



## This Issue:

**Page 1**  
Wellcome Prize  
Winners

**Page 2**  
From the Chair

Winter Field  
Trip

**Page 3**  
Connection &  
Controversy

**Page 4**  
Memories of  
Grantville

Yarmouth  
Centenarian  
Celebrates

**Page 5**  
Thank you  
Annual Fund  
Donors

**Page 6**  
Connection &  
Controversy  
*continued*

**Page 7**  
Connection &  
Controversy  
*continued*  
Scouts on Tour

**Page 8**  
Thank you  
Business  
Members

## 2024 Wellcome Prize Winners



**Above left:** Postcard of the Portland Observatory; **Above center:** Image from the student film *The Battle of Portland Harbor*; **Above right:** Gravestone of Brunswick, Maine Civil War general Joshua L. Chamberlain, **Right bottom:** Early 1960 image of 295 under construction in Yarmouth, **Center bottom:** Photo of Steamer.

In November, the Yarmouth History Center announced the winners of the 2024 Wellcome Prize for Student Historians. The Wellcome Prize is Yarmouth History Center’s student history competition, which is open to high school students in Maine.

Students are invited to undertake original historical research about a local history topic related to Cumberland County and write a research paper or make a film about their findings. Entries were judged on the quality of research and presentation. This year’s winners presented their papers and films at the History Center as part of the Fall Lecture Series.

This year the winning students submitted works that covered a wide range of subjects relating to Cumberland County. First prize in the research paper category was awarded to North Yarmouth Academy’s Ethan Sweeney for his paper, *The Portland Observatory*. Sweeney’s paper shares the history of this landmark structure as well as information about its construction and uses over the decades. Second prize was awarded to Yarmouth High School’s Matthew Dressel for his paper, *Connection and Controversy: Yarmouth’s*

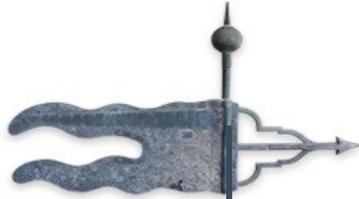
*Opposition to Interstate 295*. Because the subject of this paper relates directly to Yarmouth we have shared Matt’s research on page 3 of this newsletter. Third prize went to North Yarmouth Academy’s Sadie Swenson for her paper on Brunswick and the Civil War. Swenson highlights two notable Brunswick citizens who played pivotal roles during the conflict.

This year there were two winners in the film category. First prize was awarded to a team of Yarmouth High School students: Adam Strobel, Kevin Carr, and Ella Cameron. The team produced the documentary film, *The Battle of Portland Harbor* exploring the Civil War battle that took place off the coast of Maine’s largest city. Second prize was awarded to North Yarmouth Academy’s Chris Noreika for his film *The Yarmouth Clam Festival: A Local Tradition*. Chris’ film presents the history of the festival and insights from festival volunteers and attendees.

Visit [www.yarmouthmehistory.org/2024-wellcome-prize-winners/](http://www.yarmouthmehistory.org/2024-wellcome-prize-winners/) to read and view the 2024 Wellcome Prize papers and films.

*Continued on Page 4*

# From the Chair



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This past November we featured the winning writers and filmmakers of the 2024 Wellcome Prize competition. Links to the papers and films are on our website. In this newsletter we chose to feature the research done by Yarmouth's Matt Dressel because the subject, the history of the construction of Interstate 295 through Yarmouth, directly speaks to an event in our more recent history.

Matt Dressel's research dovetails nicely with Arlene Morton's shared history of Grantville found on page 6 in this newsletter. Grantville was a harborside neighborhood that was removed when Interstate 295 was built through Yarmouth. Interestingly, the first house I owned in Yarmouth was originally constructed near Grantville. I was outside shoveling snow one day when a car pulled up and the driver introduced himself as a former occupant of the house from when it was down by the Royal River. It turns out that when I-295 was going to come through many of the houses were relocated. My house was moved intact up the hill to a new lot on Bayview Street. Katie later confirmed this with me by helping me find photos of the house in its original location. We never know where the past will intersect the present.



Binks Colby-George



Trustee Betsy Langer assisting young visitors at a Herbie activity table.

This year the History Center has started a new series of family friendly events. On February 8 the first event "Celebrate Herbie" featured activities centered around Yarmouth's magnificent elm tree and history. The second event, "Celebrate Sandy," on March 15, highlights the museum's interactive display Sandy, the mechanical horse from Goff's Hardware Store. The event offers opportunities to play games and interact with antique toys. Please visit our website for more information on these and other upcoming events.

I want to echo the "Thank You" to our Annual Fund donors – you make Yarmouth Historical Society and the History Center possible. If you are interested in donating, there is still time to get your 2024-2025 donation in.

