

the CASTINE VISITOR

CASTINE HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

Spring 2014

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FENCING CASTINE

Roger W. Moss

My article on window shutters for the *Castine Visitor* (Spring, 2013) included a c.1859 Fitz Henry Lane painting of the Stevens house on upper Main Street. One observant reader remarked that the garden of this house at the time of the painting was enclosed with fences which no longer exist (figs. 1 & 2, pg. 4). While many fences can be seen in Castine, they are not as ubiquitous as they once were (see back page), nor do the picket fences typically used today reflect the handsome diversity of designs that once complemented the architecture of our Federal, Greek Revival, Italianate, and Victorian buildings. This article briefly explores why fences were so common a century ago and why they disappeared, and then suggests sources for recreating them today.

Nineteenth-century authors on American architecture and horticulture recognized the practical necessity for fences to exclude livestock being herded to market down village streets or to confine their own or neighbors' pigs, grazing cows, goats, sheep and horses. According to Andrew Jackson Downing, writing in *The Horticulturist* in October of 1851, "in almost every town the traveler stumbles over swine at every corner of the street; in almost every country neighborhood, the owners of gardens and orchards tremble daily for the sanctity of their premises, and guard jealously the gates, lest the domestic animals that ... live by robbing the community in general, should make an onslaught upon our light wooden fences, and sweep garden and orchard before them."

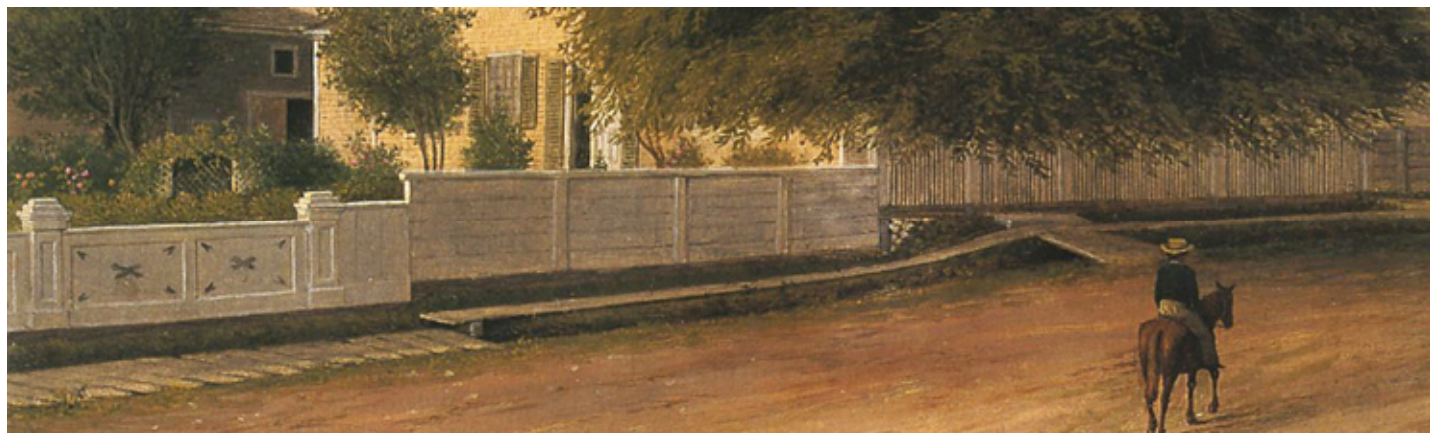


Fig. 1. The c.1859 Fitz Henry Lane painting entitled "Castine Homestead" features the Willson-Shaw-Stevens house on upper Main Street. This detail clearly illustrates a variety of fences ranging in style from (left to right): a handsome set of decoratively pierced wood gates suspended from large piers; a less decorative fence of flush horizontal planks; and, closest to the front entrance, a range of small square pales held in place by horizontal rails terminating in decoratively turned posts. *Private collection.*

(CONTINUED ON PAGE 4)

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NEW MEMBERS

The Castine Historical Society
welcomes these new members:

