

the CASTINE VISITOR

CASTINE HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

Spring 2010

vol. 20 no. 1



UNDER THE ELMS AND BY THE SEA

Jennifer Lieberman

This summer the Castine Historical Society will present the 2010 Castine House & Garden Tour on Thursday, July 29th. Aptly themed "Under the Elms and By the Sea," the tour celebrates the unique juxtaposition of Castine's scenic coastal location along the rocky shores of Penobscot Bay and our beloved collection of towering elm trees that still grace so many of our streets.

The walking tour, which includes nine houses and four gardens, will feature several examples of period style homes dating back to the eighteenth century along with some newly-built homes. It will offer participants an opportunity to experience the ways in which new and old designs come together to capture the brilliance of Castine's seaside landscape. On display throughout the tour are several homes that have been renovated to include contemporary art and furniture that mix well with the historic nature of the environment.

Ruth Scheer and Lynne Dearborn are spearheading the effort. It will draw on the support, talent and energy of a great many of our fellow Castiners including CHS members and volunteers, as well as the hosts of the homes and gardens that will be showcased. "We are pleased to offer visitors and our own residents a chance to see the lovely gardens and homes from so many periods in our diverse history," says Ruth Scheer. "Bring your friends, your family and house guests for a wonderful

day for not only a house and garden tour, but also for a chance to view special exhibits and historic buildings in our beautiful seacoast town."

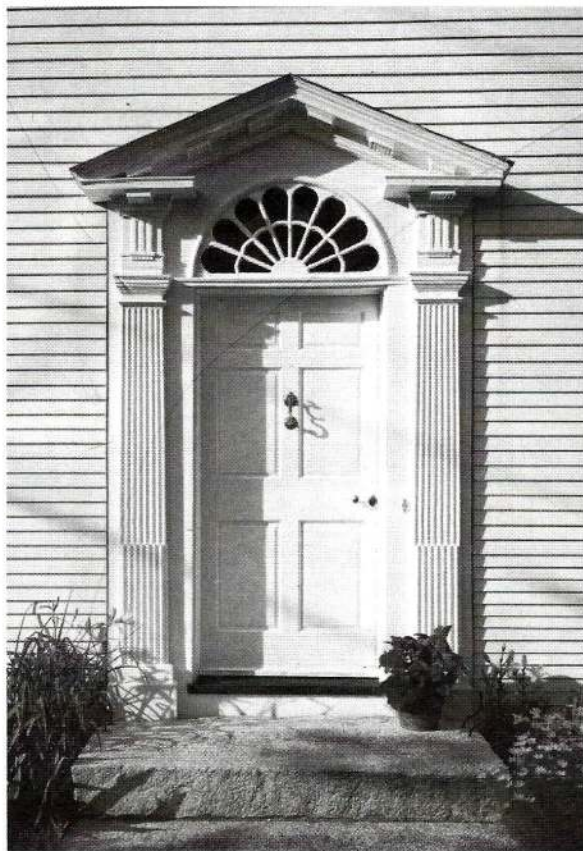
Among the homes on the tour, visitors will have the opportunity to see a Cape house decorated in the Arts and Crafts style, an historic once-

functioning sail loft that the current owners have transformed into a highly attractive living space overlooking Castine Harbor, a converted windmill, the former home of American poet Robert Lowell, a house constructed of birch logs and a eighteenth century captain's house.

The gardens on view include one that sweeps across an 1802 federal house with formal plantings, an herb garden, vegetable beds and fruit trees. Another, at the former home of the celebrated American author Mary McCarthy, is a secret garden in the rear of the house. A third garden sits high above the entrance to Castine Harbor, capturing the dramatic views of the mouth of the harbor leading out to the open waters of Penobscot Bay.

