



# Holt House News

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Newsletter of the Blue Hill Historical Society

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Local history tells us a great deal about the successful residents of Blue Hill...

## *but what about the poor?*

The poor didn't own property, so they don't appear on tax or voter rolls. Local newspapers didn't write stories about them. Genealogy publications rarely include them.

What if you were a young widow with children to care for, but no husband to provide support? What if you were the last living member of your family but no longer able to farm or fish? What if you were blind or an orphan? These misfortunes befell people of the past, just as they do today. Neighbors and family members helped each other, but when this was not enough, the town bore the entire responsibility of caring for its residents who were unable to care for themselves. The assistance that the Federal and State governments now provide was in the distant future.

Documents in the Historical Society Archive Collection offer us a window into their lives.

The Historical Society archives include a document from 1802, (shown on page 5) which invites any resident of the town who has an interest in providing for the care of a "poor boy" to come to the Meeting House and present his proposal. The boy would then become the responsibility of the lowest bidder for a specified length of time. This process was known as "vendue", which was similar to an auction. The child was not sold – as a slave would be – but was turned over to the care of a responsible citizen for a certain period of time. In 1803, Samuel Brown received payment of \$13.00 for taking care of the poor boy, Aaron C., for one year. This amount was high because Aaron was three years old and too young to contribute to the well-being of the family. Samuel Brown contracted to care for Aaron C. for the next few years.

This practice had advantages for the both the town and the pauper. The town could fulfill its duty with a minimum of effort and the pauper was assured of shelter, food and, if needed, clothing. If the person in need were young, a girl would be taught the skills necessary to care for children and a home, while a boy would be taught skills of carpentry, blacksmithing or agriculture. If the pauper were older, he or she would be expected to "earn his keep" by performing useful tasks for the benefit of the householder.

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# *Our People*

## *President's Report*

Happy Fall Everyone! Here is a quick recap of our accomplishments this year:

- We were able to open the Holt House for tours this summer and also filled our 20 hour/week summer office staff position.
- We greeted roughly 150 visitors to the Holt House between July and September and hosted 7 guided cemetery tours.
- We brought back our Summer Speaker Series with two talks that were broadcast on YouTube, a first for us! (Thank you, George!)
- We printed and distributed Blue Hill Historic District walking tour brochures for self-guided walks around town.
- We opened the Carriage House for the Maritime Heritage Festival in August and shared photos of maritime history with visitors.
- And work continues on two large projects involving our collections- the first is the cataloging of all documents in our vault and indexing for easier reference and future digitization. The second is the textile collection that has been analyzed, recorded, numbered and properly packaged. With further plans to use the information gathered to determine which items shall remain in our collection and which ones hold no historic value or ties to Blue Hill.

As we look to the future of Blue Hill Historical Society, our discussions always bring us back to the same place: we want to broaden our outreach; make our space better suit our needs and stay in-tune with our community. These “wants” make it clear that it’s time to revisit our Strategic Plan and develop our Vision! We are currently in the early stages of planning a “board member retreat” to delve into these topics and form a solid plan to get us there. As times change, it is important that we are prepared to change too. We will look at other Non-Profits of similar size as well as request help from a Facilitator to develop this plan. We plan to reach out to our membership for suggestions and feedback as part of this process so please be on the lookout for this communication in early 2022!

*Brandi Candage, President*

## *Board Members and Officers of the Blue Hill Historical Society*

We welcome our new Board Members:

**Christopher W. Closs** – has provided leadership, guidance and direction for many development projects. He served as Executive Director for the Manchester (NH) Historic Association and as Field Services Advisor for *Maine Preservation*.

**Maxfield Y. Rhine** – Currently a student at the Fashion Institute of Technology, Max will offer the Society the perspective of a younger person and assist with current media and technology. He has already served as a docent at the Holt House Museum and is involved with the processing of the textile and clothing collections.

**John B. W. Warren** – attended schools in Florida and has had a number of successful business ventures. He has served on a number of committees in his native state, including the St. Petersburg Historical Society.

We would like to present our current Board Members and Officers:

**Brandi Candage, President** - first joined the Board in 2016 and later rejoined in 2019. She lives in Blue Hill with her husband and two sons.

**Brittany Courtout, Vice President** is a Social Studies teacher at the Blue Hill Harbor School and has been on the board for about 4 years.

**Ann Durgin, Curator**- first joined the Board of the Historical Society in 1993 but demands of her job caused her to leave after a few years. In 2011 she returned to the Board and is working to catalog the archival collection. She has lived in Blue Hill since 1971.

