

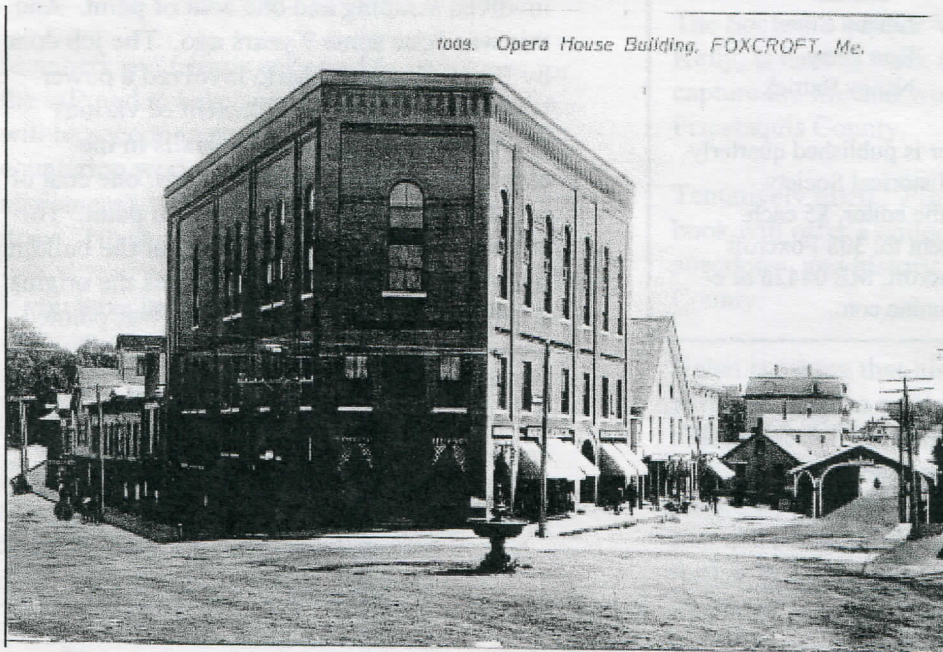
THE SHIRETOWN CONSERVER

The Dover-Foxcroft Historical Society Newsletter

Volume IX, Number 4

Winter 2005-6

Foxcroft's Opera House By John F. Battick



The Foxcroft Opera House Building & Block, before 1911. DFHS Collection.

and Corinna joined the Dover-Foxcroft firemen battling the blaze. They were able to save the adjacent structures on Lincoln Street, but those on Main Street, between the Opera House and the bridge were lost. By morning's light, the flames were out, though coal stored in the basement of the Opera House, would smoulder for a month. Fallen bricks and charred timbers littered the square and both intersecting streets. Fragments of the tall brick walls which had made the structure the largest in town stood gaunt against the winter sky while towards the bridge over the river, smoking remnants of two woodframe buildings showed an open space that would never be closed again.. On Lincoln Street a sheathing of ice hid damage to the two buildings housing the law offices of C. W. & H. M. Hayes, as well as of Judge W. A. Burgess.

Victims of the fire were 3 business offices, 4 stores, 2 restaurants, a dentist's office, a beauty parlor, barber shop, and (To page 7)

The night of December 30/31, 1935, the town of Dover-Foxcroft lost one of its most prominent edifices. From her bedroom on Harrison Avenue, young Madelyn Ballard watched flames consume the Opera House on Monument Square less than a half mile away. Earlier that evening, she and her parents, returning home from a meeting at Central Hall, had walked past the building now blazing in the night. Fire companies from Dexter

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The Dover-Foxcroft Historical Society

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Report on the Treasurer's Appeal: Onward & Upward By Jim Annis

Excitement and more excitement as the Society makes great strides toward the restorations of the Observer Building Museum and the Blacksmith Shop. These historic buildings deserve great care. It has been the determined efforts of the members of the Society's Board of Directors to see to their continued preservation - buildings of which the townspeople of Dover-Foxcroft can be proud.

However, it has taken a toll on the treasury and the strength of the Board. It's time to take a breather, step back and set our next priorities. But, I can guarantee you, with the Board of Directors you've elected, it won't be much of a breather. Already there's talk among the Board members of restoring the

front of the Observer Building to its original design. As your treasurer, we'll see!

