



# By The River's Edge

Skowhegan History House Society Newsletter

Spring 2010 Edition

**Skowhegan  
History House on  
the Web Soon!**

SkowheganHistoryHouse.org

**Four History House  
on DVD with Lee  
Granville, Curator  
Now On Sale!**

**Regina Music Box  
Recordings on CD  
Now On Sale!**

**Season Opens  
June 8  
1:00- 5:00 PM**



Louise Helen Coburn  
Founder- Skowhegan  
History House

## *Hog Reeves, Fence Viewers, Pound Keepers and Field Drivers What Were These People Doing?*

*By Lee Granville, Curator*

The year was 1783. The town involved was Canaan; it would be another sixty years or so before the name was changed to Skowhegan.

This past summer a visitor from the neighboring town of Solon visited History House to ask if I knew the meaning of "Field Driver," a term that he had come across in some old records listing appointments of town officials at an early town meeting. I thought I knew the answer, but I told him I would do some research and get back.

The earliest records of Canaan Town meetings we have at History House are from 1783, and sure enough the names of the residents appointed to these same positions were carefully listed there. As may be expected, it is a bare-bones listing with no details of the job descriptions. That's where the research comes in. Thanks to the power of the internet, I was able to do what any serious researcher does today. I Googled it!

Remembering that Maine was part of Massachusetts until 1820, I found the proper website for the General Laws of that state and simply ran a search for "Field Driver." From more than 3.3 million items, the proper section, "Old Town Laws," popped up in seconds.

All four of the offices mentioned in the title of this selection are related in function, the proper building and maintaining of property lines and fences, with the special goal of controlling domestic animals to protect crops and property.

From the time of the settlement period here in the 1770's, the settlers were dependent upon both their field crops and their livestock for the food and fiber needed to support themselves. The first order of business for any farmer who settled a piece of wilderness was to clear enough acreage to grow his grains and vegetables, his fruit trees and bushes, hay for winter feed and open ground for summer grazing. These, the pastures, were the source of many problems involving



Lee Granville,  
Curator

loose animals and crop destruction.

Building strong, reliable fences was no small task in the old days. Materials suitable for the purpose were limited to what was readily available: mostly wood or stone. Both had serious drawbacks. Fieldstone was there for the taking, but building stone walls was a lot of work, and the Maine climate was prone to frost heaving, which could tumble a poorly built wall in a single winter. Wood was prone to rotting and most species would last no more than a few years. One notable exception was native white cedar. Farmers discovered that properly split cedar rails would last for many years. Most early fences would eventually be made from stone or white cedar. There was an old saying used to define the characteristics of a proper fence. “Horse high, bull strong and hog tight” were the requirements regardless of the materials or construction methods used.

When adjoining property owners shared a fence, Massachusetts law specified that they should share the labor and expense of building and maintaining it. This is where the services of a Fence Viewer became necessary. Many times the landowners would not agree on the details of how or when an existing fence needed repair or how much time and money needed to be spent on it. The Fence Viewer was empowered by law to inspect the disputed fence and tell both parties how to proceed. If either refused, he had the power to levy fines and/or bring the dispute before a Justice of the Peace for a decision. All decisions regarding fences within a town were made by the Fence Viewer. This was a powerful position in an agricultural community.



When animals strayed despite the best efforts of the property owners and the Fence Viewer, the services of the Field Driver might become necessary. It seems very likely that the farmer would make every effort to return their animals to the home farm himself, but what if the livestock had wandered into someone else’s property and caused damage? Then the affected landowner would call upon the Field Driver to come and collect the animals and deliver them to the pound to be held until the damage had been assessed and a settlement reached with the animals’ owner.

The job of the Pound Keeper was to accept stray animals to be placed in a properly fenced area for safekeeping where they were “impounded” or held until their rightful owner came to claim them only after paying a daily charge for their board. All of these fines and fees were determined annually by the Massachusetts legislature. The keeper needed to be ready to handle any type of domestic animal with the possible exception of hogs. This brings us to the duties of the Hog Reeve.