**Camilla Saly-Monzingo, Recording Secretary** - has been visiting the Blue Hill area from New York City in the summers since she was a child in the 1960's. She joined the Board in 2017 with a passion to help preserve its historic clothing collection.

**Duncan Hamilton, Treasurer** - Duncan's family settled in the Blue Hill area in the mid 1700's. He and generations of his family have continued to enjoy summering here every year until he moved here permanently about 10 years ago and is now the owner of the Blue Hill Inn on Union Street which has been operating as an inn since 1840.

**Greg Bush** is a retired history professor from the University of Miami, owner of South Blue Hill's Historic Hen House and founder and President of Nature Links Maine.

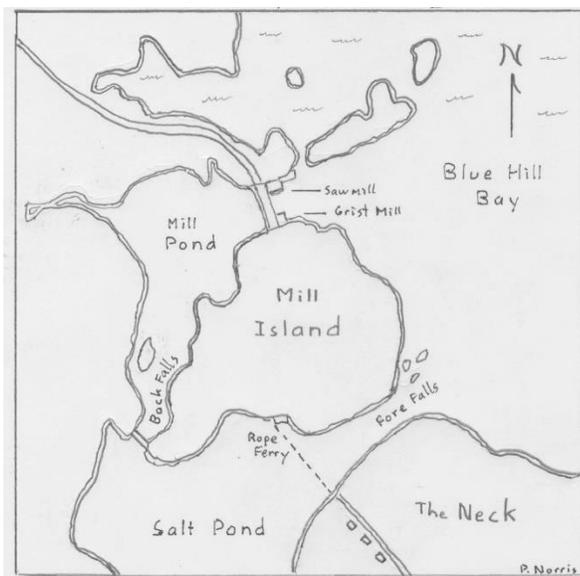
**Phil Norris** is an arborist and founded the Clayfield Farm in East Blue Hill about 30 years ago.

**George Pazuniak** is a lawyer residing full time in Sedgwick. He volunteers for a number of organizations.

## *The Early Water-Powered Mills*

John Roundy and Joseph Wood first arrived in Blue Hill in 1762. They may have heard rumors of an exceptional water power somewhere on the coast of Maine east of the Penobscot River. Or they may have stumbled on the reversing falls at the Salt Pond as they nosed into Blue Hill Bay by boat looking for a place to settle. Either way, they must have been amazed at the water crashing in and out with the tide. They must have sat there in their boat, the gears turning in their heads. Here was a power that could run a sawmill and there were giant virgin-growth trees coming right down to the shore.

All the mills of that period were powered by water. Most were on rivers and streams and made use of dams to tap the power of the falling water. But all along the New England coast there were tide mills. These would trap water in an enclosure at the high tide and use the head created by the falling tide to power up-and-down sawmills and grist mills.



Roundy and Wood landed on what came to be known as Mill Island and built two log cabins that summer. They returned to Beverly, Massachusetts for the winter and returned with their wives and families in the spring of 1763. They established a working homestead on that 24-acre island. Living there on the island between the fore-falls and the back-falls they must have gained an intimate knowledge of the water power and how to tap it. By 1765 they had a sawmill up and running. They built a low dam out of mud and stones at the inner end of the back falls and a much bigger dam, a causeway actually, at the outer end. Thus, they turned the back-falls into a mill pond. The causeway had moveable wooden gates that would allow the sea to flow in but would close when the tide turned. This causeway has survived to the present day and the state highway goes over it.

The sawmill was a complete success and enabled the settlers to saw out studs and boards for houses and timbers for ships. The settlement grew quickly then. Families moved up from Beverly and Andover and the men and women went to work clearing the land and building a town at the foot of the small mountain. The water coming off the mountain descended steeply to the sea through a stream which was also an exceptional water power. This came to be known as the Mill Stream. They built four dams in a row right near the high tide line. At the bottom, on the right, was a big sawmill, owned by various people at various times. Logs could be floated to this mill from anywhere along the shore. A second dam, a short way up the stream, supported the Osgood Grist Mill.

