



# The SHIRETOWN CONSERVER

The Dover-Foxcroft Historical Society  
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## The Crosby House

### A Fascination with an old place

by Walter M. Macdougall



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*It's not often that our stories take us away from Dover and Foxcroft, but this story tells about a fine house and a fine family in our neighboring town of Atkinson.. We hope you like it as much as we do! We can't get it all printed in this issue, but we'll finish in the next. - The Editors*



John Ricker, my college roommate from years ago, and I were out on a lazy afternoon drive over the old roads of Atkinson, Maine. This was John's country. His family on his mother's side had Atkinson roots deeper than potatoes grow—that tuber for which Atkinson is so well known. John was filled with remembering and enthusiastically identified the cellar holes we passed. As we neared the crossroads in the present village of Atkinson, my friend announced that there was a house he wanted to show me.

At the crossroads, we took the Maple Road, traveling east for a mile and a little more, and then turned left onto a dirt road that was carried up by a large swell of cleared land. John pointed ahead at an island of hardwood trees standing where the high field seemed to reach the sky. "The house is there surrounded by those trees," he said. There was something significant in the way John emphasized "the house." I glanced at him and then focused on the astonishing structure taking shape, standing foursquare in its grove of trees.

Here on this hilltop in Atkinson was a truly large house confident in its balanced strength. It seemed a transplant from the mansions in Portsmouth, New Hampshire, I thought, or one of the homes of the aristocracy that graced the banks of the Piscataqua.

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### Song of Life By Charles MacKay

A traveler through a dusty road  
Strewed acorns on the lea  
And one took root and sprouted up,  
And grew into a tree,  
Love sought its shade at evening time,  
To breathe its early vows,  
And age was pleased, in heat of noon,  
To bask beneath its boughs:  
The dormouse loved its dangling twigs,  
The birds sweet music bore,  
It stood a glory in its place,  
A blessing evermore!

A little spring had lost its way  
Amid the grass and fern,  
A passing stranger scooped a well,  
Where weary men might turn;  
He walled it in and hung with care  
A ladle at the brink –  
He thought not of the deed he did,  
But judged that toil might drink.  
He passed again – and lo! the well,  
By summer never dried,  
Had cooled ten thousand parching tongues,  
And saved a life beside!

A nameless man, amid a crowd  
That thronged the daily mart,  
Let fall a word of Hope and Love,  
Unstudied from the heart;  
A whisper on the tumult thrown –  
A transitory breath –  
It raised a brother from the dust,  
It saved a soul from death,  
O germ! O fount! O word of love!  
O thought at random cast!  
Ye were but little at the first,  
But mighty at the last!

*The Piscataquis Observer, June, 1851*

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The corset is a paradox. It comes to stay and yet goes to waist. – *Observer, 1888*

(Crosby House., continued from page 1)

“It was built in the early 1800s. It is known as the Crosby place; Oliver Crosby built it,” John added.

The house was Georgian in style; I was sure of that, but it was rustic Georgian. I felt the house was proud of this fact, as if it wanted to be important, yet fit into its surroundings—the yoked oxen, the stump pullers, the blacksmith-fashioned plow, the long shed filled with wood stored against the inevitable winter, and the wooden bucket at the well. Who was this Oliver Crosby? He must have had the company of a strong wife to build a place like this and to set their doorstone on the edge of the great Maine woods. The front door, formally recessed and centered, was open as if our coming were expected. Thus began my interest in Oliver Crosby and my fascination with the old Crosby place.

## Background

My thought of colonial New Hampshire mansions was more significant than I realized. The search for Oliver Crosby’s identity would lead from the Piscataquis River in Maine to the Piscataqua River in New Hampshire and to the town of Dover and the nearby shipbuilding center of Portsmouth. It was in these places that Oliver practiced law, and it was in Portsmouth midst the big houses that he married Harriet Chase, the daughter of a Portsmouth ship owner.<sup>1</sup> They would have six children, all born in Dover before the move to Maine.<sup>ii</sup>

Oliver himself had been born in Billerica, Massachusetts, on March 17, 1769. One of his favorite boyhood facts was that he had heard the guns at Lexington on that fate-filled day of April 19, 1775. The New England Crosbys were a respected, educated family that in 1635 came from England in the person of Simon Crosby. When it became Oliver’s turn to take up a profession, he went to Harvard, graduated in 1795 second in his class, migrated to Dover, New Hampshire, and was admitted to the bar.