With its many examples of American architecture, colonial homes and summer cottages and its well-known connection with artists and craftsman, writers and poets, Castine provides a glorious backdrop for this walking tour. Offering something for visitors of all ages, it provides a

(continued on page 8)



Parson Mason House detail

Photo courtesy of *Early American Homes*, June 1999

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**The Castine Historical Society
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and in honor of

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**Our thanks and recognition are extended to
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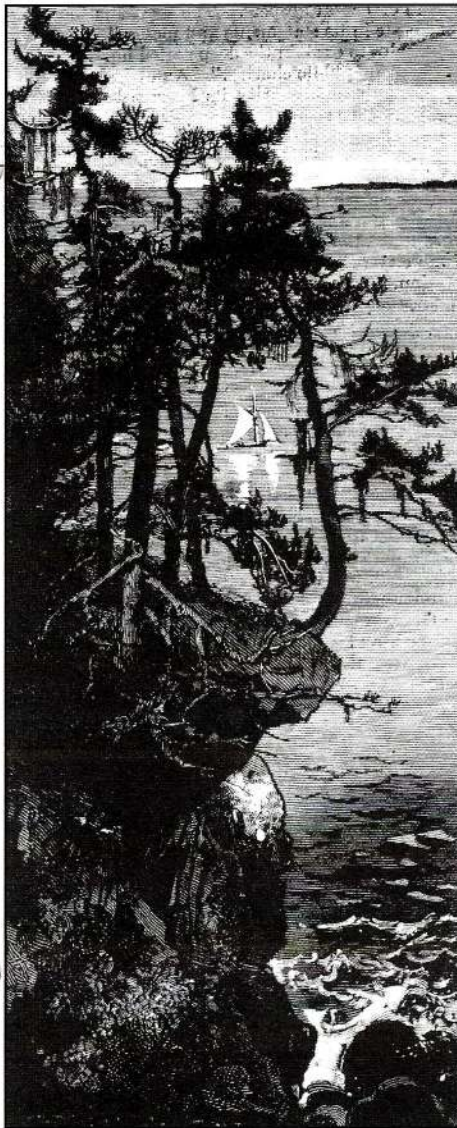
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Wilson Museum



The mission of the Castine Historical Society, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, is to collect, preserve, protect, and make available a variety of materials that illuminate the historical development of the Castine-Bagaduce River Area from its beginnings to the present.

The Castine Visitor is published three times a year by the Society for its members and friends.

Lynn H. Parsons &
Anne H. Parsons.....Editors

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**Castine
Historical Society**

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

It seems to be the season for State of the Union messages and I am not one to miss a Presidential opportunity. Fortunately I can report to you that my challenges are substantially less than the other fellow's, and the Castine Historical Society's achievements this year are tangible. You have already heard me celebrate the success of the Lincoln Bicentennial events including the McPherson lecture, and I am pleased to report to you that over two thousand visitors including history buffs, school groups and individual families came to the Lincoln Bicentennial programs. The cooperative nature of the project with the Wilson Museum, the Friends of the Witherle Library and the Castine Arts Association was also a major breakthrough. I do not think it is excessive to state that for the Castine Historical Society, 2009 was one of the most productive years in recent memory.

The challenges are also substantial. Deborah Pulliam's gift to the Society has had a profound effect. We have become a historical society with an endowment of over four million dollars. Surprisingly, that turns out not to be a lot by today's standards but it is enough to put the Society in a different place as regards its mission and responsibility to the community.

Speaking of which, in December the Executive Committee approved a settlement agreement with all of the parties to our section of the Pulliam estate. As you may know, in May we asked the local probate judge for an official interpretation of the Estate's distribution. The Estate subsequently requested the same interpretation, and we finally agreed on a distribution which provided an additional one hundred and forty-six thousand dollars to each of the three Castine recipients.

The Society's real resource, however, is the very diverse and talented group of people who volunteer to run our committees, design our programs and nurture our collection. This week I attended a Finance Committee meeting chaired by Barbara Griffiths. Barbara, along with Ann Miller, John Parish, Ruth Scheer and Roger Moss has been working on revamping our financial systems to bring them into line with accepted legal and administrative 501c3 practices. It's tedious work, but Barbara's energy, Roger's specific knowledge and the financial management experience of John and Ann plus their combined raw intelligence would be envied by any major philanthropic institution in this country.

As for 2010, Marcia Mason is organizing an enhanced Civil War period exhibit for the summer. Lynn Parsons has already engaged another Pulitzer Prize winner for the second Pulliam Lecture scheduled for July 7th. The Church History Project looks like it is going to move into a new and productive phase with a cooperative effort by the many stake holders in the project (see the article on page 7). Meanwhile Ruth Scheer and Lynne Dearborn are well along in their plans for a spectacular Castine House and Garden Tour, which will take place on July 29th (see the article on page 1).

