



# The SHIRETOWN CONSERVER

The Dover-Foxcroft Historical Society  
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## Calvin Chamberlain and his Octagonal Barn

by Mary Annis



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The life of Calvin Chamberlain is an interesting one indeed. Calvin was born in the town of Foxcroft on October 8, 1810, the second child of eleven born to Samuel Chamberlain and Abigail Tucker. He distinguished himself as a farmer, a horticulturist, an architect and an author of many articles appearing in agricultural publications.

His paternal grandfather, Eliakim Chamberlain, was born in Dudley, Massachusetts on October 7, 1753. He served his soon to be established country as a private in Capt. Abijah Lamb's Co., Col. Jonathan Holman's Reg't and marched on the Alarm. Four of Eliakim's children settled in Foxcroft. They were Lucy, Samuel, Nathaniel and Charlotte.

Samuel, Calvin's father, was born in Charlton, Massachusetts on May 21, 1784. He was commissioned Captain in the 4<sup>th</sup> Regiment of Maine Militia by Governor Caleb Strong. He married Abigail Tucker on September 13, 1807 in Charlton. The couple had eleven children, Calvin being the second born. Samuel died on June 2, 1838 and the following was published in the Piscataquis Observer. "On June 5, 1838, central Piscataquis was startled by the report of the fatal accident to Capt. Chamberlain.

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### Ode to the Genius of Home.

*"A green tree waves its older arms near my door,  
For many an age a stream has murmur'd by;  
I'm rich in fancy, tho' in fortune poor,  
Content I live and careless I shall die"*

Hail hidden power of these wild groves,  
These uncouth rocks, and mountains gray!  
Where oft as fades the closing day,  
The family of fancy roves.

In what lone cave, what sacred cell,  
Coeval with the birth of time,  
Wrapt in high cares and thought sublime,  
In awful silence dost thou dwell?

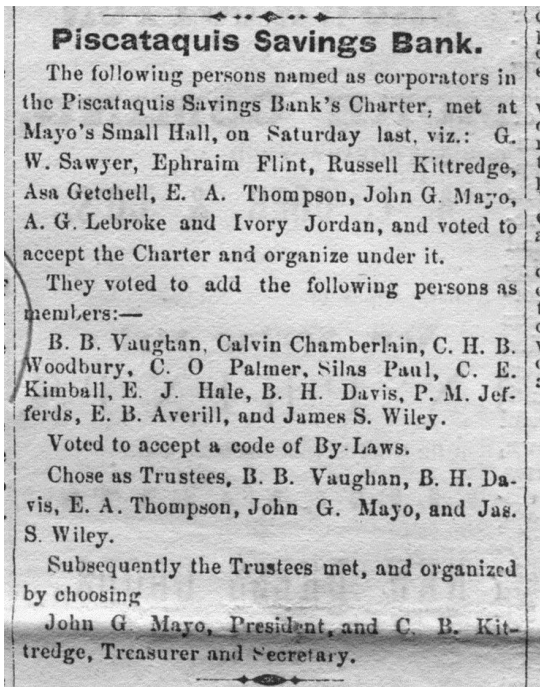
Oft in the depth of winter's reign,  
As blow the bleak winds o'er the dale  
Moaning along the distant gale,  
Has fancy heard thy voice complain?

Oft in the dark woods lonely way  
Swift has she seen thee glancing by,  
Or down the summer evening sky,  
Sporting in clouds of gilded ray.

If caught from thee, the sacred fire  
That glows within my youthful breast:  
Those thoughts too high to be express'd;  
Genius, if thou didst once inspire,

Oh please accept this artless lay,  
That in my favorite shades retired,  
And once, once more by thee inspired,  
In gratitude I pay. PONDERER  
Dover, Aug. 18[39]

*The Piscataquis Harold*



April, 1874

(Calvin Chamberlain., continued from page 1)

He and his wife had been paying a visit to his daughter, Julia (Mrs. John Haskell Loring) in Guilford. On their return to "old Foxcroft", when not far from the Loring house, his colt became unmanageable and the chaise in which they were travelling was overturned. Mrs. Chamberlain was not injured but the colt fell upon the Captain, causing internal complications from which he died within twenty-four hours.

