

# Thomaston Historical Society

## Newsletter | Spring 2025

### Thoughts From the Board President

I wanted to take this opportunity to introduce myself to the Thomaston Historical Society membership as your new interim President. My name is Lawrence (Larry) Lentz, and I have been a Thomaston resident since 2022. I am a retired U.S. Army, Air Defense Artillery Colonel with a Bachelor's and Master's in history.



My suggestion to assume the role of interim President was designed to take some of the immense burden off of our former President and current Curator, Susan Devlin. Susan has done a magnificent job in both of these positions, but is now concentrating on her role as Curator.

My tenure as President will end in June at the annual meeting, and we are eagerly looking for a replacement. On a personal note, my wife and I are moving to France and will bid Thomaston a fond farewell this summer.

I look forward to seeing all of you at our programs for 2025, which look to be both informative and interesting. Read more about them on page 4.

## **Thomaston Historical Society in Crisis**



### **Fellow Members of the Historical Society and Citizens of Thomaston,**

The Thomaston Historical Society is in crisis – our board is shrinking and we have no replacements. The Board has done amazingly well over the last few years, but age and relocations are catching up with us. Without new board members and volunteers the board will be unable to provide programs, open the museum and serve as a community resource.

All of us have ideas on how we could make the Society more relevant and involved with the community. However, without board members or volunteers, these ideas will never be fulfilled. To prevent closure of our Society or merging with another town's, we desperately need your help!

If you are interested, please email [info@thomastonhistoricalsociety.com](mailto:info@thomastonhistoricalsociety.com) or call Larry Lentz at (207) 233-6623 or Bill Gay at (207) 594-2302.

# Our Town's Naval Namesake

## Named for Thomaston, Maine, the home of General Knox



**Written by Bill Gay, Vice President, Thomaston Historical Society**

Did you know a U.S. Navy ship was once named after our town? The USS Thomaston (LSD-28) holds a unique place in history. You can find two framed pictures of her right here in town—one at the Town Office and another at the Thomaston Historical Society. If you haven't seen them, stop by and take a look.

Commissioned in September 1954 in Pascagoula, Mississippi, the Thomaston was the lead ship of her class of dock landing ships. Initially assigned to Arctic and Aleutian operations, she later took part in several major events.

During the Cuban Missile Crisis, she supported naval operations in the region. With the Vietnam War, she was deployed to the South China Sea and participated in the initial U.S. Marine landings at Da Nang and Chu Lai in March 1965. In the years that followed, she moved Marines and supplies upriver and handled coastal logistics between Da Nang, Cam Ranh Bay, and Thon My Thuy—grimly nicknamed "Murder Beach." There, she also served as a repair dock. Toward the end of the war, she helped with troop and cargo transport and amphibious operations. She played a vital role in evacuating Americans and refugees before returning to Pacific Fleet service.

After 30 years of service, the Thomaston was decommissioned in September 1984 and officially removed from the Naval Vessel Register in 1992.



Interestingly, Thomaston resident and retired maritime captain Mike Flanagan once walked her decks—a special tie between our town and this historic vessel.

# Thomaston Doctors and Pharmacists

Written by Susan Devlin, Curator, Thomaston Historical Society

In 2021 the Historical Society received an interesting donation related to a Dr. Everett Hodgkins, who lived and worked on Main Street Thomaston. This prompted volunteers to assemble an exhibit of medical providers in early Thomaston. This showcase dedicated to early medicine is nearing completion and we hope it will pique the curiosity of our members and visitors.

Dr. Hodgkins arrived in Thomaston in the 1930s to practice medicine. He practiced here until his death in 1944. When his wife went to live with her niece, many things from his medical office went with her; these were stored for decades in Carol & Richard Joyal's barn until donating medical books, documents and instruments to us. These tools give us a rare glimpse into the medical care Dr. Hodgkins provided the citizens of Thomaston. It is clear he practiced cutting edge gynecology.



While some of the medical equipment is similar to what is currently used, other pieces feel quite barbaric.

Hodgkins was a practitioner of short current electrical therapies. These were used to treat a myriad of ailments including sexually transmitted infections. The warmth generated from these probes placed in the most unfortunate locations may have been soothing but, most certainly did not cure infection and could inflict burns and start operating room fires.

This deep dive into Dr. Hodgkins triggered a larger project to explore other former Thomaston doctors and pharmacies. The archives of the museum contained images of Dr Stacey's horse and buggy from which he peddled "Little Giant Pills" at the turn of the century. We have unearthed from the archives a vial of those pills and numerous bottles from three Thomaston pharmacies that concocted and distributed cures throughout the 19th century.

Come by the museum to see these questionable and sometimes toxic tonics and learn more about the doctors and pharmacies in early Thomaston. Also visit an upcoming exhibit at the Thomaston Library featuring the beloved pets of historical Thomaston residents and related old veterinary drugs.

We thank Peggy McCray for providing her past research identifying doctors to aid in assemble of this exhibit.



# Slate of Programs Scheduled for 2025

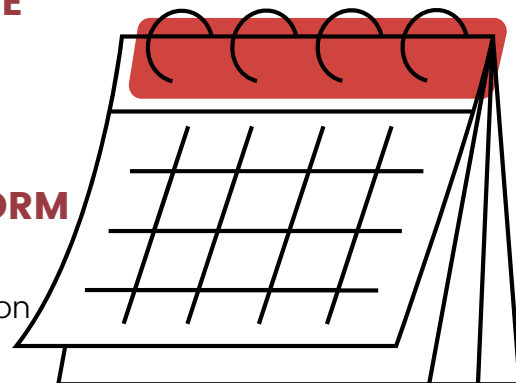
Unless otherwise indicated, these programs will take place in the gathering room on the bottom floor of the Federated Church at 7:00 pm, with easy access from the parking lot behind the church:

## Tues. May 13 – WEAVING THE PAST INTO THE FUTURE

David Erb, president of Best Co. in Thomaston, will talk about how his company is using the old looms from Camden today.

## Tues. June 17 – BRIEF ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP MEETING & ON BEYOND FENCES: A FILM ABOUT REFORM AND REDEMPTION INSIDE MAINE STATE PRISON

This film was produced at the Maine Media College, under the direction of Tom Donohue and with the support of the prison. It won the Best Documentary Short at the 2025 DC Independent Film Festival.



## Sat. July 26 – KNOX MEMORIAL DAY

The 10:30 AM annual remembrance service honoring the life of Henry Knox will happen at his grave at the Thomaston Village Cemetery, followed by a celebration of his life at Montpelier. We are honored to have BG Dianne Dunn, Commander of the Maine National Guard, as our speaker this year.

## Tues. August 12 – EDWARD O'BRIEN: FIRST THOMASTON MILLIONAIRE

Bill Gay and Susan Devlin will tell the story of this shipbuilder, statesman, and humanitarian based on extensive records recently donated by descendants.

## Tues. Sept. 8 – OUR FINNISH COMMUNITY ORIGINS & CONTRIBUTIONS

Scott Hodgkins will explore the South Thomaston's Finnish community and their economic and cultural contributions to the area.

## Tues. October 14 – GENE REIL'S HARBOR PILOT EXPERIENCES

Captain Reil will give an illustrated presentation of his career as a New York harbor pilot.

## December 12 + 13 – THS PRESENTS HOME FOR THE HOLIDAYS

More information to follow. If you would like to volunteer this year, please reach out!

**Reminder: Membership renewals are due by the end of June. Please see the attached form and return it before this deadline! Your membership dues help us to continue all of these wonderful offerings for our town.**

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