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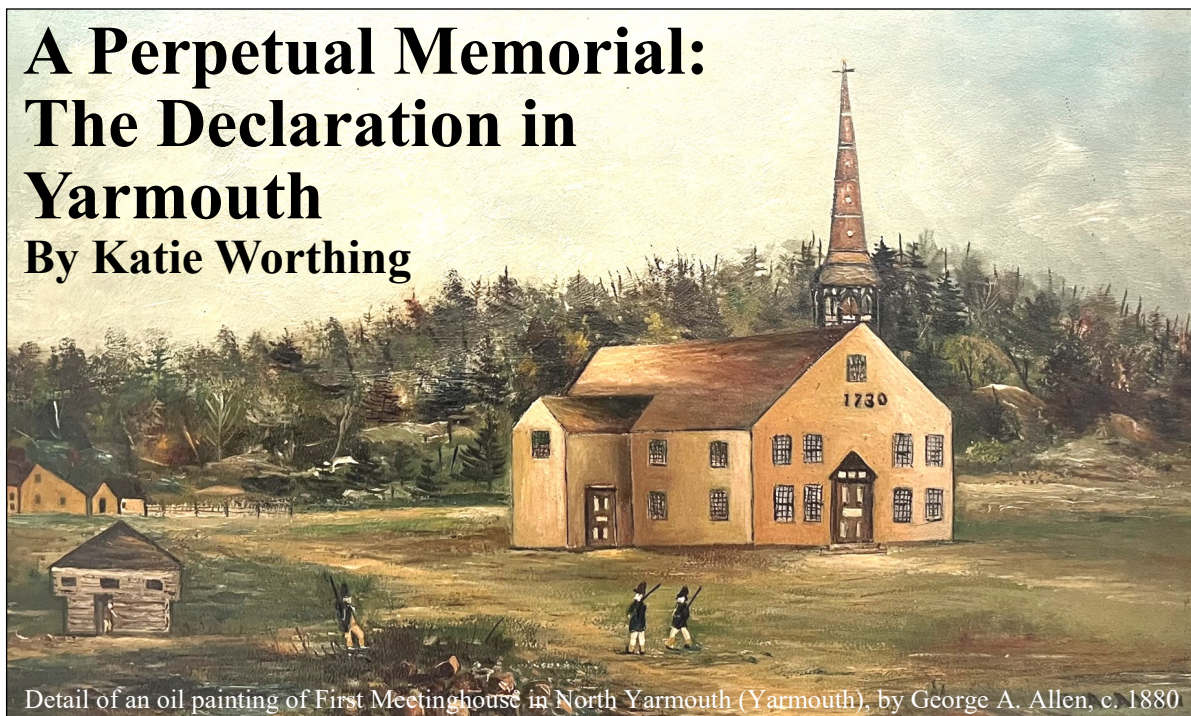
A Culinary Quest

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Thank you Business Members!

## A Perpetual Memorial: The Declaration in Yarmouth

By Katie Worthing



Detail of an oil painting of First Meetinghouse in North Yarmouth (Yarmouth), by George A. Allen, c. 1880

As we look ahead this year to the work of commemorating the events of 1776, leading up to the ratification of the Declaration of Independence, I frequently find myself thinking about what it might have been like for local folks living here in Yarmouth (then known as North Yarmouth\*) during that time. One aspect that I have always loved about my job is the opportunity to view big, nation-changing events through an ultra-local lens. Sometimes, though, I find it difficult to transpose such foundational moments onto a local scale: events like the signing of the Declaration of Independence just feel too big and consequential to squeeze into a smaller frame.

Fortunately for us in 2026, the townspeople of 1776 preserved an artifact that helps us do just that. Did you know that North Yarmouth still has its original copy of the Declaration of Independence? It's a remarkable story of luck and preservation.