Capt. Samuel Chamberlain was a very substantial and prominent citizen of "old Foxcroft". In its fullest sense a model farmer; knowing exactly how to make the farm pay, his property had increased in enviable proportions. He gave the same assiduity to town and county affairs that his own received; so his advice and assistance in shaping public needs were earnestly sought and most generously given.

And when James S. Holmes pointed out the very essential need of an Academy in "old Foxcroft", it was Samuel Chamberlain and Nathan Carpenter who generously supported him. Capt. Chamberlain manifested marked sympathy to those less prosperous than himself; he always encouraged them to make proper exertions, mentally as well as physically for their own relief, and readily assisted the unfortunate and destitute.

The assessors' books, at the time of his death gave the valuation of his real estate as \$2500, with two

houses on the estate, the family residence and head farmer's home, two large barns, cider mill, smithy shop, 16 bu. Corn raised, 80 of wheat, 10 of rye, 30 of oats, 3 of beans, 1000 of potatoes, 8 bu. of potatoes exported for seed, 12 bu. flaxseed, 25 of onions, 100 lbs of wool, 50 tons of hay cut annually, 175 acres of prime woodland, 600 bu. apples 25 barrels of cider, 2 horses, 2 oxen, 6 cows, 200 lbs of butter, 400 lbs cheese, 1 bull, 2 steers, 35 sheep, 12 swine, 2200 lbs Pork killed annually, 500 lb beef, 1 chaise, 1 four wheeled vehicle."

**'GUILFORD'**



**W**HILE looking for the wonderful cures effected by Patent Medicines—the reader will please observe that the subscriber is now receiving, and will have on hand for the next campaign, all desirable sizes of Boston

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consisting at present of thirteen different patterns of Side-hill, Subsoil and Common Plough, from the light horse to the heavy road Plough. Two years experience in Piscataquis has confirmed what has long been known elsewhere, that the

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**CALVIN CHAMBERLAIN.**  
Foxcroft, Feb. 17, 1848. 13 1/2

Continued on Page 4

(Calvin Chamberlain, continued from page 3)

Now we begin to learn about Calvin, the subject of our story. Calvin married Lavina Philbrick in Augusta on October 26, 1838. To the couple were born two children. Samuel in 1840, Samuel died in 1843. In 1841 Lucy Brown Chamberlain was born. But poor Lucy only lived 17 years. And then Calvin lost his wife in 1843. But he did find some happiness as he married Mary Rich Tucker, the widow of Freeland Tucker, and Calvin's first cousin once removed. No children came from this union. On Mary's passing the following appeared in the Piscataquis Observer, which gives us an insight into her character:

"Mrs. Mary R., wife of Hon. Calvin Chamberlain, whose decease occurred at their home on Main street in Foxcroft, on the morning of Friday, Feb 19, (1892), was the daughter of Jonas and Mary Harwood Tucker, late of Charlton, Worcester county, Massachusetts, where the subject of this sketch was born, Dec. 13, 1812, and had consequently attained the mature age of 79 years, 2 months and 6 days. Her parentage on either side was in the lines of two of the oldest families of New England, strong in mental and physical endowment by nature, and these qualities the daughter inherited in a marked degree.

Her father was a farmer, cultivating land that had been held in the family name for a century. Here her early life was passed among its busy scenes.

Her education was acquired in the best schools of her native county, and her knowledge of domestic duties on the farm under the direction of her mother.

When 22 years of age, she married with Capt. Freeland Converse, a young man of the neighborhood, and the young couple settled upon a dairy farm in the vicinity, which they successfully conducted for eleven years and until the sudden demise of the husband. The union was a happy one and prosperity attended their industrial efforts. Complications arising out of the settlement of their joint estate served to bring out the latent strength and scope of her intellectual powers to such an extent as to surprise her advisors and friends and led to her final success in the adjustment of the matters involved. (She ended up with a considerable share of the estate and, finding the farm duties too arduous, sold out and bought a 20 acre plot in Foxcroft in 1851).

In Feb., 1847, she married Mr. Calvin Chamberlain and moved to his home in Foxcroft. Such for many years was his social position that it opened to her the opportunity to make the acquaintance of many people in different parts of the State. She found congenial society and mutual friendships were formed with hundreds of men and women.