The life-scene in the early 1800s was different from our own but no less complicated and no less filled with the same human needs, hopes, vexations, and calamities we experience today. We have to keep this in mind as we ask the question: Why would Crosby leave an established law practice complete with business interest and take his wife and six children to the woods-covered hills of Maine? We know that family friends shared the view that Oliver was “carrying his family off to perish in the Maine wilderness.”

Simon Percy Crosby, in his biography of the Crosby family<sup>iii</sup> thought that the answer lay in land. Maine land was receiving more attention at that time. It was selling at a low price, and the prevailing opinion held that it soon would become worth much more. We do know that Oliver was interested in land speculation. As early as July 1806, Oliver bought a 3/20 interest in a township in the middle of the district of Maine.

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## <sup>i</sup>Notes

<sup>1</sup> Oliver and Harriet were married on October 11, 1800. Harriet was then 31. She was the daughter of shipowner Stephen Chase of Portsmouth.

<sup>ii</sup> See the appendix for information on Oliver and Harriet’s children. It is revealing how families pass along their gifts.

<sup>iii</sup> Simon Percy Crosby, *Two Crosby Families*, 1912, The H. W. Kingston Company, St. Paul, Minnesota.

(Crosby House, continued from page 3)



This township would be named for one of its proprietors, William Atkinson of Dover, New Hampshire.<sup>i</sup> Crosby and Atkinson would become close associates in their involvement with land in the township of Atkinson. The phrase *landed gentry* speaks for itself and says a great deal. Land ownership in large amounts was synonymous with security, power, reputation, and influence—at least that was the hope of the men involved.

In addition to land acquisition and selling, commerce and manufacture offered avenues to position and fortune. Crosby was involved in both of these ventures. He owned a part interest in a sailing vessel. Unfortunately, the British seized that ship during the War of 1812. Simon Crosby's family history tells us that Oliver also owned and sold a cotton factory in Dover, New Hampshire. It would appear that he was an investor rather than an owner.<sup>ii</sup> Dover was the birthplace of the cotton industry in New

England. At the time that Oliver and his family were leaving Dover, its population was doubling due to the work provided in the production of cotton cloth. It is reported that an astonishing 60,000 bricks were laid in one day during the building of one of the multistoried mills. There was something else taking place. Manufacturing interests in Boston were taking over the Dover mills with disastrous results to the original Dover ownership and investors. Perhaps this takeover had an impact on Oliver Crosby and renewed his interest in his investment in Maine.

Still, one wonders why he, himself, moved north. Was there something deeper and more personal involved—something that had to do with principles and lifestyle?<sup>iii</sup>

The year 1820 is that most often given for Oliver Crosby's arrival in Atkinson, Maine. It seems probable that his family came several years later.<sup>iv</sup> In 1821 the *Bangor Register* reprinted a letter that on October 11 of that year had appeared in the *Concord (Massachusetts) Gazette*. The letter is signed "Veritas."<sup>v</sup> From internal evidence, there can be no doubt that the author is our Oliver Crosby. It reads:

Continued on Page 5)

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<sup>i</sup> In historical accounts, William Atkinson is usually referred to as Judge Atkinson. See Piscataquis County Registry of Deeds, Book A, p. 125, Dover-Foxcroft, Maine, for the record of Crosby's first acquisition of land in what would become the town of Atkinson.

<sup>ii</sup> Simon Crosby says that Oliver owned a cotton factory from 1817 to 1822. Because of the historical importance of Dover's cotton cloth manufacturing, considerable research is available. There is no mention of Oliver Crosby as a mill owner. Cathleen Beaudoin, Director of the Dover Public Library, who has done much research into Dover's industry during the era in question, informs me that she has found no reference to Crosby owning a cotton mill. The names of the eight investors in the original cotton mill have never been found, and Beaudoin thinks that Oliver Crosby was probably one of these Dover men of means.