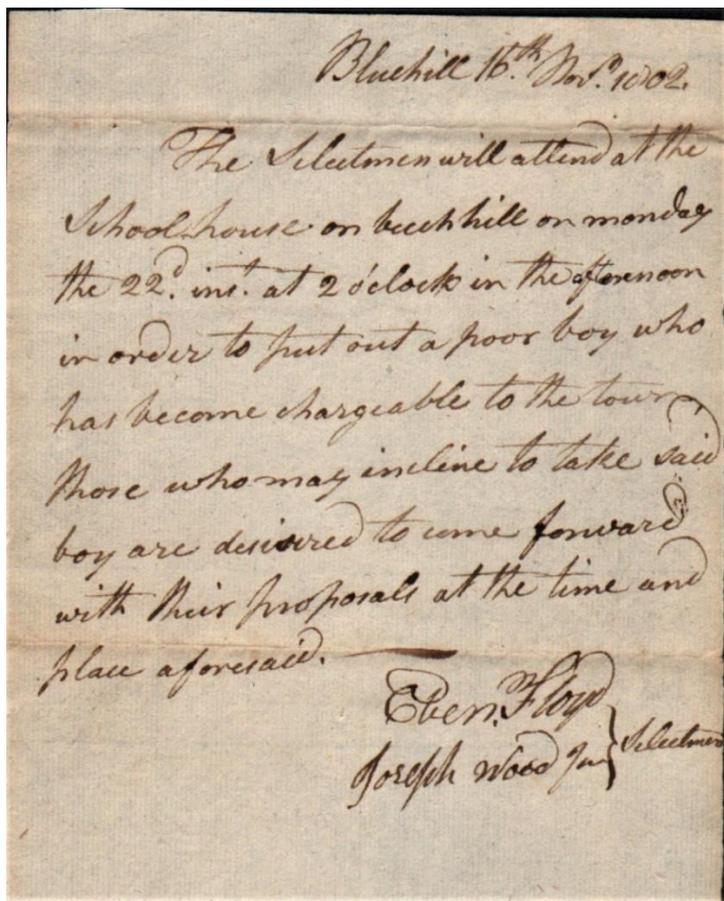
“Blue Hill is a pretty town; it’s built quite near the hill,  
And through it runs a rapid stream that runs the Osgood Mill.” RGF Candage

At the third dam, on the right, was a cooperage. And the fourth dam? The one farthest from the harbor? The George Stevens mill? Now there’s an interesting story for another issue!

Phil Norris

## ...but what about the poor?

(Continued from page 1)



Bluehill 16<sup>th</sup> Nov. 1802

The Selectmen will attend at the Schoolhouse on beech hill on monday The 22<sup>nd</sup> inst. at 2 o'clock in the afternoon in order to put out a poor boy who has become chargeable to the town. Those who may incline to take said boy are desired to come forward With their proposals at the time and place aforesaid.

Eben Floyd  
Joseph Wood Jr. Selectmen

Other documents referred to in this article can be viewed on our website:

[www.bluehillhistory.org](http://www.bluehillhistory.org)

A citizen was encouraged to bid for a relative who was ill or had fallen on hard times. The town, therefore, would pay a share of the relative's expenses.

When someone in need required the services of doctor, the town paid the bill. On July 6, 1802, Dr. Nathan Tenney presented a bill for \$2.00 to the town for "my travel and attendance upon Ebenezer Lyon, a stranger who was taken sick and died at the home of Col. Nathan Parker". On November 4, 1806, two young women from Deer Isle became ill while in Blue Hill. The town paid Isaac Ingalls for boarding them and paid Dr. Tenney to provide medical care. By December 4, they were well enough to return home. The cost was \$79.13 - a large sum for that time. The Selectmen of Blue Hill wrote a letter to the Selectmen of Deer Isle asking to be reimbursed for the expense. Also in 1806, Henry C., a Blue Hill resident, became ill while he was in the town of Penobscot. Blue Hill paid for a doctor to treat him, and later, for a local captain to transport Henry, his wife and children, back to Blue Hill. Eventually, Henry died and the town paid for his burial. In 1809, Obed Johnson found a stranger in his barn. The person was ill, so Mr. Johnson took him in and cared for him for six weeks. Mr. Johnson presented the town with a bill for \$8.00 to cover his expenses caring for the stranger and two visits by a local doctor. Mr. Johnson's signature attests that the money was received.

## *but what about the poor?*

There were disadvantages for both the town and the pauper, as well. Sometimes families had to be split up – a mother and her youngest child might go to one bidder and older children might go to other families. The Selectmen were expected to monitor the care that the paupers received and take action if it was not satisfactory. Warrants for Town Meetings included the amounts the Town spent on the upkeep of the poor, and included the names of both the pauper and the person to whom the money was paid for their care. Confidentiality was not yet an issue.

As with the young women from Deer Isle, the poor did not always stay in their place of legal residence. Those who wandered from home caused a very large group of documents to be generated as the Selectmen attempted to be reimbursed by other towns or neighboring towns requested reimbursement from Blue Hill. That will be the subject of a later article.

