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Family's Gift Preserved and Shared

by Katie Worthing, Executive Director

In late 2023, the History Center received a generous gift of four paintings from Deborah Small Harris. Although she hails from Charlotte, North Carolina, Deborah has deep family roots in Yarmouth and an abiding affection for her family's hometown. These works were donated in honor of her Small family relatives and ancestors. We are thrilled to add them to our collection and share them with visitors to the Center over the next several months. All four pieces are currently on display together in our museum.

Although these paintings may initially seem to present an unrelated array of styles and subjects, when exhibited together they embody a fascinating microcosm of Yarmouth's history over the past two centuries. Stretching from the 1840s through the 1950s, these works touch on topics like architectural preservation, Yarmouth's seafaring past, the role of art in 19th century women's lives, and the value of preserving and sharing family heirlooms.

The oldest of the four paintings is the c. 1846 portrait of Sarah D. Chambers (1838-1894), which was almost certainly painted by Eliza McLellan Mayall (1822-1849), Sarah's first cousin once removed. Eliza was the daughter of Anna Nancy Hicks and Samuel Mayall of Gray; Samuel Mayall had established North America's first successful water-powered woolen mill there in 1791. *Although long closed and now in ruins, the mill site is preserved and accessible through the Maine Bureau of Parks and Lands' Pineland Public Reserved Lands.* The sitter in our portrait is Sarah D. Chambers, who was born in Portland to Margaret T. Lane and Thomas B. Chambers on 23 May 1838. Her father died in 1840 and her mother later remarried Jeremiah Loring III of Yarmouth in 1853. The Loring house still stands at 52 West Elm Street. It's highly likely that Sarah also came to Yarmouth with her mother in the 1850s. She is listed as living with her mother in the Loring house in the 1860 census.



Above: 1846 portrait of Sarah D. Chambers attributed to artist Eliza McLellan Mayall.

The close family relationships among Sarah, Margaret, and Eliza imbue this piece with a special significance and provide us with a remarkable window into the lives of women in Maine in mid-19th century. Eliza's sensitive handling of Sarah's face and curls suggests a closeness between painter and sitter. An education in the genteel arts of floral and portrait painting would have been appropriate for a young woman like Eliza, who was part of a prominent family charting their path toward financial success. Eliza ensured that Sarah, with her pretty lace-edged dress and gold-embossed book, likewise evinced these refined qualities.

The two watercolors in this new collection date to the 1950s and were painted by New Jersey artist Russell J. Conn (1896-1983) while vacationing in Yarmouth with his brother and some local friends. Following an early retirement in

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From the Chair



Binks Colby-George



Do you know a high school aged person who is interested in History? The Yarmouth History Center has several opportunities for young historians to grow and learn in the field. With a little planning ahead students can take advantage of these opportunities.

Yearly the Center holds the Wellcome Prize competition for topics related to Cumberland County. Students can submit either a research paper or a short film about their findings and will be asked to present their work to the public as a feature of our Fall Lecture Series. Entries are judged on quality of research and effectiveness of communication for each type of media. First prize winners will receive \$1000, second prize \$500, and third prize will be awarded \$250. Details may be found on our homepage under Latest News, or visit www.yarmouthmehistory.org/the-wellcome-prize/

In addition, the History Center offers a paid summer internship program made possible by a grant gifted to the Center. The paid internship is awarded to a rising junior with an interest in History or Museum Studies and attending school in Yarmouth. This is a good way to get firsthand museum and research experience working directly with the staff and collections at Yarmouth History Center.

Binks Colby-George
Chair, Board of Trustees

Yarmouth
Historical Society

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Student History Contest Wellcome Prize



PRIZES

1st prize \$1000
2nd prize \$500
3rd prize \$250

Three prizes
awarded for
both Film &
Research Paper

Offered by
Yarmouth History Center

A competition open to
Maine high school students.
Create a video or write
a research paper on any
historical topic relating to
Cumberland County.

Visit yarmouthmehistory.org
for more information
Entrants should be in high
school during the fall of 2024

Upcoming Fall Lecture Series

September 18, 7:00

Vivian Cunningham

“Maine’s Connections to the Cotton Industry
in the 19th Century”

October 9, 7:00 Annual Meeting

Seth Goldstein

“Maine and New England's Black Sailors”

November 20, 7:00

2024 Winners of the Wellcome Prize for Student Historians

Lectures will take place at the History Center.

Lectures are free and open to all.

Series sponsored by the Leon and Lisa Gorman Fund.

Storage Space

The History Center is searching for a local, offsite location for its overflow collections inventory.

