

News from the Old Town Museum

MUS-NEWS

December 2009

Vol. 8, No. 1

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Joe Ayotte, Beverly Clarke, Barbara Conners, Barbara Csavinszky, Philip Dunn, Richard Eustis, Virginia Fortier, Margaret Manzer, Carol May, Howard Merrill, William Osborne, Betsy Paradis, Kenneth Sirois, Carolyn Smith, Troy Turner

We're Back!

To our Readers-

We are back after a few years vacation, we hope we were missed. For others, this may be our first visit and we hope you will read our Newsletter and visit the Old Town Museum when in the area.

For those that remember us, this is the fifth year that we have published a Newsletter but we did take a break. We expect to return to our old schedule of two issues a year with possibly a third issue if we can accomplish it. We would like to bring you up to date and tell you a little about what has happened while we were "away" and the fact that "burn-out" of our editorial staff may have ended.

Since our last Newsletter, we have had a couple of Board Members participate in a meeting of the New England Museum Association where they gained some knowledge of how to improve our Museum. Board Members have also participated in some workshops hosted by the "Maine Archives and Museums (MAM) Association was a way of gaining some knowledge about the details of collecting and storing museum holdings. The Board has also undertaken the development of a "Long-range Strategic Plan" as a way of identifying our future needs and directions. One item that came to the top very quickly was the re-establishment of our periodic newsletter to our friends and supporters.

Last year, we had an opportunity to obtain some additional

Museum display cases from the University's Hudson Museum with the only cost being the moving of the cases to Old Town from Orono. These new cases have given us an opportunity for additional secure displays. We have also added some 8 foot tall partitions to create replicas of an early kitchen and an early parlor. This has allowed the display of appropriate material in the context of its original use and provided for a much better viewing by visitors.

The Museum has completed one video history "In their Own Words" from taped interviews with a number of local citizens. This video was done with the assistance of the Folk Lore group at the University of Maine and is of very high quality. A second video history is now underway that will include some new interviews as well material that was not used in the first video.

The Museum has expanded its activities with the third grade classes at the Old Town Elementary School and we now have five separate classes visit the Museum in late Spring where they get "guided tours" to help them better understand life in Old Town during earlier years. We are finding that many of the children return with their parents at a later date because of something that caught their interest.

The Museum continues to run its Sunday Afternoon Programs that attract visitors to the Museum. Most of these programs are of general interest and many have been musical in nature. We usually scatter a few programs relative to the history of the area in the summer program.

We hope that you do visit the Old Town Museum when you have the opportunity and if you have any specific requests, please let us know.

MISSION STATEMENT:

The mission of the Old Town Museum is to collect, preserve and display objects and information related to the heritage of the Old Town area and its residents; and to create interest in this heritage through programs, exhibits, education and other methods.

VISION STATEMENT:

The Old Town Museum will be the premier source of information on the history and culture of the Old Town area and its people.

Steamboats on the Penobscot

By Dick Eustis

One of the lesser remembered modes of travel on the Penobscot River in the mid 1800's was the steamboats operated by the "Penobscot Navigation Company" that ran between Old Town and Winn with occasional trips to Medway. These flat bottom, stern-wheelers carried passengers, freight and mail for several years ending operations in about 1869.

The Penobscot Navigation Company was the idea of William and Daniel Moor Jr. of Waterville who in 1846 secured a Charter from the Maine Legislature giving them exclusive rights to operate a steamship line from Old Town to the Winn area provided they made certain improvements to the river channel and were able to develop a way around Piscataquis Fall within seven years. If the brothers were able to comply with the conditions, the exclusive Charter would remain for 20 years.

The first steamship built in the Old Town area was named the "Governor Neptune" in honor of John Neptune, Governor of the Penobscot Tribe. This vessel made it's first trip up-river in May of 1847. Initially, the steamships only went as far as Piscataquis Falls but in November, an especially high river level allowed the steamship to continue to Lincoln and then on to Medway. In the summer of 1848, a second steamship known as the Mattanawcook was operational. This steamship was also built in the Old Town area. Eventually two additional steamboats, the Sam Houston and the William N. Ray were added to the Penobscot Navigation Company fleet.

