

# the CASTINE VISITOR

CASTINE HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

Summer 2007

vol. 17 no. 2



## MEMORIES OF THE GOODWIN AND AUSTIN FAMILIES IN HARTFORD AND CASTINE

by David Austin

*On August 8, Eugene B. Gaddis, curator of the Wadsworth Atheneum in Hartford, Connecticut, will present an illustrated talk at Maine Maritime Academy's Delano Auditorium on the Austin family's contributions to Hartford and the art world. Gaddis will highlight Sarah G. (Sally) Austin's artwork and the inspiration for it she derived from her upbringing. For more descriptive information about Sally's collage dioramas, or "boxes" as she called them, see the material on pages 6 and 10. Following the August 8 lecture, a sample of Sally's work will be on display in the Mitchell Room of the Abbott School. In anticipation of the talk and showing, the Visitor asked Sally's brother, David, to share some observations about his and Sally's early years in Hartford and Castine. His reminiscences follow. Editors*

My family's connection with Castine dates back to 1901 when my grandfather, James Goodwin, Dean of Christ Church Cathedral in

Hartford, accepted the offer to become the summer pastor for the Episcopal Church in Castine. He and his wife, Frances, known as Fanny, had four children and in the next generation there were six grandchildren, my sister and I among them. We never met our grandfather, who died before we were born, but my sister and I spent almost every summer of our childhood with our grandmother at "Fircliff", the cottage just below the lighthouse on Dice's Head. Castine had a deep affect on me. It had a daily rhythm, like the sound of Victor Black's lobster boat hauling traps that would wake me at 6 every morning. I would watch the mail boat *Hippocampus* leave the harbor for Belfast at 8 and return at 3. There was the

sound of the great fog bell on the lighthouse ringing on foggy nights and on windless days the reverberating rat-tat-tat of the yawl boats as they pushed the great many

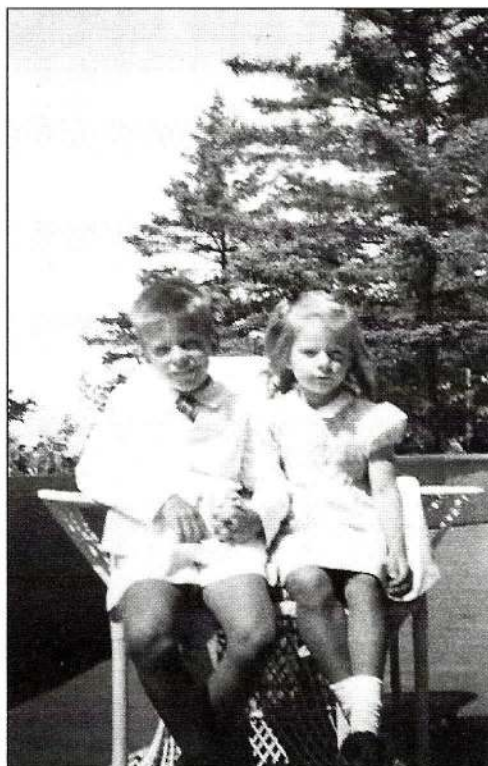
masted schooners laden to the gunwales with logs down the river from Bucksport.

The village as we were growing up looked very different than how it does today. The now well-kept properties were dilapidated and neglected, still reflecting the hard times of the depression era. My grandmother told the story of how my grandfather would give small amounts of money to some of the poorest residents each year when he left at the end of the summer. One family was so grateful they named their own children after my mother and her three siblings.

### *Childhood Amusements in Castine*

Highlights of our early years were elaborate picnics, often with our cousins, at favorite places like Hahn's Beach and Ribame Beach. These picnics required enormous preparation ably overseen by my grandmother.

Transportation, always by water, was provided by Jake Dennett in the *Bonton*, or as we usually referred to it, Jake's motorboat. Other childhood amusements



**David Austin with his sister Sally at  
"Fircliff" their grandmother's Castine  
cottage, late 1930's**

Courtesy David Austin



included many hours of fishing from the rocks below the great overhanging cliff on which the cottage was perched. The descent to the water below was by means of an extremely narrow and precarious path which no mother of today would allow her children near. There was also the Witherle Woods, or the "Indian Trail" as