Finally, I would like to wish each member of the Castine Historical Society a productive and healthy 2010.

Michael Coughlin

Signs and the Times

Lynn Parsons

In a previous issue of the *Visitor*, I cited one of the more popular (or, one might say, “notorious”) of Castine’s “Historic Signs” in order to raise questions about its veracity, based on what we know about the incident (See “The Sign at the Top of Tarratine Street”, Summer 2009). Since then discussions and events in Castine have prompted consideration of two broad questions: 1) what is the purpose of the signs? and 2) how obligated is the Town to revise them if it can be proven they are inaccurate, misleading, or offensive?

There are many who maintain that the signs are intended to reflect the era in which they were put up approximately a century ago. Or, as one commentator put it, “an attempt to recall the conditions of the past, including the mindset in early settlements.” But we need to be careful about assuming anything about their purpose. Charles Noyes, who was largely responsible for their creation and placement, died in 1921, leaving no record of what he thought their purpose was, other than to inform the public, and no doubt to enhance Castine’s attractiveness to visitors.

Certainly the hundreds of visitors to Castine, including those who arrive on the windjammers or cruise boats in the summer, are not told their purpose. They may assume that they reflect, as accurately as possible, what actually happened here. Or they may not. But if we assume the purpose was to reflect the values or “mindset” of the time, we need to think about those values and “mindsets.”

Last spring, Ms. Kathy Pollard, a member of the Penobscot Indian community, visited Castine, along with her daughter. They paused before the sign posted near the Catholic Church, which read, in part, “Probable site of Betsabe’s permanent camp of eighty wigwams and three hundred savages visited by Biencourt and Fr. Biard, November 1611.” Ms

Pollard and her daughter were offended by the use of the term “savages” to describe people who very well could have been their ancestors. Ms. Pollard’s eighty-one-year-old father, who served the nation in the U. S. Navy, presumably felt the same way.

In a letter to the *Bangor Daily News* ((June 16, 2009) Ms. Pollard urged Castiners at the next Board of Selectmen meeting to support a revision of the sign. At the meeting it was agreed to take the sign down (which was deteriorating in any event) and refer the matter to representatives of the local Indian communities. As of this writing, that is where matters stand.

Ms. Pollard’s letter provoked at least two responses. Jewel Reed, of Castine, (*BDN*, June 26, 2009) didn’t see any need for outrage. Many ethnic groups had been characterized as “savages” in the past, she noted, including, among others, the Scots. Since then, she continued, “the Indians have become good Americans, just as the Scots, whom the Brits once called ‘savages.’”



JoAnne Fuerst, of Southwest Harbor, tended to agree, (*BDN*, July 15, 2009) pointing out that the word “savages” did not mean in the seventeenth century what it does today. In support of her thesis, she cited David Hackett Fischer’s recent biography of Samuel Champlain, *Champlain’s Dream*, which offers a full discussion of the origins of the word. She implied that Indians today should not be upset, even if the word is still used. “I, too, admire our Indian nations, but they do their cause no good by rising to every perceived offense.” Her solution was to use the French word “sauvages” perhaps adding a footnote explaining the term.

The issue also unleashed a spate of letters to the *Castine Patriot* (including one by one of your editors). Mark Honey, a frequent contributor to the

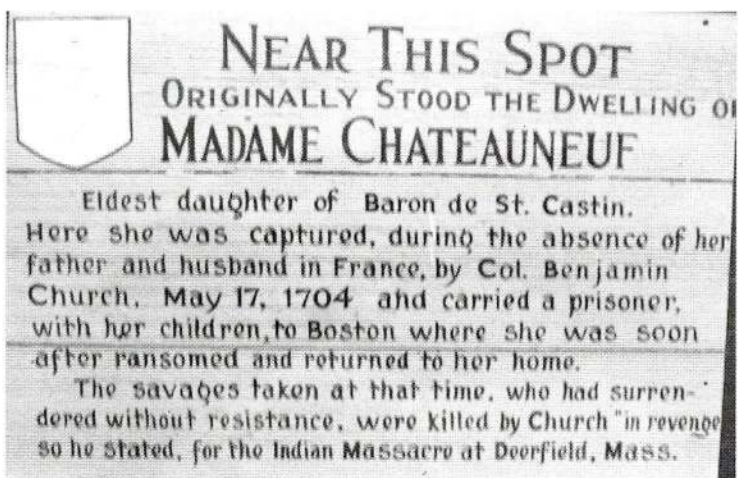
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Patriot, was inclined to dismiss the controversy. The word “sauvages” is “certainly not appropriate today,” he wrote, “but it was considered appropriate by some in ‘that day’ . . .” Racial prejudice was and is a fact of life, he maintained, and there is no point in trying to erase it from the record. (He also thought there should be five flags, not four, representing the history of Castine, the fifth presumably being a representation of the Native American Indian presence.)

