FOR NEARLY 140 YEARS, Skowhegan has been a major center for manufacturing footwear. Over the years many hundreds of local folks have worked in the shoe shops, giving their all to construct a good product and earn a decent living.

“The Shoe Shops”, a featured exhibit in the Granville Gallery at the Skowhegan History House Museum & Research Center, opened June 13th. This new exhibit curated by former director, Melvin Burnham, tells the story of shoe making in Skowhegan from its earliest days through the industrial age and into the 20th and twenty first centuries. Those early settlers who carved out a life in the Canaan wilderness brought few provisions with them. However, they did bring their prior skillsets which allowed them to succeed in building a new life. They prepared the land, established farms, and created homes. Every resource was valued, preserved, and used to its fullest, including animal hides – which were used to craft clothing and footwear. Good footwear was essential to survival in the wilderness.

As circumstances changed, the making of shoes became an itinerant occupation where cobblers went from home to home making each family’s footwear. The cobbler moved on to the next home when the job was done or the food ran out. As communities formed, the production of most goods became more centralized. Cobbler’s quit traveling from home to home and instead, set up shop in a community where locals came to them for their footwear.

Interestingly, tanneries became one of the most common businesses in the community as leather was used not only for footwear but also for harnesses, clothing, and furniture.

Beginning in 1882, Skowhegan supported the creation and expansion of manufacturing jobs by taking subscriptions and selling stock to construct new factories, including the building New Balance Shoe now occupies. Tax easements and special considerations were also extended to companies as a way to keep them in.
Volunteer with Us at History House
Skowhegan History House Museum and Research Center depends heavily on dedicated and talented volunteers to continue the mission of "Preserving an increasingly valuable historic collection representing Skowhegan's legacy and promoting Skowhegan's cultural heritage." Last year our supportive volunteers at the History House donated many hundreds of hours of their time in service to the museum, research center, and gardens. History House has been greatly enhanced over the years by the dedicated and consistent giving of time, talent and loving care by the many volunteers. We look forward to working with our veteran volunteers again this year. We also look forward to working with new volunteers, like you!

Our volunteers help in the following ways:
Contribute to the community, learn new skills, help others, and assist visitors.
Design and create displays, catalog artifacts, write articles, and assist patrons with research.
Assist the Board of Trustees with preparing materials for distribution and mailings.
Work in the Heirloom Gardens

If you would like to volunteer or know someone who would, please contact: Kay Marsh, Volunteer Coordinator @ 465-7458 or grammy.kay.cee@gmail.com, or call History House @ 207-474-6632.

MELVIN BURNHAM, citing the need for a change, retired last season as Museum Director. Members of the Board spent a good deal of time determining the required actions needed to maintain stability so that History House could be in a position to promote continued growth and development. We assessed our current strengths and voted to reorganize our staffing structure. We decided to move forward concurrent with strong Board involvement. Our strengths include having two talented and devoted employees returning for the 2018 season. With the combination of their return, a capable group of volunteers, and an active Board of Trustees committed to supporting their work, the result is a fully professional organization dedicated to preserving and promoting Skowhegan’s cultural heritage.

The History House Board of Trustees promoted Museum Assistant, Kim Wilson, to the position of Curator with responsibilities focused on the on-going operation of History House. She will be responsible for the protection, conservation, and preservation of the History House & Museum collections and for providing oversight for historic accuracy, presentation, and portrayal of the collections and its purposes.

Mariah Bonneau returns for her 3rd year as Student Intern. She will assist Kim with special projects, conduct tours, enter data into a digital catalogue program, and perform other assigned duties within the scope of a professional museum and research center.

Melvin Burnham, now as a volunteer, curated “The Shoe Shops”, a featured exhibit in the History House’s Granville Gallery. At the June 13th grand opening he presented a program telling the story of shoe making in Skowhegan from its earliest days through the industrial age and into the 20th and twenty first centuries. Melvin

(The Times... Continued on page 5)

“The Times They Are a-Changin” - but maybe not so much!
by Patricia Horine

Mariah and Kim in the gardens

Skowhegan History House Museum & Research Center
Our Mission
Preserving an increasingly valuable historic collection representing Skowhegan’s legacy and promoting Skowhegan’s cultural heritage

By The River’s Edge, Skowhegan History House Newsletter, published twice annually
Contributors: Patricia Horine, Melvin Burnham, and Diane Crawley
Editor: Patricia Horine
Graphic Design: Kim Wilson
New ‘Oral Histories’ Program

The Skowhegan History House Museum & Research Center will again be open on Mondays, 10 to 1:00 PM, for research purposes (no tours). This will allow researchers to come in and concentrate on their research with the assistance of research specialists/volunteers, David James or Kay Marsh, if needed.