The Observer Building has seen the roof replaced at a cost of \$10,325. However, the roof is a 30 year roof and of quality materials and comes with a warranty. The painting of the building came at a cost of \$14,301.93. When one considers that the painting done last time cost a little over \$1,800, one wonders about the significant increase. Many of the clapboards were either missing or in extremely bad shape and had to be replaced. The last painting only involved scraping and one coat of paint. And this was done some 9 years ago. The job done by Butch Cramer of Milo involved a power washing, scraping, replacement of various clapboards, setting of all the nails in the clapboards, putting the nail heads, one coat of primer paint, and 2 coats of finish paint. The colors of white with green trim for the building were researched by our curators as the original colors. At one time the building was painted completely red! Interesting!

Wow, you're saying, where did all this funding come from? Fortunately, a town-sponsored program called a facade grant from Eastern Maine Community Development (To page 10)



The roofing crew tackled the flat iron roof with the help of a bucket lift. Photo by J. Battick

Yard Sale! Book Sale! Bake Sale! Our First Ever White Elephant Sale



On June 3, 2006, the Society will sponsor a yard/book/bake sale at the Fire Station in Dover-Foxcroft. This will be a major fundraiser for the Society in 2006.

Members and friends are urged to save items for the sale and to bake something if they can. We will be accepting general household items, countertop working appliances (no large appliances), tabletop TVs, books, and other items. No clothing, please!

If you have items to donate now or need further information please contact either of the sale's co-chairs, Sylvia Dean at 876-3663 or Sharon Phillips at 564-7251.

Please mark your calendars for this date and help us make it a financial success for our Society. Funds raised will be applied toward continuing repairs at our two museums.

From Our Archives A Recipe For What Ails You

Among the treasures in our Archive is this recipe found among the Favor Tavern papers donated by Madelyn C. Betts. We have no hint what it was supposed to "cure". We have left the original spellings and lack of punctuation. The recipe dates from around 1830.

Steep Chocolate, yellow Dock Burdock and Sarsa purrella with Poplar tree & dandelion root & Branch Steep two ounces of each Kind in a

quart of water & Sweeton with Loaf-Sugar and put it in a cool place take Half a wine glass full three times a day

PS you may Add one pint of pune P.t wine & if so you must take two thirds of a wine glass full thee times a day

Piscataquis Landscapes

The Society's former Vice-president, Helen Kelly, is hard at work on a project intended to capture the life and work of 20th Century Piscataquis County.

Tentatively titled "*Piscataquis Landscapes*", the book will offer a collection of photos, anecdotes, and history of the towns of the County.

Helen is asking that historical society members who have photos and/or stories they'd like to share about life in Dover-Foxcroft from 1900 to 2000 contact her. She is asking specifically that photos be crisp and clear since they'll be scanned and reproduced, and "not static". Rather than posed formal class photos and their ilk, she is looking for photos that show people working, having fun, or otherwise engaged in life.

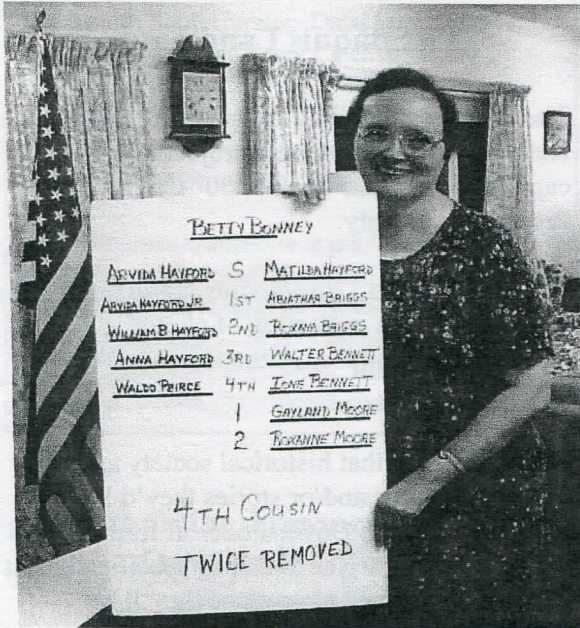
She's also seeking stories. If you have a memory of life in town that you think might be worthy of being included please write it down and send it to Helen

She won't be able to use everything submitted, but will carefully consider all items and the original photos will be returned to their owners.

Helen's address is: 850 West Main Street, Dover-Foxcroft, ME 04426.

What's A Removed?

Roxanne Moore Saucier, author of Family Ties a weekly genealogical column in *the Bangor Daily News*, joined us at our final meeting of 2005 to talk about "cousins". Roxanne explained the degrees of kinship, including "removes" and talked about some Piscataquis county cousins, including Sir Harry Oakes.



