

South Bristol Historical Society NEWSLETTER

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SBHS NEWS

The 2018 Annual Meeting of the South Bristol Historical Society was held on July 5. The following officers were re-elected for two-year terms: Vice President, Wayne Eugley; Treasurer, Betsy Graves; Secretary, Deb Storch; Historian, Dave Andrews. Cynthia Garrels was elected Interim President. Short biographies of three new trustees elected for three-year terms, Mary Avantaggio, Jason Bigonia, and Priscilla House appear below: a complete list of officers and trustees appears at the bottom of the page.

Board members stepping down were Genie Cole, Bob Emmons and Nat Hammond. We are grateful for their strong support over a number of years and will miss them. Genie was recognized at the October 3 program evening with the award of a new pair of scissors, her old ones having become worn out from years of faithfully clipping Lincoln County Newspaper items about South Bristol for our files!



Genie Cole showing off her new scissors at our October 3 meeting

Outgoing President Sue Edwards outlined the activities, programs, and achievements of the past year. Sue's resignation as President was accepted with the grateful thanks of the Board and members for her strong leadership during the past two years. She noted that the Society continues to maintain good fiscal health, with growing membership and donations. New volunteers have come forward, and Board members continue to give their time and support in many ways.

MEET OUR NEW TRUSTEES

Mary McFarland Avantaggio grew up in South Bristol, the daughter of Roland and Peggy McFarland, and younger sister of Roland and Mickey. She was a travel agent in Boston for a few years, and later Manager of Adams Travel in Damariscotta. In 1981 Mary married Dr. Frank Avantaggio; their sons are Christopher and August. Mary also has three stepchildren, Glen, Andrea, and William and ten grandchildren. Now living in South Bristol once more, Mary is enjoying getting to know more of the history of the town.



Jason Bigonia has lived in Lincoln County for 13 years. He is a resident of Walpole, and is married to Erica Qualey. They are the parents of a daughter, with another child on the way. Jason teaches science and math to 5th-8th graders at the South Bristol School, where he has led the soccer team, Running Club, Nature Club, and has been involved with circus arts for most of his time at the school. Jason has a keen interest in history, and was involved with the Berwick Historical Society while in high school. He has frequently involved South Bristol students with SBHS activities. He can be seen most afternoons running on South Bristol roads.



SBHS BOARD MEMBERS

Interim President – Cynthia Garrels; Vice President – Wayne Eugley; Historian – Dave Andrews; Secretary – Deb Storch; Treasurer – Betsy Graves;
Trustees – Mary Avantaggio, Jason Bigonia, Scott Farrin, Priscilla House, Carol Kelsey
Carolyn McKeon, Mike Naylor, Donna Plummer, Warren Storch, Ellen Wells

Priscilla House was born at Miles Memorial Hospital in Damariscotta and has lived in South Bristol most of her life. She attended the South Bristol Elementary School and Lincoln Academy. She lives in a house she built on land once part of her grandparent's property on the Thompson Inn Rd. She is a self-employed social worker with an office in Damariscotta. She never tires of walking "around the island" and kayaking in local waters. She looks forward to learning more about her hometown and sharing her own memories of living in this beautiful place.

THANK YOU, VOLUNTEERS

SBHS could not exist without volunteers. Just think of the hours it takes to care for the S Road School, to keep it open and in good condition; to plant and water the flower boxes at the Museum; to process gifts of various types and to acknowledge their receipt; to compose and distribute the newsletters; to develop and conduct the yearly summer programs; to maintain newspaper report files; to care for artifacts; to maintain membership records; keep the website up-to-date, and on and on throughout the year. Our officers and trustees may be the backbone of the organization, but we are pleased to acknowledge the support that comes from a growing number of others as well.

Some of the wonderful volunteers, in addition to Board members, who shared their time and expertise this past summer were; Juliet Totten and Mike Smetana, Larry Kelsey, Bill Kelsey, Janet Davis, Barbara Smith, Susan Bartlett Rice and her daughters, tan Wells, and Amy Lincoln and her granddaughter. Once again this year, Gladden Schrock planted marigolds and other flowers around the S Road School: then after a severe wind storm early this fall uprooted the old tree in front of the SBHS Museum, Mike Nyboe, Bill Kelsey and Ken Lincoln chopped up and removed the trunk and limbs. To them and any others we may have inadvertently omitted, we say a heartfelt THANK YOU.