<sup>iii</sup> There were other threads woven into the tapestry of feelings held among members of established families who moved northward. See Walter Macdougall's *Settling the Maine Wilderness*, 2006, Osher Map Library and the University of Southern Maine, especially chapter 8, "Friends and Neighbors."

<sup>iv</sup> Mark Kinney has a 1902 newspaper clipping celebrating Josiah Crosby's 86th birthday, which states that his family came to Atkinson in 1822.

<sup>v</sup> The use of such pseudonyms as Veritas ("truth") was common in newspapers of the day. Obviously, in this case, Crosby's own name would have made this letter appear prejudicial, as Crosby was selling Atkinson land. The fact that "veritas" is the motto for Harvard may have had something to do with its choice.

(Crosby House, continued from page 4)

A gentleman of respectability and character, who last Spring moved into the Town of Atkinson in the state of Maine, where he commenced his operations last summer writes ... that he has raised the present season 400 bushels of wheat, his Indian corn was very good and he expects 1500 bushels of potatoes. These are always of the best quality as the soil is excellent and produces the finest potatoes. That he has built, in the present year, a barn, 100 feet on length, 42 feet wide and 22 feet post.

The letter continues: Bangor, a “flourishing sea port” and “ready market for all kinds of produce,” is only 25 miles away and reached by a “good carriage road.” In addition, Atkinson is located on the Piscataquis River, which affords transportation by boats and rafts. The river also “abounds with fish such as salmon shad and bass.”<sup>i</sup> Now comes the best news from Atkinson: The price of “first quality land in picked lots of 100 acres” is \$2.00 per acre.

Dealing with first things first, Oliver had begun by clearing land, planting crops, and building the huge barn mentioned above. It is reported that the barn was the biggest in Penobscot County; it very well may have been. When its huge skeleton of hewed timbers stood against the sky, an exuberant barn-raiser climbed to the front peak and sat on the end of the ridge pole, his feet dangling in the air. Perhaps this fellow waved his arms too vigorously, for the bottle with which he intended to make a toast slipped from his hand and fell 40 feet to smash upon the ground. There was a half gasp, half groan from the audience that had gathered. Here was a dire sign. Yet that barn stood snow load, high winds, and the threat of summer lightning for more than a hundred years.

When Oliver brought his family north, they came to a log cabin located some 800<sup>ii</sup> feet south of where the big house would be constructed. There must have been many stories associated with this move. S. P. Crosby simply says they came by wagon—his grandfather and grandmother, their six children, and, perhaps, the long case clock that was to stand in the lower hallway of the big house when it was built. S. P. Crosby describes this clock as having “beautiful and dignified proportions.” People in those days became attached to their clocks. They lived closer to the physical markers of time than do we to the vibrating quartz crystals hidden in our wristwatches or to atomic clocks located somewhere sending out unseen, unheard electromagnetic waves that correct our clocks while we sleep. In Oliver Crosby’s era, it was sun up, sun down, the moon and the metered sweep of a pendulum governing geared mechanisms, moving clock hands that told it was high noon or dinnertime or marked the time of death and the cry of new life. When the house was quiet enough for memories and contemplation, the clock’s faithful tick-tock presence was good company. At the end of the Crosby family presence in Atkinson, their clock went west with grandson Oliver Crosby to a new home in Saint Paul, Minnesota.

The close family life in the log cabin was long remembered as a happy time. It was an adventure in which everyone pitched in. The building of the new house lay ahead in its expectant excitement. The farm was growing in crops and animals, and the children went to bed tired, well fed, and filled with the security of tomorrow.<sup>iii</sup>

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<sup>i</sup> The letter does not give the price of this fish; however, S. P. Crosby quotes 1 to 3 cents per pound.

<sup>ii</sup> One account says 1000 feet.

<sup>iii</sup> Oliver often told his children how he had worked as a boy. At 7 years old he was often up at five-thirty in the morning boiling potatoes for the hogs.