Binks Colby-George  
Vice Chair, Board of Trustees



Friends School 2nd graders view the Railroad Bridge on East Elm Street

## Winter Field Trip

In January, before the snow fell, a hardy group of 2<sup>nd</sup> graders from the Friends School of Portland took a winter field trip and walked along Yarmouth's Royal River Park pathway in order to view the bridges that traverse the river.

Before the field trip the school approached the History Center for information about the bridges' construction, materials, and usage. Director Katie Worthing found plenty of resources in the Historical Society's archives to add information and a bit of local history to this class's engineering unit.

# Connection and Controversy: Yarmouth's Opposition to Interstate 295

2024 Wellcome Prize Winner: Matthew Dressel, Yarmouth High School

Without a doubt, Maine's reigning status as vacationland wouldn't be the same without the Interstate Highway System. Maine's highway system boasts an impressive 367 miles of interstate highway which provides rapid transportation throughout the state. There were quite a few bumps in the road (no pun intended), especially in regards to building Interstate 295 through Yarmouth, Maine. In order to truly understand why things happened the way they did, it is important to know how transportation was done before the Interstate System.

With the invention of the automobile, things would never be the same for planning and linking cities and towns. It is estimated that in 1920, 20% of the American population had an automobile, but by 1929 nearly 60% of the population had an automobile (Cochrane). This explosion of the amount of people with cars meant that roads became of utmost importance. The first road to arise from the growing need for better roads was US Route One in 1926. Route One was crucial for the growth of Maine's tourism industry as it meant that people could travel further, and therefore spend more money. Eventually, there was too much traffic for Route One to handle which led to the creation of the Maine Turnpike.

The first section of the Maine Turnpike from Kittery to Portland was completed in 1947, 9 years before the Interstate Highway Act was created. The Maine Turnpike was the first superhighway in New England and the second modern toll highway in all of the US. This impressive feat of engineering that led the way for many other highway projects after it is something that every Mainer should be proud of. The success of the Maine Turnpike showed how beneficial highways could be and inspired the creation of new ones. In 1955, an extension of the Maine Turnpike was completed from Portland to Augusta. One of the most important things that separated the Maine Turnpike from the later construction of I-295 was the fact that the Maine Turnpike was completely self-financed. This means that it wasn't financed with state or federal funding, but with \$20 million of bonds that were paid by tolls meaning that taxpayers never paid a cent extra in taxes (Maine Turnpike). The fact that the Maine Turnpike was able to be financed so responsibly led to criticisms about the funding of I-295 later on. The Maine Turnpike was the first superhighway in the world to use asphalt instead of concrete for paving (Maine Turnpike). This was seen as a controversial move at the time, but after the asphalt survived Maine's cold winters, the experiment was a success and asphalt became the main paving material. Interestingly enough, Route One



**Above:** 1958 photograph of groundwork preparations for the construction of Interstate 95 (now US Route 295) through Yarmouth.

in Yarmouth still continued to use concrete throughout the 1950s, and in a Portland Press Herald article from October 1957, it shows concrete paved Route One being repaired with more concrete (Patching Breaks).

The 1956 National Interstate and Defense Highways Act was the biggest public works project in our nation's history, authorizing \$25 billion to build highways. Signed by President Dwight D. Eisenhower, the act established 40,000 miles of freeways, intended to improve transportation and commerce (National Interstate). The supposed benefits of the interstate system were: to be safer than traditional roads, quicker transportation of people and commerce, and a standardization across the highways. Since Interstates don't have intersections or other obstructions, it makes them safer than traditional roads. Without obstructions on the interstate, transportation is faster and since every interstate highway has to be designed with the same specifications, it means that no matter where you go, the interstate will always be reliable. Despite the many positives associated with Interstates, there are also some negatives.

The controversies surrounding the Interstate projects are that they are expensive, unnecessary, and that people don't like the use of eminent domain/the fifth amendment. Since the average household income in 1956 was \$4,800, the \$25 billion dollar price tag would've shocked any who heard it (US Department). The Interstate System doesn't get its money through direct taxes though, but rather indirect taxes like the gas tax which lessen the burden on taxpayers. Eminent domain is a constitutional power in the fifth amendment that allows