From her first coming to Maine to reside, until disease laid its heavy hand upon her, she made frequent visits to her early home, keeping in mind the friendships and associations of youth. These visits were often extended to other and distant states. The last of the journeys was in 1884, when she accompanied her husband to Chicago and attended the National Convention of the Democratic Party, to which he was an accredited delegate, where she occupied a seat in the ladies' gallery at every session, thus enjoying the rare privilege of observing many distinguished men of the country. After the convention they continued their trip into the valley of the Upper Mississippi.

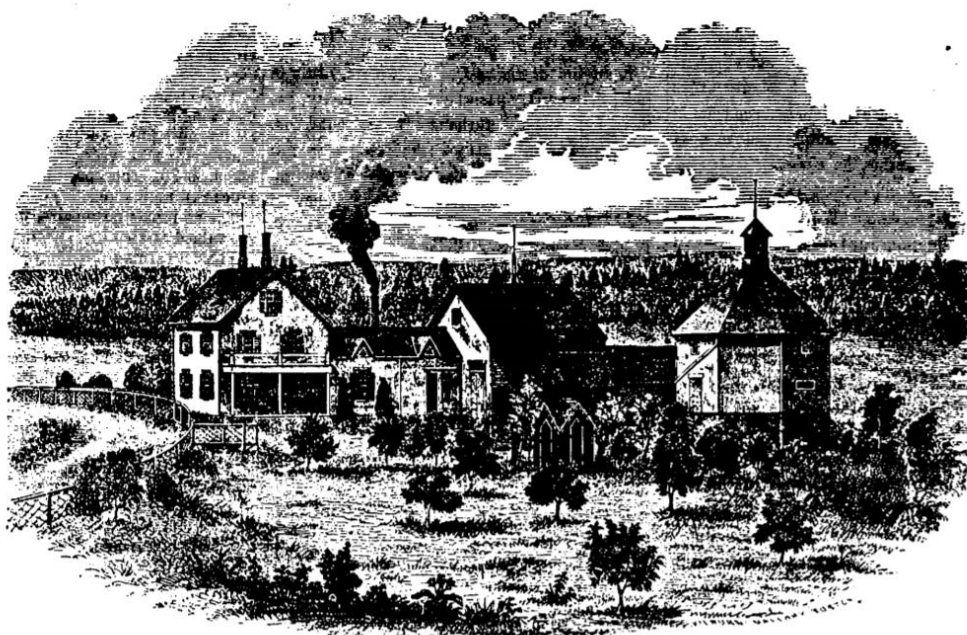
In the winter of 1885, appeared the first symptoms of the fatal disease which finally resulted in dissipation. Its progress was gradual, but constantly advancing, one faculty giving away after another until the last change came. During all the years of physical decline, she suffered no pain and was uniformly cheerful and considerate to such a degree as to make it a pleasure to wait upon her"

Let's return to Calvin's story. Calvin graduated from Foxcroft Academy. He went on to teach in our local schools for several years. In 1836 Calvin moved to Michigan where he "entered in the lifework of making a farm in another wilderness." But, after his father Samuel's death in 1838 he returned to Foxcroft to assume the management of the family farm. One of Calvin's improvements to his family farm was the building in 1853 of an octagonal barn at the rear of the farm complex. It was an extraordinary design for an agricultural building with few similar barns built in Maine. The barn featured exterior walls fifteen feet in width and nineteen in height. Resting on a tall granite basement, its first floor cattle stalls were reached by a

Continued on Page 5)

(Calvin Chamberlain, continued from page 4)

cart-way. The loft was said to have contained storage space for twenty tons of hay, a testament to Chamberlain's claim to the space saving qualities of the octagonal shape. It was covered by a tall roof crowned by a ventilator. The barn still stood until 1915 when the site was cleared by Edward J. Mayo.



**Farm Buildings of Calvin Chamberlain, Foxcroft, including Octagon Barn, described in his Report.**

An illustration, plans and a description of Chamberlain's unique barn were published in the 1857 edition of the *Annual Report of the Secretary of the Maine Board of Agriculture*. The following year this article was reprinted in the *Maine Farmer*, and in 1859 the plans were published for the third time in D. H. Jacques' *The House: A Manual of Rural Architecture*. Despite all this wide publicity, octagonal barns remained among the rarest of farm buildings in the state. Only one other similar structure, a hexagonal barn in Newport, is known to have been built in Maine.