(Crosby House, Continued from page 5)

The spot that Oliver chose for their new home and the headquarters of his venture was high ground and located on one of the principal roads running through the township.<sup>i</sup> The north side of this chosen place slopes down to the Piscataquis River a third of a mile away. There would soon come a time when this slope was cleared all the way to the riverbank. Just when work on the big house began is not recorded. Oliver did not have a clear ownership of the land until 1826; that fact may have slowed



THE OLD ATKINSON HOMESTEAD

construction. I found the date of October 10, 1835, scratched in the mortar of the foundation for one of the great brick arches in the cellar of the Crosby house. The house must have been built before the brickwork was started, but the fireplaces those bricks supported would have to have been serviceable before the family could spend a winter. We can suppose that this house became the Crosby homestead in time for Christmas 1835. If this is the case, then in that year Oliver became fully enthroned as a hilltop aristocrat.<sup>ii</sup>

Before describing the house, more needs to be said concerning its mistress, Harriet Chase Crosby. In her portrait she looks at us with an intriguing hint of a smile. She is wearing a stylish white turban typical of the era. One suspects that many of the guests who came to Crosby's hill came to see Harriet as much as Oliver.

Simon Crosby observes that Harriet was “a woman of strong character” with “a full share of intelligence and judgment in carrying on the farm.”<sup>iii</sup> Both Oliver and his wife held strong opinions; Oliver's wife engineered her husband rather than carrying on a battle. Harriet read, when she could find time, and kept up with world events.

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<sup>i</sup> Two roads appear on Moses Greenleaf's map of the District of Maine dated 1815. Both connect Atkinson with Bangor. One comes by way of Kenduskeag through New Charleston (now simply Charleston) and into the center of Atkinson Township. This road retains its old name, the Stage Coach Road. The second road, the one on which Crosby built, runs north from Bangor, passing west of Pushaw Lake through Blakesburg (now Bradford) to enter Atkinson at its southeast corner. It then parallels, more or less, the east boundary of the township for more than half the township's length before swinging northwest. This portion of the road is now spoken of as the Ridge Road. The objective of both of these roads was the sight of the old ferry across the Piscataquis and the township of Sebec.

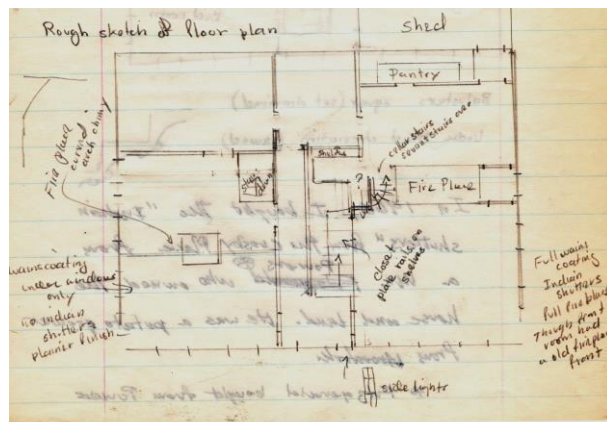
<sup>ii</sup> Over the years, Oliver Crosby added Atkinson property. It is reported that at one time he owned one-third of the township. When he came to Atkinson, he bought lots from the estate of Judge Atkinson and from a Corners, who had been one of the town's proprietors. Amasa Loring, in his *History of Piscataquis County*, says that Crosby retained 700 acres of this acquired property for his own use. Simon Crosby gives that figure as 400 acres. The records in the Piscataquis County Registry of Deeds show how active Crosby was in buying and selling lots after he moved to the town.

<sup>iii</sup> Simon Crosby, *Two Crosby Families*, pp. 31–32.

She made barrels of currant and elderberry wine and manufactured hundreds of pounds of sausage along with “sweet, yellow butter,” all of which were well known to neighbors and guests. There were times during haying and harvest when there were twenty laborers sleeping in the big attic of the Crosby house and sitting down at the long table set up in the shed. Amazing amounts of food vanished. Harriet had help, but she labored as well as managed. She had a work ethic and a religious faith based, so Simon Crosby tells us, on the Golden Rule and the Sermon on the Mount.