New this season is our Oral Histories program; Trustee Kay Marsh will interview Skowhegan area senior citizens on Mondays at History House to compile an oral history of our region. This promises to be an invaluable legacy. Feel free to participate! Call 474-6632 for more details or appointments.

I HAVE LOVED Skowhegan History House since I first visited it as a Girl Scout eons ago. However, various other commitments (family, work, etc.) kept me occupied and away from the History House until retirement. Having been employed in a medical field I am well aware that we all come into contact with contagious things but I never realized that enthusiasm could be one of those things - until I became exposed!

My reintroduction to History House was helped along by my friend, Edna Marshall, one of the most enthusiastic volunteers I’ve ever met. She told me all about the interesting things she was doing at History House and encouraged me to volunteer. My initial resistance lasted for a couple of years. Then in 2016 I finally agreed to try my hand at volunteering. One of my earliest projects was indexing Skowhegan industries and businesses from newspaper articles. Did you know that at one time we had three thriving bakeries in our town? Since I was born and brought up here in Skowhegan I was familiar with so many of the names and occurrences in the materials I indexed. Last year I worked on scrapbooks filled with accounts of social occasions, such as weddings, graduations, family reunions, and births. I smiled as I read the description of a bridal shower for one of my teachers. She became a real person as I visualized her in a group of giggling girls. She was no longer just my teacher. I look forward to the interesting stories and information I’ll encounter this season.

I extend an invitation to you, dear reader. Try volunteering at the History House for one season. But beware of my enthusiasm, just like Edna Marshall’s enthusiasm, it can be contagious. I will share it with you!

Celebrating Architectural Heritage - Historic Home Registry Program

Skowhegan has numerous old homes dating well before 1900 that have interesting histories and are of importance and significance to our community’s history. Skowhegan History House Museum & Research Center offers an opportunity for residents of Skowhegan with homes at least 100 years old to participate in its Historic Home Registry Program.

The program provides an opportunity for the owner to document the home’s age, register it in the Historic Home Registry, and to display an approved house marker indicating the original homesteader, the year of construction, and the owner’s affiliation with the Skowhegan History House Historic Home Registry Program. Further information can be found under “Programs” on our website: skowheganhistoryhouse.org.

Confessions of a Once Reluctant Volunteer

by Diane Crawley

Volunteers Edna Marshall, and Diane Crawley, right, welcome visitors to an event
production in Skowhegan. These plans worked. Shoe manufacturing had moved from homes to local shops, to the impersonal, multi-floored structures with bosses having expectations directly related to production and profit. As goods and trades became less home centered and available in communities, women and children found they could supplement the family’s earnings on the farm by seeking employment in local factories. The industrial age offered a new way of life and, as a consequence, the family farm began to slip away. Shoe shop work, when available, was demanding. The pay was low and the working conditions were often poor, especially in the early days. It required craftsmen, familiar with creating a whole product, to now focus on producing a small part of the end product with both skill and efficiency. No mistakes were allowed. Working conditions and practices provided little comfort for the needs of the worker. In the 1930’s these practices and conditions fueled a difficult strike in Skowhegan that lasted for months and had a devastating effect on families, community, and the manufacturers.

In 1956 eight hours of production line work could yield only $6.00, which was much less than earned in earlier days. A skilled worker might be placed on piece work which paid per unit completed, yielding perhaps $8.00 a day. Health insurance, sick-time, and guaranteed employment were not provided. Shoe factories have come and gone. Some businesses were sold for millions of dollars. Other investments were lost due to bad judgment or hard times. Today Skowhegan remains at the center of the shoe making industry because the New Balance Shoe is the only company producing athletic shoes in the United States.

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**Getting Rid of Harmful Insects** by Patricia Horine

THE EASIEST WAY TO PREVENT INSECT damage in your garden is to discourage insects from coming in the first place. A healthy garden is the best defense. Here are some suggestions:

- Clear your garden area of debris and weeds, which may be breeding places for insects.

- Build healthy soil - natural composting methods, mulch, and top-dressing with compost or natural fertilizer are the best way to develop strong, vigorous plants. (Guidance on composting: [planetnatural.com](http://planetnatural.com)).

- Minimize disturbance - practice no-dig or no-till gardening to minimize the introduction of pests to the soil and increase the beneficial microbes.

- Seaweed Mulch or Spray - contains trace elements (iron, zinc, barium, calcium, sulphur, and magnesium) to promote healthy development in plants. Either will enhance growth and give plants the strength to withstand disease. Seaweed mulch also repels slugs.

- Pull out any weak plants - they may already be infected. If not, they will attract predators. Dispose of weak plants away from the garden area.

- Water early so foliage will be dry for most of the day.

