the task of husking out ears so factory jobs moved largely inside. But farm income depended on the cannery.

The night of May 20, 1925 a fire broke out in several places in the industrial portion of the town next to Dwelley Avenue. Before it was under control a sawmill, the creamery, part of the spool factory and the Corn Factory were all gone. The inventory of canned corn had been shipped out so there was no spectacular sight of exploding cans being flung at firefighters. It was determined the fires had been deliberately set, but no one was ever convicted of arson. Thus a chapter in the busy life of our town closed. Young folks moved away, the extra



Young children are seen working with their mothers in this photo of huskers. DFHS Photo Collection.

income dried up, corn fields were planted to something else and the woods moved in again. Somewhere there may survive a can label or a wooden packing crate from the era when the Corn Factory flourished in Foxcroft. It would be wonderful to add these to the Society's collections.

A Peek Inside the "New" Blacksmith Shop

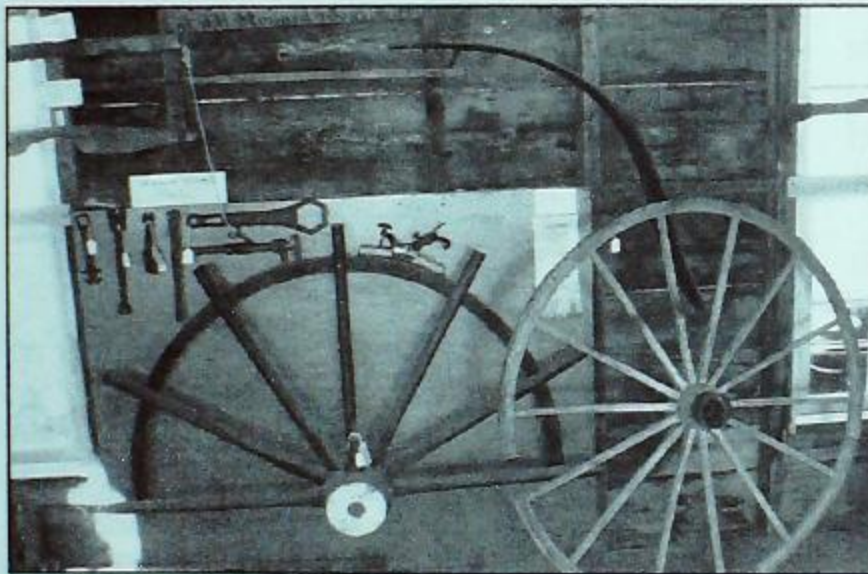
Curator Dave Lockwood tells us the Blacksmith shop is a work in progress with more interpretative material, special displays, and other surprises in store. The museum is looking great already with no clutter, attractive displays, and we thought you'd like to see how things are progressing. Be sure to visit the Shop next year.



On one side of the forge can be found vintage signs and ox bows.



The saws, clearly labeled, now hang on a bright wood wall.



Equipment to make wheels of various types await the blacksmith's attention.



A vintage sleigh in a well-lit nook along with various tools.

A Message From Mary

We are now in the time of year when we can devote ourselves to the work at the museum. We have our new Past Perfect software and have entered more than 2,000 items into the database. It's a great system and will allow us to track our artifacts and do lots of research for people, especially after we have entered the other thousands of items. We could sure use help with this (see page 7 for information).

We mourn the passing of two men who were so supportive of our efforts. Bob Pomeroy of Rowell's Garage had been a business sponsor for years, and Jim Brown, a member of our board, currently serving as our Vice-President. They both leave a huge hole in our Society and in the community. Our prayers go out to their families and loved ones.

I wish you all a very Merry Christmas and hope your New Year will be healthy and happy.

Mary I. Annis
President, DFHS



The Dover-Foxcroft Historical Society Membership Application & Donation Form

Name: _____

Mailing Address: _____

Town/City: _____

Phone: _____ e-mail: _____

Annual Dues (\$10 per person; \$7 senior membership):\$ _____ Donation: \$ _____ (tax deductible). Donation to James A. Brown Memorial Fund \$ _____ (tax deductible).

Please make checks payable to: Dover-Foxcroft Historical Society. Mail to: 874 West Main Street, Dover-Foxcroft, ME 04426. Dues cover January to December. .

If you are giving a gift membership, please include the name and address and we'll gladly notify the recipient of your gift. The Society is on the web at www.rootsweb.com/~medfhs; e-mail us at dfhistory@yahoo.com.

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

NON-PROFIT
U.S. POSTAGE PAID
PERMIT NO. 57
DOVER-FOXCROFT
ME.



*Our Wishes for You and
Those You Love*

*Joyous, Peaceful,
Healthy, and Wonderful Holidays*