*Continued on Page 6*

# In and Around the History Center



**Above left:** Arlene Morton and her son Fred Morton visit the History Center.

**Above right:** Making way for the Interstate.

**Right:** Grantville along Yarmouth's harbor.



**Above:** Katie Worthing and Hazel Currier; Hazel at the Hazel and Owen Currier Doll Museum.

## Memories of Grantville

In December 2024, Director Katie Worthing had the opportunity to sit down and chat with longtime Yarmouth resident Arlene Morton and her son Fred Morton about Arlene's memories of growing up, working, and raising a family in Yarmouth over the years. Arlene shared many stories and anecdotes about her time in Yarmouth, and also helped document details about Yarmouth's Grantville neighborhood, where many of her family members lived before the construction of the highway. The Grantville neighborhood, which once lined the northern shore of the harbor at the base of the East Main Street hill, was removed to make way for the 295 overpass in the late 1950s. Arlene's recorded memories will become part of our growing oral history collection to help aid researchers in the future. *Interested in recording an oral history with us? Contact Katie to discuss: [kworthing@yarmouthmehistory.org](mailto:kworthing@yarmouthmehistory.org)*

## Centenarian Celebration

On December 10th, the Center temporarily closed so staff could attend the 100th birthday party for Yarmouth Historical Society member Hazel Currier. Despite the new snowfall the Casco Lodge Community Room was filled with Hazel's family and friends who gathered for lunch to celebrate her milestone birthday.

At the luncheon Yarmouth Town Councilor Karin Orenstein awarded Hazel the honor of being named the recipient of Yarmouth's Boston Cane. The Boston Post Cane is a tradition that started in 1909. Edwin A. Grozier, the publisher of the Boston Post, sent a gold-headed ebony cane to the Boards of Selectmen to over seven hundred New England towns to recognize their oldest resident. Yarmouth's Boston Cane is currently on display in the town hall along with the names of past recipients. Hazel received her honor in the form of a framed certificate.

Hazel has achieved much in her long life. At ninety-one Hazel made the news when she donated her extensive doll collection to the Fryeburg Historical Society. Her collection of over 10,000 dolls now resides in the Hazel and Owen Currier Doll Museum located in the historic Fryeburg Town House.

## Annual Fund *Continued from page 5*

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Gifts from February 12, 2024 to February 21, 2025. Donations support the operations of the History Center with every dollar donated going toward preserving and sharing the history of Yarmouth. We are grateful for your support!

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## In Memoriam

### In memory of Jean Carr Semonite

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### In memory of Kenna Small

Hazel Currier

### In memory of Margaret W. Soule

Mary LeMaistre

# Connection and Controversy *Continued from Page 3*

the government to take private property for public use, but the government must provide just compensation. This aspect made interstates controversial for two reasons. Firstly, because people don't like to have their private property taken, and secondly, it can be very difficult to appraise the property taken which can lead to intense legal battles.

Throughout this essay, I will be referring to the Interstate that goes through Yarmouth as I-295 for the sake of consistency although that wasn't always necessarily the case. Present day I-295 was referred to as both I-95 and I-295. Technically, until 2004, I-295 only went from Portland to the Falmouth Spur and the rest of I-295 was called I-95 despite it being continuous throughout. In 2004, the highways in Maine were renumbered for the sake of clarity, and it was established that I-295 went from Portland to Gardiner (as we know it today).

The first proposition of a plan for I-295 came in the Portland Press Herald on January 24th, 1957. I-295 was to be built in sections, the first section was from Portland to Yarmouth and in subsequent years other sections would be built. The plan shows 4 possible routes from Portland to Yarmouth with prices ranging from \$13,482,400 to \$18,284,000 (Engineers). The route that was chosen was option 4: 11.4 miles and \$13,482,400. This price tag must have shocked Cumberland County residents because the 50 mile stretch from Kittery to Portland only cost \$20 million whereas this 11 mile stretch would cost nearly \$13.5 million.

The first piece of criticism came out in an article in the Yarmouth Shopping Notes newspaper less than two months later on March 14th, 1957. The article called the highway and proposed a coordination of opposition between Yarmouth, Falmouth, and Cumberland although nothing much ever came of that. The final line sums up the beliefs of the article pretty well: "we don't need it, we don't want it" (The Shopping Notes). Adding fuel to the fire, during a joint meeting between the Yarmouth Chamber of Commerce and the Maine State Highway Department, written about in the Portland Press Herald on April 14, 1957, the Highway Commissioner refused to answer a question about the highway's economic impact on the town. This made the people of Yarmouth mad for two reasons: firstly because the Interstate Highway Act required that the people of a town proposed to be affected by an interstate must be aware of the economic impacts, and secondly because it made the people of Yarmouth feel like they were being ignored and that their voices weren't being heard. All of this tension culminated in a hearing about the highway on May 7th, 1957. Yarmouth residents tried to invoke a legal argument about a Maine statute and vote on this issue, but the Highway Commission said that any action that the town takes would not be

binding (Yarmouth Plans Special). The votes were tallied, and in a Portland Press Herald article on May 10th, it was described that "200 irate citizens of Yarmouth voted [unanimously]" against the highway (Yarmouth Votes Down).