Courtesy David Austin

**Grandmother Frances "Fanny" Goodwin in Castine, 1947**

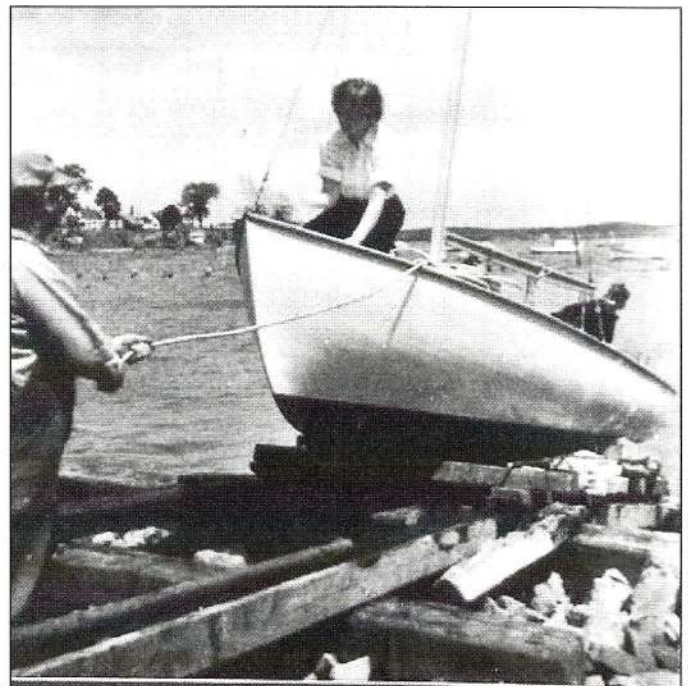
we called it, where you could hike all the way to Wadsworth Cove, usually with a stop at Trask Rock on the way. These woods, steeply sloping to the shore were, of course, the site of the ill-fated attempt to wrest Castine from the British in 1779. Many remnants of the battle, such as musket and cannon shot, belt buckles, and parts of china dolls were later unearthed by my sister, armed with a metal detector.

### ***Castine Teens in the 1940's***

Castine provided two great public attractions for teenagers in those days, the swimming pool at Wadsworth Cove and the movie theater on Water Street. Both functioned to bring the summer kids together with their local contemporaries in a casual way that has no counter-

part in today's world. We spent long hours at the swimming pool showing off our prowess (or lack of it) on the high diving board. The audience at the movie theater usually consisted almost entirely of teenagers. The purpose of the movie seemed only to provide a continually unfolding subject for a constant barrage of loud, raucous, and often lewd comments. It was no wonder there were few adults in attendance.

The one thing that, for me at least, was missing during those years in Castine was sailing, a love of which was instilled in me by my mother in early childhood. She had her own sailboat growing up here and in those days Jake Dennett, whose father was a sail maker, always had sailboats for rent at the wharf. Yet when I was a child there was virtually no sailing, despite the fact that Castine is a sailor's paradise. Perhaps it was a fear of the strong harbor tides, or the well-known prejudice of Jake himself, virtual ruler of the waterfront at that time, as he summed up in his often heard comment, "they're pretty but they're no damn good!" This was to change in the 1960's, when a group of families came together to



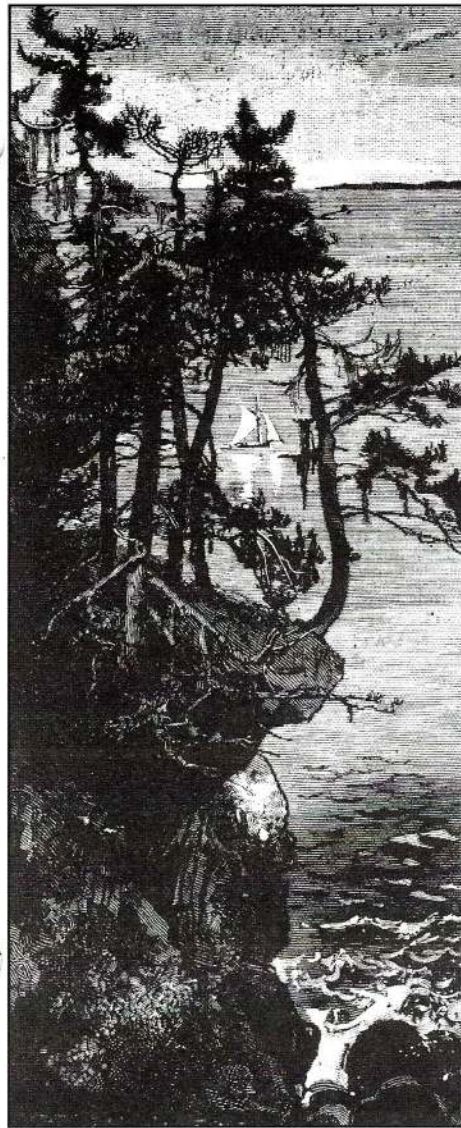
Courtesy David Austin

**Sally and David Austin with Alonzo Eaton launching the "Fanny G", the first of the Castine Class boats**

form the Castine Yacht Club. Among them, the Robinsons, Brownells, and Austins agreed to commission Mace Eaton to build three eighteen foot centerboard boats on the model of an existing sixteen foot design of Mace's but with a tall modern rig. Also about this time, Barclay Robinson Sr. and his wife, Peggy, donated to the

*continued on page 4*





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.

Sally Chadbourne &  
Delacroix Davis III.....Editors

[info@castinehistoricalsociety.org](mailto:info@castinehistoricalsociety.org)  
[www.castinehistoricalsociety.org](http://www.castinehistoricalsociety.org)

*Castine  
Historical Society*

## PRESIDENT'S REPORT

While the wind has been howling and the snow falling this year, steeplewright Bob Hanscom has been busy in his workshop restoring the Abbott School cupola to its original beauty. On May 30, the project culminated with the gleaming copper-topped restored cupola replaced on the new roof of the Abbott School. All members and friends of the Castine Historical Society are cordially invited to attend the dedication of the restored cupola and opening reception for this season's exhibit on June 30 from 5:30-7:30pm. At that time we plan to ring the old school bell in celebration. After years spent in the cellar of town hall the bell has been replaced in the Abbott School cupola.