From the **Report on Barns** in the *Maine Register* (July 15<sup>th</sup> and July 22, 1858)

Our farmers complain that winter interferes with, and diminishes their profits. To what extent it does so, is an important subject of inquiry.... We cannot possibly shorten the period in which our stock must wholly be fed at the barn; and it is only left us to adapt our system of husbandry to the production of the largest amount of feed to the smallest area... "shelter is cheaper than fodder". An improvement on our present practice of shelter, and care of our animals, would be an equivalent to an actual shortening of winter. In building, we study convenience and adaptation to the uses and purposes intended. To this we join economy ...and greatest convenient space in proportion to the outside.

Continued on Page 6

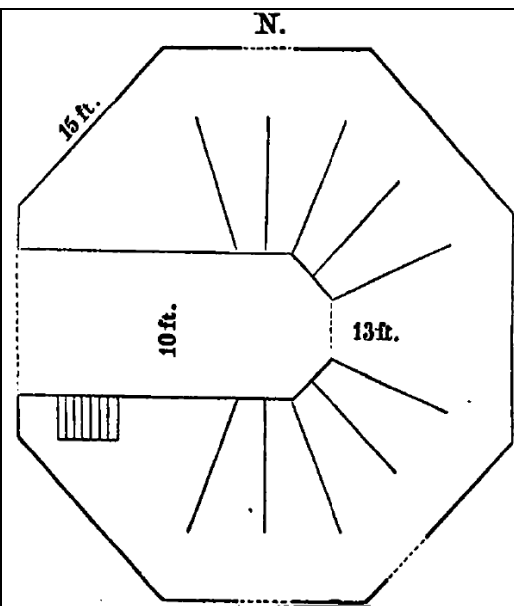
(Calvin Chamberlain, Continued from page 5)

Take a barn thirty by thirty feet, and twenty feet high –  $30 \times 30 = 900 \times 20 = 18,000$  feet. Compare this with an octagon of the same extent of wall, each of its eight sides being fifteen feet. We have  $15 + 10, 61 + 10, 61 = 36, 22 / 2 = 18, 11 \times 15 = 271.65 \times 4 = 1086.60 \times 20 = 21,732$  cubic feet showing a gain by this approach to the form of the circle, of 3,732 feet in this small barn; the capacities of the two being as 6 to 5. ....

The small barn above described will store twenty tons of hay. We find it convenient, and if it has faults and omissions, we have not, in three years, had time to find them.

We are satisfied that no other disposition of the same amount of material will give so strong and spacious a structure.....A ventilator is left at the apex of the roof, and always kept open.

Calvin Chamberlain, *Chairman, Foxcroft*, Nov., 1857



**Fig. 1.**  
Scale 15 ft. to the inch. Diameter of barn 36 ft. 2½ inches.

While archiving the records of the Dover-Foxcroft Congregational Church, we came across the following letter from Calvin to the church. The letter was dated December 29, 1853 and reads as follows: “To the Orthodox Congregational Church of Foxcroft & Dover: Whereas certain stories have obtained currency in this community during the present year designed and well calculated to detract very much from my character of fair and honorable standing in society; and whereas I have good reason to believe that Mrs. John H. Loring did on a certain occasion, at the house of Mr. J. Bush, at a meeting of your Society’s Industrial Circle, originate and utter the story, charging me with abusing my own mother.... I deem it a duty to myself and you, to charge Mrs. Loring with giving utterances to slanderous falsehoods, totally without foundation in fact, and designed to do me the greatest lasting injury.

In presenting this case to the church of which she is a member, my sole purpose is to avail myself of the easiest mode that promises to lead to a fair and just close of the case, to the ultimate correction of public opinion. Calvin Chamberlain”

On March 30, 1854 the church responded thus: “The undersigned, a committee to whom the letter of Mr. Calvin Chamberlain of Dec 29, 1853 charging Mrs. Loring with falsehood & slander of him, was referred – would report that we have attended to the matter by calling on Mrs. Loring and hearing her statement. We notified & requested Mr. Chamberlain to meet at Mr. Loring’s house & make such statements & address such evidence in the case as he pleased. But as he did not appear, & made no statements & addressed no evidence of the charge, he had made .... Our opinion is that the committee have no occasion for action in the case, & we advise that the complaint be dismissed. Joel Pratt, Wm. Parsons, Joshua Kittredge.” (Although Calvin’s parents were members of this church, we cannot find that Calvin ever officially joined.)

