

# Yarmouth History Center Newsletter

Fall 2019

118 East Elm Street, Yarmouth, Maine

207-846-6259

## The North Yarmouth Pottery Industry: A Preview

By Justin Thomas

*Newburyport, Massachusetts collector, researcher, and writer Justin Thomas has been researching the history of this local pottery industry for the better part of a decade now. He has recently completed his research and written an in-depth feature story that will be published in the October issue of Maine Antique Digest. The story is likely the most comprehensive material ever published about this industry, citing past publications and scholarship, in addition to his own research, along with all sorts of archaeology and surviving wares.*

The late eighteenth- and nineteenth-century North Yarmouth\* red earthenware industry is an aspect of Maine's utilitarian pottery production which is somewhat forgotten today. John Thomas (1754-1843), a native of Gloucester, Massachusetts, established the industry about 1791, and he likely influenced the early part of this industry with his Essex County, Massachusetts potter's background.

John Thomas had previously worked at the Daniel Bayley (1729-1792) Pottery Company in Newburyport, Massachusetts in the 1770s and 1780s. Before that, he was apparently employed at Joseph Wilson's pottery in Providence, Rhode Island in the 1760s. Wilson's career also began in Essex County.

The Yarmouth Historical Society owns an important example of Thomas' local nineteenth-century production, in the form of a bowl, with a wide rim, decorated with an orange lead glaze on the interior. Thomas inscribed the base of the bowl, "*North Yarmouth / October 15, 1836 / John Thomas / Aged 82.*"

The family names of Brooks, Cleaves, Corliss, Foster, and Thomas are frequently associated with the North Yarmouth industry. Many of these people were also farmers, merchants, and sea captains supplementing their yearly income. It is almost certain that there were other potters who trained at these businesses in the 1800s, such as the famed Maine potter John Corliss (1799-1892), who learned about the industry at his Uncle Ebenezer Corliss' (1764-1853) company before he later established his own pottery about 1824 in Days Ferry, Woolwich, Maine.



**Above:** Justin Thomas at the Yarmouth History Center. **Below:** Nineteenth century pan attributed to the Thomas family pottery in North Yarmouth from the collection of the Yarmouth Historical Society.



\*Yarmouth was known as North Yarmouth until 1849.

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## From the Chair

The Yarmouth Historical Society is looking for a few good, young historians—more if we can get them. We're offering money (The Wellcome Prize) to find them—\$1,000 to the winner, \$500 and \$250 for runners up. And we invite you—and all interested in Cumberland County history—to hear on November 19 what the top three young historians have discovered and written.



Any high school student residing or attending school in Maine is encouraged to submit by October 1 a research paper, based on their own original historical research. Topics must be related to Cumberland County history. All entrants are encouraged to consult their local historical societies/libraries for appropriate archival materials and resources.

We look forward with great anticipation these young historians' papers (1,500 to 2,500 words) and the winners' oral presentations. We hope many in the community will join us for their brief lectures on November 19.

The Wellcome Prize is named after Elsie Wellcome (1893-1918), who was raised in Yarmouth, attended local schools, and early became involved in community activities. She joined the Village Improvement Society, participated in Town-wide beautification efforts, and was an ardent advocate for women's suffrage. Sadly, Elsie died of Spanish flu in 1918 at the age of 25.

But...if you want to hear and discuss local history sooner than November, please join us on Tuesday, September 17, for Sarah Jane Wallace's presentation on the many Depression-era Post Office murals in Maine, or on Monday, October 21, for a talk by Arthur Spiess, Senior Archaeologist, Maine Historic Preservation Commission, on the Archaeology of Casco Bay.

Looking for more? Join us for films, jointly presented with the Royal River Conservation Trust: they include *Valley Uprising* on September 17 (which is, by the way, the 137<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Battle of Antietam, the bloodiest single day of the Civil War), *The Human Element* on October 17, and *Tomorrow* which showcases alternative and creative ways of viewing agriculture, economics, energy and education, on November 21.

I hope to see you at the Yarmouth History Center.

**Bill Nugent**

## Latchstring Award Presented to Linda Grant

This past June the town celebrated the recipient of its annual Latchstring Award, Linda Grant. Linda Grant was recognized for 25 years of service to the town for her work with the Village Improvement Society, Yarmouth Historical Society, and the 2010 Comprehensive Plan Committee, just a few of the ways Linda has dedicated herself to the town.