We are indebted to David Adams, the new chair of the Building and Grounds Committee, and the other members of the committee for their stewardship of the cupola restoration and roof replacement project. In addition to many hours spent on details of the project, David made three long trips to Greene, Maine to check on the steeplewright's progress during the winter. We also appreciate the cooperation of the neighbors, Darren Stone and Gunilla and Par Kettis, in allowing the steeplewright and roofing contractor to place staging, machines and other materials on their properties.

Fundraising for the cupola and roof project is nearly complete. A recent \$20,000 grant from The 1772 Foundation brings the total pledged and received to \$115,000. Barring any unforeseen expenses, this amount should be sufficient to complete the project. Grateful thanks are extended to all organizations and individuals who have made it possible.

Appreciation is also offered to all renewing members of the Castine Historical Society for promptly responding to the membership letter. We are especially pleased to welcome more than fifteen new members. Those who have not yet sent in their annual dues are encouraged to do so.

After a successful initial year in 2006, the consortium of nine Blue Hill Peninsula historical organizations will again sponsor a collective open house, "Touring Through Time", on July 28 and 29. The group effort has greatly strengthened communication among participating organizations. A grant obtained for the endeavor by the Orland Historical Society has provided for creation of a website, [www.eastpenobscothistory.org](http://www.eastpenobscothistory.org), publication of publicity brochures, and conduct of two educational workshops on preservation methods. More information follows on page 8.

We are putting the finishing touches on the rest of the Society's summer activities. The new exhibit on the past fifty years of Castine writers promises to be informative and lively. There will be displays ranging from esoteric textbooks to snippets from the HBO series *Sex in the City*. Dixie and Paul Gray, Jim Stone, Sally Foote and Eve Stwertka have done a remarkable job assembling a vast amount of material. For additional information on the exhibit see the item on page 9 of this newsletter and visit our website at [www.castinehistoricalsociety.org](http://www.castinehistoricalsociety.org). The Eugene Gaddis lecture on August 8 will kick off the show and sale of Sally Austin's artwork at the Abbott School. And the Historical Society's popular Art Show and Sale will return in late August. A panel discussion on and by Castine writers in July and a report by Todd Nelson about his family's visit to St. Castin, France after the August 29 annual meeting complete the planned events. The complete summer 2007 schedule for the Historical Society appears on page 7.

Delacroix Davis III



club a small piece of waterfront land suitable for a clubhouse. The fleet of Castine class boats now numbers over 20, almost all built by the Eatons, and the club has brought sailing to generations of youngsters in Castine.

In this context I should mention Margaret Ames, a longtime resident of Castine, who, though she had lost her husband and two sons to the sea on a Trans Atlantic race many years before, became a tireless advocate and supporter of the yacht club and sailing in Castine. I especially remember the teas she presided over at the club every Saturday after the races.

The two months spent in Castine each year were always a high point for me. I dreaded the increasing buzz of the locusts and the sun setting further south over the Camden Hills, signs of summer's end and anticipation of the day we would have to leave.

### *The Austins in Hartford*

Back in Hartford we found ourselves in a very different world, a world not of nature but a world of artifice. Our parents, who met in Hartford and married in 1929, were both passionately fond of art. My father, A. Everett Austin, Jr., known as "Chick", had come from Boston to become Director of the Wadsworth Atheneum at the age of 27. My mother, Helen Goodwin Austin, was an art student and had begun to collect



Courtesy David Austin

**Austin family home in Hartford, known as the "cardboard house"**

pictures. On their honeymoon traveling in the countryside near Venice, they fell in love with a sixteenth century villa and took photographs of it. Back in Hartford they built a copy of it, much smaller in size. Their house was like a flat stage set, 86 feet long but only one room deep, grand in its classical proportions but,

because of its reduced size, also like an over-sized doll house. Growing up in this house was to be surrounded by artifice. Eighteenth century architectural and decorative elements acquired by my parents in Italy and France covered the walls and ceilings of the living room, dining room and music room. The circular entry space and stair, barely 12 feet in diameter, soared to a height of three stories. The walls were covered with paintings and drawings and everywhere on the tables were exquisite small objects that fascinated us. In sharp contrast to the period rooms below, the second floor featured spaces designed in the crisp modern minimalist style of the Bauhaus that my father had seen in Germany, virtually unknown in America at that time.

Of course my father's effect on our lives went well beyond the house itself. He was a man of enormous energy and charm whose talents included painting, acting, set and costume design and even magic, and he had an unerring eye for quality in judging art. He acquired an enormously varied and fascinating group of friends, many of them famous for their contributions to art and culture. Most of them came to the house at one time or another to the many parties my parents gave as we were growing up in the 1930's. Their friends included Alexander Calder, Salvador Dali, Le Corbusier, Bette Davis, Igor Stravinsky and George Balanchine.