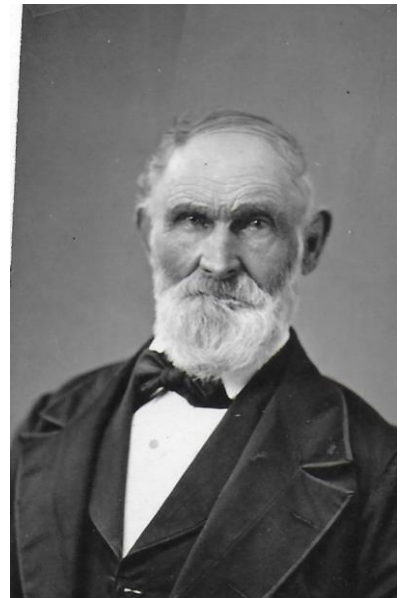
Continued on Page 7



(Calvin Chamberlain, Continued from Page 6)

During the late 1850's and the 1860's Chamberlain contributed a number of articles to state agricultural publications, primarily in his knowledge of fruit and in particular apple orchards. In 1858 the *Maine Farmer* carried his lengthy six part article entitled "Apples for Cultivation", He went on to publish eight times more on topics ranging from "The Soiling System: to "Protection of Forests".

In 1870 Calvin was appointed to a one year term on the State Board of Agriculture. That year the annual report printed a long essay "Our Homes: Where and What to Make Them". After a lengthy explanation of the role of geographic position in the success of the industrialized nations, the author concluded that, in an overt reference to the tide of immigration to the west, "there is no spot on earth better for the sons of Maine than Maine herself." Finally, in one paragraph he defined a home – "A home presupposes a house, a house is always a teacher, it becomes an agent of civilization. When the house embodies fitness, truth and dignified simplicity, it sustains the national roots of these republican virtues. The dwelling exerts a might influence on it inhabitants".



Calvin Chamberlain

Three years after he wrote this essay, Chamberlain's architectural theories were expressed once again in the design of an octagonal house whose plan and perspective view were published in *Moore's Rural New Yorker*". The text which accompanied the drawings contains a description of the site on which Chamberlain proposed to build and one paragraph that addresses a key element of his scheme:

"In talking with you of a house in detail I must put in my confession that I have become chronic with complaint regarding the national habit, in country and village, of setting up dwelling to be speedily burned down. I want my hard-earned dollars to be invested in a house that shall stand to give shelter and comfort to others when I am forgotten – a house that shall not kindle when this square mile of village, with it shingle palaces, may on some unfortunate day, be turned to smoke and ashes."

Chamberlain's model house was a somewhat modified octagon, a form whose virtues he had embraced two decades earlier during the construction of his barn. His proposal called for a two-story masonry structure covered by a cross gable roof. A one-story piazza was drawn across four of the elevations and along a short ell. The porch was to be decorated with sawn brackets, the gables outfitted with bergeboards, and the roof crowned by an octagonal cupola. As a concession to Chamberlain's horticultural interests, a greenhouse was attached to one of the eight sides. The interior plan was drawn with a centrally located stair around which were grouped a cluster of rooms of nearly square and triangular shape. For whatever reasons, his house never came to be.

During the rest of the 1870's Chamberlain continued his work in horticulture. His native grapes were exhibited at many state fairs and received much attention. In March of 1875 Calvin and Charles H. Chandler acquired a lease on a lime quarry and kiln, off the Foxcroft Center Road. (a future article?) In April of 1874 Calvin was a member of the original Piscataquis Savings Bank incorporation and in March of 1875, in a meeting at his home, Central Grange was organized. He continued his contributions to the annual agricultural reports throughout the 1880's and 1890's.

The First Piscataquis Spiritualist Church was organized in Foxcroft on August 6, 1892. Prior to that date, a group of 18 men and women met on July 27, 1892, to sign an application to Joseph D. Brown, a Justice of the Peace, to become an incorporated parish or religious society under the name of the First Piscataquis Spiritualist Association. Justice Brown approved the application, and instructed those signing to meet at the residence of Calvin Chamberlain in Foxcroft on August 6. Since the society had no meeting house or "public worship", a notice of the meeting was placed in the post office in Foxcroft. Justice Brown presided at the meeting when Calvin Chamberlain was elected president, L. A. Rogers secretary/treasurer and the three trustees being Benjamin T. Genthner, George Washburn and Fred Butterfield. By-laws of the church were considered and adopted.

