



Picnic at Presidents Hall

Castine Normal School

by Nathan Jedziniak

Today, the campus of the Maine Maritime Academy sits on 35 acres on Pleasant Street in Castine. For more than 80 years, M.M.A. has educated generations of mariners. But this is only the modern story. The legacy of Castine as an educational powerhouse goes back much further than this.

Following a trend in education in the middle of the 19th century, in 1860, the Maine state legislature passed a law “providing for Normal schools in several counties.”¹ In 1867, the Eastern State Normal School opened and was originally held at the Abbott School on the town common. As early as 1871, just four years into the school’s existence, educators in the state were speaking highly of the quality of education at the school while recognizing the need for a much larger campus.²

What is a “normal school” and who goes to one? The term “normal school” comes from the French term *école normale*. Simply put, a normal school was what we would today refer to as a

teachers’ college. By the middle of the 19th century, there was a growing movement in the United States which advocated for universal state-funded education for children. Education reform led to a reevaluation in how teachers themselves were educated. Normal schools were established in nearly every state to train generations of school teachers.³

Early on, the rules for students were strict. Both boys (17 and older) and girls (16 and older) were admitted to the school. Students had a curfew of 8:00 PM in the summer months and 7:00 PM in the winter months. They were expected to study quietly until retiring for the night at 10:00 PM, wake early to study for an hour before school, and conduct an hour of vigorous exercise in fresh air each day. Boys and girls were not allowed to visit one another in their respective boarding rooms, and students were not allowed to leave town during the school term without permission from the principal. Although education at normal schools in Maine was legally secular, the student

continued on page 4

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Closed for the 2025 season, to reopen Memorial Day weekend 2026.

Grindle House (13 School Street)

Staff work year-round Monday-Friday. Researchers should contact research@castinehistoricalsociety.org to set up an appointment in advance.

Castine Uncovered Walking Tours

Finished for the 2025 season.

Virtual History Tour of Castine

To download the app or access the web version of the tour, visit castinehistoricalsociety.org. Go to the "Visit" drop down button and click on Castine Virtual Tour.

Our Mission

We make Castine history accessible, relevant, and inspiring to all.

Our Vision

The Castine Historical Society cultivates curiosity about our past to foster a more inclusive, empathetic, and informed society. Inside and outside our walls, we build relationships among individuals, organizations, and the community to enhance understanding of our collective experiences.

The Castine Visitor is published twice a year by the Castine Historical Society as a benefit of membership.

Karen V. Lyons, Editor



A View from the Common

Director's Letter

As we head into the fall season, with the darker days and cooler temperatures, it is natural to reflect on the season and year that has passed. I am particularly reflective this fall, as I have wrapped up my first summer as the Executive Director of the Castine Historical Society. I have been so warmly welcomed to Castine by our members, board, and the residents of this incredible town. I have also been awed by the work of the CHS and how engaged our community is in stewarding their history. We have had a wonderfully successful season, and I look forward to many more to come.

We recently closed our exhibition, *A History of Castine in 40 Objects*, on October 13, Indigenous Peoples' Day. Over 4,000 people have visited this exhibition since it opened in spring 2024! The feedback we have received from our visitors has been incredibly positive. We are sad to see this exhibition go, as we know our visitors have enjoyed learning about the town's history through our incredible collections, but we are looking forward to bringing you a new exhibition in the spring!

We plan to open an exhibition on the Japanese American artist Francis Hamabe in spring 2026. Hamabe moved to Maine in 1947 and lived and worked on the Blue Hill peninsula. Many of you may be familiar with Hamabe's work creating vibrant silkscreen town posters, featuring many different towns in the area, including Castine. He also was a watercolor and oil painter, mixed-media abstract artist, sculptor, and even had a puppet show with puppets he made from recycled materials. He taught art classes in Castine and surrounding towns, and many people remember him fondly as a kind and generous teacher and friend. Carl Little, who curated our exhibition on Clark Fitz-Gerald a few years ago, will curate the new exhibition. We cannot wait to welcome you to what will surely be a vibrant and compelling exhibition!

This summer, we hosted our annual summer fundraiser cocktail party, to great success. Our "Senior Prom" honored long-time CHS supporters and members, Ruth and Ken Scheer. Julia and

Brooke Parish generously offered their historic barn to us for our event, and our guests enjoyed wonderful music, dancing, food, and drinks. We held a silent auction with incredible experiences and items up for grabs, generously donated by many of our members and supporters. Through our attendees' generosity, we raised over \$20,000 for the CHS!