### *The Roots of Sally Austin's Art*

During this period my mother made great efforts to bring us up as "normal" children. I think this was very difficult for her, especially as my father was away a great deal of the time with his myriad activities in which she, herself was often involved. My sister and I spent hours upstairs playing alone and the family only occasionally had dinner together. The dinner conversations we were privy to were memorable, however, as were all the other precious moments we could steal in our father's presence. In fact our childhood years spent in the "cardboard house", as some of the neighbors called it, constituted an artistic and cultural education that was unique and otherwise unavailable.

The above may give you some idea of the roots of my sister Sally's art, which will be shown at an exhibit at the Castine Historical Society later this summer. Sally strongly resented our father's frequent absence as she was growing up, yet she loved him dearly. I believe her art at its deepest level is a sublimation and expression of

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## **CASTINE HISTORICAL SOCIETY**

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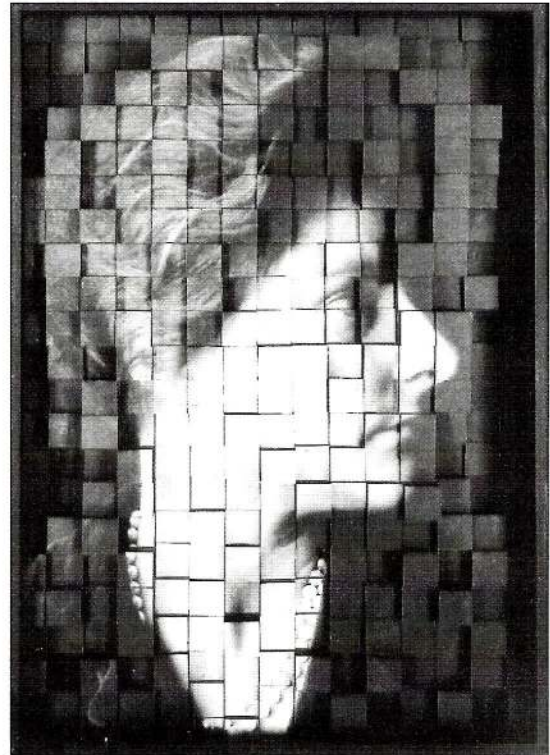
Laura Hatch

Matt Merfeld

Robert C. Dick

"David Austin"... continued from page 4

that love. She began to make her "boxes", as she called them, rather secretly in her small New York apartment in the 1970's and had amassed some 300 of them when she died in 1994.



Courtesy Sarah G. Austin Foundation

**Sarah G. Austin self-portrait in diorama box**

Sally never learned to draw or paint, so that those usual types of artistic expression were denied to her. She was, however, adept at making things out of wood, plastic and the like, a talent that did not exhibit itself until she began to make her boxes. Perhaps these were among the factors that led her to develop her own striking means for expressing her ideas. The early boxes were often animated, some resembling the eighteenth century automatons that intrigued our father. Others were obviously related to the work of the American artist Joseph Cornell. Over the years her work became more abstract and focused as she began to assemble and manipulate fragments of paintings and drawings of the past, images cut out of art books and exhibition catalogues familiar to her childhood.

In Sally's art we see the images of art history transformed through the lens of collage, a way of seeing very much of her own time. Her work thus fuses our father's great passions for both modernism and the art of the past.

I hope to see you at the exhibit in August!





## THE MODERNIST ART OF SARAH AUSTIN

by Mary Ann Caws

*Following are excerpts from a tract published by the Sarah G. Austin Foundation in 2000 in conjunction with an exhibit of Sally Austin's artwork in New York and Hartford. With special thanks to Kimberly Venardos, Director of the Foundation, this material is reprinted with permission. Editors*

Sarah Austin's true place was eventually in the world of art. The sense of having finally arrived somewhere gave her modernist sensibility a real home. She found herself in her collages and constructions, with all of their theatrical string intact and working: "I am interested in art history, classical music, tennis and anything that has to do with woodworking tools. Although I began making mechanical objects in the early 60s, I have spent the past 25 years making collage constructions using reproductions mounted on wood or Masonite. My intention is not to distort the original image, but rather to change it in a good-natured way."<sup>1</sup> These boxes of white pine, painted black and protected by Plexiglas, were her private theater.

The sense of place in Sarah Austin was always strong, in her work as well as in her life. She was intensely close to her surroundings: her family home in Hartford; her New York apartment (where her small working space was carefully constructed, organized); and in the brisk air and glancing light of her summer home and studio in Castine, Maine.

....