Hogs, a very important food source for the early settlers, were thrifty eaters who could make most of their own living off the countryside when turned loose. The downside of this was that they were very destructive animals when they got into crops and vegetable gardens. Hogs are also nearly impossible to contain behind regular fences. A mature hog can reach a weight of hundreds of pounds. They are as powerful as small bulldozers and can tear down almost any fence that isn’t made from large pieces of stone. If hogs were allowed to run wild they soon established a breeding population of feral animals that were very difficult to control. Because of all these factors, a special Hog Reeve was appointed to deal with them.



The term “reeve” is said to have the same root in old English as the “riff” in *sheriff*, denoting legal authority.

Because hogs destructively root the earth with their snouts and push through nearly any barrier with their shoulders, Massachusetts law ordained that all mature animals be “ringed and collared.” The rings were metal and pierced a hog’s snout to discourage rooting, and the collars

looked like small ox yokes placed around the necks. Part of the Hog Reeves duty was to inspect every farmer's pigpen to be sure this had been done. If not, he had the authority to do the job himself and charge the farmer a set fee.

There was yet another old saying that is as true today as yesterday. "Good fences make good neighbors" The reverse is also true. "Good neighbors make good fences."

The titles of early town offices may sound a bit strange to our ears today but make good sense when they are examined closely. As long ago as our own settlement period, the 1770's, may seem today, it is important to remember that the Massachusetts Bay Colony had been developing town governments for 150 years prior to that time.

**Board of Trustees**

**Melvin Burnham, President**

**Patricia Horine, Treasurer**

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**Ruth Blood**

**Bonnie Chamberlain**

**Steve Govoni**

**Lee Granville**

**James Hastings**

**Ron La Fratta**

***Our Mission***

***"Preserving an increasingly valuable historic collection  
representing Skowhegan's legacy and promoting  
Skowhegan's cultural heritage"***

***We invite you to visit  
the Skowhegan History House.***



**Head of Skowhegan  
Island as seen from Elm  
Street, ca. 1870**

Photo was evidently taken to show the effects of high water. Part of the underpinning is gone from the Stinchfield Mill, and flood damage is very apparent in the back of the Bragg Shovel Handle Factory. The logs in the river were characteristic of that time period.

The Weston & Brainerd Sawmill, the Bragg Shovel Handle Factory and the Stinchfield Carding Mill make up the group of buildings in the center. Two or more of the Bailey Oilcloth buildings show in the distance, breaking the skyline. The Parker residence on Alder Street shows over the Weston Mill. The John Turner home on West Front Street is visible still higher up and to the right.

**Skowhegan History House**

**Open for the Season June 8<sup>th</sup> – September 24, 2010**

**Tuesday – Friday, 1:00 to 5:00 PM**

# Skowhegan History House

History House Association, Inc.

## Giving Opportunities

The History House Association, Inc. - Skowhegan History House welcomes financial support to further its goals and mission, programming, general operations, and endowment activities. ***History House is a 501(c)(3) non-profit charitable organization, and your donation is tax deductible within the limits of the Internal Revenue Code.***

For information on any of the following giving opportunities, please contact the Skowhegan History House, P.O. Box 832, Skowhegan, Maine 04976, the Curator at [skowheganhistoryhouse@hotmail.com](mailto:skowheganhistoryhouse@hotmail.com), or any member of the Board of Trustees.

## Society Membership

In 2006, the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of the Skowhegan History House Museum, the Board of Trustees of the History House Association, Inc. created a society to assist in the further advancement of the organization. Members of the Skowhegan History House Society represent patrons, families, and friends of the History House who wish to support financially the Association's efforts in preserving Skowhegan's legacy and promoting its heritage. Annual and lifetime memberships are offered. In addition to supporting the History House, membership benefits include subscriptions to the Society's Newsletters, access to the research center, invitations to events, and the opportunity to submit articles for publication in the newsletter.