Judy Adams

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Sue Hazlett

**The Castine Historical
Society gratefully
acknowledges
contributions received**

In Memory of

Diana Bogdonoff

Barbara Stearns

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The CHS Buildings & Grounds
Committee thanks
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for their donation of signage for
the Abbott School

For breaking news from the
Castine Historical Society, visit
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and our Facebook page at
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Thank you

**to the following for their
donations to CHS Collections**

Elizabeth Beim

James Day

Leland Fitts

Sally Foote

Richard Hale

Roger Moss

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Donald Tenney

Save the date! Alan Taylor, Pulitzer Prize-winning historian and Maine native, will deliver the 2014 Deborah Pulliam Memorial Lecture on August 5. One of Dr. Taylor's recent books is *The Civil War of 1812: American Citizens, British Subjects, Irish Rebels, & Indian Allies*.

Editor's Note: My tenure as editor of *The Castine Visitor* begins with this issue, and I'm looking forward to the adventure. I invite you, CHS members, to help me create an interesting and informative newsletter. Please feel free to pass along your ideas or requests for articles, along with your comments and suggestions. Contact Wendy Knickerbocker by phone at 326-8205 or email: wknick@myfairpoint.net



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.

Wendy Knickerbocker.....Editor

info@castinehistoricalsociety.org
www.castinehistoricalsociety.org

**Castine
Historical Society**

PRESIDENT'S LETTER

Winter settled into Castine with a vigor and vengeance we don't normally see. Temperatures in the single digits complemented by the whole spectrum of wintery precipitation (sleet, freezing rain, ice and snow) challenged us all to research our sweater, mitten, hat and glove supplies while staying close to a warm fire for as long as possible. However, neither rain nor snow nor wind nor ice has kept the Castine Historical Society from reaching out to our community to provide information, exhibits and educational events highlighting the fascinating history of Castine.

Although an old-time New England winter may have compelled us to think more than twice about the wisdom of any outdoor activities, the weather did not affect indoor activities focusing on the history of Castine. The CHS exhibit committee is working hard on carefully assembling the exhibit for this summer. The 2014 exhibit will deal with some fascinating events that occurred in Castine during the War of 1812. This exhibit will feature a British invasion and occupation and the interesting effects these events had on Castine. The War of 1812 exhibit at CHS will be well worth a visit this summer.

Another indoor activity involving history occurred this winter in Castine and was embraced with gusto by its participants. The Adams School pupils have been actively participating again this year in the Maja Trivia game. As you may remember, Maja Trivia was developed by the Wilson Museum, with funding from Acadia Trust and the Hancock County Fund of the Maine Community Foundation. The CHS and the historical societies of Penobscot and Brooksville have collaborated with the Wilson Museum to provide the questions (and answers) about the history of the three towns.

There is no question that playing Maja Trivia teaches history to students. The CHS has provided the Mitchell Room for the Maja games of Adams School 6th-8th graders. CHS members Johanna and Pedric Sweet have volunteered to lead the games. The town, the CHS, and most of all the Adams School students are very fortunate that the Sweets have been so generous with their time and talents.

With the Sweets' help and the hard work of the students, not only do we expect the Adams School to do well in the Maja Trivia competition this spring, we also know that a new generation of young Mainers will be learning the history of Castine and her sister communities. Perhaps best of all, the students will be learning that history can be fun.

John S. Macdonald



Fig. 2. An 1871 photograph of the Stevens house shows that Fitz Henry Lane either took liberties with the middle fence design or, by the time of the photograph, the horizontal flush plank fence had been replaced with an open plank design. This photograph is one of a series of Castine images by the Portland photographer, George E. Collins. *Courtesy Maine Historic Preservation Commission.*



Fig. 3. Looking up Perkins Street toward the Acadian Hotel, this photograph shows a handsome double pale design supported by large square piers on the south side. The north side of the street is lined with a typical Castine fence design of rectangular pales supported by a horizontal plank base tied together by a simple brace and molded cap. *CHS Collections.*

The forms of these barriers were usually modest, consisting of simple boards or pickets (pales) held in place by rails and plain posts. But with growing prosperity—and the increasing elegance and sophistication of architectural styles in the early decades of the nineteenth century—came a desire for embellished fence posts and pales with decorative profiles or finials (figs. 3 & 4). (Here we are talking about fences of wood. In the post-Civil War period decorative cast-iron fences became more common, not only to accommodate high Victorian styles but also for their greater strength and durability; these, unfortunately, disappeared in large numbers during twentieth-century scrap metal drives.)

