



Skowhegan History House History House Association, Inc.

“Preserving an increasingly valuable historic collection representing Skowhegan’s legacy and promoting Skowhegan’s cultural heritage”

Skowhegan History House

Skowhegan History House was founded by Louise Helen Coburn, a niece of former Governor Abner Coburn, in 1936, as a private historic house and museum. Its purpose was to accumulate, preserve, and display documents and artifacts related to Skowhegan’s history. The property is located along the historic eastern shore of the Kennebec River on Elm Street among neighboring homes of the same period.

Upon her death in 1949, Louise bequeathed the historic home and museum to the Bloomfield Academy Trust which was established in 1807. The Bloomfield Academy Trust also manages the Skowhegan Free Public Library and a variety of other trust accounts supporting scholarships and benevolent groups. The Bloomfield Academy Trustees utilize the interest from Louise Coburn’s trust to maintain the physical property, insurance, and security.

Louise Coburn, who was Colby College’s second female graduate, also provided for the establishment of a new non-profit corporation, History House Association, Inc. to manage the historic house, museum, and collections and keep them available to the public. This work is led by a volunteer Board of Trustees and funded through support from the Town of Skowhegan, donations, Society membership, grants, etc. The Association also relies heavily on volunteers who average over 1,000 hours per year in documented time.



Louise Helen Coburn

The Skowhegan History House serves as a repository for many of Skowhegan’s unique historic records and archives. Some early town records and photographs exist only in our collections. Researchers find genealogical information in the family histories that cannot be found elsewhere. The History House offers assistance local and regional researchers including newspaper staff, family historians, and to town officials in need of local historic facts. History House is a destination for many tourists, who contribute significantly to the local economy. We also work with area schools in archival education. **We strive to make local history come alive.**

The 1839 Greek revival cottage is filled with antiques, furnishings, and other items of everyday life during the mid 1800’s. Everything in the house was used within the community of Skowhegan. Some of the collections include:

- The **Philbrick Pottery Collection of Exeter Redware**, milk settling dishes, pots, and a pitcher, were manufactured from 1799-1825 on the site of History House.
- The **Regina Music Box**, ca. 1895, uses perforated metal discs to play music of the period (i.e. Summer Wedding, The Sweetest Story Ever Told, The Mockingbird, and Hail Columbia).

- The **Anadrosis steam bath cabinet**, ca. 1880, was invented by “Dr.” Conant, a photographer in the community. Dr. Conant developed a process to expel poisons and banish diseases in the steam bath followed by a liniment consisting of alcohol and opium.
- Upstairs contains a **collection of dolls, Civil War weaponry, and historic clothing** plus other artifacts of the period.
- Also included are **oil on canvas paintings**, portraits of notable local people, including Samuel and Joseph Philbrick, the founders of the Philbrick Pottery.
- The **Redington-McClellan collection**, on permanent loan by the Redington-Fairview Hospital, represents some of the finest furnishings of that period.

The 1936 addition to the historic house serves as a museum to showcase collections (photographs, library, archival documents, and objects) accumulated at different times which are not part of the original historic house. Specific collections include:

- The **town records collection** has documents dating back to **1783**: an original leather-bound journal kept by the town clerk at the time; cemetery, birth, death and marriage records; and a transcript of Joseph Weston’s second journey (1772) to what was Canaan, now known as Skowhegan. The Weston’s were one of the first families to settle in this area.
- The **Alexander Crawford, Jr., Civil War Collection** contains documents, letters, uniform, and personal items used by this Civil War soldier, a native son. This is one of the better Civil War memorabilia collections in the state.
- **Collections of early Skowhegan newspapers (1828 – 1900)** include the *Somerset Reporter*, *Skowhegan Sentinel*, *Democratic Clarion*, *Republican Clarion*, and the *Down East Screamer*.
- Numerous updated **family histories**, user friendly and specific to local families, are prized by genealogical researchers.



Lt. Alexander Crawford, Jr.

Ornamental heirloom gardens, established in 2005, showcase examples of old-fashioned plant materials, which would have been available to New England gardeners during the mid 1800's. Signage, featuring both botanical and common names, offers visitors background information for each individual heirloom plant.

Why It Is Important?

The Coburn family had the foresight, organizational means, and the ability to raise the funds to make their visions reality, and Skowhegan has benefited significantly from their leadership.

We, the History House Board of Trustees, know that it is critical to continue Louise Coburn’s vision for the Skowhegan History House: *Preserving an increasingly valuable historic collection representing Skowhegan’s legacy and promoting Skowhegan’s cultural heritage.* To accomplish this involves labor as well as funds for conservation, archival materials, environmental control, storage, program development, general operational expenses, and the creation of exhibits.

We need your help to preserve this legacy for those who follow us, our future citizens and leaders of an informed society.