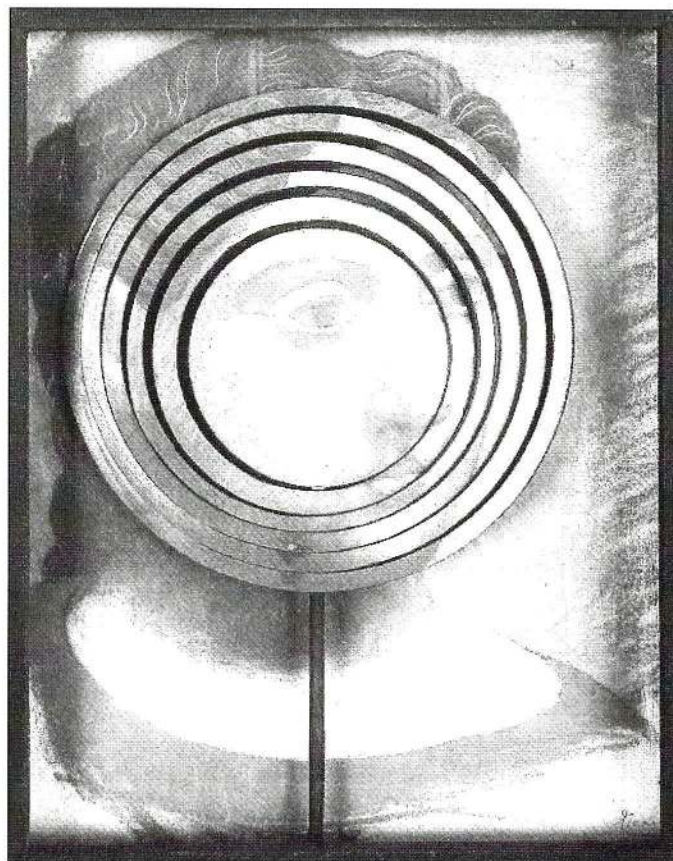
Sarah Austin was an artist of great intuition. For her boxes she used her quick intelligence and joyous sensuality to celebrate the figures and movements she found important to Modernism. She would continue to perfect her procedures: working with silver paper, xeroxed figures and cutouts; building wood frames and managing intricate instruments. She cut, arranged and glued together the spectacle.

....

What is most engaging about Sarah Austin's boxes is the extraordinary way in which each of the artists she features is given exactly the form of recall most befitting. The Russian Constructivist Kasimir Malevich is seen in all phases of his work. Frank Lloyd Wright's tiny figure stands proudly against the dizzying ramps of The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum. Paul Klee is pictured in front of a female figure madly waving her arms and legs. Frames, easels, and artists at work abound. Each subject confronts us directly, like a clever A-B-C of the brilliant characters in this art historical play: Max Beckmann's

surly massive faces, Constantin Brancusi's egg-shaped heads, Franz Kupka's bright circles, Alberto Giacometti's striding figures, James Ensor's leering masks, Edvard Munch's melancholy wail.

....



*Picasso Portrait of a woman, diorama by Sarah Austin*

Courtesy Sarah G. Austin Foundation

We are drawn into Sarah Austin's private theater by the clever ways in which her constructions are staged. In each instance the anecdotal reinforces the satisfaction of the visual. Her use of repetition makes, in its own complicated way, an implicit reference to Gertrude Stein's repetitions. Whatever Austin intended, since she neither wrote nor spoke of her work at any length, we are left to imagine her motivations. And this is precisely what we do. The particular genius of Sarah Austin is that she sets our minds to work with what she has seen

*continued on page 7*

and remembered, and has then made to converge. Like Modernism itself, her work celebrates the art of convergence. What her collage constructions lead us to meditate upon is a highly personal view of Modernism, one that is carefully constructed.

....

Sarah Austin combined knowing reference and formalist construction to engage in an inventive dialogue with the history of art and with her own history. Her decision to utilize what was at hand was Modernism's own favorite technique of bricolage. Her theatrical constructions gave a new and deeper meaning to the artistic

giants she had loved in the world of her father. But it was through her own distinguished cultural heritage and hard work that she finally discovered herself. She built her own museum and placed in it what she cared most about. The sophistication and beauty of Sarah Austin's self-portraits with their tilting layers, receding and advancing forms, vibrate in haunting repetition. They speak finally, not of absence, but rather of a full presence, revealing with dramatic clarity Sarah Austin's own meditations upon history and art.

<sup>1</sup> Sarah Austin, unpublished biographical notes, 1992



### CASTINE HISTORICAL SOCIETY SUMMER 2007 SCHEDULE OF EVENTS

5:30pm Saturday, June 30	Dedication of the Abbott School's restored cupola, including bell ringing followed by a reception and opening of the new exhibit, "Turning the Page: Writing Castine 1956-2006". Town common and exhibition hall.
7:30pm Wednesday, July 25	Panel discussion entitled "Carrying on the Tradition of Castine Writers - New Media, Changing Audiences" with Peter Davis, Russell Bourne, Deborah Joy Corey and Jeffrey Lewis. Mitchell Room.
10am-4pm Saturday, July 28 & 1pm-4pm Sunday, July 29	"Touring Through Time" A collective open house of nine historical organizations of the Eastern Penobscot Bay area. Activities include exhibits, demonstrations, lectures, walking tours and refreshments.
7:30pm Wednesday, August 8	Presentation by Eugene Gaddis, Curator of the Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford, CT on the Austin family and especially on the life and art of the late Sarah G. (Sally) Austin. Delano Auditorium, MMA.
August 9-August 15	Sally Austin's artwork on display and for sale in the Mitchell Room of the Abbott School. A percentage of the proceeds from this sale will support the Castine Historical Society.
5:30-7:30pm Friday, August 24 (opening reception); 10am-4pm Saturday, August 25; and 1-4pm Sunday August 25	Castine Historical Society Art Show and Sale in the Mitchell Room. To participate or for more information, please contact Stefanie Scheer Young or Sue Macdonald.
7:30pm Wednesday, August 29	CHS Annual Meeting in the Mitchell Room followed by Todd Nelson, Principal of the Adams School, with remarks about his June visit to St. Castin, France.