Fences also serve purposes beyond excluding roaming livestock. They delineate ownership, provide privacy, and offer security from intruders *outside* the perimeter. They may also conceal unattractive objects that might otherwise be viewed from *within* the property. Fences also provide an ideal backdrop for planting an ornamental garden. Nineteenth-century architects and horticulturists had strong opinions when it came to plants and trees in close proximity to residences. For example, they believed that the stone or brick foundations of houses should not be obscured by overgrown trees or shrubbery. Countless prints and early photographs illustrate well-tended houses rising directly from a drip line of crushed stone or a tidy bed of low ferns and annuals.



Fig. 4. This view of Samuel T. Noyes's house on Pleasant Street illustrates a simple picket fence (in the rear, right side), a horizontal plank fence in the middle, and the omnipresent "Castine Style" fence similar to that shown in fig. 3. Also notice the wood plank sidewalks in all of the Castine pictures. *CHS Collections*.

Homeowners in the nineteenth century understood that tall bushes and trees planted next to the foundation of a house—especially when allowed to flourish unchecked—would harbor insects and retain moisture, causing paint failure, mildew, wood rot, damp basements, and unhealthy interior humidity. Landscape gardeners such as Edward Kemp declared that “in the immediate neighborhood of the house ... it is particularly desirable that shrubs should not abound. Independently of darkening the windows, they communicate great dampness to the walls, and prevent that action of the wind upon the building which alone can keep it dry, comfortable, and consequently healthy.” Kemp also argued that overgrown foundation plantings “prevent the true proportions, outlines, and details of a building from being properly seen and rightly appreciated.”¹

Another popular authority, Frank J. Scott, claimed that physicians “attribute much of the consumption so fatal in New England families, to the want of sun, the damp air, and the tree and shrub-embowered and shutter-closed houses peculiar to its villages and farms.”² Whether foundation plantings constitute a risk to the health of twenty-first-century New Englanders I’m not qualified to say. But overgrown trees and bushes such as the ubiquitous yew, rhododendrons, and lilacs can be offensive to the eye and too often blur the definition between lawn, garden and house, so the building appears to float above—or hide behind—a ragged ruffle of green rather than rise cleanly from its site. In short, nineteenth-century critics argued that it is better to plant where you can appreciate your garden from inside the house or from the porch rather than plant so close to the house that only an observer from the street can enjoy your labor and gardening skills—and perimeter fences provide an ideal backdrop for such a garden.

So why have fences disappeared? First, because their primary need declined as towns and villages enforced livestock regulations. (When was the last time you saw cows or sheep being driven down Main, Court, or Perkins Streets? Or how often have you worried that a neighbor’s horse or pig would stray onto your property?) Second, trends in modern American housing played a significant role. In the decades after World War II, suburban developers homogenized the American landscape as houses were mass-produced and shoehorned onto ever smaller plots of land. As Kenneth T. Jackson remarked in *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States* (1985), the developers of Levittown—to cite one

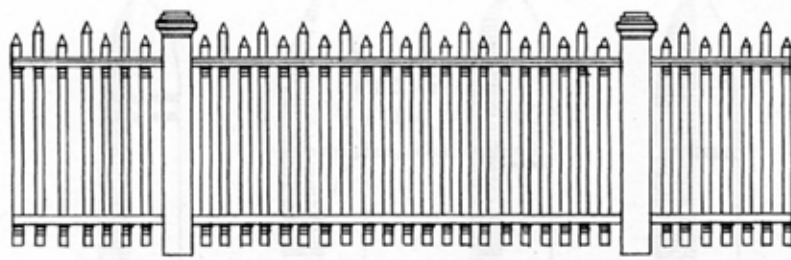
notorious example—bulldozed vast tracts of farmland and forbade the erection of fences or perimeter plantings that would call attention to lots as small as 60-by-100 feet.