If you are aware of approximately 2,000 sq feet of dry, heated, secure, ground level space for rent please email Katie at the History Center kworthing@yarmouthmehistory.org

Mitchell Funeral Records Available Online

by Grave Atwood, Museum Assistant

This time last year I introduced the Harry B. Mitchell Funeral Home Registers that I was working on digitizing. Now, a year later, they're done! All four volumes have been converted into digital files that can be searched easily and used for research without risking damage to the original books. Records like these can be invaluable for researchers looking into family trees, how prolific certain illnesses were, and employment patterns, among many other subjects.

Now that the volumes are fully digitized, we're happy to announce that they are on our website for public access and research. The records can be found under the Research tab on our website.

There are two documents, the direct digitization in PDF and a keyword document in Microsoft Excel. The direct digitization is a page-by-page transcription of the volumes with supplemental information added in red. The supplemental information is taken from sources like FamilySearch, Find A Grave, and Newspapers.com. The keyword document is a collection of search terms (some of which are multiple words) that can be used to search within the direct digitization. This was created to provide a more concise reference list so researchers can get a better idea of what the digitization contains. For example, if the keyword document has 'Yarmouth, Me' as a term listed in the Birthplace column, then at least one person in the direct digitization was born in Yarmouth and will come up in a search of the digitization. Importantly, the keyword documents do not have repeated terms within a single column and are not meant to be used as statistical sources.

A digitizing project like this can be a tremendous undertaking, especially when doing extra research to fill in gaps in the original source. I started transcribing the pages by hand into a notebook and then typing the information from the notebook which was a slow and admittedly clumsy method. Part way through the second volume I switched to taking photos of each page of each volume so that the transcription was directly from the volumes to the Google document I was working in. This sped the process up considerably, although there is something of a terminal velocity where a person can only type so fast.

Before beginning the transcription of each volume, I would use the photos of the pages to give further information on each of the deceased. Some of the records have information missing and sources like FamilySearch and Find A Grave can fill in the gaps. Halfway through the third volume I gained access to Newspapers.com and included it in the list of sources that I could go to when faced with a missing piece of information. Newspapers.com often provided ages and occasionally causes of

RECORD OF A DEATH

Name, Zoe W. Lovell

Place of Death, Yarmouth, Me.

No. SPRING Street

Ward. Village.

How long a resident, 15 years

Previous residence,

Date of Death: Year 1918 Month Sept. Day 26

Age: Years 15 Months 9 Days 7

Place of Birth, Yarmouth, Me.

Date of Birth: Year 1902 Month Dec. Day 22

Sex, F. Color, W. Married, Single, S. Widowed, or Divorced.

Occupation, Scholar

Name of Father, Harlan P. Lovell

Maiden Name of Mother, Bertha M. Anderson

Birthplace of Father, Yarmouth, Me.

Birthplace of Mother, " "

Occupation of Father, LABORER

Deceased was wife of,

Widow of,

Cause of Death, Lobar pneumonia

Duration, 4 days

Contributing cause, Influenza ✓

Duration, 8 days

Above: The death record of Zoe W. Lovell of Yarmouth who died during the flu epidemic of 1918 at the age of 15 years.

death and, if I was particularly lucky, where a person was born and assorted family members. Using multiple sources allowed cross-referencing to ensure that I had found the correct person's records and wasn't about to ascribe the wrong information to the wrong person.

Sifting through funeral records can also lead to some interesting, if sad, stories about the people in the records. As you might expect, there aren't many happy stories to come from funeral records, but they can lead you down a rabbit hole of headlines about a seventeen-year-old murdered by her husband and his trial or the consequences of a failed abortion. There are plenty of interesting records with unanswered questions or curious details and now they're available to peruse on our website.

In and Around the History Center



Above, left to right: Trivia Night at Brickyard Hollow, teams the “Know It Alls,” Freeport’s “Bingo,” and “Old Timers!!”

Yarmouth Trivia Night

After the April ice storm cancellation, Yarmouth Trivia Night 3 finally came together on May 6th at Brickyard Hollow. Seven teams showed up to display their Yarmouth knowledge and compete for bragging rights and prizes.

The competition was lively during the early questions of the quiz with all the teams’ scores close. No clear winner emerged. Midway through the quiz a few teams would pull ahead but the scores stayed close right down to the last question! The “Know It Alls” comprised of members of our last trivia night winners competed under a different team name and won 1st place with the score of 25.5 points. They edged out the “Old Timers!!” by only a half of a point while team Kangaroos and The Drinkwater Project came in close behind the “Old Timers!!”. Freeport’s Sophie Swiatek and Scott Hendee came to Brickyard Hollow for dinner and ended up forming team “Bingo.” Despite placing last, team “Bingo” was thrilled to be awarded a prize for being named the “Team That Tried the Hardest but Still Came in Last.”

Era of Change 1955-1962

If you missed the gathering at the History Center on Saturday, May 4th do not dismay! You still have an opportunity to hear about Yarmouth during the years 1955-1962, a pivotal era for the town. Yarmouth Municipal Television recorded the program. It is available on their YouTube channel and is linked from our home page, Inside Yarmouth History - Panel: Yarmouth 1955-1962.