As you can see, there are many ways to contribute to SBH. If you are interested in volunteering and have even a free hour or so, we'd be happy to have you join us – it's fun, too! Just contact any Board member.

'WINTER WEDNESDAY' BECOMES 'WINTER FRIDAY'

Once again there will be a 'winter work-day' at SBHS, but please take note of the change in the day of the week. We will now gather on Friday afternoon from 1-3. Anyone who can spare an hour or two is most welcome to come to the SBHS museum between the hours of 1 and 3 pm to help with copying and filing news clippings, cataloguing and storing

artifacts, reviewing movies donated over the years with an eye to digitizing them, transcribing oral history tapes, and whatever else needs to be done! No prior experience required! Keep in mind that work-day 'holidays' will be observed on Nov. 23, Dec. 21, and Dec. 28.



WW II Memorial as it appeared on May 29, 1944

A NEW VETERANS' MEMORIAL

Close to the end of World War II the citizens of South Bristol were anxious to honor the town's veterans of that war, and on May 29, 1944 the dedication of a memorial took place.

A parade left Red Men's Hall at 11 a.m. and proceeded to the Rutherford Library (now the South Bristol Historical Society Museum). The Lincoln Academy Band played for the



Dedication ceremony: Leland Gamage and Maxwell House stand behind the Memorial, while Earle Haley, Bradford Redonnet, Albert Drummond Farrin Jr. and Ralph W. Brown stand to the right

parade and noontime dedication service, at which Bradford Redonnet, an American Legion Commander, was guest speaker. The honor roll was unveiled by A. Drummond Farrin, Jr. and Ralph William Brown (both were on leave from active military duty). After the ceremony, the parade returned to Redmen's Hall, where a luncheon was served under the direction of Mrs. Gertrude Osier.

That wooden memorial in front of the old library building fell into disrepair and was removed in the mid-1950s. SBHS trustee Scott Farrin in 2015 proposed that a new memorial be erected. He realized that with only 50 names (including that of his father, A. Drummond Farrin, Jr. who served in the U.S. Navy) the list on the old memorial was not complete.

It was eventually agreed that the town would erect a new memorial to include the veterans of all wars and conflicts. Scott, as well as Lance and Carol Kelsey (an SBHS trustee), and other SBHS members, put a lot of time and effort into helping compile a complete list of names. The new memorial, which will be erected at the West Bristol Cemetery in Walpole, will display the names of 88 WWII veterans, along with those from other conflicts. Watch the Lincoln County News for information about the dedication of the new memorial.

The photos shown here are from the dedication of the original

memorial. Readers who have photos, mementoes, or other information from that 1944 day are invited to share them with the Historical Society.



SBHS SCHOLARSHIP AWARD 2018

For many years, the South Bristol Historical Society has given a scholarship of \$500 to a South Bristol resident graduating from Lincoln Academy. The 2018 award went to Thalia Mullen, daughter of Charles and Natalie Mullen. Thalia attended the South Bristol School, graduated from Lincoln Academy with honors, and is now a freshman at Dartmouth College. We wish her well in her college career.

SAVING THE HISTORIC PEMAQUID MILL

Many of you may already be aware of the effort underway to purchase the old Pemaquid Mill building which stands on the property owned by Hammond Lumber (formerly Poole Bros.) at the intersection of Harrington Road and Route 130. A group called 'Friends of the Pemaquid Mill' has been formed for this purpose by several individuals and non-profit organizations including the Old Bristol Historical Society, with the Damariscotta River Association acting as its fiscal agent.

As explained in their brochure, “This site has significant archaeological, historical and natural resources. Native Americans have used the site for over 5,500 years. There have been mills on the site from the mid-1600’s... (it) is the site of a significant run of alewives and elvers...the location of two waterfalls and is close to two 120-acre nature preserves...”