Even in older communities with established traditions of large lots, fences and perimeter planting, the owners gradually adopted the modern “democratic” open garden style over the private, enclosed traditional plot, aided and abetted by shopping-mall purveyors of rapidly growing “foundation plants” advocated to disguise ugly poured or concrete block tract house foundations. Gradually these plantings were adopted for older houses by owners attempting to follow modern trends in landscape gardening. Finally, as with window shutters, the cost of maintaining a handsome wooden fence in a style appropriate to an historic house and garden encouraged owners to avoid the expense altogether by simply removing the fence.

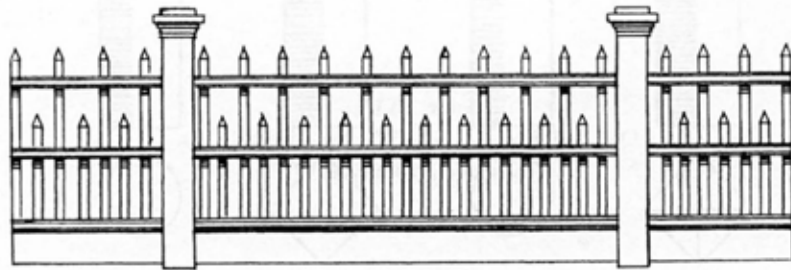
For the modern owner of an historic house who is considering a fence and wants an alternative to the pointed pickets sold by lumber yards, there are two published sources that illustrate historic designs. The first is Carl F. Schmidt’s *Fences, Gates & Garden Houses: A Book of Designs with Measured Drawings* (Dover Publications, 2012). Originally published in 1963, this book contains photographs and measured drawings which Schmidt compiled beginning in the 1920s of New England villages where “privacy and a proper regard for one’s neighbors were expressed in faultless fashion” by beautiful wooden fences. The second source is Peter J. Harrison’s *Fences: Authentic Details for Design and Restoration* (John Wiley & Sons, 1999), which contains a particularly useful section on all types of wooden fences copied from surviving New England examples, as well as those found in other communities such as Williamsburg, Virginia. Both of these books are available for purchase, or they may be consulted at the Castine Historical Society.

¹ Edward Kemp, *How to Lay Out a Small Garden: Intended as a Guide to Amateurs ...* (London: Bradbury and Evans, 1850) 23, 27.

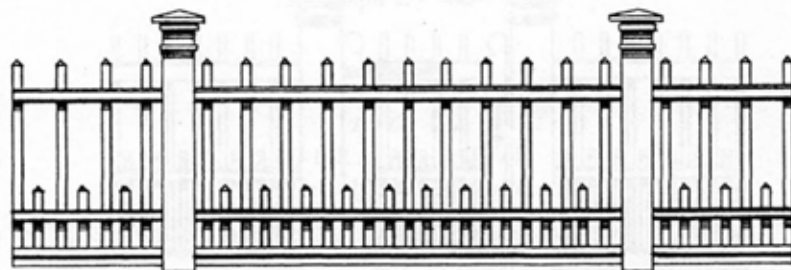
² Frank J. Scott, *The Art of Beautifying Suburban Home Grounds of Small Extent ...* (New York: D. Appleton & Co., 1870) 78.