**Above:** Linda Grant

Linda was thanked for her time, creativity, and passion that she has shared over the years, her efforts at building community, and all the projects she has taken on throughout the years. At the town meeting where Linda received her award she stated that she has enjoyed her years of work on a variety of projects important to the town, but also emphasized how it takes "a lot of willing hands to get things done."



**Left top:** Potter's kick wheel from the Foster Pottery 1840-1891, corner of Main and East Elm Streets (donated to the Yarmouth Historical Society by Gary and Pat Ricker). **Left bottom:** The ruins of Joel Brooks Pottery on East Elm Street (Collection of the Yarmouth Historical Society). **Center photo:** Various pieces of kiln furniture recovered by Chris Havey in Yarmouth. **Right top:** Large black glazed jug recovered by Chris Havey in Yarmouth; the jug is similar in form to some jugs manufactured in Essex County, Mass. **Right bottom:** Nineteenth century pot attributed to Thomas family pottery in North Yarmouth (collection of the Yarmouth Historical Society).

*Continued from Page 1*

The majority of the red earthenware industry was located at a small section in North Yarmouth, known as Corner Village, which can be found today at the intersection of East and West Elm Streets and Main Street. Multiple potters' businesses operated at this location in the 1800s.

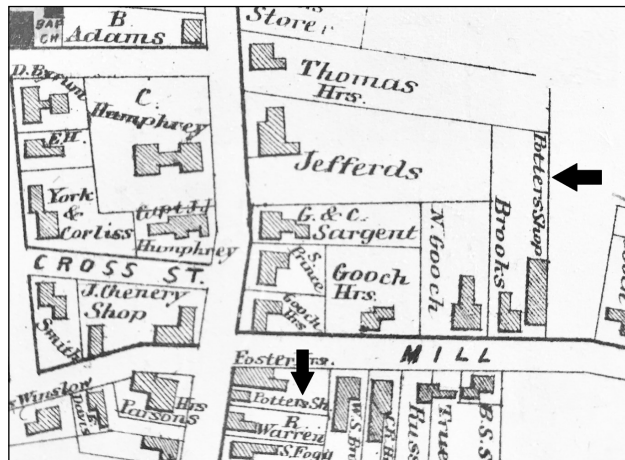
But in one way or another, the North Yarmouth industry is a major part of the history of Maine; the wares manufactured by these potters were not limited to local consumption. They were instead necessities utilized in households up and down the coast, all while contributing to the success of the state's dairy industry. These potters helped maintain the local economy, but they also contributed to the financial and everyday success of people living all over Maine.

The identity for much of the production from this industry would be lost forever if not for Gorham, Maine historian, preservationist, and Yarmouth native Chris Havey, who recovered a number of red earthenware artifacts in the 1990s from potters' sites, crawl spaces, and privies. Most of these artifacts have since been donated to the Maine Historic Preservation Commission in Augusta.

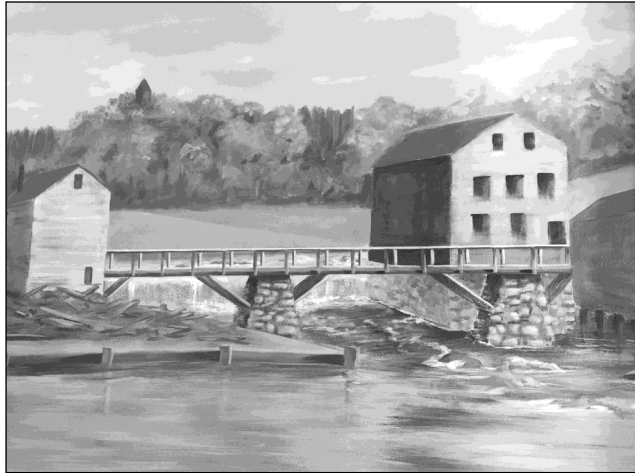
Some of the more exciting finds are the artifacts that Havey recovered from the property of the first min-

ister of the Baptist Meeting House in North Yarmouth, Reverend Thomas Green (1761-1814), who had come from Worcester, Massachusetts. A variety of locally made wares was recovered from this context.

**Below:** Detail of an 1871 map of Yarmouth with arrows indicating the location of the Foster and Brooks pottery shops in the Corner Village neighborhood. Mill Street is now called East Elm Street.