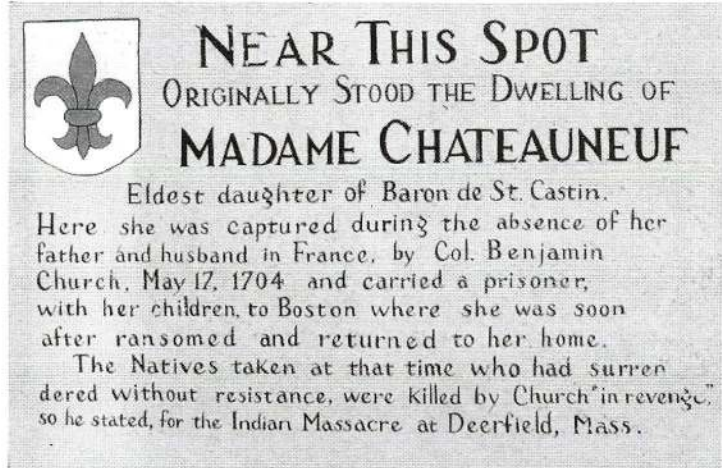
This is not the first time the nomenclature, to say nothing of the accuracy, of Castine’s “Historic Signs” has been called into question. In 1985, Fr. Eugene Gaffney, then priest at the Roman Catholic Church in Castine, protested the use of the word “savage” on the sign in a letter to the *Patriot*, but to no apparent avail. (He also questioned the date of the first French occupation of Castine, but that’s another story.)

And indeed, the offending word once appeared on the sign next to the present fire station on Court Street. It described the somewhat unsavory actions of Colonel Benjamin Church in May, 1704, who, after the local “savages” had peacefully surrendered following his attack on their community, proceeded to slaughter them anyway, in revenge, he said, for the so-called “Indian Massacre” at Deerfield, Massachusetts. (One might ask who the real “savage” was in this instance.)



Before

However, at some point in the 1990's, the sign was redone, and the “savages” became “natives.”

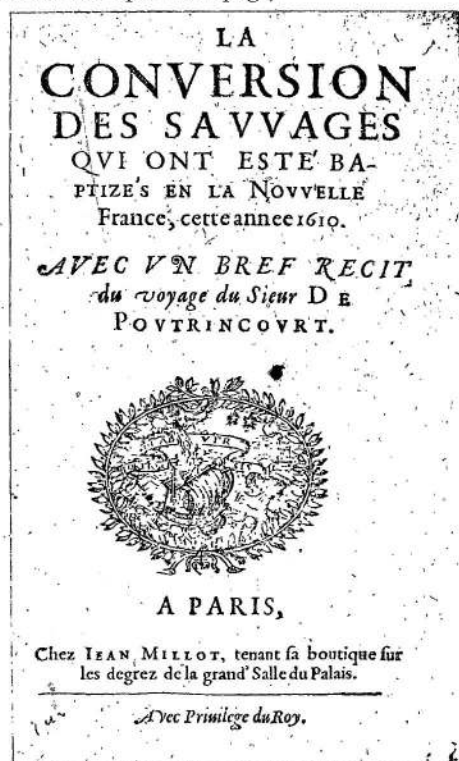


After

A word about the word “massacre.” Serious historians are very careful about its use, since it is often a loaded phrase. What happened at Deerfield in November, 1704, was an attack by the French and their Mohawk allies on an English frontier outpost as part of the seemingly endless series of Franco-British wars for control of North America. Many colonists were killed and others kidnapped. Most of those kidnapped were later returned, although some chose to remain voluntarily with the Mohawks. Local historians at Deerfield today prefer the term “raid” to “massacre.” Note too, that the event occurred six months *after* Church’s capture of the natives in Castine.