\*\*\* Please check our website, [www.castinehistoricalsociety.org](http://www.castinehistoricalsociety.org), and the local papers for any additions or changes to the CHS Summer Event Schedule \*\*\*



## CONTRIBUTIONS

Our grateful thanks are extended to the following individuals who have recently added their gifts to the Castine Historical Society collections:

Frances Bos	James Grindle
Pat Boudreau	Elizabeth Kelly
Russell Bourne	Par Kettis
Sharon Bray	Laura Mattison
Annegret Cukierski	Deborah Neve
Gail Ellsworth	Doris Russell
Eve Stwertka	

## MEMORIAL GIFTS

The Castine Historical Society gratefully acknowledges the gifts recently received in memory of the following individuals:

Maurice Bogdonoff

Chet and Jean Hill

## TOURING THROUGH TIME

July 28 & 29, 2007

### A Collective Open House of Nine Blue Hill Peninsula Historical Organizations

For more information visit [www.eastpenobscothistory.org](http://www.eastpenobscothistory.org)

#### Orland Historical Society

Saturday & Sunday 10 am-4 pm.

- \* Saturday at 2:00 pm, George Sawyer will talk about the Robert E. Peary ship, *Roosevelt*, at the Town Hall.
- \* Sunday at 2:00 pm, Bill Larkin will discuss artifacts of the Red Paint People at the Museum.

#### Castine Historical Society

Saturday, 10 am-4 pm & Sunday, 1-4 pm.

- \* Light refreshments will be served. "Turning the Page, Writing Castine 1956-2006" and "The Penobscot Expedition, 1779" exhibits will be on view.
- \* Saturday at 1pm, a guided walking tour of British occupied sites in Castine will start at Fort George.
- \* Sunday at 10:30am, The Reverend Mark Worth will speak in the Castine Unitarian Church on the town common about the history of the 1790 church and its first minister, Parson William Mason.

#### Penobscot Historical Society

Saturday, July 28 12:30-5 pm

- \* All buildings will be open for tours, with special exhibits of ledgers including the original Record of Transfer of the Town from the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. Large collection of antique clothing and hats will be on display.
- \* 1:30 Ceremony marking 30th year of incorporation.
- \* Music and barn dance.
- \* 5:00 Beanhole supper.

#### Brooksville Historical Society

Saturday & Sunday 10 am-4 pm

- \* July 29, 2-4 pm demonstrations of historic crafts.
- \* Lemonade and cookies will be served.

#### Deer Isle-Stonington Historical Society

Saturday 10 am-4 pm & Sunday 1-4 pm

- \* Open House - All buildings & gardens
- \* Special Exhibits - Islander's uniforms & ladies gowns from the Civil War through WWII, steamboats and America's Cup models & memorabilia
- \* Saturday - Demonstrations on Spinning, Dying, Hooking, Quilting, Knitting and Dowsing
- \* Sunday - Special Music, 2-3 pm

#### Sedgwick Historical Society

Saturday & Sunday 10 am-3 pm

In the Historic District, featuring artists, Eggemoggin 6, in the Old Town House.

#### Brooklin Keeping Society

Saturday & Sunday 10 am-4 pm

- \* A Brown Bag Lunch with crabmeat sandwiches available both days from 11am.
- \* Featured display will be History Projects by the Brooklin School students. Topics include: The Battle of Naskeag, Steamboats, and Profiles of Famous Citizens.
- \* Genealogy section will be open for research.

#### Jonathan Fisher House

Saturday, July 28, 1-4 pm

- \* Exhibit of Fisher's original carved woodblocks, prints, and carving tools.
- \* New exhibit of Fisher-made tools and implements.
- \* Special exhibit of Fisher's watercolor notebooks.

#### Blue Hill Historical Society

Saturday & Sunday 10 am-4 pm.

- \* Cookies and punch will be served.

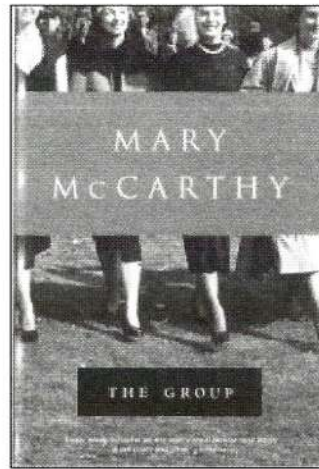


# CASTINE HISTORICAL SOCIETY 2007 SUMMER EXHIBIT

"Turning the Page: Writing Castine 1956-2006"

Abbott School Exhibition Hall

Last year's Historical Society exhibit featured two centuries of literary life in Castine, from the Revolutionary War to the mid-twentieth century. This year's exhibit will include literary highlights from the town's last fifty years. The exhibit on the summer colony of Mary McCarthy, Elizabeth Hardwick, Robert Lowell and Philip Booth will be back, joined by a astonishing amount of new material. A significant number of current and former members of the Castine Historical Society will be mentioned in the exhibit.