# In and Around the Yarmouth History Center



Details from the colorful mural of Yarmouth's waterfront. **Above left:** The Royal River at First Falls. **Upper right:** View of Yarmouth's working waterfront. **Right:** The family's dogs were added to the landscape.



## Collection Provides Inspiration for Mural

There is nothing better than seeing your vision become a reality. This is what Stephen Parker, the Historical Society's former Trustee and Treasurer, and his wife Jane experienced watching the evolution of the mural they commissioned for the dining room in their Yarmouth home. The subject matter of the mural went through a number of versions until the Parkers settled on creating a distinctively Yarmouth scene.

This is when Stephen approached the Yarmouth Historical Society to find images to help bring their vision to life. The staff at the Center provided Stephen and muralist Deb Hides access to the collection's images so they could compile a 360-degree view of what the town's harbor would have looked like in the mid-1800s.

Hides was asked about her research experience at the Center and said, "As far as using the Historical Society's archives, I couldn't have done it without them. The photographic references were invaluable. And, as you know, apart from being so helpful pictorially, you, and they inspired me to really get interested in local history." Parker echoed Hides, "The historical society provided us with numerous images of the waterfront in the ship building era that were essential to creating the beautiful artwork produced by Deb. The staff were super helpful in

locating images and providing the backstory of ship building history in Yarmouth." Local historian Alan Hall was also called upon to consult with the artist and the Parkers on notable landmarks for the scene.

In June the History Center staff was invited to see the completed mural. The result is stunning. Standing in the room one can imagine being at the waterfront on a bright, spring day. Rolling green hills slope toward the working shipyards while the Royal River flows into the harbor.

There are familiar landmarks in this scene still visible in today's view like Marina Road trailing up into the village. Muralist Hides also included a few images in the landscape that relate specifically to the Parker family. For example, the family dogs can be seen standing on a corner getting ready to head away from the waterfront. The mural is a beautiful work of art and the Historical Society was happy for the opportunity to provide historical images that both informed and inspired.

# In and Around the Yarmouth History Center

## Yarm-opoly

Inspired by this year's Clam Festival parade theme of board games, the staff at the History Center created YARM-OPOLY, an oversized playable version of a classic board game. The game was made available for visitors to play from mid-July to mid-August.

Many came into the Center to escape the heat and stayed to play the game long enough to collect locally-themed properties, build houses and hotels, collect rent, and learn a little bit about the history of Yarmouth.



**Above:** Museum Assistant Shelby Bryant rolls the dice testing out the Center's Yarm-opoly game.

## Walking Tours Explored the Village's Architecture

In June the History Center collaborated with the Village Improvement Society and offered three walking tours: The Harbor and Lower Village, Bridge and Main Streets, and The Upper Village. The tours were free and open to all. The well attended tours were guided by Director Katie Worthing and VIS President Linda Grant. Katie Worthing noted how great it was to see community interest in Yarmouth's architectural history. Both Katie and Linda were excited for the opportunity to share the information gathered by the recent architectural survey completed in 2018.



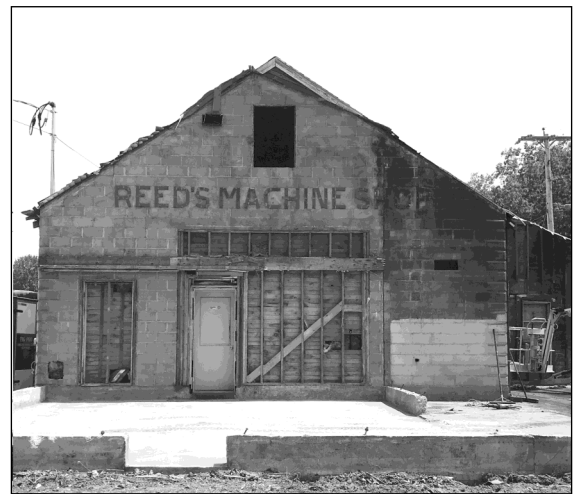
**Above:** The tour of the Upper Village led by Linda Grant.

## History Mystery

This summer the History Center received many calls alerting us to an old business sign that was revealed during the exterior renovations to the Hewitt's Auto Body building on the corner of East Elm Street and Leighton Road. Center staff contacted Dorothy Reed McAloney to help clear up the mystery surrounding the location of Reed's Machine Shop, now located at the corner of Marina and Lafayette Streets, and for the dates the business operated on East Elm Street.