We are looking forward to next year and the return of our House & Garden Tour on July 24, 2026! This semi-annual event will draw thousands of visitors to Castine to see the incredible homes and beautiful gardens curated and cared for by Castiners. As in past years, we will hold a gala dinner on July 22, 2026, which will surely be a night like no other. The House & Garden Tour committee is hard at work already planning these events.

As we are getting nearer to the new year, I want to remind you that you'll be receiving your Annual Appeal request letter in early November. We hope you will consider making additional donations to the CHS. These donations help us with our day-to-day expenses, including our ongoing collections care, our heating and cooling expenses to protect our collection, and will support our upcoming exhibition on Francis Hamabe. Your donations also support our ongoing programmatic initiatives, which we are looking forward to expanding through partnerships with local organizations such as the Wilson Museum in 2026. As always, we are grateful for your steadfast support and commitment to the CHS year-round and thank you for considering a year-end gift to ensure we can continue offering the same level of exhibitions, programs, educational offerings, and collections access that you are used to.

Thank you for your support as I have transitioned to my new role, and I can't wait for you to see what we have in store for you in our 2026 season!

Kate McMahon

Kate McMahon, Ph.D.

continued from page 1

Castine Normal School

handbook required students to attend public church services on Sunday. The students had options—as long as those options were Congregational, Trinitarian, or Methodist. This church requirement was removed from the student handbook around 1904 or 1905, though students were still expected to present themselves as well-mannered and upstanding moral citizens.

The Eastern State Normal School did not have a dormitory building of its own until 1910. Students could take room and board in houses throughout Castine; if you take a walk through the town today, you can still see some houses where families built an addition onto their homes to provide a living space for students. It usually cost the students around \$3 a week for room and board (laundry services not included) and another \$1.50 per term for incidentals. In 1910, a girls' dormitory was built on the campus. The building was named Richardson Hall, after the long-serving principal of the school, Albert F. Richardson. Today, this building is still on the campus of the Maine Maritime Academy and has been renamed Dismukes Hall.

Tuition at E.S.N.S. was free for the majority of the school's existence, as long as students committed to teaching in Maine's public schools after graduation. This changed around 1930, when tuition for in-state students was \$50 per term and tuition for out-of-state students was \$100 per term. This free tuition was provided so the school could produce teachers for the state; education as a public service and a public benefit was the guiding principle of the normal school movement. Graduates of E.S.N.S. went on to become educators, school principals, and district superintendents all over New England.

The students at E.S.N.S. did not just receive education in how to teach; they gained hands-on experience. The school set up “model classrooms” where the soon-to-be teachers could gain practical experience in teaching children in various grades. The school also conducted a teacher exchange program. Starting around 1930, teachers from public schools in Maine who had not received normal school training came to Castine for several weeks of training in the newest methods of education. For a number of years in the early 1900s, superintendents from all over Maine came to Castine to discuss issues facing education in the state.

The school offered students a variety of extracurricular activities. Sports included baseball, basketball (including a girls' team), and tennis. Students sometimes played baseball on the grassy fields of Fort George, while basketball games took place on a court on the second floor of Emerson Hall. A Christian association on campus conducted weekly Bible studies, while students interested in the arts had access to glee clubs and theatre activities. While there does not seem to be a full list of plays that were performed at the school over the years, CHS has some photographs of students performing the famous Gilbert and Sullivan opera *The Pirates of Penzance*. The student newspaper, *The Echo*, included accounts of social activities such as school dances, dinners, and Halloween parties. Reading through the yearbooks and newspapers shines a light on the social aspect of the school. A frequent inclusion in these publications was a page of jokes and funny quotations from teachers and students.