These documents come from a very large collection of Town records donated by Roland Howard.

### *One Hundred Years Later... 1917*

Amount budgeted for support of the poor \$1,000.00

Here are some of the notable expenses in this category:

Paid to Dr. Otis Littlefield for medical aid to the poor	\$80.75
Paid to W.B. Hinckley for boarding paupers	\$362.30
Paid to C.A. Gray for boarding paupers	\$182.65
Paid to A.E. Wescott for boarding paupers	\$90.45
Paid to other towns for their care of Blue Hill citizens	\$123.17
Paid to Eugene Leach for auto trip to Southwest Harbor	\$9.00
Paid to S.G. Hinckley for auto trip to Bangor	\$10.00
Paid to R.C. Hinckley for auto trip to Southwest Harbor	\$12.00
Paid to Merrill and Hinckley for food	\$9.43
Paid to H.H. McIntyre for supplies	\$6.65

Many other citizens were reimbursed for goods and services provided to the poor.

The total amount expended \$1166.71

Amount overdrawn \$ 166.71

(figures taken from the Annual Town Report, 1917)

## *The Maritime Heritage Festival was a Success!!*

Blue Hill Historical Society is proud to have been an integral part of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual Maritime Heritage Festival on August 20<sup>th</sup>. Although the weather threatened, there was enough warm air and sunshine for the music, exhibits, displays and speakers. We co-sponsored the presentation by Lincoln Paine, which can be seen on the Historical Society You-Tube channel. The Carriage House was open with wonderful photos of ships and their captains, as well as the navigational instruments they used. The Holt House Museum was open beyond its regular Saturday hours and hosted nearly 80 visitors. We are already looking forward to being part of next year's festival!

*Our Annual Meeting* was held Tuesday, October 19 in the Howard Room at the Blue Hill Public Library. After a brief business meeting, we welcomed three new members to our Board of Directors. Our guest speaker for the event was Dr. Richard Kahn, author of "Diseases in the District of Maine, 1772-1820" – a transcription of an unpublished manuscript by Dr. Jeremiah Barker. This book was the subject of an article in the Spring 2021 edition of this Newsletter. His talk was presented via Zoom and is now available for viewing on the Historical Society's You-Tube channel.

*Please stay connected with us.*

### Take a Self-Guided Walking Tour of Blue Hill Village

Since the streets of Blue Hill may be quieter than usual this year, we suggest that you download a copy of our Self- Guided Walking Tour brochure and reacquaint yourself with the interesting stories behind each one of the houses in our historic district. This brochure is the result of The Building History Project carried out by students of the Blue Hill Harbor School. You will find a map of the village, the history and a photo of each house. Our history is rich, indeed. The brochures will be available on the Society website: [www.bluehillhistory.org](http://www.bluehillhistory.org).

### Visit our You-Tube Channel

Watch videos of our summer programs:

Lincoln Paine Presentation at the Blue Hill Maritime Festival, August 20, 2021

Dr. Richard Kahn's Presentation at our Annual Meeting in October

The Mariner's Art: Blue Hill and Beyond, Professor Kevin Murphy

Wabanaki Waterscape Stories, John Bear Mitchell

Find us on Facebook,

Contact us via email: [bluehillhistoricalsociety@gmail.com](mailto:bluehillhistoricalsociety@gmail.com),

Visit our website: [www.BlueHillHistory.org](http://www.BlueHillHistory.org).

Through the website, you can learn about events, sign up for membership online, purchase books, and view listings of genealogical resources we have available at Holt House.

## *Yesterday and Today*

Most museums display only the most beautiful, the rarest or the most valuable. The Blue Hill Historical Society displays items that tell a story about the people who lived in the town in the past. This small pitcher is proudly displayed on the mantle in the kitchen of the Holt House. On close inspection, you can see that it was badly broken. The handle is missing and the spout has been glued back together.



How can a broken pitcher tell a story? It tells about someone who placed a great value on an otherwise common item. Perhaps it belonged to someone's grandmother. Unfortunately, we don't know. We do know that this pitcher was loved. It was loved so much that someone bothered to have it repaired. There is an iron band around the base and around the neck. A small V shape is cut out of the neck band to accommodate the spout. An iron handle replaces the original. This was not done quickly or easily. It is the work of a skilled craftsman. Rather than throw away a broken item, it was mended because it had value to its owner.

Today, we use things briefly and then discard them – often while still functional – without regard for the consequences. What story will our artifacts tell to the generations that come after us?