

# Thomaston Historical Society

Spring Newsletter– May, 2023



## Dunn and Elliot Walking Tour – August 12th

On August 12 the Thomaston Historical Society will sponsor a Walking Tour of several of the homes of the Dunn and Elliot families who were the founders of the Dunn and Elliot ship builders sail makers and marine mercantile shopkeepers in Thomaston. The Walking Tour will last 30-45 minutes and will end with participants being able to explore the first floor of 11 Elliot Street (shown above), currently the home of Susan and Charlie Grover, and the home of one of eight Elliot families living on Elliot Street. Lavinia Wren, the real-life woman from Irene Drago's historical novel *Lavinia Wren and the Sailmakers*, launched last summer at Watts Hall, would have frequently visited this house. Irene Drago will be present for a book signing of her novel and to answer questions. Historian Peggy McCrea, who provided background information for the novel, will lead the first tour. Captain Arthur Elliot's granddaughter, Ida Clark, will also be present. Light refreshments will be available following the tour and house visit.

Tickets will be \$10 for THS members and \$12 for non-members and will be available at the Federated Church parking lot on Dunn Street between 1-2:15 PM. Cash/checks only, please. The event will have two tours available at 1:15 and 2:15. The rain date is Sunday, August 13. Please contact Mimi Zwick at 207-354-7029 for additional information.

Mimi Zwick, Tour Chair

## Edward O'Brien Windfall

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Recently a 4<sup>th</sup> great-grandson of Edward O'Brien, Will Keene, donated a significant number of items as well as a generous financial donation from the family. Included were packages of letters, receipts, library books, the paintings of Edward and his wife from their home and many more things. Come visit the museum to see what we received.

In addition, we will be helping the family renovate the O'Brien monument in our Elm Grove Cemetery. Luckily our Treasurer, Ron Gamage, is also the assistant sexton for the Thomaston Village Cemetery where other O'Briens are.

During Will's visit we learned more about the family. Thanks Will for everything!

Susan Devlin, Curator



## The Tragic Death of Harland Davis, THS's 1941 Class Valedictorian!

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A recent book written by Cathie Pelletier, NORTHEASTER, covers the story of the February 1952 blizzard in Maine and its impact on many, including Harland Davis and his family. His Thomaston High School Yearbook picture is shown here.

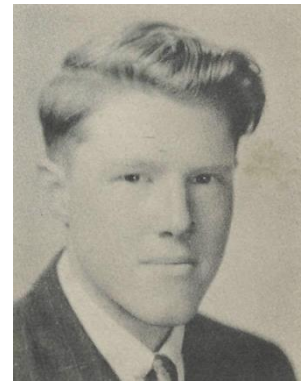
Harland's day of Feb 17, begins with his leaving home to go to Port Clyde, to meet James Haigh, a lobster buyer from Portsmouth, NH, then to Monhegan to pick up the lobsters. Tragically, their return trip ended in their death by hypothermia and drowning when the boat capsized half way back. Involved with the rescue were the Coast Guard station from Burnt Island and Rockland firemen.

The story explains how this tragedy affected his four-months pregnant wife and the son to be born. The son later was adopted by a couple from Bath and is a Bowdoin graduate.

An excellent write up appeared in the Jan/Feb issue of Yankee Magazine and the Portland Maine Sunday Telegram of Feb 12, 2023. We have a copy of these reviews available to review at the museum. Stop by on a Tuesday or Thursday between 2pm and 4pm when we are open or buy a copy of her book at Sherman's Book Store in Rockland, or at our upcoming program with the author.

I would be remiss if I didn't mention that the author has a large listing of acknowledgements at the end of the book. Among those listed are Ron Gamage a member of our current Board and Sandra Overlock, a former member of our Board. The book includes a nice little write-up about their help in the author's research, even mentioning the 1941 high school Sea Breeze yearbook. Incidentally the name of Harland's 30 foot lobster boat was "Sea Breeze". The author will be our speaker on May 30<sup>th</sup>.

Bill Gay, Vice President



## Prison Exhibit Update

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This exhibit was showing its age. Thanks to Kyle Barter and his father, we received several hundred pictures dating to the end of the prison in Thomaston. We are using these to replace the worn wall posters, after repainting the walls. This, along with some other fairly recent acquisitions, will make this new view of the State Prison worth visiting. Have you seen the Prison sleigh now welcoming visitors as they enter the museum?