Dorothy, Willis Reed's daughter, informed us that the first location of Reed's Machine Shop was near Grist Mill Park. Willis was in business there throughout the 1930s, until 1939, when he enlisted in the military. In 1945 Willis completed his military service, returned to Yarmouth, and opened Reed's Machine Shop on the corner of East Elm and Leighton Streets.

The shop was there until 1952, when he sold the property to Eastern Building Supply and moved his business to the corner of Marina and Lafayette. Willis Reed retired around 1980 and took a 3-month trip to Australia and New Zealand with his wife. He passed away in 1985.



**Above:** Reed's Machine Shop sign revealed on the corner of Leighton and East Elm Street.

We would like to thank everyone who alerted us to the sign and Dorothy for offering us the chronology of Reed's Machine Shop's locations. The Center is always ready to research any history mystery especially one that puts our mission—to collect, preserve, and share the history of Yarmouth—into action.

# Upcoming Events and Programs

## SEPTEMBER

All events take place at the History Center unless otherwise noted.



**Tuesday, September 17, 7:00 pm.**

**Lecture: WPA Post Office Murals in Maine**

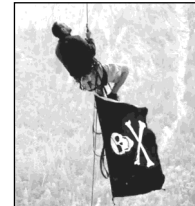
Sarah Jane Wallace, Independent Art Historian, will present her research on WPA Post Office murals in Maine. **The lecture is FREE for members and \$5.00 for all others.**



**Thursday, September 19, 7:00 pm**

**Film: *Valley Uprising***

A riveting, unforgettable tale of the bold rock climbing tradition in Yosemite National Park: half a century of struggle against the laws of gravity -- and the laws of the land. The film series is co-hosted with the Royal River Conservation Trust. **FREE**



## OCTOBER



**Tuesday, October 15, 7:00 pm**

**Readers Circle: *Our Beloved Kin* by Lisa Brooks**

Brooks' innovative scholarship is grounded not just in extensive archival research but also in the land and communities of Native New England, leading the reader to a new understanding of the history of colonial New England and of American origins. **FREE**

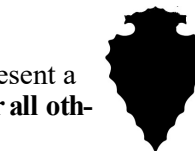


**Thursday, October 17, 7:00 pm**

**Film: *The Human Element***

In this compelling, unsettling, and visually stunning documentary, National Geographic photographer James Balog explores the ever-changing and significant effects of the human race on a fragile world.

The film series is co-hosted with the Royal River Conservation Trust. **FREE**



**Monday, October 21, 7:00 pm**

**Lecture: Archaeology of Casco Bay**

Arthur Spiess, Senior Archaeologist, Maine Historic Preservation Commission, will present a talk on the Archaeology of Casco Bay. **The lecture is FREE for members and \$5.00 for all others.**

## NOVEMBER

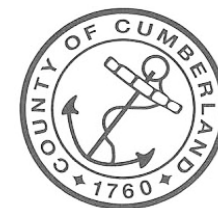


**Tuesday, November 19, 7:00 pm**

**Lecture: Winners of The Wellcome Prize for Maine Student Historians**

Topics in Cumberland County history. See our website for full competition details.

**The lecture is FREE for members and \$5.00 for all others.**

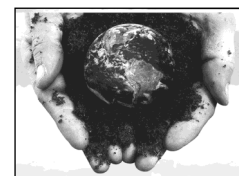


**Thursday, November 21, 7:00 pm**

**Film: *Tomorrow***

This documentary sets out to showcase alternative and creative ways of viewing agriculture, economics, energy and education.

The film series is co-hosted with the Royal River Conservation Trust. **FREE**



**Royal River Film Series—Films for 2020**

Check our website for the complete film list.

These events are **FREE** and open to the public. Refreshments and cookies by Maple's.