Old Deerfield Village Deerfield, Massachusetts



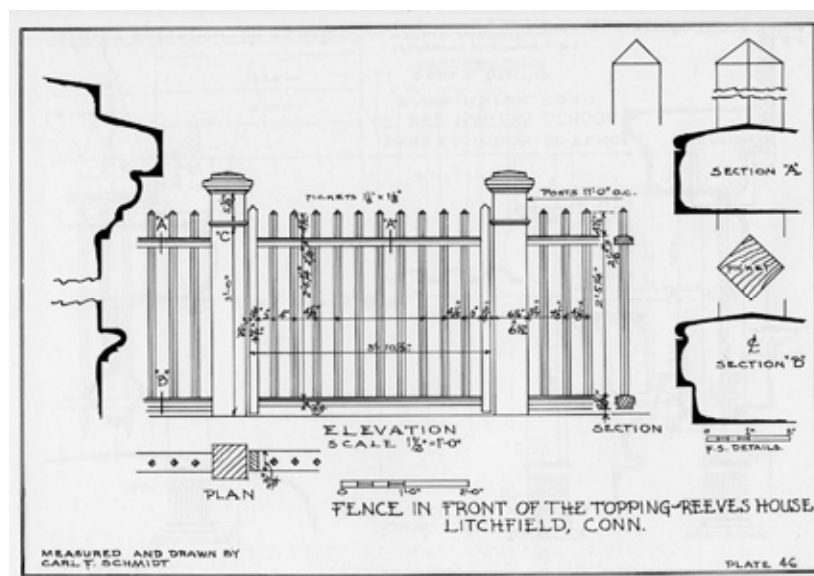
Mystic Seaport Mystic, Connecticut



Old Sturbridge Village Sturbridge, Massachusetts

Fig. 5. (left) These fences from Old Deerfield Village, Mystic Seaport, and Old Sturbridge Village are examples of “double pale” New England fence designs reproduced by Peter J. Harrison. Similar fences appear in photographs of Castine. From *Fences: Authentic Details for Design and Restoration* (Wiley, 1999), 34. This material is reproduced with permission of John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

Fig. 6. (below) This fence in Litchfield, Connecticut, is one of sixty measured elevations of historic fences by Carl F. Schmidt that provide sufficient detail to be reproduced by any competent carpenter. From *Fences, Gates & Garden Houses* (Dover Publications, 2012). Reproduced by permission.



CASTINE HISTORICAL SOCIETY FIELD DAY

[Today's Castine Historical Society has many forbears, the exact number of which is unclear. In 1915, Dr. George Augustus Wheeler helped organize what was called the Third Historical Society, with Wheeler as president. It was still active in 1923, although Wheeler's daughter Louise Bartlett noted that "women greatly predominate and have done a large part of the research work." The Society left few records. One of them is a typewritten account of a "Field Day" undertaken in November of 1916. Consistent with Mrs. Bartlett's description, of the nine participants, only two were men, including Dr. Wheeler himself. An edited account follows. Of interest are the many messages from the dead to the living on early 19th-century gravestones, a custom that largely disappeared later in the century.—Lynn H. Parsons]

Having met at the house of Mr. W.A. Walker at 10 A.M. with lunch baskets well filled we departed by jitney to North Castine, our specific objective point being the two old cemeteries there, one being located near the old ferry about one-eighth of a mile Southeast from the Emerson House at Emerson's Corner ... The other cemetery being situated about the same distance South of the Avery or Dodge House and being called the Avery Burying Ground.

The first of these was said to contain the grave of the Rev. Jonathan Powers, the First Minister of the town of Penobscot about whom we learned a great deal from Rev. G.W. Patterson's paper on "Old Churches and Ministers" delivered at a previous date.

We also desired to locate the old road or highway running parallel to the Bagaduce River and on the ridge of land some three or four hundred yards to the East of the present road.

This old road bent more to the right than the one now in present use and passed along the ridge nearer the river than the one over which we now travel, its course being marked still by cellars of the homes which once stood along the route, one below the "Lawrence Place" marking the site of the home of Judge Oliver Parker of the days just following the Revolution: another being the present home of Miss Josephine Wescott and the river marking the site of the earlier homestead of her great-grandfather, Mr. William Wescott; also another on a line between the house on the W.H. Hooper farm and the river called the "Springfield Place" and one or two others of which we heard but could not definitely locate.

The Capt. Joseph Wescott house, now occupied by his daughter, Miss Martha, was in part built from lumber taken from the church which stood for a few years on the hill at the Four Mile Corner. That church was the second one presided over by the Rev. Jonathan Powers. ...