When the original prison was built, it contained 50 cells, 9' by 4.5' cells, that were 10' high, covered with a piece of granite. Cells had one small opening for airflow and another small opening for light and access. Inmates were given 3 items for their sentence: a tin cup for food and water, a bible, and a wooden three-legged stool.



As far as we know, there is only one remaining stool, and it was passed to the Josh Robbins, the son of Warden Allan L. Robbins. We hope to get it on loan for the opening of the restored exhibit.

Susan Devlin, Curator and Jim Beaudry, Board Member

## ***Meet Mary Catherine Carpenter – A New Museum Volunteer***

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Even before she and her family bought 64 Knox St, Mary Catherine visited our museum and volunteered to help build a new Then and Now Medicine exhibit. Mary Catherine is an Advanced Practice Midwife and nurse (MSN, CNM) associated with the Women's Health Center at Pen Bay Hospital.

Mary Catherine is researching some of the donations received from the family of Dr. Everett Hodgkins, who practiced on Main Street and died in 1944. Her research also includes pharmacy artifacts. For example, did you know that Sodium Bromide was used as a sedative and treatment of seizures and headaches during Dr. Hodgkins time, but bromides were proven to be toxic in 1975.

We also have electric shock instruments from Dr. Hodgkins used to cover many different ills. Later this year stop by to see what else we have learned and have on display.

Another benefit of the Carpenters coming to Thomaston is the expertise daughter Grace gained while working as an undergraduate in restoring and cleaning costumes and old clothing. She will be helping restore our Margret Ruggles dress, which will be part of the expanded new Ruggles exhibit we hope to complete this summer.

Susan Devlin, Curator and Mary's next door neighbor

## ***Full Slate of Programs Scheduled for 2023***

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We are finally back to a full slate of events this year. Unless otherwise indicated, they will take place in the bottom of the Federated Church at 7:00 pm, with easy access from the parking lot behind the church:

**Tues. May 30 – "NORTHEASTER" BLIZZARD OF 1952.** Award winning author and Maine native, Catherine Pelletier, will talk about the blizzard and the courage and resolve of the people in Maine affected, including the tragic loss of 1941 Thomaston High School's Valedictorian, Harland Davis. There will be a book signing.

**Tues. June 20 – MEETING HALL MAINE.** Michelle Hauser, artist and grant winner of a Pollack-Krasner Foundation Grant, records for posterity her selections of photographs of meeting halls throughout the state. She will explain the different rituals, significance of symbols, historical and economic origins and the present.

**Sat. July 22 – KNOX MEMORIAL.** The 10:30 AM annual remembrance service honoring the life of Henry Knox at his grave at the Thomaston Village Cemetery, followed by a celebration of his life at Montpelier.



**TUESDAY- August 15 – HAND MAKING BOAT LINES.** Bill Wasson will demonstrate how to make boat riggings. This will take place outside at the museum.

**TUESDAY-September 12 – THE ECONOMIC COLLAPSE AT THE MAINE STATE PRISON 1861,** Sandra Hoekstra, Bookseller, will talk about the Civil War and the economy of the town of Thomaston and the Prison.

**TUESDAY-October 10 – HISTORY OF MALAGA ISLAND.** Maine State Archivist, Kate McBrien, will talk about this 42 acre island near Phippsburg, its mixed race population and treatment of residents and eviction over the years

Aleta Kilborn, Program Chair and Secretary

## ***A “cute?” FIND IN THE ARCHIVES!***

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While looking at the 1928 Town Report, I found a folded piece of paper evidently placed as a book mark. Curious, I unfolded it and found the following written in elegant hand writing:

“I have been informed that you have shares in the following stocks: American Can; Consolidated Gas; U.S. Water. I would advise you to sit tight on your can, let go of your gas and hang on to your water. Scott Tissue has recently reached the bottom and wiped many people clean.”

One never knows what will show up in our extensive archives! Always fun.

Bill Gay, Vice President

## ***WE NEED YOUR HELP!***

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Please renew your membership, due 7/1/2023 for the 2023/2024 year or join the Thomaston Historical Society if you are not a member.

Also, we are looking for volunteers from all walks of life to help in all areas of the organization. Volunteers are the key to our continuing success. Currently we are particularly looking for anyone interested in the areas of planning/designing new displays, helping with a fund - raising event, managing building and grounds projects, editing Facebook’ helping with the website, writing Publicity releases, designing Membership drives, or joining the Board.

If you want to explore possibilities for helping, start the ball by emailing [info@ThomastonHistoricalSociety.com](mailto:info@ThomastonHistoricalSociety.com).

Thanks to our current Gold Business Members.