I regret that I did not make a floor plan of the Crosby House while it was still standing. There are features on second floor, especially in the area at the head of the main stairs, that need to be clarified. Thus warned, let me give you a tour of the house on the hill as best I can remember.

There was a full cellar rocked up, cool and dry.<sup>i</sup> The cellar was dominated by the brick arches that supported the fireplaces (these have already been mentioned). Supplies for the winter, including Harriet’s wine, probably filled most of the remaining cellar space.<sup>ii</sup> It may have been the later owners, the Ramsdells, who added a wood furnace.<sup>iii</sup> Mrs. Lew Rideout,<sup>iv</sup> one of the last residents of the house, remembered that the furnace smoked a lot and never managed sufficiently to heat the rooms above. “In the winter when we had dishes to do, we would push a table close to the kitchen stove and set the dishpan on that.



First-floor plan of the Crosby House, drawn from memory.

Still, we were cold.”

It is difficult to describe, but there was in the entire house a certain presence. Even in the cellar it was there, existing in the darkness. From a corner of my imagination, Mrs. Crosby steps around a barrel, the bail of a candle lantern in her right hand and her left balancing a large bowl of potatoes against the curve of her hip.

“I see you have made it over March Hill,” she says looking us over with those big eyes which missed so very little.

“Well, I am glad for that,” she continues. “It has been a long winter. Stay for supper. It will cheer up Oliver. He does get disgusted with mud season. We’re having codfish gravy, boiled potatoes, and our first taste of dandelion greens. Would you please bring along that box of salt fish when you come up?”

More needs to be said about the stairs that went from the cellar to the kitchen, and we will get to that. The kitchen with its big cooking fireplace was the workroom of the house. Of the eleven rooms, the kitchen had received the most remodeling. The two doors in the kitchen’s east wall remained unaltered. Through one you entered the large, shelf-lined pantry; the other gave access to the shed, actually an ell housing those two essentials, water and wood.

The well was in the ground floor of the ell. Equipped with a windlass, it was the source of wonderful water, sparking and cold even in the summer—one of the joys of life. The amount of wood that each year became ashes in the attempt to heat the house is not recorded; perhaps that amount of fuel was too closely associated with backache to be comfortably remembered. As winter began, the woodshed (probably should read “sheds”) would be crammed with fuel. As the sticks disappeared, more wood from the backup supply would be brought in. As keen-witted Mark Kinney, an essential citizen of south Atkinson, observed, “Those old houses were nothing more than windbreaks. No insulation in the walls or overhead.”

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<sup>i</sup> It is not clear whether the bearing under the sills was composed of split granite blocks or built-up flat stone. That there was a source for such stone is evident in the stone wall built around the Crosby cemetery.

<sup>ii</sup> Large objects were brought into the cellar by way of a rollway built under the entryway addition on the south side of the house and under the kitchen.

<sup>iii</sup> On the map of Atkinson, *Colby Atlas of Piscataquis County* (1882), the Crosby place is identified as the property of J. H. Ramsdell. This designation was widely used.

<sup>iv</sup> The Rideouts lived in the Crosby House from 1915 to 1951.

(Crosby House, Continued from Page 7)

The kitchen door, which led to the yard, opened first into a small vestibule,<sup>i</sup> a “defrosting chamber” one might call it, from which one could enter a long “cubby” built onto the south side of the house. This structure served as an entryway and a place to hang wraps and leave muddy boots. The kitchen vestibule mentioned above had a third door leading to the large dining room (see diagram). When it was truly cold or when the winter wind swept around the house, I suspect this space served as the living room as well. Its fireplace, fitted with an iron frame, was part of the great block of bricks that held the kitchen fireplace. Conveniently, the dining room fireplace had its own small crane from which to hang a teakettle.

The special feature in this room was the “Indian shutters” fitted inside the frames of all four of its windows. In colonial houses, these shutters were intended to stop arrows. They were retained in later houses as barriers against the merciless fingers of the cold.<sup>ii</sup> In the Crosby’s dining room there were two solid shutters for each window, top and bottom. When not needed they slid neatly back into the wall, leaving only a brass knob protruding to assist in pulling them back across the window. They were built of inch-thick pine with each shutter having two bevel-edged vertical panels.