These years brought a new public high school, the bridge to Cousins Island, and the arrival of the interstate, all of which changed the way people lived and worked in Yarmouth. The program was a collaboration between Yarmouth Historical Society and Allan Wilson and Rick Wile, both members of the NYA class of 1961. Joining Wilson and Wile on the panel as speakers were Barbara Peaslee aka Coky Burnham, Joe Saunders, Ted Sharp, and Kenna Small. In a conversational format, the panelists shared their insights and experiences gained from living and learning in Yarmouth at this important time. The audience also had an opportunity to ask questions and add their insights.



Above: Allan Wilson and Rick Wile, event organizers, and panel members share their experiences growing up in Yarmouth.

In and Around the History Center



Above: Trustee Ed Libby, volunteer Steve Goessling, Trustee Melina Roberts, and volunteer Rob Anderson clean up the garden.

Weather or Not

This year our volunteers for the spring garden clean-up endured two weather reschedules. The third scheduled workday started at 10 and despite the gray skies the crew went right to work. One hour later the skies opened up and it poured. The downpour did not deter our unstoppable Trustee and master gardener Pam Adams who managed to work her way down the walkway and finished sprucing up the front garden despite the pouring rain. Thank you Pam!

It certainly looked like it was going to be another wash-out, but the group was determined to get the job done. It was decided to delay the work for later in the day. Those in the group who were available agreed to reconvene at the Center when the rain stopped. Aside from the typical spring garden tasks the late spring storms left a lot of debris around the grounds to be dealt with.

Trustee and organic victory farmer, Melina Roberts felt bad that she did not get pictures from the morning crew before they were drenched. The efforts of both groups were successful in removing the spring storm debris and cleaning up the gardens despite the weather challenges.

Get ready for our next Yarmouth Trivia event!

Which Yarmouth property had its landscaping designed by Fredrick Law Olmstead's firm?

- North Yarmouth Academy
- Camp Hammond
- Merrill Memorial Library

Answer: b



Above Left: Caroline Knott **Upper Right:** Portrait of Edward Thaxter **Lower Right:** "Pouting" by Edward Thaxter.

Sharing History

Supporting our mission by creating opportunities to share the Society's collection and Yarmouth's history is why we are here. It is doubly special when our presenter has intimate knowledge of the history we are sharing.

In April, the volunteer docents of Portland's Victoria Mansion were invited to the History Center for a presentation by Trustee Caroline Knott who used objects from the Center's collection to share details about the life and work of Yarmouth sculptor, Edward Thaxter (1857-1881). Victoria Mansion has a sculpture by Thaxter and the docents were happy to learn more about the artist who created the piece.

Knott's family was related to Yarmouth artist Leila Small who was a close friend of Thaxter at the time of his unexpected and tragically early death. Knott, on behalf of her family, donated a collection of letters that Thaxter had sent to Leila in 1870s and 80s from Italy where he was studying and creating sculpture. Knott shared excerpts from the letters that offer insight into Thaxter's creative process and about his daily life in Italy in the late 1800s. We hope to offer this program to the public in the future.

Thank you Caroline!



Top: Neighbors gathering on the lawn 5 West Main Street;
Bottom left: Event host and Trustee Sarah Day with Tom and Liz Reinsborough; **Bottom right:** Volunteers help set up the canopy.

Lawn Party Shares Neighborhood History

The front lawn of 5 West Main Street, the former home of captain Samuel Drinkwater (circa 1803), and the current home of Historical Society Trustee Sarah Day and her family, was the perfect location to spend a Friday evening serving refreshments and local history.

The lawn party was a great way for us to connect with old friends and meet those new to the neighborhood. Of course, we took the opportunity to introduce folks to the History Center and share historical stories and photos of the neighborhood from the Historical Society's collection. Historical pieces also arrived with guests Tom and Liz Reinsborough who shared a dairy license and a photograph of the farm stand once operated on East Elm Street by the former owner of their property.

Our thanks to the Day family for lending us their front lawn for the event. Also, thanks to the Days for the help setting up the event along with Trustee Melina Roberts and volunteers Riley Anderson and Audrey Goessling. Thanks to Trustee Ed Libby, Amy Panagakos, and Stephen Goessling along with the Day family for helping with the speedy clean up. And a big thank you to Mother Nature who paused the rain long enough for us to hold the event. Look for more local history events happening in other Yarmouth neighborhoods in the future.



Above: The new Director's Office in progress at the Center.

New Workspace

One noticeable change at the Center is the recently completed Executive Director's office. This new space allows the Director to hold both in-person and online meetings and provides a staging area for new acquisitions and current projects.