Continued on Page 8

(Calvin Chamberlain, Continued from Page 7)

Mary Chamberlain died in 1892 and Calvin continued to live alone in his home. His farm was located on the site of Mayo Hospital, the house is presently on Grange Street. An interesting article appears in the Winter 2004-2005 *Shiretown Conserver* written by Nancy & Jack Battick, telling story of the moving of the house.

Calvin died on October 22, 1904, age 94, and is buried in the Rural Grove Cemetery, Lot 151. Calvin Chamberlain's commitment to the conservation and improvement of both the natural and built environments, with the ultimate goal of aiding his fellow man, is perhaps best stated in his own words:

"I can do no more for the fruit cause with my hands, and can only advise people of our county of Piscataquis to continue to work for good apples and pears, believing that in and through them will come many of the blessings of life."

This article thanks to gleanings from:

Pamphlet "A Biographical Dictionary of Architects in Maine" by Kirk F. Mohney  
Piscataquis Observer

Lou Stevens "Dover-Foxcroft: A History"  
Ancestry.com

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From the 19<sup>th</sup> *Annual Report of the Maine Board of Agriculture*, 1865, page 278 (Committee on Cattle, Calvin Chamberlain, Esq., Chairman)

"A practical men (and women) we must turn the pleasures of this farmer's holiday to practical account; and to do this we must freely express to each other our matured opinions on important questions pertaining to our vocation; and as cattle now "have the floor," it becomes our duty to speak for these noble tenants of the farm....

From our own experience the last few years, and as proved successfully, with the infusion of Short-horn blood on the previous stock of this county. "



(Continued on Page 9)



We now have a tolerable basis for future operations, and have only to choose breeders from the Short-horn, Herefords, or the Dutch. By a selection of Short-horns from a herd that has not had its milking qualities all bred out and sacrificed to beef, we shall probably be on the direct road to success. Good calves of that breed may be had for about \$100, and the neighborhood that has the enterprise to obtain one, will find in it a sure return of several thousand dollars in the natural lifetime of the animal. Should the owners of the rich pastures of Dover, Sebec, or Sangerville, conclude to build and stock a cheese factory, then they would want the Ayrshire cows.



There is another, and growing demand on the stock-breeder that should not be overlooked. The poor(?) residents of cities and villages who want one cow as a family nurse, are very well satisfied if they can get a delicate little Jersey. And they are not disposed to laugh at the figure she cuts in the farmer's yard beside the noble Short-horn. He who now laughs his ridicule at Jersey cattle, be he of the city or the country, only makes

himself ridiculous by showing his greenness.

Jersey cows have worked their way to favor in this country as they have in all others. They are, and must continue to be a success. A Jersey cow in Augusta brought a heifer calf a few days ago, and there were more than fifty applicants for it before it was seen. The price set upon it was very moderate – only \$40! As proof of our position in regard to character in the progeny of thoroughbred animals, we will assert that Jersey heifers are all prizes. There are no blanks in the scheme. A poor Jersey cow, or a low priced one is never seen or heard of.

Breeding Jersey stock for market is much like an investment in swine or sheep. They make quick returns. The heifers become cows at two years and are off your hands. Should you distrust the soundness of judgment in the man who to-day offers his sixty or seventy-five dollars for a yearling heifer, you may rest assured that man belongs to a numerous class, whether wise or foolish.”

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From the Report of the *Maine Board of Agriculture*, 1865

“the following paper from Mr. Chamberlain was presented, read, and after some discussion, was placed at the disposal of the Secretary:”

“It is the aim of every good citizen, while he gets his “living,” to develop himself fully. To this end no situation is more favorable than one that carries him constantly to the field – throws him in close communion with nature where every influence is pure and good. Material success is desirable, for its evidence speaks to all men in the higher general stamp of all our surroundings. To gain these is worth some effort, for they contribute to our comfort and pleasure and consequence, and they elevate us in the opinion of others.