There was also a large closet in this room built into the space under the main staircase. Plate rails in this closet were a clue that it served the room where the Crosby’s did their feasting and their entertaining.

Travel was easier by the time the house was finished. One arrived at the Crosby’s front door not much more jostled than one would today. Friends from Bangor and nearby towns traveling in their sleighs in winter and in their “carryalls” in summer<sup>iii</sup> made calls, though for many the traveling was an all-day venture. True isolation was becoming an experience of the past.

John Appelton was a welcome dinner friend. He was a fellow lawyer, an 1822 graduate of Bowdoin, and a good companion. He had opened a law office in Sebec, Maine, a few years after Oliver had settled in Atkinson. He was to become the chief justice of Maine’s Superior Judicial Court. Simon Crosby mentions a Judge Kent as one who visited Oliver. Probably this was Edward Kent of Bangor, who was to serve two terms as governor of Maine. There was Abram Sanborn, who early on was a preceptor (principal) of Foxcroft Academy in Foxcroft, Maine. Oliver hired Abram to help his youngest son prepare for Bowdoin.

The dining room with its wide pine wainscotting was the most “finished” room in the house. The fireplace front had a simple elegance. The hand-planed moldings in this room and throughout the house were not ornate but beautifully done.<sup>iv</sup> Perley Wells, an older man who helped me build my own house, recounted that an old-time carpenter hired to build a house started laboring the winter before house construction began. He set up his bench and made all the moldings, trim, and other finish that would be needed. This practice was likely followed in building the Crosby Place.

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<sup>i</sup> There were similar designs to the kitchen vestibule found throughout the house, all intended for keeping out the cold and discouraging drafts.

<sup>ii</sup> See images of Indian shutters at [bing.com/images](http://bing.com/images).

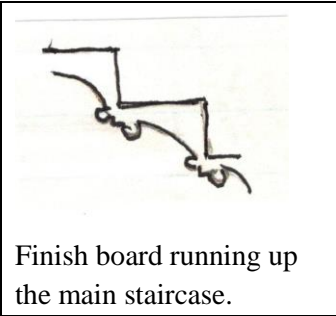
<sup>iii</sup> A lightweight, four-wheeled wagon with a cover of some sort in case of rain.

<sup>iv</sup> It was my impression that the rooms in the south side of house were more “finished” than those on the north.



(Crosby House, Continued from Page 8)

The door in the northwest side of the dining room led to the wide main corridor lit by the sidelights that framed the front door. These sidelights were notable for being two panes wide, but it was the straight staircase that commanded the eye. There was again a solid impressiveness about these stairs. The balusters were square but turned on the diagonal and the banister substantial.



Finish board running up the main staircase.

At the top, these stairs passed under an arch to a landing backed by a full bookcase—glorious as only good pine can be. In Oliver’s day this bookcase would have been filled with the one hundred books given to the town by his friend, Judge Atkinson. The gift expressed the judge’s appreciation for having the town named for himself. It is reported that at appointed times Crosby opened this library to the town.

Before climbing the staircase, the room across the main corridor from the dining room deserves mention. It had wainscoting under its windows and a considerable fireplace. It may have been used as the sitting room. With the curtains swept inward by the summer breeze, it would have been pleasant enough. In full winter, with the wind buffeting the northeast corner of the house, occupants might have been more comfortable in the dining room or the kitchen.

The Crosby House was a place of doors. There was a door on each side of the main stair landing. The righthand door opened in to a closet-sized hallway with three doors of its own. Of these, the right door took one into the large master bedroom—plastered except for the pine-sheathed closet, fireplace, and four windows with a lovely view south across the extending fields to the range of the Charleston Hills. The lefthand door led into another ample bedroom. Opening the third exposed the so-called secret staircase. It wasn’t actually secret, but rather a much-used tight corkscrew communication running from the cellar to the attic. I remember it being not much more than shoulder wide, mounting sharply and keeping company with the chimney and masses of brick around the fireplaces.