Wet foliage encourages insect and fungal damage to your plants.

- If you’ve been working with infested plants, clean your tools before moving on to other garden areas. This will reduce the spread of invading insects.

- Beneficial insects, such as Praying Mantid or Lacewings fight insect damage - each has a big appetite for common garden pests. Praying Mantid and Lacewing eggs (and directions for their use) are available at [Arbico.com](http://arbico.com).
Keene Brothers Shoe Company by Melvin Burnham

A PHOTO of the all-male workforce gives us a glimpse into the times of shoe shop workers. These rugged young to middle aged men were trying to make a living wage to support their families. Children, like the young boys in the front row, were often part of the industrial labor force. Maine’s first child labor law (1847) forbade employing any child under 15 who had not attended school for 3 months preceding the year of employment, and for children under 12 unless they had attended school for 4 months preceding the year of employment. Truancy laws, passed in 1887, required children under 15 to attend at least 16 weeks of school annually in order to work in manufacturing and mechanical workplaces when school was in session. Work days were at least 10 hours long, yielding wages of nearly one dollar per week for children. The laws did not provide for reliable age verification. Parents were openly known to falsify their child’s age in order to obtain work.

HISTORY HOUSE received a $10,000 Davis Family Foundation grant which will be applied towards the restoration of 8 historic Museum windows and the rebuilding of six basement window frames with restored sashes. During the fall we will seek additional funding through a Community Development Façade Grant program to complete this restoration project. We are grateful for The Davis Family Foundation funding because it supports an ongoing goal of restoring the historic History House and Museum to its original integrity. History House, a non-profit organization, has been listed on the National Register of Historic Places since 1963. It was founded in 1937 by Louise Helen Coburn, niece of Maine Governor Abner Coburn (1863-64) and the noted author of the two volume set Skowhegan on the Kennebec. She created an authentic Skowhegan home straight out of the 1800’s featuring tools, portraits, art, clothing, personal items, children’s toys, and so much more. The Museum offers the Alexander Crawford Jr. Civil War and Somerset Newspaper Exhibits as well as journals, diaries, family histories and other research materials invaluable to researchers and genealogists. As keeper of our community’s cultural heritage, History House is a vital part of our town’s cultural, educational, and heritage infrastructure. We tell our community’s amazing story through on-site and community-based historic tours, activities, special events and by expanding special programs beyond our doors into the greater community.

Bonnie Chamberlain recently conducted House tours for Margaret Chase Smith 5th grade students. In the fall they will partner with teachers to provide local history-based lessons for the entering 5th grade students. Melvin will once again lead this summer’s Historic Skowhegan Falls & Island Tour and the North Cemetery’s "Useful Citizens" Tour. So, while there have been changes, there’s also continuity with staffing, a new two year exhibit, community tours, and a full slate of interesting programs. We hope you will visit History House this season.

Changes to the History House schedule:
Monday, 10 am - 1pm open for research and by appointment for the Oral History program.
Tuesday - Friday, 10 am – 4 pm open to the public.
**SKOWHEGAN HISTORY HOUSE MUSEUM & RESEARCH CENTER**  
**2018 Programs & Events (UPDATED)**

**Mondays, 10 to 1:00 - Researchers Only** (Closed July 4 and Labor Day, September 3)

**New this season: Oral Histories program** - Trustee Kay Marsh will interview Skowhegan area senior citizens on Mondays at History House to compile an oral history of our region. This promises to be an invaluable legacy. Feel free to participate! Call 474-6632 after May 29th for more details or appointments.

**June 13, Wednesday 7:00 - Grand Opening "The Shoe Shops":** Join us at the History House for the opening of our new 2018-2019 rotating exhibit curated by Melvin Burnham. His presentation will explore the history of shoemaking and its important role in Skowhegan's economic development, beginning with the arrival of the 1800s Industrial Age and continuing to this day. Refreshments offered, free to the public.

**July 10, Tuesday 7 – 9:00 - Join us at the Margaret Chase Smith Library for a presentation exploring notable local writers inspired by the Skowhegan area and the Kennebec River.** Our talk features local novelist, Barbara Winslow, who includes local history in her books for younger readers. She clearly enjoys conveying her excitement for our history - so abundant around us. Together we'll take a look at past local writers, Harriet Nash, author of *Polly's Secrets* (1902) and Levi Parker Wyman, author of *The Golden Boys Series* (1923-1927). Winslow, along with both of these past authors, share a common love and appreciation for including historical backdrops into their stories. Refreshments offered, free to the public.