But to return to the current issue. Ms. Fuerst, had a point, one made also by your editor. The word “savage” (or the French version, “sauvage”), indeed had a different meaning in the early seventeenth century from what it has today.

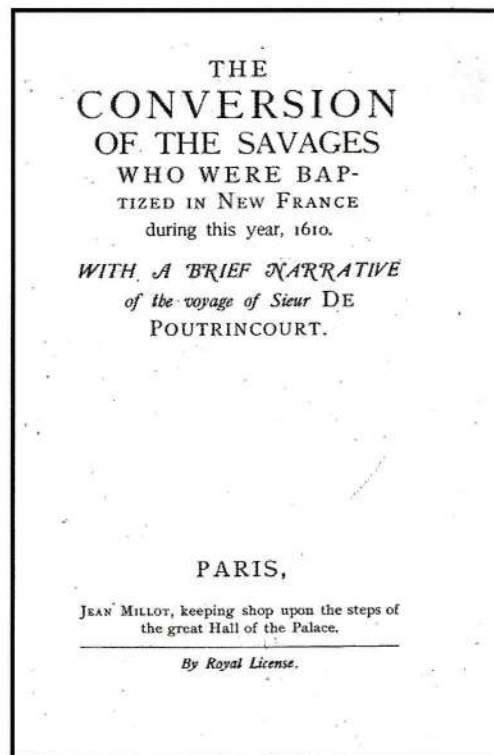
Note the phrase in parenthesis at the bottom of the sign on the preceding page describing the arrival of Fr. Biard: “(Jes. Rel.)” This suggests that whoever was responsible for the sign, nearly a century ago, was relying on the magnificent seventy-three volume set of documents usually referred to as the *Jesuit Relations*. In the early seventeenth century the Jesuit Fathers annually sent reports back to Paris describing their progress – or lack of it – in the conversion of the natives to Christianity. They were written in French or Latin, but late in the nineteenth century the *Relations* were translated into English by a group of American scholars. When the Americans came across the French word “sauvage” (occasionally spelled “savage”) they quite naturally converted this to the English word “savage.” (continued on next page)



Quite naturally, perhaps, but not quite accurately. As Fischer explains in his biography of Champlain (who was a contemporary of the Jesuits) “sauvage” is derived from the Latin “silva,” which was a word for a forest or woodland. Indeed, Englishmen like Captain John Smith often used the word “salvage” to describe the natives of Virginia, which is a clue to the word’s original meaning. In the seventeenth century, Fischer notes, the word “sauvage” preserved this meaning, and was used “to describe wild things that lived in the forest.” When Champlain and the Jesuits wrote “sauvages,” they meant simply “forest-dwellers.” They did not mean it in the “modern” sense of “primitive, uncivilized, coarse, simple-minded, barbaric, brutal, violent, vicious, treacherous, ferocious, and inferior”

Being neither linguists nor anthropologists, the Castiners who put up the sign thought they were doing the right thing by relying on the English translation of the *Jesuit Relations*. If the Jesuit Fathers wrote “sauvages,” they obviously meant “savages,” or so they thought.

A closer reading of the *Relations*, however, might have given the Castiners cause to reconsider. On the very same page upon which the sign relies, Fr. Pierre Biard says:



“on recognoist souvent en ces Sauvages des vertus naturelles et politiques qui font rougir quiconque n’est eshonté, lorsqu’en comparaison ils regardent une bonne partie des François qui viennent en ces quartiers”

Or, in English:

“I confess we often see in these Savages natural and graceful qualities which will make anyone but a shameless person blush, when they compare them to the greater part of the French who come over here.”

Indeed, a century ago it may have been acceptable to refer to Native American Indians as “savages.” But a century ago there were also “acceptable” words for African-Americans, Jewish-Americans, Italian-Americans and other ethnic groups that no sensitive person would use today. How comfortable would we be in putting them on our signs? And while it is true that many ethnic groups, including the Scots and the Irish, have indeed been called “savages” by the English, how many signs today in Scotland or Ireland use the term to describe their own citizens?