If the effort succeeds, the mill buildings would be leased to the Old Bristol Historical Society which hopes to restore the mill building and its equipment as well as to provide space for an office and archive vault. It is expected that the other buildings on the side would be demolished and restored to open space.

At its September 19 meeting, the SBHS board lent our support to this effort by authorizing a contribution of \$500 toward the goal of \$380,000 needed to complete the purchase. As this newsletter goes to print, the deadline set by the seller is November 30. If you wish to make a contribution, please contact the DRA at 563-1393 for further information.

GRACE COURTLAND, WITCH OF WALL STREET

PART I

It’s common knowledge that Witch Island, the 10-acre island at the eastern end of the Gut in South Bristol, is named for Grace Courtland who was known as the Witch of Wall Street. What, however, do we know about this ‘Witch’ who had the power to change the name of such a prominent bit of South Bristol?

To begin with, the Witch’s real name was Anna Loomis, not Grace Courtland. Born in 1839, Anna was the first child of Levi Loomis and Anna Hallet. She grew up in Milwaukee where Levi was a pawnbroker and owned a theater. Perhaps it was at this theater that our heroine first appeared on stage at age 12. She claims she was quite an accomplished young actress. Perhaps it was in this same establishment that she met her future husband, Morris Davis. He was 30 years old and she 15 when they married.

It was not a good marriage. The couple moved between New York City, Chicago and Milwaukee as Morris tried to establish a jewelry business. He gambled, drank and hung out with the wrong crowd. They would go from riches to rags and back again several times. According to Anna, he was abusive and even tried to get her committed to an insane asylum. They divorced in 1872 in a highly publicized event. Anna and Morris had 3 sons and 2 daughters. The two girls stayed with Anna after the divorce.

To make ends meet, Anna went back on the stage doing character roles and entertaining as a clairvoyant, a skill she learned from her mother. Anna tells us her troupe was a great success. In 1877, Anna decided to go to England to further her career. A newspaper reports that she “... went to Europe for a few years with a Newspaper man.”

The newspaper man was Daniel Chittenden, known later to everyone in South Bristol as “Uncle Dan”. Chittenden was the second son of a very successful business man in New York and New Jersey. Dan’s older brother was a reporter and newspaper editor ultimately working for the Hearst Organization and the New York Herald newspaper. Dan was a reporter and editor for several liberal, muckraking New York City newspapers. His younger brother, Larry, was also a reporter who became known as the Texas Ranchman Poet and was owner of Larry’s Autograph Library of South Bristol fame.

In the 1870’s Dan and his older brother Henry owned the Commercial Times newspaper in Milwaukee. They sold the paper in 1875. They would have certainly known of Anna Davis. It is possible Anna and Dan were married in 1876 or 1877, but no record has been found. In January 1879, the Chicago Tribune reported that Mr. and Mrs. Chittenden were in London. They left England together in May 1879. The passenger list names Dan’s companion as Grace Courtland, the first time her alias appears in public.

In 1879, Grace’s book, *A Marked Life: or The Autobiography of a Clairvoyant*, was published. The autobiography is an account of her upbringing in Milwaukee focusing on her childhood clairvoyant events, marriage, adventures as an actress and trip to Europe, including the sinking of the vessel in which she was a passenger off the coast of Ireland. Almost certainly the book was ghost written by Dan. The book is a blend of fact and fiction: The stories of Grace’s clairvoyant successes are, of course, total fiction. Those of her adventures that can be dated roughly match the actual event. She is the heroine of all the happenings, successful at every turn and a paragon of virtue. All in all, the book is more a public relations polishing of Grace’s image than a true account of her life.

Shortly after returning to the United States, Grace apparently became a highly successful stock speculator in the markets of mid-western cities. In 1881, she was in New York, advertising herself as available to give tips to commodity and stock traders on the New York Stock Exchange. She claims to have given advice to the likes of robber baron Jay Gould and millionaire Jim Keene. It was here in New York that she gave herself the moniker of “Witch of Wall Street”. Like the autobiography, there is nothing in Courtland’s background that would account for her clairvoyance in the world of finance. It’s hard to believe that Dan was not the “man behind the curtain”.



*Grace Courtland and Dan Chittenden,
from a photo taken on Witch Island*

In an 1888 Pemaquid Messenger article, she explains her method.