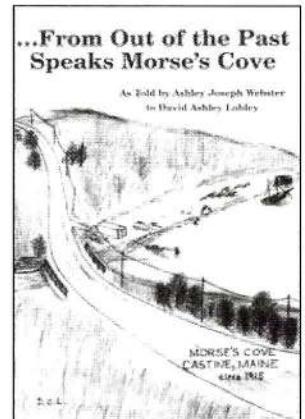


In spite of the shorter span, the new exhibit is able to draw on the work of over 130 Castine writers who have produced in excess of 150 books, innumerable articles,

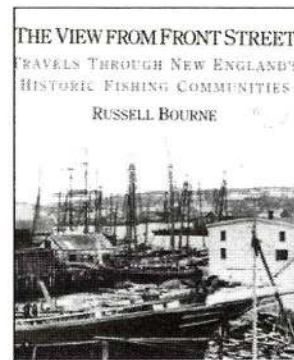
stories and songs. These include novels by almost a dozen different authors and more than 40 books for children. This being a nautical town, a number of works focus on the sea, such as James Aldrich's history of the Maine Maritime Academy, **Fair Winds and Stormy Seas**, Walter Jaffee's **Heritage of the Sea**, and Allie Ryan's

The exhibit includes works of philosophy, law, aesthetics, medicine, biography, poetry, literary criticism, and humor. It will display book covers and writing samples from the books, along with samples of articles and poems. It will also feature an audio-visual section focusing on media and songwriters. Perhaps best known in this group are Peter

Davis, whose Vietnam War documentary, **Hearts and Minds**, won an Academy Award; Jennie Bicks who cre-



ated and wrote many episodes of HBO's **Sex and the City** and ABC's **Men in Trees**; Jeff Lewis who wrote for NBC's popular **Hill Street Blues** television series; and Don McLean whose **American Pie** is among the best known songs of this period.



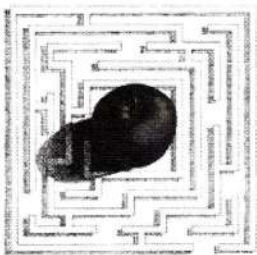
Once again, there will be a map, showing where these writers have lived or visited. The exhibit will be open to the public from July 1 through Labor Day.

## DOCENTS NEEDED!

Looking for an opportunity to meet interesting people from around the country and expand your knowledge of Castine's history and its literary tradition? Please consider volunteering as a docent for the exhibit this summer at the Abbott School. There is always a need for either regular or substitute docents. A normal session is three hours and may be accomplished either individually or with a spouse or friend. Anyone interested should call Diana Bogdonoff on 326-9410.

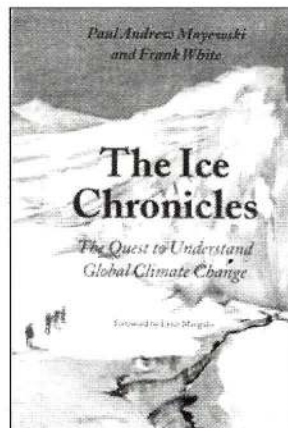
## QUANDARIES AND VIRTUES

Against Reductivism in Ethics



EDMUND L. PINCOFFS

**Penobscot Bay, Mt. Desert & Eastport Steamboat Album.** A dozen different works have contributed to our understanding of Castine history ranging from Charlene Devereux's **Castine's Then's and Now's** to Ellenore Doudiet's **Majabigwa-duce: Castine, Brooksville, Penobscot.**





## THE DIORAMAS OF SARAH AUSTIN AND THE REVOLUTION IN ART

by Cees Nootboom

*The following are excerpts from a translation of an article published in the June 1982 issue of Avenue Magazine, written by Cees Nootboom. A noted Dutch poet, novelist, essayist and travel writer, Nootboom has received many awards for his writing and has frequently been mentioned as a candidate for the Nobel Prize in Literature. Nootboom has also been the travel and poetry editor of Avenue, one of Holland's largest magazines.*

Fall 1980. I am staying in the cool, far North of the United States. The state is called Maine, the village is called Castine. The house where I live is made of wood, it lies on a long tree-lined avenue which slowly descends to a wooden jetty standing on long poles in the bay. Every day I walk down that road past other old white houses. It is very quiet here. It almost does not seem completely real. White-haired ladies soundlessly float by in cars too big for them (to drive). A chill carrying sea gulls sails in from the ocean into the village.