On January 21st, 1958, Yarmouth Chamber of Commerce Secretary Kenneth G. Larrabee contacted Governor Edmund Muskie trying to change the location of the final hearing for I-295 (Yarmouth Group Seeks). Kenneth Larrabee wanted to change the location from Augusta to somewhere closer to Yarmouth because the Interstate would be affecting Yarmouth. This action from the Highway Department was slightly shady, but also demonstrates the need for the project. Since the hearing was located far away (by standards back then) it would effectively silence opposition, but at the same time it would highlight the need for better transportation that the Interstate would bring. Conversely, just three days later, Yarmouth's First Selectman Richard Hodsdon said that the project was "about as good as it possibly can be" which shows how the opposition to the Interstate was weakening (Yarmouth Seen Favoring). Mr. Larrabee's proposition didn't work and the hearing went on as scheduled. On January 28th, 1958, The Portland Press Herald declared that it was the "quietest and shortest hearing of any phase [of an Interstate]" (Long Battle). There was one letter of opposition sent in and one person in the audience. The furious letter of opposition came from Kenneth Larrabee that called the Interstate "economically unsound, entirely unnecessary, and morally indefensible" and that it would be an "indelible blot upon the good faith of Maine" (Long Battle). The comment from the sole person attending in the audience was a request to create a road that would connect to the Yarmouth Harbor because the original plans didn't include that. This comment would lead the Highway Department to create plans to secure access to the harbor, which today is the underpass on Route 88. This event, and the different methods that Larrabee and the other person in the audience used, shows how real, lasting change can be made. On January 29th, 1958, the Highway Department announced that it was opening bids for the construction of the Interstate, effectively ending any hope of opposition and moving plans forward (First Highway Bid). Construction of the Interstate bridge over the Royal River started in November 1958 and was estimated to cost \$974,321 (Start Interstate).

Despite the fact that the project was moving forward, controversy still surrounded I-295. In an article from the Notes on July 17th, 1958, Governor Muskie was accused of approving of this project only to earn votes without thinking of the maintenance that taxpayers would have to pay for in the future. Edmund Muskie went on to win his

*Continued on next page*



**Above:** Early 1960s aerial view of the nearly completed interstate bridge over Yarmouth's harbor.

next election in the Senate in September 1958 (1958 United States). In February 1960, a lawsuit about differing appraisal values for the unspecified damages caused by the Interstate was featured in the *Portland Press Herald*. The appraiser hired by the property owner said there was \$14,000 in damages whereas the appraiser hired by the state said there was only \$3,200 in damages. It is unknown how the lawsuit ended, but it shows how even two years after the project was finalized there was still legal aftermath.

I-295 from Portland to Yarmouth was finally completed in 1961. One of the unknown casualties of the creation of I-295 was a section of Yarmouth called Grantville. Grantville was near present day Route 88 and the Royal River where the highway is today. Grantville was named after the Grant Family who were fishermen and lobstermen. Three Generations of the Grant family lived in the ideal location near the water. In the *Portland Press Herald*, Harry Morrill, a relative of the Grant family said that “none of us really wanted to move, but if it's a coming

thing, the highway, then we'll just have to go” (Interstate Road Spells End). Morrill also adds that the Interstate may be “inconvenient for us, but the new road will be convenient for a lot of people for a long time” (Interstate Road Spells End). This altruistic sentiment is nowadays unusual and a powerful message to our town because he sacrificed the way he lived and his memories for the future and betterment of his community. These are the kinds of selfless ideals and decisions that make our communities a better place.

During peak season, I-295 as a whole carries a shocking 80,000 people per day (Interstate 295). Nowadays, most people that take I-295 through Yarmouth take for granted the benefits it provides without knowing the history of how divisive it was and how it came to be. There is no doubt that I-295 has stimulated growth and promoted connectivity in our town, but building it was full of challenges. I-295 truly is an example of a public works project that has benefited our community in the long run.

*Visit our website to view Matt's full bibliography.*



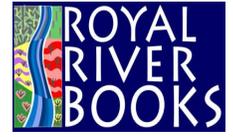
## Scouts on Tour

This October local Girl Scout Troop #1537 took a guided walking tour with Executive Director Katie Worthing. The group started at the History Center and explored some mill sites in Royal River Park. They then walked along East Elm Street to Latchstring Park and up Church Street to the Old Meetinghouse.

The tour offered historical information about Yarmouth and highlighted many landmarks along the way. The group enjoyed the adventure and were especially excited to have the chance to see the interior of the Old Meetinghouse.

**Left:** Katie Worthing hosts Girl Scout Troop #1537 at the Meetinghouse.

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