After the Declaration was signed in Philadelphia on July 4, 1776, the Executive Council of the State of Massachusetts ordered that a printed copy be sent to each town in Massachusetts, including the District of Maine. Since churches served as the administrative center of colonial towns, these printed copies were sent to the ministers of each parish, of every denomination, within Massachusetts. These ministers were then required to read aloud the Declaration to their congregations on the first Sunday following their receipt of the document. After this, the document was to be delivered to the Town Clerk who was instructed to record its content in the town minutes, "there to remain as a perpetual Memorial."

North Yarmouth's copy was read aloud to the congregation at the Old Meetinghouse Under the Ledge\*\* by Rev. Tristram Gilman on August 19, 1776. It was then duly logged into

*Continued on Page 3*

\* North Yarmouth was incorporated in 1680 and encompassed the modern towns of Yarmouth, North Yarmouth, Cumberland, Freeport, Pownal, and parts of Brunswick and Harpswell. Towns split off over time with Yarmouth and North Yarmouth splitting in 1849.

\*\* The original Meetinghouse sat "under the ledge" on Gilman Road, near today's 44 Gilman Road, across from the Old Ledge Cemetery. It was built in 1729 and torn down in 1836.

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# From the Chair

Spring is around the corner (hopefully) and as we look forward to the daffodils sprouting through the snow in the front garden of the History Center, we're also welcoming additions to our collection, spring events, and some preparations for summer. Having served on the Board since 2018, I'm easing into my role of Executive Chair and excited to work with our board especially our newer additions, Yarmouth residents Martina Duncan, Mike Gengras and Mitch Feeney. Coincidentally, all three have roles connected to education; Martina serves as the Registrar at Bowdoin College, Mike is an English teacher at North Yarmouth Academy, and Mitch has recently shifted positions to general counsel for Dartmouth College. We welcome them, and their expertise, to the Board.



Jessie McGrath

The Center was recently presented with new items for the collection. One gift included two photo albums featuring photographs of past Yarmouth residents. These albums belonged to the late William H. Rowe, former Town Clerk, local pharmacist, and town historian. In January, the Collections Committee spent a morning archiving, folding, and packing clothing items from the Allen/Gooding/Crockett family collection. This donation included scrapbooks from the late 1930s and 40s that illuminate the life of a then-recent graduate of North Yarmouth Academy.

In late Spring, we will be opening The Old Meetinghouse on Hillside Street for visitors and tours throughout the summer. If you're interested in being a docent for any of these open houses, please let us know! The History Center will be happy to provide you with the historical facts and features of the building, so you'll be ready to share that history with our visitors.

In July, the United States will be celebrating 250 years of independence. At the time of the American Revolution, Yarmouth's primary colonial settlement was located in the area of Gilman Road and Route 88. Along with a cluster of homes and barns, this settlement had Yarmouth's first church, known as the Meetinghouse Under the Ledge, a school, and a cemetery. Yarmouth's Historic Preservation Committee is currently working on plans to designate the area as a Historic District.

On behalf of our Board, a special thanks goes to our Annual Fund donors. We greatly appreciate your support. If you missed the opportunity to support the Annual Fund campaign, please consider adding a gift to the Fund when renewing your Membership this spring.