Roxanne Moore Saucier and a simple relationship chart. Photo by Jack Battick

New Members

We welcome the following new members to the Society:

Debie Fillmore	Massachusetts
Ed Conroy	Maine
Constance P. Brown	Oregon

Deceased Members

The Society was saddened to lose the following members and sends our deepest sympathy to their families:

Bill Allen

Kay Green

As Reported in the Observer

"A very unfortunate and sad accident occurred in front of Carleton's harness shop one day towards the close of last week and the relatives of the victim have the sympathy of the readers of the OBSERVER we are sure. This terrible affair happened in rather a mysterious manner, and the mystery adds to the interest. The victim was riding from the Dover post office and when just opposite the harness shop, sunk in the mud which is in that vicinity. When discovered, he was entirely out of sight with the exception of his hat. Horse, carriage and all were sunk into oblivion, and if Mr. F.W. Gifford had not discovered the hat in the mud, no one would have known anything about the affair. At the time we go to press, no knowledge of who the unfortunate was has been gained. People living in the vicinity are very sorry some one did not come along before Mr. Gifford so they might have known whom the person was. The hat was an ordinary one and furnished no clue to the owner."

Piscataquis Observer, April 30, 1896

Editor's Note: We regret to inform you that the unfortunate "victim" was never identified. Many of you will note the similarity to a favorite "Bert and I" story. Apparently jokes about the ferocity of Maine's "mud season" have been perennial staples.

The Society's Unknown

This issue's unknown is a recent gift. The carte d'visite photo was taken by D.C. Dinsmore of Dover, Maine and shows a young woman in a costume replete with stars. Some suggestions have been that this was a traveling performer, or one in a series of ethnic photos. Do any of you have any information as to who or what this photo is about?



Girl in Costume. Photo by D.C. Dinsmore, Dover, Maine. DFHS Collection

News From The Archives

The Society's archival grant project is well underway. For those of you unfamiliar with this project, a grant from the Maine Historical Records Advisory Board allowed us to obtain the services of a consultant to review our priceless documents and photos and offer advice on how best to preserve them. Archival safe (acid-free) storage containers and supplies were purchased with grant funds and work is now in progress to do the following:

- 1) Place our oldest, most fragile, and rarest documents into acid-free file folders and acid-free storage boxes.
- 2) Get the *Piscataquis Observer* photo collection into acid-free storage containers and begin the cataloging process.
- 3) Place acid-free paper between the pages of some of our oldest photo albums and scrapbooks for temporary storage.
- 4) Place our extensive cabinet and carte-d'visite photo collections into acid-free sleeves and acid-free boxes and create an index system.
- 5) "Relax" some tightly folded historic documents to allow them to be stored flat.

Many thanks to all those who are helping with this project, including: Mary Annis, Jack Battick, Sharon Phillips, Edie Hussey, Miriam MacArthur, Leilani Stites, Lois Bigelow, Helen Taylor, David Dean, and Jim Annis.

Work will continue on this project for some time. If you're interested in helping please contact Nancy Battick at 564-3576.

The Blacksmith Shop Season By David Lockwood

We had a successful and busy season this year. From Memorial Day weekend through October, there were 251 visitors who signed our guest book. That is about average. As in the past several groups also came including a home school group and a local group home.

Notably this year was the replacement of all the main windows in the Shop, 9 at ground level and 2 upper units at each of the gable ends. In an effort to match the originals, the replacements are single-hung wooden. Donor plaques for each window are being ordered and will be in place for next season.

On August 6, the Saturday of Homecoming, we



Late autumn sunshine reflected in the new windows at the Blacksmith Shop Museum. Photo by J. Battick

had a Blacksmith Shop Field Day in which 3 blacksmiths and 2 farriers demonstrated their crafts. A local 4-H group sold sandwiches and drinks and about 150 people attended.

Projects to be yet completed are the shingling of the north side roof and installing winter covers over the new windows.

Editor's Corner

In this issue of the *Conservator* we feature the grand Opera House of Foxcroft, in part because so many people are unaware that there *was* an Opera House. We also have included several pieces of the ongoing work at both our museums as well as the archival and photo collection. And, to share some of what's in our collection we're starting a feature "From Our Archives". We'll try to print something from our vast collection to share with you in each future issue.

And, a tip of the editor's hat goes to all who contributed to or helped ready this issue for distribution, namely Sharon Phillips, Dave Lockwood, Jim Annis, Jack Battick, and Mary Annis.