## Major Partner

History House Association, Inc. welcomes patrons, families, and friends of History House who wish to support financially the Association's efforts at a higher level. This level of support allows the Association to fast track projects that dramatically affect programming that preserves, protects, and promotes our heritage. Partnership benefits may include Partnership Plaque- honoring the donor; Preferred Partner Brochure Rack; Recognition on all Donor Lists; subscriptions to History House Society Newsletter; and an opportunity for a private tour with the Curator and/or Master Gardener.

## In Memoriam

Families, family members, or friends may make memorial donations to the Skowhegan History House in honor of their loved one. Memorial donations will be respectfully recorded in the Skowhegan History House Memorial Giving Registry and maintained for public review at the History House as well as published on all Donor listings.

## Remembrance

Remembrance donations may be arranged through the deceased's obituary notice. Donations may be sent in the deceased's memory to the Skowhegan History House, P.O. 832, Skowhegan, Maine 04976.

## Giving Opportunities Continued

### Annual Appeal

Society members and friends of the Skowhegan History House can make tax deductible contributions to the Annual Appeal. Donations advance the goals and mission, programming, general operations, and endowment activities.

Although Annual Appeal gifts are usually made within a few weeks of the appeal event, gifts in any amount may be made throughout the year. Such gifts may honor loved ones on birthdays, anniversaries, holidays, etc. Acknowledgments will be promptly mailed to donors and listed in all donor listings.

### Stocks, Bonds, or Tangible Property

Donation of stocks, bonds, or securities is an important and useful way of supporting the History House Association Inc. - Skowhegan History House. If you are interested in making a donation of this type, please contact your broker and ask him/her to arrange the transaction. Donations of real estate or other personal property are also welcome.

### Bequests and Trusts

Donors are encouraged to make charitable donations to the History House Association Inc. -Skowhegan History House in the form of a bequest in a will, the establishment of a trust, or other financial arrangements. Such gifts are structured to support the goals and mission of the Skowhegan History House while assuring the security of the donor or the donor's family. Those interested in arranging a bequest or trust should make such arrangements through their attorney.

### Historic Items

Those interested in donating items to the Skowhegan History House should contact the Curator to discuss the proposed donation and its relevance to the existing collections at the History House. Skowhegan History House cannot appraise donated items. Donors should consult an independent appraiser.



**Skowhegan High School 1858**

Replaced Bloomfield Academy and became the community's first high school open to all at no charge.

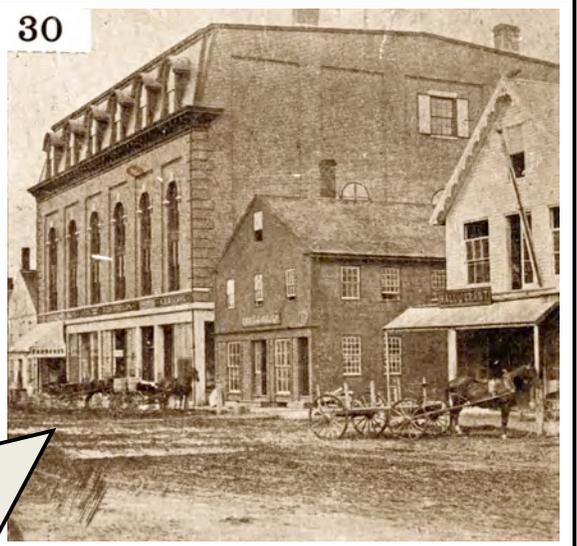


**May 1, 1894 Maying Party**

Maud Wing Carr, Blaine S. Viles, Lois Weston Patten, Harold Hanson, Estoria Pennell Jewett, Marshall C. Viles, Maud Nay Viles, Dr. Charles R. Viles. Photo was taken in front of Portland Packing Company.

# Regina Music Box Recordings on CD On Sale at History House

Many of the photos in this newsletter came from the collection of the Roland T. Patten, 1929. Captions abstracted from the Maine Memory Network.



### The North Side of Water Street, looking west, ca. 1870

The large brick building is Coburn Hall, which burned in 1904. The sign on the awning is Farrand, a tailor. Other occupants of Coburn Hall at that time may have been W. R. G. Estes, clothier; Bixby and Phillips, druggists; and James P. Blunt, hardware dealer.