And that is the point.

References: David Hackett Fischer, *Champlain’s Dream* (New York, 2008); *Jesuit Relations* (Cleveland, 1896), Vol. 2; *Bangor Daily News*, *Castine Patriot*.

CASTINE'S CHURCH HISTORY PROJECT

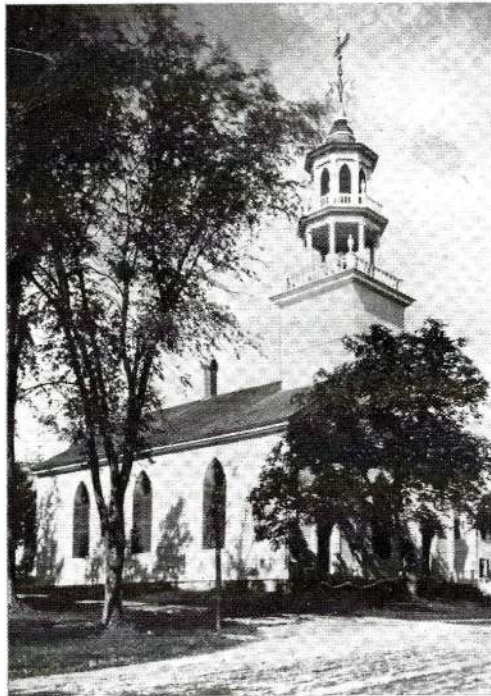
Lynn Parsons

The most recent Pew Research Center polling on religion in America lists northern New England as the least religion-oriented section of the nation. While 56% of the entire United States believe that religion is a "very important" part of their lives, only 42% of Mainers feel the same way. In Vermont and New Hampshire (which were combined for purposes of the study) only 36% so responded. At the other extreme, only 16% of Americans believe that religion is not important at all, but 26% of Mainers think that way, as do 30% of those living in Vermont and New Hampshire.

Your editors have no interest in developing explanations for this pattern, only to remark that things must have changed from the days of the Puritan-minded founders of many New England towns, including Castine. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the law required that no Massachusetts town could be organized without providing for "a suitable Meetinghouse for the publick Worship of God, and [to] settle a Learned Protestant Minister. . . ."

From their very beginnings, Castine and its municipal parent Penobscot often found themselves ensnarled in controversy, not only over theology, but the location of the "Meetinghouse," (they were rarely called "churches" until the mid-nineteenth century), who was to preach there, who was to pay the preachers, and how much toleration was to be given to dissenters.

In time, Castiners, and Americans in general, found other things to argue about, but church attendance remained high nonetheless. Religion moved from the center of affairs to the periphery, but it never vanished. And no historian worth his or her salt would attempt to separate religious history from social or political history.



**First Parish Meeting House
now the Unitarian Universalist Congregation
of Castine**

It is with this in mind that the Castine Historical Society has embarked upon an exploration of the history of Castine's churches, from the days of the organization of the "First Parish" down to the recent past. The idea was first floated at the CHS in the spring of 2008 by Russell "Rusty" Bourne and Doug Fitzsimmons. An editorial advisory board has been put together under their leadership, with representatives from the four existing churches, and the Wilson Museum. We will be working with Paige Lilly, the CHS's curator, in locating, compiling, researching, and ultimately producing the work. We see it as a first step in the eventual production of a complete history of the Town itself.

The CHS Board of Directors has approved initial funding for the project, pending a progress report to be submitted to them at their April meeting. In the meantime, CHS members and others who may possess documents or other material concerning Castine's churches and their congregations are invited to bring them to our attention.

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CHURCH HISTORY PROJECT



Trinity Congregational Parish of Castine also known as the Main Street Church



Trinity Episcopal Church



Our Lady of Holy Hope Catholic Church

(continued from page 1)

UNDER THE ELMS AND BY THE SEA House & Garden Tour

remarkable glimpse into life in the village. For those with an interest in architectural periods, interior design and unique gardens, or for those who just want the chance to soak up the beauty of Castine, it is sure to be a fabulous experience.

On the evening of July 28th Christopher Glass will deliver a lecture based on his newly published book, *Historic Maine Homes: 300 Years of Great Houses*, which includes one of the houses on the tour. The lecture will be free and open to the public.