(Continued on Page 10)

## Annual Dues

Many thanks to all those who have sent in their Historical Society dues for 2020. We really appreciate having you as a member. If you haven't sent in your dues yet, please do so now so you can continue to enjoy all of the benefits of membership in the Historical Society, including receiving copies of the *Conserver*.

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### The Dover-Foxcroft Historical Society – Membership Application Form

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Street: \_\_\_\_\_ City/State/Zip \_\_\_\_\_

E-Mail: \_\_\_\_\_

Annual dues are \$10 per person and \$7.00 for senior memberships. Please make checks payable to: Dover-Foxcroft Historical Society, 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.

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Report (continued from Page 9)

But the balance sheet of profit and loss in dollars, should not be the only test of rural improvements, or the sole inducement to agricultural labors. That economy which feeds the body well at the expense of starving the mind, is wretchedly short-sighted.... An ancient writer has well said, "Perhaps there are few things that mark the progress of civilization and the arts more than a correct taste in architecture and gardening. So long as men are indifferent to the appearance of the house they live in, and the grounds that surround it, they will rarely exhibit a true taste in anything else."....

In respect to the comforts and embellishments of homes, we see a constant improvement in our State; but when the true uses of such improvements are better understood, we hope to see their growth in an accelerated ration. One of their first uses is the formation of a taste for the beautiful in the young....

Garden culture will surround our homes with associations of beauty, and with memories of pleasure and joy that will go with us in all our wanderings. The effect of culture on taste and character is already seen in active business men, who with their intelligent families intend some day to be farmers. It is the garden that interest them in rural employments. It is the this taste for country life that is beautifying the homes of towns and cities; and this taste for the beautiful there wrought out in life pictures, to some extent finds its way into the country in feeble reflection. It is a law of nature that we become attached to those objects upon which we have bestowed labor, and on which we have expended care. We love the trees our hands have planted, the vines we have cultivated and trained over our doorways, and of the the trellis our own hands have constructed.

Should our reader interpose th ever ready objection to the adoption of our ideas – the pecuniary one – we suggest that gardening is nearly allied to that system of culture which must sooner or later prevail in New England, now known as "high Farming".

....Cultivated flowers are evidences of high civilization; they are a sort of floral thermometer, indicating, in some degree, the intelligence and refinement of the people; and their indications ae as signivicant as are the evidences afforded by architecture, painting, poetry, or any of the sciences. The lessons of these gentle teachers are having an influence on the habits and manners of our people.... Where there are flowers I thought I could see more order about the buildings; an air of tidiness, thrift and comfort, and better farming generally; and when I entered the dwellings I found the families intelligtne, comparatively refined, and not unfrequently imaginative and poetical. Strange as the assertion may sound to some, it is nevertheless true, that if these last two qualities were more gnerally prevelent and cultivated on the farm, they would tend to keep thousands of farmers' sons and daughters from deserting the old homestead."

## Message from Mary -

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We're looking forward to Spring! Work continues at the Observer Building museum, where we'll be setting up a new display in the front room called "Our Towns' Talents", featuring items made through the years by residents. Hope you can stop by and check it out this summer.

As we celebrate our State's Bicentennial, we are going to join with other area historical societies for an event on August 22 at Central Hall. So far we have 17 societies ready to set up exhibits and displays.

We'll have speakers, a band and an 1820 luncheon menu. Put the date on your calendar! Hope to see you there.

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### Our Corporate Sponsors

A grateful thank you to the following businesses whose funds support the Society and its efforts to preserve our history. When you shop or see these folks, please tell them 'thank you' for their support!

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Sean Stitham, M.D.

**Thank you all!**

### Items Available

Glass Christmas ornaments: \$6.00 each (add \$4.00 for shipping)

2008 – Blacksmith Shop  
2009 – Observer Building  
2010 – Central Hall  
2011 – Thompson Free Library  
2012 – Foxcroft Academy  
2013 – The Blethen House  
2014 – Pleasant Street School  
2015 – Mayo's Mill  
2016 – Piscataquis County Court House  
2017 – Brown Mills  
2018 – (Old) Mayo Hospital  
2019 – The Opera House

DVD's : Glimpses of Dover and Foxcroft - \$10.00 (add \$3.00 for shipping)

Memories of Central Hall/Lou Stevens - \$15.00 (add \$3.00 for shipping)

Dover-Foxcroft throws: \$40.00 (add \$8.00 for shipping)

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