If *you'd* like to submit something for the *Conservator* please send it to me. Photos will be scanned and returned. If you have suggestions for items for future issues, please let me know that as well. And, I want to wish each of you a happy holiday season and hope it will be a joyous season for you and your loved ones.

Nancy Klimavicz Battick

Thank You, Thank You, Thank You

Sometimes you just can't say those words enough. The Historical Society is an all-volunteer organization which means we won't exist without your contribution, timewise and financial. This issue we have several special people and businesses to thank:

Dave Lockwood for refurbishing the front sign of the Observer Building Museum and for creating a magnificent sign for the Main Street side of the building (not yet up, but watch for it soon!) We don't know what we'd do without Dave. (To Page 7)

Moosehead Manufacturing for the donation of a fine maple table for our library.

Webber Hardware for donating strapping for the ceiling in the library (as well as offering us discounts on the ceiling tiles and paint).

All of you who gave time to host this year.

Our Business Sponsors

And a sincere thank you to our business sponsors who helped the Society with their financial support in 2005.

Lary Funeral Home
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C. W. & H. M. Hayes, P.A.
Webber's Hardware & Building Supply
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Bangor Savings Bank
Rowell's Garage
Drs. Daniel L. Steinke & Hillary F. Caruso
Finest Kind Tree Farms
Dr. David P. Frasz
Dr. Ellen Anderson
Dr. Mark Stitham
Dover-Foxcroft Chiropractic Center

We couldn't do it without your support and hope you'll continue with us in 2006.

Foxcroft's Opera House (from page 1)

5 apartments, as well as Society Hall, the auditorium on the top floor of the Opera House and venue for stage productions, motion pictures, special town events, and Foxcroft Academy graduations. With its balcony, Society Hall had seated over 900 persons, while a smaller hall on the building's second floor had served as the site for town meetings as well as meetings of the Piscataquis Club, a business and professional association. And with its demise went a staunch reminder of inter-town rivalry



Flames engulfed the restaurant and shops nearest to the bridge. Photo courtesy of Alan Smith.

that had itself ended 13 years before. The Opera House was built to meet two needs of the town of Foxcroft: businesses run by residents of the town sought modern premises on their side of the river, and as the town grew in population, a large hall was required for the annual town meeting. Until the new building went up in 1892, Foxcroft selectmen had to rent space for town meetings. In 1885-86, the town meetings were held on the premises of O.P. Martin; in 1890, the town paid E. S. Favor the princely sum of \$12 for "use of the hall for town meetings". Local historian Lou Stevens suggests that Foxcroft town meetings could have been held in the congregational Church or the Academy Building, or (perish the thought!) In the third floor of the Mayo Block *on the Dover side of the river!* The need for a spacious, permanent meeting place was keen in the hearts of the residents of Foxcroft. After all, residents of Dover could point with pride to *their* Central Hall, dedicated March 1882, with its office spaces on the first floor and the large auditorium on the second capable of stage productions, graduations, dinners, etc. *So, there, Foxcroft!*

Civic pride prompted a group of Foxcroft businessmen to form the Piscataquis Improvement Company (hereafter PICO) in the spring of 1891. 400 shares with par value of \$50 was the initial capitalization, with the majority of shareholders holding 2 shares, a few but 1, others with 5 or more. The two largest shareholders were Josiah B. Mayo (of the

woolen mill) with 20, and Sheldon S. Davis with 130. Davis was from Greenville! How did that happen?

Well, he just happened to own the parcel of land the incorporators had in mind - at the junction of Lincoln and Main Streets at the Foxcroft end of the bridge. It is a curious fact that Sheldon Davis had purchased that land from Benjamin H. Davis and Hiram S. Davis, of Foxcroft, a little over a year before the incorporation of the PICO, at the price of \$4,500. The day after the incorporation of PICO, Sheldon Davis deeded the land to PICO for \$4,300. On the incorporation papers he is listed as owning 130 shares of stock plus "my interest in the real estate". A little quick calculation will reveal that Sheldon had made a book profit of \$2,000 on the deal.

The lot in question was irregular in shape: 80 feet on Main Street, 90 feet on Lincoln Street, with an easterly line that doglegged at right angles to the two streets. With a facade facing what would be called Monument Square a few years later, the structure to be raised on the lot was five-sided with a basement and 3 floors, the upper one to be a high ceilinged auditorium. Because of the slope of the lot, there was space for 2 stores in the side facing Lincoln Street which were in fact in the basement, while there would be two additional store spaces on the first floor of the Main Street side, plus another store facing the square. The second floor and part of the first on the Lincoln Street side would contain seven office spaces with closets, and a meeting hall. Access to the upper floors would be from an arched entryway on Main Street and via a stairway abutting the law offices of F. W. Knowlton (1 share) starting at the basement level on Lincoln Street.