CHS has hundreds of photographs of E.S.N.S. classes and students. The student and class portraits of the school's early years reflect the fashions of the late 19th century. These are

continued on page 5



1914 model classroom

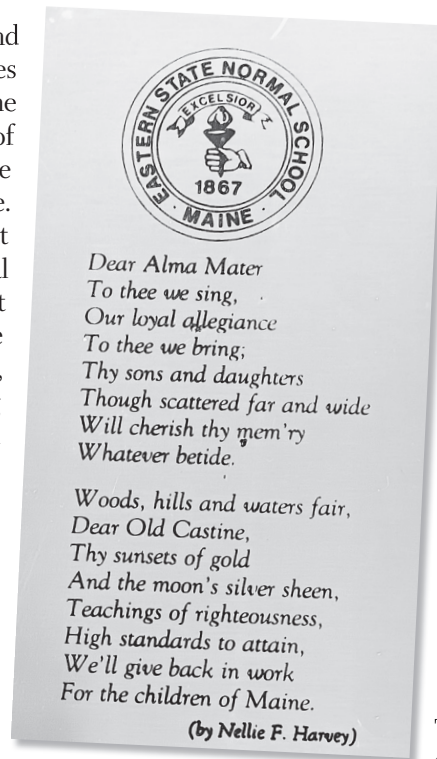


1940 model classroom

photographs of finely dressed young men and women standing or sitting in rigid, regal poses (and usually without a smile) that were the standard of those years. As the early decades of the 20th century wore on, photography became more common, affordable, and portable. Students at E.S.N.S. were able to document and share their experiences through personal photographs which tell us students spent their time outside of school visiting Dyce Head lighthouse, hiking in Witherle Woods, and going on picnics. Like today, people living in Castine took advantage of the beautiful landscape. One of the latest photographs of a class from E.S.N.S. is a 1941 photograph of a relaxed picnic at the principal's house. Looking through these photos, we can get a sense of the Eastern State Normal School as more than just a place of learning—it was a place that students enjoyed.

In particular, the amount of school pride students demonstrated in their school stands out. The Castine Historical Society has a full collection of *The Pilot*, which was the E.S.N.S. yearbook from 1924 until the school closed in 1942. The name of the yearbook evokes the nautical meaning of the word; although used less commonly today, a “pilot” was the person who steered a sailing ship. From poems, short stories, and songs that E.S.N.S. students wrote in their yearbooks and student newspapers, clearly these young men and women took great pride in their school and in their responsibility to educate the state's youth.

This sense of school pride continued for decades after the normal school closed. Around fifteen years after the first class graduated from E.S.N.S., school alumni formed an official organization to stay connected with each other and with the school. At least one graduating class (CHS has only one copy) sent out a booklet



Class song Eastern State Normal School lives on.

five years after graduation that updated all of the members of that class on what they had been up to since graduating. The alumni made annual trips to a campground at Sandy Point, about twenty-two miles from Castine. In 1967, a group of alumni celebrated the centennial of the founding of school. Even though the school had been closed 25 years earlier, the alumni still took great pride in Castine and the Eastern State Normal School.

In 1941, some of the Eastern State Normal School buildings were used to teach a new type of student: cadets for the United States Merchant Marine. Eastern State Normal School officially closed in 1942 and the Maine Maritime Academy opened that same year. For 75 years, E.S.N.S. was a prominent feature of Castine's social and cultural landscape, producing teachers who contributed to the education of countless students across Maine. The campus has undergone many changes over the years, but the spirit of the Eastern State Normal School lives on.

Nathan Jedziniak is a graduate student in the Public History program at Central Connecticut State University in New Britain, Connecticut. He was this year's CHS summer intern, where he learned how to process archival collections. He curated the exhibit of E.S.N.S. photos and documents on display at the Witherle Library.

Endnotes

- 1 https://ldc.mainelegislature.org/Open/Rpts/PubDocs/PubDocs1860/PD1860_S22.pdf.
- 2 *The Maine Journal of Education* Vol. 5, No. 7 (July 1871), pp. 253-256. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/44860030>.
- 3 Wendy A. Paterson, “From 1871 to 2021: A Short History of Education in the United States,” *Buffalo State University*, December 8, 2021.

Castine Historical Society Summer Cocktail Fundraiser

The Castine Historical Society's Senior Prom themed fund-raiser honoring Ruth & Ken Scheer took place on a glorious July evening and was a rousing success.

Brooke and Julia Parish graciously hosted the event in a classic shingled barn on their beautiful and historic property, Hatch Cove Farm. The barn was beautifully decorated with delicate strands of white lights expertly hung from the rafters by Sarah and Bryan Carey and beautiful large flower arrangements created by Jill Eastland. Jill also provided elegant boutonnieres and wrist corsages for guests and one of a kind baby's breath wreaths for the silent auction.