The office was designed by local architect Frank Roberts with materials from business partner Hancock Lumber and construction work done by a division of our business partner Brad Moll, owner of Brickyard Hollow. We want to thank them all for creating this new workspace.

Family's Gift *Continued from page 1*

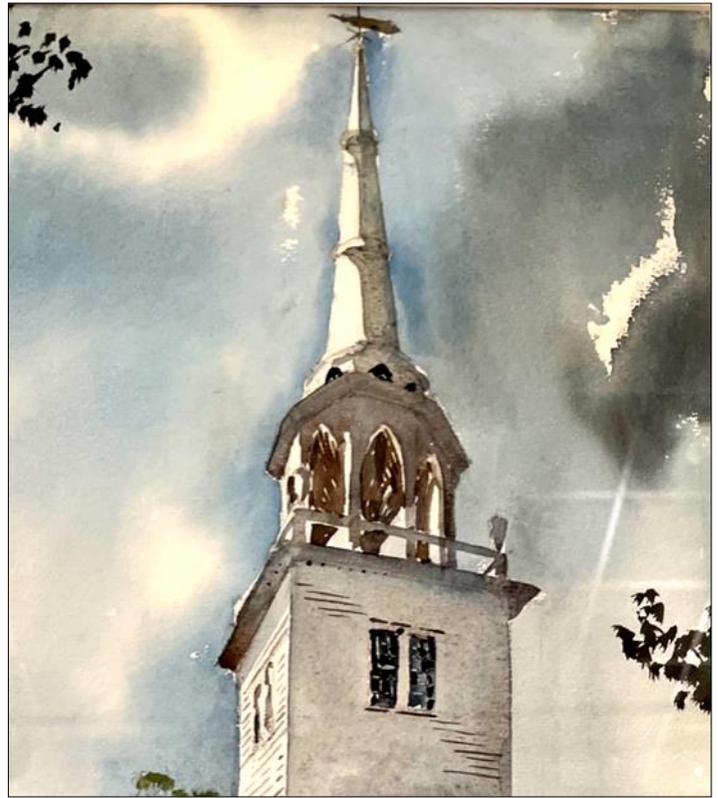
his 40s, Conn took up painting, primarily in watercolor, and is said to have produced between 4,000 and 5,000 paintings before his death in 1983.

Conn's facility with the watercolor medium shines through in these works, which depict two local landmarks in Yarmouth: the c. 1817 Reuben Prince House at 210 Gilman Road and the 1796 Old Baptist Meetinghouse on Hillside Street. He captures the essential architectural details of each place, making them instantly recognizable to locals. Even 70 years later, Conn's paintings still feel fresh: the preparatory pencil lines visible underneath the washes of bright color suggest a moving paintbrush, capturing shifting light, fluttering leaves, and life within each building. For viewers, this effect is a bridge through time, back to Conn's mid-20th century summers in Yarmouth. He, in turn, provided us with glimpses of two of Yarmouth's well preserved historic buildings and the elements that made them special then and now.

Built in the Soule shipyard of South Freeport in 1879, the ship *Paraminta* is shown here in a dramatic setting, as dark clouds gather to the left and the vessel moves between the heavy waves toward calmer weather on the right. Through the 1890s, she was engaged in cargo freighting to and from ports including New York, San Francisco, Liverpool, Melbourne, Kolkata (formerly Calcutta), Hong Kong, and Manila. During the mid-1880s, the *Paraminta* was captained by Claude Lawrence (1844-1894) of West Elm Street in Yarmouth.

Although the painting is unsigned, we can surmise that Capt. Lawrence commissioned the work, perhaps during a stopover in port. It was common for major international shipping ports to play host to a community of professional artists whose livelihoods centered around painting the various vessels that called. Although the stormy setting is somewhat unusual for this type of marine painting, the work nevertheless provides minute details about the vessel's characteristic rigging, signal flags, crew, and decks, making it a true portrait of the ship. In these ways, the painting of the *Paraminta* provides a striking and suitable pendant to the portrait of Sarah Chambers.

All four paintings pull at strands of local history and daily life in Yarmouth over the past centuries. From the domestic setting of Sarah Chambers' portrait and the window it offers us into the lives of women in the mid-19th century to the potent reminder of Yarmouth's seafaring prowess in the *Paraminta* to the widespread appreciation for historic structures that Conn's watercolors reveal, this group of paintings offer a wonderfully concise, yet rich, look at Yarmouth's past.



Above: Conn's watercolor of the Baptist Meetinghouse, detail of the Meetinghouse's steeple.



Above: The portrait of the ship *Paraminta*, detail of the vessel's bow and sailors working on deck.

Many thanks to Susan Lane Fuss for her thorough research into the Chambers and Mayall families and to Richard Stower for his meticulous research tracing the movements of the "Paraminta" while it was in service.



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