Reaching the "Webber Place" now owned by Mr. W.E. Ordway, we located the first site of the church erected in 1789, just opposite Mr. Ordway's

home, this church being moved before completed to a spot on the opposite side of the road from the Emerson school where it stood until within thirty years.

Our first objective was now reached—the Burying Ground on the Webber Place—where an hour was spent in deciphering instructions, locating stones and uncovering those fallen and covered with mold. The male members of the party ably seconded by Miss Anna Witherle ... unearthed the headstone of Rev. Jonathan Powers, dragged the broken parts to a place of greater safety and matched them together. The following inscription was found: "Sacred to the memory of Rev. Jonathan Powers, Pastor of the First Congregational Church in Penobscot, Ob. Nov. 7, A.D. 1807. AE 45 years and Mrs. Mary Powers his wife Ob. Feb. 2, A.D. 1800, AE 30. Also Joshua, son of Jonathan & Mary Powers, ob Aug, A.D. 1798. AE 21 months." An epitaph follows:

"Praises on tombs, are titles vainly spent
A man's own good is his best monument
Erected by Joshua and Susan Powers, A.D.
1820."

Upon this stone there was carved at the top an open book, presumably the bible, and at the bottom of the book three fingers show as if the book was being held up and read. A weeping willow is also carved below the book, and on either side of the inscription there is a column either of Doric or Corinthian design.

Another stone as follows: "Here's rest to the dust of Mr. Hunt, who labored in the vineyards of his Lord through much adversity and happily end[ed] his sufferings on the 26th of June 1810—aged 23.

His sufferings and toils are now o'er
He's gone to receive a reward
The cross of his Saviour he bore
And now he's at rest with the Lord."



The cemeteries visited by the CHS in 1916 were still marked on this U.S. Geological Survey Map of 1943.

Another: "In memory of Hannah Freeman, consort of Wm. Freeman and daughter of Thacher Avery and Hannah Avery, who departed this life, Sept. 25, 1799, aged 19.

Behold and see as you pass by
As you are now so once was I
As I am now so you must be
Prepare for death and follow me."

"Also her sister Prudence Avery, died Sept 23, 1799, aged 9 years."

It will be noticed in this instance in the Avery family that two sisters died within two days of each other. From the number of deaths in the fall of 1799 it might be properly inferred than [that?] an epidemic or some contagious disease might have been prevalent at that time.

Another: "Hannah Atkins, consort of Capt. Nath. Atkins, who departed this life Oct. 12, 1799, aged 27.

Farewell dear friends, a short farewell
Till we again shall meet above
In the bright world where dear ones dwell
And the fruits of bliss enjoyed by love."

In this yard is also the stone of Mrs. Isabel Webber, died 1792, aged 30, Wife of William Webber. The stone of William Webber however, is located in the cemetery at Castine on Windmill Hill.

All of the stones in this burying ground are of slate with the exception of the one of Mr. Hunt, which is of marble.

After a picnic lunch at Mrs. Ordway's house and supplemented by Mrs. Ordway's most delicious brew of coffee, we proceeded—locating the church site opposite the Emerson school, and the muster ground opposite the Avery House now occupied by Mr. A.K. Dodge. This muster field was probably used for the last time before 1830 for general muster. The last general muster of militia in this region being held in Orland about 1836 and two years before that in Bluehill.

We visited the burying ground on the Avery Place (our second objective) and in this plot the earliest grave being that of Lucy Perkins daughter of John and Phebe Perkins, who died in 1782. The farm must soon after her passed into the hands of the Thacher Avery family and this burial plot received their dead for more than a century, the last occupant being that of Capt. John Avery who died only last year.

Some of the inscriptions of this burying ground are as follows: "In memory of Capt. Thacher Avery who died May 4, 1827, aged 70.

Great God I own my sentence just
And nature must decay
I yield my body to the dust
To dwell with fellow clay."

Also: "Hannah, consort of Capt. Thacher Avery, died Dec. 20, 1828, aged 65.

Though greedy worms devour my skin
And gnaw my wasting flesh
When God shall build my bones again
He'll clothe them all afresh."