Advance tickets are \$30 if purchased by June 30th. Tickets purchased throughout July are \$35. Advanced group reservations of 10 or more, \$30. They may be purchased by contacting Robin Vogell at svogell@castinerealty.com or 207-326-9392 and will be available at locations throughout Castine in the late spring and summer.

A special luncheon is available, by reservation, at The Manor Inn. Reservations can be made at the time of ticketing. Luncheon price is \$25.

The Castine House & Garden Tour takes place 10am-4pm on July 29th. Proceeds benefit the Castine Historical Society. Additional information is available at www.castinehistoricalsociety.org.


* * *



Methodist Church on Court Street
demolished in the 1940s

Paige Lilly

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work.
As to the mill, I do not
think there needs be any debate
over that. He is a conscientious
young man and will give
more for the money than any
body else. His design will be
expanded or contracted to fit the
mill to his hand. Let me hear
from you soon.
(Mr. A. Wheeler) Yours sincerely,
Noah Brooks

(figure 2 Detail from Noah Brooks' letter)

More research. The diary nowhere cites "Noah Brooks," only N. Brooks, so I explored the possibility of another N. Brooks with Castine and Boston connections in 1848. Captain Noah Brooks (died 1852) of South Boston, was our Noah's uncle and may have visited Castine to see his family. However, the references in the diary to the younger Noah's sisters and their homes, his close friendship with George Witherle, and his art study are solid. It really has to be the same guy. Maybe the handwritten diary is an early copy of the original? But what about the drawings, some of which are reflected in Brooks' paintings from the 1850s, and the errors and corrections in the daily accounting?

Maybe he was left-handed but forced to use his right hand as a young man, only eighteen when the diary was written? Certainly the letters from the 1890s look like the work of a left-handed person. But he is holding the pen in his right hand in the photograph of him at his desk (see figure 3 on next page), so that can't be the explanation. The style Brooks used in the diary for titles and lists is closer to his writing of the 1890s (see the phrase "Games of Chess" in figure 1). Maybe he consciously changed his handwriting style from the formal style learned in his youth to the distinctive, artistic and individualized style of his professional life.

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Then the search began for examples of his writing in the intervening years. The only examples found so far are three letters among Abraham Lincoln's papers at the Library of Congress and now available online through the American Memory website. Written in 1864, the handwriting and signature are more like our examples from the 1890s

than the 1848 diary, but also a smaller and tighter style. For someone with expertise in handwriting analysis, the transition may be clear.

It is now an ongoing inquiry. I'm open to suggestions, and still eager to see more examples of handwriting from N. Brooks of Maine, Massachusetts, New Jersey, Illinois, and California.



MR. NOAH BROOKS IN HIS LIBRARY.

(figure 3 Photo from *Castine Past and Present*, George Wheeler, 1896)

Much time was spent examining several images of Noah's library to identify artwork, memorabilia, furniture, and décor for the exhibit last fall. This shot was taken in a different setting than Noah's larger room at his house on Main Street in Castine, but many of the paintings, photos and objects shown here also appeared in the exhibit. Note that he is holding the pen in his right hand.

CHS Appreciates Your Support

We would like to thank all of our members for their generous support of the Society. Including life members, we now number more than 600. Each new or renewed gift membership conveys all privileges of being a member of the Society, including a subscription to *The Castine Visitor*, published three times a year.

If you have an address change, winter or summer, please let us know. It is important to keep the files accurate so you receive all the CHS mailings. Thank you for your support. It is what makes the CHS and its members, near and far, an active part of the Castine Community.

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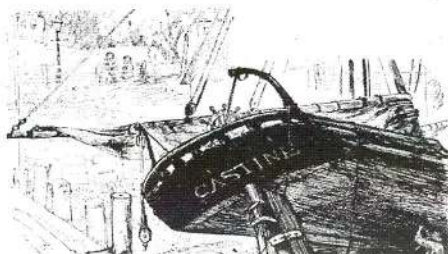
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This home known as the Parson Mason House at Court and Main Streets was built for Castine's first minister in 1797 by Doty Little, a carpenter from Marshfield, Massachusetts. The photograph from the CHS archives dates from the 1800s with a gas street light, unpaved streets and the now missing elm trees.