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# Yarmouth's Railroad Icon: A Look Back at the Grand Trunk Station

By Connor Tull, YHS Class of 2020

For the past six weeks I have had the pleasure of being able to work as a summer intern at the Yarmouth Historical Society. During that time, I have worked with several exhibits, categorized artifacts and objects, and gotten a first-hand look at what it is like to be a historian. While doing my research, one theme that pops up again and again is change. Change, or rather, the collection of changes that happened before, forms the very bedrock of history. One industry that is perfect for exemplifying this theme is the railroads. Ever since I was a kid I have been fascinated by trains and the railroad industry, studying the way they worked, the lines they ran, and how they could completely decide the fate of towns economically. Considering that we are fortunate enough to have our very own piece of railroad history, the Grand Trunk station, allow me to tell you its fascinating story.

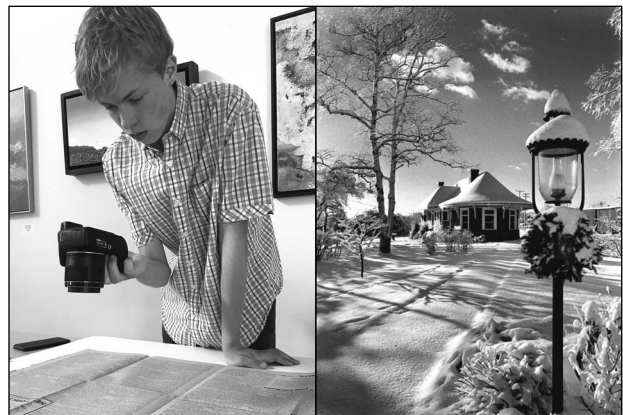
The area that would become the site of the Grand Trunk station was first utilized by the Atlantic and St. Lawrence Railroad. This railroad was incorporated in part due to the vision of a man named John Alfred Poor, who for much of his life was obsessed with building the railroad system in Maine. Poor believed that by building a route from Montreal to Portland, Montreal could receive an ice-free port for shipping and commercial traffic could be diverted from Boston to Portland. As the Montreal Board of Trade was weighing its decision, Poor made a legendary 500 mile trip through the White Mountains during a harsh February blizzard. He succeeded in getting the Board to approve the line at the cost of severe frostbite and pneumonia. The Atlantic & St. Lawrence was chartered in Maine on February 10, 1845, with the first section between Portland and Yarmouth completed in July 20, 1848.

Once the line opened it was very successful, bringing in an average of 174 passengers daily. Five years later, in August 1853, the Grand Trunk Railway leased the company and its line. In 1906 the passenger depot was built, intending to serve as an important junction where the GTR crossed into its northwesterly course into Canada. Unfortunately, in the 1920s due to budget constraints and lack of expansion the GTR went bankrupt and was nationalized by the Canadian government. Its subsidiary, Canadian National Railways, continued to run the line and station until 1968 when it was purchased by the Village Improvement Society for \$500 to prevent demolition. And that brings us to today.

The architecture of the station is one of its most unique characteristics. It is a single-story wood frame structure, set on a granite block foundation. It has a hip roof and clapboard siding and is roughly rectangular in shape with small projecting sections on either side and a semicircular wooden frame on the northern end. The roof has extended eaves, typical of many railroad stations, with the eaves supported by large decoratively-cut brackets. What makes it special is that the overall design of the station is not only generally rare, but that it is also the only station of this



**Above:** Yarmouth's Grand Trunk station built in 1906. **Below left:** Connor Tull photographing news articles from 1905. **Below right:** The station in winter.



architectural style in the entire state. It was also added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1979, one of only two Grand Trunk Railway stations in Maine to hold this honor.

As I'm sure many of you have noticed, the Grand Trunk station is again experiencing the presence of change. Gorham Savings Bank is renovating the building as part of its lease there. They intend to provide more relaxed "conciierge" style services separate from a busier branch bank while also updating the surrounding area. And while some may decry the conversion of such a historic place into an area of business, I personally support the work being done there. Finding new ways to breathe life back into places like the station not only ensure that we will continue to have them around for longer, but that more people will have the chance to be immersed in the history of the station and the town itself. And as long as this station stands, I am happy to know that Yarmouth can ride the tide of change with grace.

You are invited to  
the Yarmouth Historical Society's  
**Annual Meeting**  
Monday, October 21, 2019

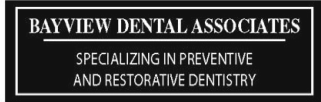
After a brief meeting  
the featured speaker, Arthur Spiess,  
Senior Archaeologist at the Maine Historic  
Preservation Commission, will present a talk  
on the archaeology of Casco Bay.



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