The oldest stone in the cemetery was: "In memory of Lucy Perkins, Daughter of Capt. John and Phebe Perkins, died March 4, 1782, in the 12th year of her age.

Beneath this clod of dust
I sleep where all the living must."

This stone which was of slate and the only one of that material in this burying ground had carved at the top a human skull. ...

It was voted to set on foot a movement to cause some of these stones, especially that of Mr. Powers to be cared for, reset if possible and the plot protected by a fence. ...

We reached home by jitney at 3:30 P.M. ...

Members present:

Dr. George A. Wheeler
Mrs. Charles W. Devereux
Miss Anna C. Witherle
Mrs. E. E. Philbrick
Miss Gertrude Lewis
Mrs. W. A. Walker
Mrs. E. P. Walker
Miss Mary Walker
Mr. E. P. Walker

[Dated December 11, 1916. Signed by Boyd Bartlett.]

Curator's Corner

Paige Lilly

Caution: "Fun and Addictive" Opportunity

CHS has a crew of archives volunteers working one morning every week to organize incoming donations and maintain the vast vertical files of biographical and reference material. Indispensable work is accomplished on Wednesday mornings by the core group consisting of Sam Friedlander, Fran Bos and Sally Foote!

Although we would welcome another helper in that sphere, this Curator's Corner is a plea to reinvigorate another category of volunteers. Since 1980 CHS has had the support and dedicated service of a series of individuals answering research requests. They have spent hours digging for answers and fielding what sometimes felt like an onslaught of queries. Signatures on letters in the early correspondence files include Gardner Gregory, Virginia Koffman, Lois Cyr and Mark Honey. For at least fifteen years the intrepid head of this effort, year round, was Sally Foote. Many other folks have contributed to the research over the years.

This effort is *central* to the mission of the Society, for several reasons. Timely responses to research requests received almost daily by phone, email and post are an important means of providing access to what we know. Conducting research within our own collections helps CHS prepare for exhibits and publications. Discovering information about Castine in the collections of other museums and libraries fills gaps in our knowledge and supports our goal to be a clearing house for Castine history. The people doing this work become thoroughly familiar with the files and collections in the care of the Society. They make it possible to share what CHS has collected.

Right now CHS has only one person with the inside knowledge to navigate within the several filing systems, indexes, databases, notebooks, boxes and drawers of material here in the Abbott School. Maybe CHS has members out there who would be interested in volunteering but don't really know there is a need? The Grindle House project highlights the urgency of the situation because later this year we will move the collections and research activities to the first floor of the new space. The visibility and accessible location will stimulate activity, allowing CHS to share its resources with more Castine history enthusiasts than ever before.

Members reading this pitch who might have time to devote should be cautioned that the work is FUN and addictive. If you know Sally Foote at all or

have done a bit of research among the reference files she has created, you have an idea of the detective work involved and a sense of the years she has put into it. When we find five people each ready to spend two to three hours a week learning about the collections and responding to research requests, together we would begin to match half of Sally's output.

Sign up for this exciting volunteer opportunity or request more information by emailing curator@castinehistoricalsociety.org or calling 326-4118. Flexible schedule. Training provided.



CHS Appreciates Your Support

We would like to thank all of our members for your generous support of the Castine Historical Society. Including life members, our membership numbers around 650. Each new, renewed, or gift membership conveys all the privileges of being a CHS member, including a subscription to *The Castine Visitor*, published three times a year.

If you have a change of address, either winter or summer, please let us know. It is important that we keep our records accurate, so all members will receive all CHS mailings. Your support is what makes the CHS and its members, near and far, an active part of the Castine Community.

- ☐ Individual\$ 25.00
- ☐ Family \$40.00
- ☐ Sustaining\$60.00
- ☐ Contributing \$100.00
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- ☐ Benefactor\$500.00
- ☐ Please renew my membership
- ☐ Please send a gift membership to:

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This nineteenth-century view looking up Main Street from the intersection of Court Street confirms a continuous fence line running up both sides of street. A similar view looking down Main toward the harbor confirms the same configuration. *CHS Collections.*