No, I am not a fortune teller....my business is conducted wholly on business principles. I give points to all kinds of speculations and investments. I can tell you how you have made money and how you have lost it; I can also tell you how you will make it again and will give you lucky and unlucky periods....I tell all from the lines in the palm of the hand, an art I learned from my mother who was a real gypsy.

In November 1881, Grace gave an anti-monopoly lecture, almost assuredly written with Daniel's assistance, titled The Kings of Wall Street or The People versus Monopoly New York. She would give the talk many times around the country. The lecture vilified powerful stock speculators who wanted to control the national finance for their own selfish ends. Courtland ended with a long harangue urging the people to arise and do battle with the fiendish monopolists before it was too late. For a person who was in the business of giving stock tips to the selfsame monopolists, this is a very strange piece of advice.

Grace advertised her consulting business in large city newspapers in the early 1880s. Interviews with her appeared in many newspapers of that period. She clearly was looking to gain celebrity status, but her actions resulted in notoriety instead.

From 1881 to 1884, Grace did get a lot of free publicity as her name was frequently in the press. Unfortunately, it was mostly bad press. She made the papers when she sued her ex-husband for unpaid alimony and sued a client for \$50,000. The most widely reported incident was her whipping of 25-year-old William Jones in Milwaukee in 1883 for seducing her daughter, Mazie, age 16. Mazie was discovered living with Jones in a hotel. In today's jargon, this story went viral. In 1884, Grace's son made the papers when arrested for bigamy just two weeks after being arrested for swindling.

The Witch's biggest scandal involved President Garfield who was shot in July 1881 but did not die until September. Reports on his day to day health caused fluctuations in the stock market. Grace falsely claimed that monopolist Jay Gould had inside information on the status of the President's health which he used to manipulate the stock market. She was roundly condemned for creating fake news.

THIS ARTICLE WAS WRITTEN BY SBHS HISTORIAN DAVE ANDREWS AND WILL BE CONTINUED IN THE SPRING 2019 NEWSLETTER.

LE ROY GREEN AND LARRY CHITTENDEN, THE COWBOY POET: EVERETT SPEAR AND UNCLE DAN CHITTENDEN

THE FOLLOWING EXCERPT IS FROM THE
DAMARISCOTTA HERALD NEWSPAPER DATED
SEPTEMBER 9, 1918:

That brave little hero of the Tourist (a river steamer) at Damariscotta on August 30th, Le Roy Green of Brooklyn who was carried under three times but held on. The Poet had helped Le Roy aged four to sign his name on a book plate the day before the wreck, and now that Le Roy is famous, of course his autographed book will be very valuable and interesting, and a great addition to the rapidly growing and most interesting library at Christmas Cove in Maine.

The poet referred to above is Larry Chittenden. Mr. Chittenden
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is a well known character around Christmas Cove in the first part of the 20th century. He had the “Autograph Library” which was located just south of the bar on the west side of the road in Christmas Cove. He was a New Yorker who, as a young reporter in 1890, became famous as the author of the Texas ballade “The Cowboys’ Christmas Ball”. Hence, his self-styled title of the Cowboy Poet.

Dan, another local character, was also a poet. Here’s his rather “purple prose’ contribution to the same Damariscotta Herald issue. (Everett Spear, if you remember, was the young engineer of the Steamer “Tourist” whose failure to put the boat into reverse caused the accident.)

TO EVERETT SPEAR, DROWNED IN THE WRECK (FOR THE HERALD BY D. G. CHITTENDEN, UNCLE DAN)

THE LAST TRIP

He died at the post of duty,
In his prime, with heart so brave,
No thoughts in youth’s ambition
Of how near he was to the grave.
To the call of the bell made answer
With a torn and bleeding arm,
His nerveless hand was palsied
‘Mid the panic of wild alarm.

In the angry swirl of the pitiless wave,
Crunching and grinding his youthful form,
He dashed for life to find a grave
Out of all trouble, out of all storm.
The tangled seaweed in his hair
On the muddy bank gleamed in the sun
A requiem whispered in the summer air.
For a pale-faced boy whose task was done.