**Historical Tours -10:00 am Suggested Donation $5.00 per Participant**

**June 29, Friday - Old Bloomfield Cemetery Tour:** Trustee Kay Marsh invites you to join her at the Old Bloomfield Cemetery entrance off South Route 201. The entrance to the cemetery is on the left side of the road, about 2 miles from the Skowhegan Bridges. Rain date: Saturday, June 30.

**July 20, Friday - Historic Skowhegan Falls/Island Tour:** Melvin Burnham will lead an informative tour of this important Skowhegan area. Meet at Arnold Park on Skowhegan Island at the rear of the Federated Church Parking Lot. Rain date: Saturday, July 21.

**July 27, Friday - Southside Cemetery Tour:** Trustee Kay Marsh will lead a tour that covers Southside "Stone Stories." Meet at the cemetery entrance on Skowhegan's upper Main Street. Rain date: Saturday, July 28th.

**August 17, Friday - North Cemetery's "Useful Citizens" Tour:** Explore the North Cemetery with colorful accounts from Melvin Burnham about some of Skowhegan's early residents. Meet at the cemetery gate behind Walton Apartments on Madison Avenue. Rain date: Saturday, August 18.

**August 10, Friday 7:00 - History House "Mystery at the Museum - Resurrecting Rachel (Coburn) Parker"** Join us as Trustee Kay Marsh explores a mystery involving an ancient photo and the genealogy of a Skowhegan family. This presentation will include discussions about early photography and errors in family histories. Refreshments offered, free to the public.

**August 22, Wednesday 5-7:00 - Museum After Hours:** Join us at History House to view a selection of *Exciting New Acquisitions* presented by History House staff and Trustees. Refreshments offered.

**September 15, Saturday 1-3:00 - Riverside Tea, celebrating this spectacular time of year!** Join us at History House to enjoy a garden party featuring music by the Sandy River Ramblers. This event, held on our lovely side lawn, offers an opportunity to wander about the gorgeous riverside gardens, view outdoor exhibits overlooking the Kennebec River, or go into the History House to peruse the exhibits. Refreshments offered, free to the public.

**October 5, Friday 4-6:00 – History House’s Ghost Story Night hosted by the Margaret Chase Smith Library:** Enjoy dramatic and spooky readings and share Maine ghost stories. Refreshments offered, free to the public.

**October 12, Friday – History House Closes for the Season**

We are honored to be a part of the Bernard Langlais Art Trail

(Untitled) Indian c. 1967
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 articles for publication in the Society Newsletter
✓ Consultation with the Curator and Master Gardener
✓ Notification of events and activities

Giving Opportunities…

The History House Association, Inc. 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 donations are tax deductible within the limits of the IRS Code.*

For information on any of the following giving opportunities, please contact the Skowhegan History House Museum & Research Center, P.O. Box 832, Skowhegan, Maine 04976, or online at [skowheganhistoryhouse.org](http://skowheganhistoryhouse.org).

**Society Membership** Members of the Skowhegan History House Society represent patrons, families, and friends of the History House who wish to support financially the mission of preserving Skowhegan’s legacy and promoting its heritage.

**Major Partner** This level of support allows the Association to fast track projects that dramatically affect programming that preserves, protects, and promotes our heritage.

**In Memoriam** Families, family members, or friends may make memorial donations in honor of their loved one.

**Remembrance** Donations may be arranged through the deceased’s obituary notice as a remembrance.

**Annual Appeal** Contributions to the Annual Appeal advance the goals and mission, programming, and general operations.

**Stocks, Bonds, or Tangible Property** Donation of stocks, bonds, or securities is an important and useful way of supporting the History House Association Inc.

**Bequests and Trusts** Charitable donations in the form of a bequest in a will, the establishment of a trust, or other financial arrangements to support our mission are welcome.

**Historic Items** Donations that have relevance to the historic period of the museum and existing collections are appreciated.

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2018 Society Membership Form

Please renew your History House Membership or join today!

Membership dues are the History House’s major source of operating support. Consider what a strong History House means for our community and choose the level of support that’s right for you.

[] $24  [] $36  [] $60  [] $120
[] $180  [] Other Amount $________

Name ________________________________

Mailing Address ________________________________

City/ Town ________________________________

State ________________________ Zip ____________

Email ________________________________

Method of payment:

[] Check, payable to Skowhegan History House
[] VISA  [] MasterCard  [] American Express
[] Discover  [] PayPal

Card # ________________________________

Exp. Date ________________ CVV2 ________________

Signature ________________________________

For Gift Membership: Please print:

Name ________________________________

Mailing Address ________________________________

City/Town ________________________________

State ________________________ Zip ____________

Email ________________________________

Complete and Return to:
History House Association, Inc.,
PO Box 832, Skowhegan ME 04976

Your membership is tax-deductible to the extent allowed by law.
From the Archives: Boating on Lake George c. 1910