The small building just at the right of Coburn Hall was formerly the Eben H. Neal Store; a little later this firm became Patten & Neal. Still later the firm became Neal & Wentworth, a general grocery store. The structure was moved to Court Street. The Griffin Building replaced it.

The truck team in front of the Hall & Grant store was owned by Hiram Thing.



### Miss May Fellows at Age 18, ca. 1893

May Fellows, a Skowhegan violinist who performed as Elise Fellows White, is shown here at age 18. At this point in her career, she was becoming a nationally known violinist. She shared the concert stage with many talented singers and instrumentalists, performing in North America and Europe.



### Harvesting Grain, Skowhegan, ca. 1920

Photo shows farmers binding bundles of grain that will later be processed with a threshing machine. Note the Chapman's building in the back and the Friends' Church in the left rear.



### Skowhegan Railroad Station, ca. 1935

Photo contains railroad station in the center. The building in the right rear now houses Rumor's and was once part of the Heselton Hotel where the Municipal Building is now located. People are seen enjoying mid-winter on horse drawn sleds.



**Model T Fords, Skowhegan, ca. 1920**

These cars are sold and ready for delivery after the spring mud season was over. The dealer took delivery of the partly assembled vehicles during the winter and prepared them for spring delivery. Most drivers did not attempt to drive during the winter and spring months due to impassable roads.

The sign to the left on the barn over the horses reads "Holt & Hight".

**Lt. Alexander Crawford, Jr., ca. 1864**

Lt. Crawford lived on the Dudley Corner Road in Skowhegan and was the commanding officer of Co. G, 31<sup>st</sup> Maine Volunteers. This was his second tour of duty, having previously served a nine-month enlistment with the 21<sup>st</sup> Maine Volunteers.

This photo was made in the summer of 1864, near the time of the siege of Petersburg, VA. He was seriously wounded in July, but after having recovered from his wound, he rejoined his regiment in February of 1865. History House has an extensive exhibit featuring Lt. Crawford.



**Skowhegan History House Membership Benefits**

- ❖ Recognition as an interested supporter of the preservation and promotion of our heritage
- ❖ Spring & fall newsletters
- ❖ Access to historical research
- ❖ Opportunity to submit pieces for publication in the Skowhegan History House Society Newsletter
- ❖ Invitation to upcoming events
- ❖ Consultations with the Curator and/or Master Gardener

**Skowhegan History House Society Membership Form**

*Please Print*  
 Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Mailing Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
 City/Town: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip Code: \_\_\_\_\_  
 E-mail Address (Optional): \_\_\_\_\_

*Circle relevant Annual Membership Category or Lifetime:*

Student/Senior (65+) \$15	Individual (1 Person) \$25	Family \$50
Business \$100	Benefactor \$150	Lifetime \$300

Checks payable to: **Skowhegan History House, P. O. Box 832, Skowhegan, Maine 04976**

# Tour History House on DVD



A professional film documenting the Skowhegan History House and featuring Curator Lee Granville has been completed. Mr. Allen Baldwin of Catama Film and Video of South Portland and a native of Norridgewock, was the cinematographer/director of the film. This archive-quality documentary film, funded by the Maine Community Foundation, features the Skowhegan History House collection and Curator Lee Granville as he conducts a guided tour. The film, which is in DVD format, also includes a tour of the Heirloom Gardens with Master Gardener, Patricia Horine.

Although an in-person tour of this nineteenth century icon is always best, the new DVD allows those who live away or who are not able to access the History House to see the valuable historic collections representing Skowhegan's legacy. Copies are now on sale at the following Skowhegan retailers: Wish on Madison Ave.; Blueberry Cupboard; and The Bankery on Water Street.

***“Mr. Granville possesses an in-depth knowledge of the collection and its relevancy to our community’s history. We want to preserve his unique knowledge, which currently exists only as an oral history.”***

Skowhegan History House  
P. O. Box 832  
Skowhegan, Maine 04976