Before construction could begin, the existing structure on the lot was bought by O.P. Martin (2 shares) who moved it across and up North Street to the site of the present Penquis CAP building with some inconvenience to traffic for

a couple of weeks. By late August 1891 large blocks of granite had been brought in for the foundations, some from South Dover, most from Guilford, set into well-laid concrete to support the tremendous weight of over half a million bricks, some from East Dover, the greater part from Waterville. A Waterville contractor was hired to do the brickwork. By October 1 the brickwork had commenced, there having been some delay in the materials reaching the site. Despite the onset of cold weather, the brickmasons were finished by mid-November and inside carpentry work began. Cost overrun made it necessary for the shareholders to raise additional funds to finish the inside work. By late January 1892 the grocery store on Lincoln Street began setting up shelves and counters and 10 large (7 by 9 feet) plate glass windows were soon set on the fronts of the stores facing the streets. There does not seem to have been a ribbon-cutting ceremony to inaugurate the new structure, but the 1892 Foxcroft town meeting was held in the building on March 14. The voters of Foxcroft had leased the smaller hall on the second floor before construction had even started.

Initial occupants of the building were C. D. Paine, clothier (4 shares), and F. D. Folsom, dry goods (2 shares) on Main Street, and W. S. Ham, grocer (4 shares) on Lincoln Street. Later a restaurant was established in the other street level space on Lincoln Street as well as a barber shop and drug store on the first floor. The second floor rooms were occupied by a variety of businesses and some converted to apartments. The grand auditorium would not be finished until after the first stage presentation and the acting company complained of the drafty dressing rooms. Still later an elevator was added to relieve the companies of lugging props, scenery, and costumes up three flights of stairs. A few senior citizens recall seeing silent films in the Opera House as well as attending other events. In photos of events, Society Hall is easily identified by checking the side walls: if they converge toward the stage, it was Society

Hall, if they do not, it was Central Hall. The stage in the former was at the "short" end toward Monument Square.

In 1922 the twin towns "wed" and the rivalry officially ended and town meetings were held at Central Hall.

On the evening of December 30, 1935, a fire broke out in the kitchen of the Roma Restaurant on the Lincoln Street side. Quickly reported and supposedly quenched, the firefighters went home. Just before midnight, janitor W. A. Jipson was awakened in his bed on the second floor by something that didn't seem right to him. When he opened the door to the hallway, dense smoke billowed into his room. He groped his way toward the stairs. Today, he might have been taught to drop and crawl to the exit, but Jipson was upright and part way down when he collapsed. Fortunately, he ended up in the vestibule of the Lincoln Street doorway where he was discovered and rescued. The only fatality of the fire was a cat in one of the two frame buildings which caught fire from the Opera House blaze. Some businesses were able to save a few items of stock and equipment, but most were lost. After the fire was extinguished, several safes were eventually recovered from the ashes in the basement with their contents intact,



The remains of the Opera House still smolder in this photo. Water can be seen playing on the ruin. Midway, the heavily damaged Hayes Law Office is visible. Photo courtesy of Alan Smith.

including the records of the town's tax collector whose office had been on the second floor.

Thus ended an establishment in which the citizens of Foxcroft had once taken great pride. For 43 years the Opera House had shared the skyline in the west end of town with the Congregational Church steeple and the belfry of the Mayo Mill.

While the Opera House is gone now, if you look at the brickwork next to the Hayes Law Office on Lincoln Street you will be looking at the remnants of the Opera House.



Spectators in Monument Square gaze at the ruined Opera House. The Masonic Building is at the rear right in this picture. Photo Courtesy of Alan Smith.

(Onward, From Page 2) helped tremendously in getting the job done. The roofing job cost the Society \$2,581.25 with the grant picking up the rest of the cost. Painting of the museum cost the Society \$3,528.25 with the grant picking up the remainder. A new bathroom was added to the first floor of the museum replacing the upstairs bathroom that had a lot of problems. This cost the Society \$1,426. This work was not part of the grant but not a bad deal when you consider it included a toilet, sink, and water heater.