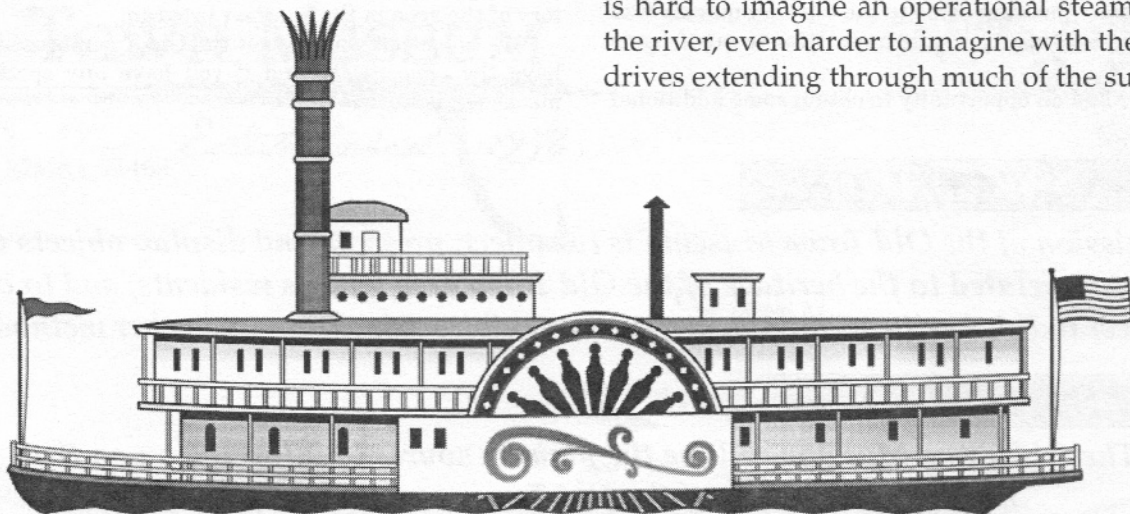
To comply with the terms of the original Charter, a horse drawn railroad was constructed to move passengers, freight and mail around Piscataquis Falls in time for the 1849 season. About five years later, the

canal and locks that allowed the steamboats to bypass the Piscataquis Falls were completed.

In 1849, our favorite General, Samuel Veazie, thought he had an opportunity to "cash-in" on what he saw as a very profitable opportunity. He believed the Moor brothers had not lived up to the terms of their Charter so he constructed a steamboat known as the Governor Dana to operate on the Penobscot, north out of Old Town. The Moor brothers brought suit against General Veazie and won. General Veazie then had his steamship disassembled and loaded on a sailing vessel for the long trip around Cape Horn to San Francisco, where it was reassembled for use in the Gold Rush. The steamship was later lengthened, its name changed and used between San Francisco and Sacramento.

The Penobscot Navigation Co. remained as a viable carrier of passengers, freight and mail. In 1858, the company was sold to General Joseph Smith, William Smith and others. It was not until after this purchase that the steamboat William N. Ray was actually launched. Two more sternwheeler steamboats, the John A. Peters and the Aroostook were added to the fleet along with two steam scows, the Lizzie Smith and the Nicatou. During this time, the fare from Old Town to Lincoln was \$2 and freight was transported at \$4.50 a ton.

By 1867, the developing availability of new modes of transportation north of Old Town had a major impact. The European and North American Railroad was extending their lines north and did not look favorably on the steamboat competition. As a result, they purchased the Penobscot Navigation Company in 1867 and kept it operational only until they began running trains north of Old Town approximately two years later. Looking at the Penobscot River today, it is hard to imagine an operational steamship line on the river, even harder to imagine with the annual log-drives extending through much of the summer.

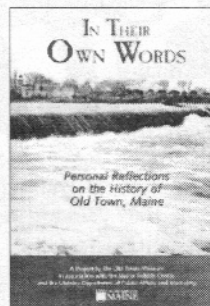


Great Gift Ideas from the Museum

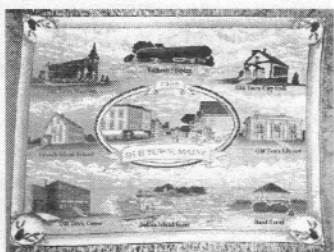
In Their Own Words \$15

Personal Reflections on the History of Old Town narrated by several local citizens.

Available in VHS (\$5 each) or DVD (\$15 each) tax inc., \$2 shipping



"Family Favorites" Cookbook \$7
\$2 shipping



(Please include shipping costs)

NEW! T-Shirts
in Forest Green or Heather Grey with our new Peavey logo in sizes M-L-XL-XXL
\$10.95 tax inc., \$2 shipping

Old Town Afghan \$55
tax included, \$7.25 shipping

These items may be purchased by calling
(207) 827-6785 (Barbara Csavinszky)
Or send check to: Old Town Museum,
c/o B. Csavinszky,
15 Sewall Drive, Old Town, ME 04468

Membership/Donation Drive

Membership in the Old Town Museum or financial donations are ways which anyone can help in preserving the history of the Old Town area. Dues and donations are a substantial help in the funding of the Museum operations. As you know, the Museum does not charge an admissions fee. Your Membership payment or your donation is greatly appreciated.

We hope the readers of this issue of Mus-News will continue their support of the Old Town Museum. The

Museum is the place where the history of the area is displayed for your viewing. It is place to visit to bring back old memories and a place to show your children (or grandchildren) how things were in earlier times.