Senior Prom honorees
Ruth and Ken Scheer

Guests donned creative prom attire including actual prom dresses of years past, stunning vintage gowns, tuxedos with festive bow ties and elegant white dinner jackets.

Thank you to Alex Huppe and Brooke Parish for lending classic vintage cars which were perfect backdrops for Prom photos!

The silent auction was filled with unique items thanks to generous members who donated stunning jewelry, vacation homes in Key West and France, an elegant boat trip, a flower arranging class, an exclusive catered dinner, a guided trip down the Allagash, one-of-a-kind artwork, and much more. The Historical Society surpassed

our financial goal thanks to these donors and to the guests who bid often and bid high on the items!

The highlight of the evening was honoring Ruth & Ken Scheer for their decades-long involvement with and support of the Historical Society. Ruth is an Honorary Director who has served on several committees and co-chaired the House & Garden Tour masterfully for over 20 years. In addition to helping with logistics during the House & Garden Tour, Ken's major undertaking has been recording an engaging series of interviews with several of Castine's most illustrious citizens as they reminisce about aspects of life in town. These living history videos are available on the CHS website for your viewing pleasure at CastineHistoricalSociety.org.

After celebrating our guests of honor, attendees enjoyed dancing, cocktails, and hors d'oeuvres. The delicious cocktail fare was provided by Rioux Caterers. HI Tech Events DJ Michael Tuthill kept the dance floor hopping by spinning great tunes throughout the evening. The memorable evening was capped by a breathtaking dance of fireflies over the beautiful Hatch Cove Farm fields.

Thank you to our sponsors Bank of America, Saltmeadow Properties, Julia Parish Jewelry, Hammond Lumber, and Rioux Catering! And thank you to those who attended, donated, purchased items, and enthusiastically supported the event.

Don't Forget the CHS Gift Shop for Your Holiday Gift Giving!

The 2025 season in the Historical Society's Gift Shop has been a resounding success! We have received many compliments from visitors and members about our selection of gift items, many that are produced exclusively for us. People have told us it is "the best little gift shop in town".

Once again, we will host our Sip 'n Shop Night in the Abbott School on December 10 from 3 to 6 p.m. Enjoy hors d'oeuvres, a beverage, and holiday music while selecting unique items for your gift giving needs. Participants will have their names entered into a raffle to win an authentic Sea Bag®.

We also offer online shopping. We will ship your gifts, or you can opt for local pick-up. Some of our holiday offerings include:

- Birch wood trays in a variety of designs and sizes with matching coasters
- Castine Postmark canvas tote bags and a variety of Maine-made totes and wristlets
- Etched CHS four flags logo rocks glasses and stemless wine glasses
- Fleece jackets and vests with CHS four flags logo
- Candles in Witherle Woods, Wadsworth Cove, and Baron de Saint-Castin scents
- Castine nautical chart dog collars and leashes for the special pet in your life

Purchasing items in our store or online helps support the work of the Castine Historical Society, which we greatly appreciate.



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Castine Historical Society

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**Sisterhooks
Clark Fitz-Gerald**

n.d., ca. 1970s • Carved elm from Main Street in Castine
Acquired through a generous donation in the memory of William A. Lovett
2024.36.5

We were very lucky to acquire this sculpture by famed Castine-based artist Clark Fitz-Gerald this summer through a generous donation by the Lovett family. In his nearly fifty years as a year-round Castine resident, Clark Fitz-Gerald became a renowned and beloved member of this tight-knit coastal community. Villagers came to know him through his art, but also as a go-to mender of everything from church door hinges to weathervanes. Many of the materials he used to create his sculptures came from the natural environment in and around Castine.

His works were often inspired by the coastal community which he came to call home. "Sisterhooks" are nautical interlocking devices often used in the rigging of sailboats, ever present in a place like Castine. The mirrored curves of the sculpture evoke the strength of these linked pieces while revealing the immense skill of the artist.

Stephen Fitz-Gerald, Clark's son, notes that "Clark saw this as a metaphor, that the two articulating parts are dependent upon one another to secure the line. This concept of cooperation and interdependence is prosaically illustrated in many elements of modern life. Clark's talent was revealing the symbolic nature in everyday life, infusing meaning to the most mundane of daily activities."

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