Then, of course, there's the matter of heat for the winter. Fortunately, the Blacksmith Shop is unheated, but the Observer Building has hot water heat. Prebuying the fuel oil necessary to last throughout the winter cost the Society \$2,080.65 at \$2.199 per gallon. With the added bills of lights, water, sewer, and telephone our treasury reflects a positive balance of \$5,125.35 at the end of October down from \$14,688 at the end of May of this year. But, we're on our way up again thanks to so many of you who have answered our appeal.

The Blacksmith Shop has had all the windows and frames replaced and we're now awaiting the brass tags with the names of those of you who have risen to the challenge of replacing them. The replacement windows cost the Society \$3,785 for the 11 windows. Because of a mid-winter price change, the window costs went over a little more than we expected.

The next project for the Shop will be the replacement of the building sills and replacement of the roof shingles on the north side of the building. The south side of the roof has already been replaced with Class A cedar shingles. A new sign has been placed near the road and looks just great. Dave Lockwood, The Blacksmith Shop curator, has been extremely active in keeping a close eye on the repairs to the Shop and was responsible for the complete coordination of the very successful "Smithy" Day celebrated on the grounds in August. He really put the Blacksmith Shop in the spotlight

that day.

With the extremely hard work of Jack and Nancy Battick, none of this would have been accomplished, Tirelessly, they pursued grants, finagled donations, and begged volunteer work. The success of the July 2nd Civil War celebration at Monument Square was due to their efforts. Grants from the Maine Humanities Council and the Historical Collection Grant needed for the purchase of protective materials for our valuable collection of artifacts and to fund the July 2nd celebration was due to the efforts of the Batticks. They are invaluable to your Society. They pursued the facade grant for the Observer Building museum to the point of exasperating town officials. But you know how government works. Sometimes they need a little prodding. Right? Believe, me, Jack and Nancy know how to prod.

Our efforts have not been in vain. With the Observer building residing in the center of the town many people pass by on their way to work, to recreate, or on their way to Bangor and have remarked about how grand the building looks. It's a real source of pride for our membership. It's been a real labor of love for those who have been a very important part of its restoration.

Currently there's a lot of activity in the Observer Museum cataloging all the photos and artifacts. This is important in that we must be able to put our hands on whatever an individual is doing for research. And there have been many calls from people doing research.

This is not a job done by a few members, but by many - too many to name names and include all who've been such as asset to the Society. With such a wide range of interest, it's hard for me not to be overwhelmed by such dedication by such a great group of people.

Jim Annis, Treasurer

A Message From Mary

It's with a great deal of pride that I write this message. The Observer Building is a sight to behold! It stands at the head of Union Square sporting a new roof and a new coat of paint. During the painting process it was wonderful to hear comments such as , "What color is it going to be?" from so many people. Our building was the talk of the town. Progress on both the roof and painting was done under the watchful eye of the workers at Moosehead Manufacturing and Jack Battick.

Speaking of Moosehead Manufacturing, they have donated a gorgeous maple table to be used in our library. A hearty thank you for their generosity.

Work is under way as we tackle sorting hundreds of photos donated to us by the Piscataquis Observer. Several folk have helped already - a few hours here and there. The goal is to get these photos in a stable environment. It's a daunting task but we will persevere! Happening at the same time is getting our documents sorted, recorded, and put into acid-free folders and boxes.

It's a busy time as we head into our "slow" time at the Observer Building Museum. Come down and help us. Call me or the Batticks!

Mary Annis, President

Need A Thoughtful Gift For the Holidays?

The Society still has a supply of our D-F throws in FA colors and sporting fabric portraits of some of our town's historic buildings, many no longer with us. Cost of the throw is \$38 plus \$8 shipping.

We also have Civil War booklets with a complete listing of all known to have served in the Civil War from Dover & Foxcroft, along with sketches of a selection of their lives. Price: \$5 plus \$3 shipping.

And, we have CDs of Laura Johnson's Diary from 1869 which contains both a transcription and scanned images of the diary, plus selected photos of the Johnson family. Laura's diary contains mention of many of the town's citizens and is done in a pdf format. Price is \$13, includes shipping.

Finally, a gift membership in the Society is still only \$5.00 per year - the best buy in town!

To order any of these items please send a check or money order made out to the Dover-Foxcroft Historical Society and indicate which item(s) you are ordering. If it's a gift membership, please be sure to tell us the name and mailing address of the recipient and how you want us to refer to you (e.g. Aunt Louise, Dad, the Smiths). Send your order to:



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Happy Holidays

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Society**



We wish you a peaceful and joyful season