I wrote about this earlier when I was translating poems by Philip Booth, poems about the ocean. Poets

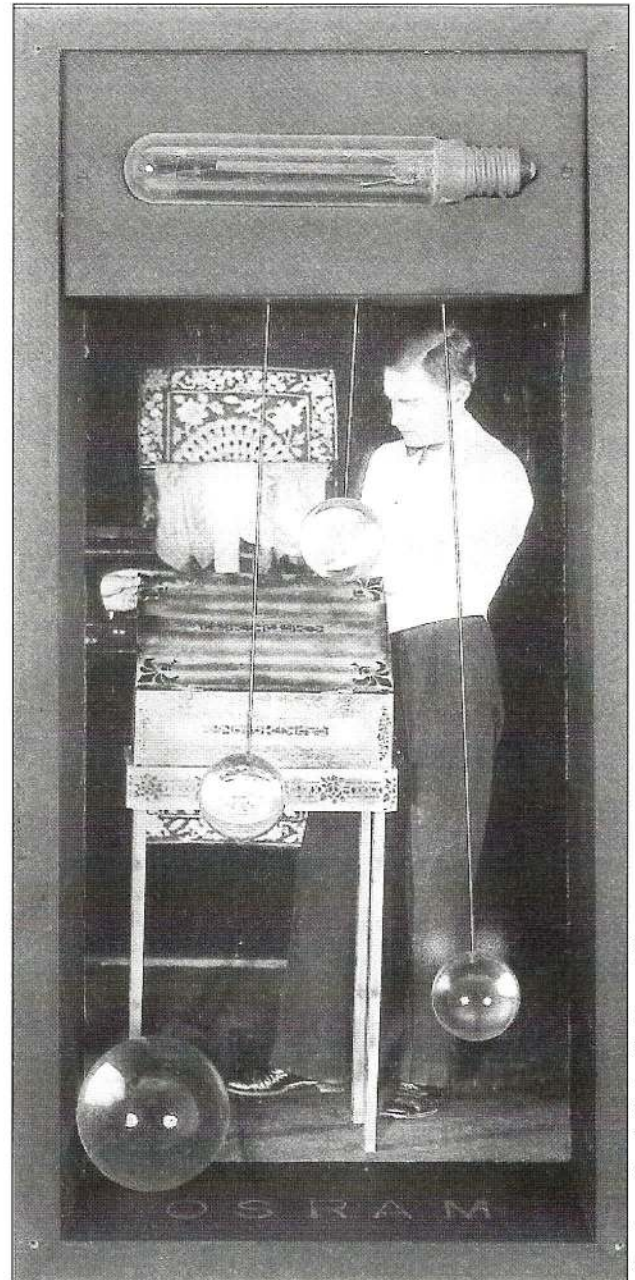


**Sally Austin in 1982**

Courtesy David Austin

and writers live here part of the year. In earlier days Robert Lowell, Mary McCarthy still and Elizabeth Hardwick. Every day I take the same walk: down to the jetty, I take a left past the drugstore, following the bay until I can't go any further. Dark, northern waters, already too cold for swimming. Where the road turns away from the water, stands a strange wooden house. Smooth wood, grayish, silvery, unpainted. It has one high windowless wall that fascinates me. The slanting roof looks as if it is about to collapse. Actually they are two houses connected by a boardwalk. Strange sounds

are associated with that house: knocking and humming, hammering and screeching.



**Chick Austin with magician's box, diorama by Sarah Austin**

Courtesy Sarah G. Austin Foundation

One day a woman emerges from the house. We recognize each other from a cocktail party. On that

*continued on page 11*



occasion we did not speak to one another. She is in her forties and resembles a distant relative of someone painted by Toulouse Lautrec. A strong face, strong hands. We say hello to each other and I ask her about the sounds I keep hearing when I pass her house.

"Those are exactly the sounds that you hear," she says, "hammering, scraping, drilling." We go inside and it is the first time I see her dioramas, or viewing boxes as I call them, large wooden frames filled with collages. They are not very deep, light enters from above and when I look inside, far from Europe and far from the twenties, a familiar world appears, a world of cubists and surrealists, their work, their faces. From this distance, it resembles a family photo album. I recognize Braque's guitars, Max Ernst's collage, Duchamp's ready-mades, the faces of Magritte and Dali, Miro and de Chirico, everything that has come to belong immutably to the broad landscape of this century's art, yet ordered willfully by someone who surely knows this world like a village.

The maker of these, Sarah Goodwin Austin, was

born on April 22, 1935, in Hartford, Connecticut. Her father was a well-known museum director and everything she is involved in this many years later, surrounded her in her childhood, like stage props. She studied art history and lived in Florence for two years, then continued to the Hartford Art School to study drawing, painting and design. In New York she has indirectly been connected with the international art world for her assistance in organizing the exhibit entitled *7 Decades 1885 – 1965, Cross Currents of Modern Art*, and her work is represented in art galleries. She has been making these dioramas since 1961 and during the past few years has been working on a series of two-dimensional collages about contemporary artists. It would mean a lot to me if these willful and somehow very uplifting works could be exhibited here [in Holland]. The last time I was able to see them was somewhere high up in New York at her apartment, which is much too small for these large objects. It was as if someone had tried and succeeded to house the Stedelijk Museum [Municipal Museum, Amsterdam] in a walk-in closet.



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CHS archives

*As thoughts turn to summer, Castine's annual July Fourth Parade comes to mind. While today's parades are all about the children, in earlier years it appears that all ages participated. This photo is labeled "Fantasies. July 4, 1873. Corner of Court and Pleasant Streets. Dresser Rope Walk in the background."*

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