This narrow twisting stairway was an ingenious means to family privacy in a house that at times was sleeping a crew of men in the attic. They passed up and down with no more than a hidden shuffle.

Reportedly, there was another instrument of communication—a speaking tube that ran from the cellar to the top of the house. One can see the usefulness in such a contrivance. It would be very convenient while saving the annoyance of shouting.

One who took the left door from the main stair landing was again in a short hallway that also had three doors plus a connection with the balcony that ran around the top of the stairwell.<sup>i</sup> To the left, the hallway led to a bedroom with a north view. Years after Oliver, when the Rideouts were living in the house and the railroad followed the north bank of the Piscataquis River, Lew Rideout, as a boy, would race up the stairs when the train’s whistle was heard. From the window in this bedroom one could see the engine and its cars, like a toy train, making their way to Sebec Station and beyond.

There was a real mystery midst the rooms on the north side of the house. The middle room had never been finished. Its walls and ceiling were never sheathed, and it was as black as the inside of a smokehouse. The thought occurred to me that it might have been used for that purpose; Lew Rideout assured me that was not the case.

The room in the second floor’s northeast corner was smaller and fitted with shelves perhaps used to stow bedding and sheets. A sudden surprise was waiting in this room on one of my visits. I had asked Charles Powers, the owner of the abandoned Crosby House, if he minded my looking inside. “No,” he answered, “go ahead if you can stand the crowd.”

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<sup>i</sup> I wish that I might see again the second story arrangements. There was another stairway from the rooms on the north side of the house. However, I cannot remember how it fitted in.

## 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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#### The Crosby House (continued from Page 9)

I never thought that in company with a partridge I would be party to a piece of unintentional vandalism during my explorations. As I opened the door of the upper, northeast room, a partridge that had been standing on the floor exploded into the air. The lower sash of the window was open a foot or so, probably left that way by a poacher watching for a deer, but the partridge was oblivious to that exit and slammed through the top of the window. Glass shards and fragments of muntins flew. In the seconds that followed there was a drum rapidly beating somewhere; I finally realized that the sound came from my heart.

The attic had its own atmosphere aloof from the present. A room had been constructed in the southeast corner. Someone had emptied a container of letters on the wide floorboards in that room; perhaps they were looking for old stamps. Old houses are filled with stories and no one left to tell them. What I remember is the color of the roof timbers, the purlins, and the collar beams. Perhaps it was smoke combined with age and who knows what, but the result was a deep red-purple mahogany color. (Later, I tried to duplicate that patina and had some luck by mixing stains: mahogany, cherry and oak.) As I sat there on the floor in the middle of the attic's quiet, a story told by S. P. Crosby came to mind: how Oliver's sons had chosen to sleep in the attic with the hired hands, especially when the rain drummed on the roof. I thought of Oliver as well.

He marched by the drummer of principle and restraint. He expected others, especially his family, to do the same. Simon Crosby records this story about his grandfather, whose oldest son, Oliver, was moderating an Atkinson town meeting.<sup>i</sup> Mayhem was pending midst the heated debate, motions, and amendments. It was evident that Oliver, the besieged moderator, was on the verge of losing his temper. His father was sitting toward the back of the room. When he caught his son's eye, his cane came down on the floor; each tap was accompanied with an audible "tut, tut, tut." Oliver, the younger, regained his composure and brought order to the meeting.

Continued in the next issue of the *Conserver*

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<sup>i</sup> *Two Crosby Families*, p. 37.

## Message from Mary -

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It's a strange time we live in. For weeks we stayed away from the Observer Building and nothing was done except from home. We are now back there but not open as yet. It may be the whole summer may pass with all events canceled or postponed. But we will get through this and somehow salvage some things. We have all been healthy and are very fortunate to live here in Piscataquis County.

The Blacksmith Shop remains closed also. Please keep checking our website [foxcrofthistoricalsociety.org](http://foxcrofthistoricalsociety.org) for the latest in our reopening plans.

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**Thank you all!**

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