Remember, donations of any amount to the Museum may qualify for a tax-deduction in accordance with IRS regulations. Donations should be sent to the same address as dues. Please consider a membership in the Museum or a donation to this valuable institution.

Old Town Museum, P.O. Box 375, Old Town, ME 04468

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____

State and Zip: _____

Phone Number: _____

E-mail: _____

OLD TOWN MUSEUM

353 Main Street
P. O. Box 375
Old Town, Maine 04468

Established 1976

| | |
|-------------------------|--------------------|
| Individual \$30 | Senior \$15 |
| Family \$45 | Life \$375 |
| Group or Business \$140 | Donation: \$ _____ |

Membership entitles you to voting rights at the Annual Meeting.

Donations and memberships are tax deductible to the extent provided by the applicable regulations.
The Old Town Museum is a 501(c)(3) organization.

If you are interesting in volunteering at the Museum, please check here ☐

The Old Town Museum –

A Museum Created to Celebrate an Event

By Dick Eustis

Member, Old Town Museum Board of Directors

The Old Town Museum has been in business for over 30 years. That's quite an accomplishment for an organization that came about as the result of the City's desire to celebrate the nation's bicentennial. The City had created a "Bicentennial Committee" that was to work with the City's Parks and Recreation Department to develop an appropriate way of celebrating the nation's birthday and to be a part of a region-wide celebration. Out of this beginning came a plan to create a small museum in the building which was abandoned when the Old Town Water District ceased drawing water from the Penobscot River. Converting the old building to a museum was a sizeable task. Ruth Ross who chaired the committee responsible for cleaning out the building is quoted as commenting that it was a "long, dirty, messy undertaking".

No matter what the problems, the conversion was successful and the Old Town Historical Museum opened on Saturday, June 26, 1976, a little over a week prior to the official bicentennial date. Within a week of its opening, it had registered visitors from 12 different states.

As a result of the success of the Museum, the City kept the Museum as a part of the Parks and Recreation Department until 1982 when the City Council voted to get out of the Museum business but the City did agree to lease the old Waterworks Building to a non-profit corporation that was proposed by a group of dedicated Museum supporters. Thus was formed the Old Town Museum, a non-profit corporation dedicated to preserving the heritage of Old Town and the surrounding area. One of the first steps for the newly formed corporation was to obtain an IRS 501(c)(3) designation so that private donations to the Museum would be income tax deductible to the extent provided by IRS regulations.

The Old Town Museum remained in the old Waterworks Building for 20 years under cramped and limiting conditions. There was insufficient space to either store or exhibit the historic materials that had been donated. In 1996, the St. Mary's Church became available when two catholic parishes merged and they consolidated into the larger of the two churches. The Museum Board voted to purchase the church, make some minor renovations and move into much larger quarters and the facility was much more centrally located than the old location.

A combination of a successful capital fund drive and loans provided the necessary funding for the acquisition, necessary renovations and the moving costs.

Since moving into a new home, the Old Town Museum has an expanded operating schedule. It has also undertaken some noteworthy projects to show the history of the community. One Board Member undertook the project to develop a CD containing about 200 old photos of Old Town with the CD functioning like a "slide show" or one can go directly to specific photos. The Museum started a periodic "Newsletter" with each issue carrying an article about an activity or event related to the city. The Museum has also developed, in conjunction with the University of Maine Folk Lore Department, a 30-minute video that contains first-person reports by eleven older citizens of items they remember from their childhood. This 30 minute video was condensed from about 22 hours of actual interviews. The production cost of this video was underwritten by a grant from the King Foundation.

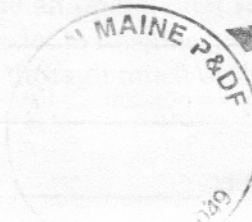
During the summer, the Old Town Museum hosts numerous "Sunday Afternoon Programs", some of which are historical in nature while others are pure entertainment. One of the purposes of these programs is to attract visitors that might otherwise not come to the museum to see the changing displays. These displays cover an eclectic mix from Old Town's past. A sampling of these include displays relating to Old Town's past in the lumbering industry, materials and equipment from some professional establishments, simulations of rooms in early homes, wood carvings of Old Town artist Bernard Langlais and a prized birch bark canoe. Displays are periodically changed or new displays are added to help maintain interest. Like most other volunteer-operated local historical associations, the Board of the Old Town Museum is continually looking for ways to display information related to a past that has great historical significance to a large area of Maine.

The past 32 years has resulted in a Museum that offers much more to the community than could have been envisioned when it was created as a part of a bicentennial remembrance program. It is providing a glimpse into the past that might have been lost otherwise. It is a place where the older generations can reflect on the way things were in earlier years and a place where today's youth can get a better idea of the advancements that have been made with time.

OLD TOWN MUSEUM

P.O. Box 375
Old Town, Maine 04468

Established 1976



Old Town Museum
Peggy Manzer
1171 Bennoch Rd
Old Town, ME 04468