**Jessie McGrath**

Executive Chair, Board of Trustees



## Old Meetinghouse Summer Schedule

Thursday, June 11

Saturday, June 20

Thursday, July 9

Saturday, July 25

Saturday, August 8

Thursday, August 20

**Free and open to all! Event hours, 1pm to 3pm**

25 Hillside Street, Yarmouth, Maine

# A Perpetual Memorial *continued...*

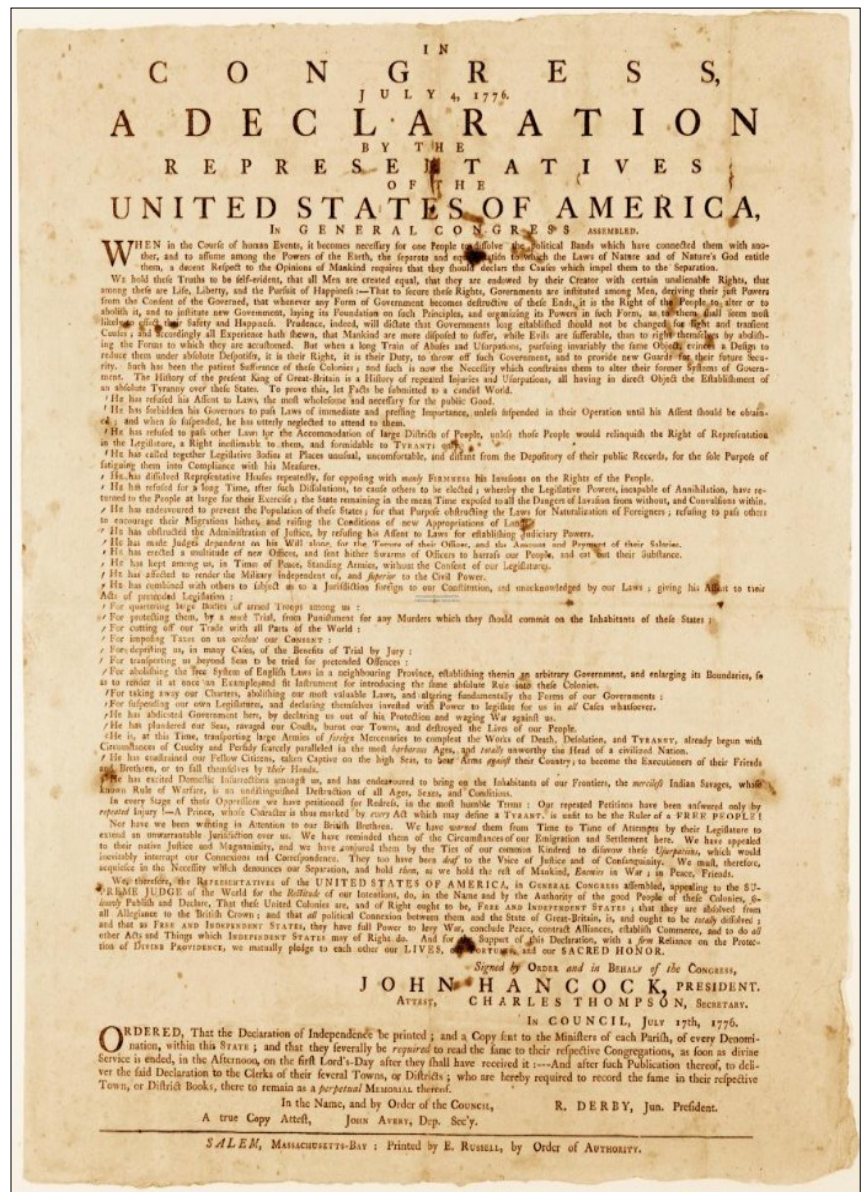
the town minutes by clerk David Mitchell and then became part of the town's early archive. Historian William H. Rowe recounts that Mitchell "in his enthusiasm change[d] so far from his usual extremely compact and fine penmanship as to print in bold letters with some attempt at fanciful arrangements" the full title and date of the Declaration.

When Yarmouth and North Yarmouth formally split in 1849, North Yarmouth retained the original town name as well as the oldest town records, which were kept carefully by the town clerks, and eventually the North Yarmouth Historical Society, over the years. At some point, though, a sheaf of papers including the original copy of the Declaration found its way into the home of Nellie Leighton, longtime town historian and founding president of the North Yarmouth Historical Society. It seems likely Leighton had simply brought the papers home to continue her cataloguing and research work for the town. However, the story of these papers, and the fate of the Declaration, got much more complicated after Nellie Leighton's death in 1999.

As Leighton's estate was going through an appraisal process, the collection of historic documents containing the Declaration was flagged for consideration and sale. Some sources recount that the box had even been destined for the trash and was saved only when the dumpster was too full to accept it. When the Declaration was later listed for sale at an estate auction in the summer of 1999, it triggered immediate interest among potential buyers and debate about its true ownership and the legality of the pending sale. The Declaration achieved a sale price of \$99,000 at the auction, but not before Maine State Archivist James Henderson stepped in to file a claim on behalf of the state, arguing that the document was a public record and could not legally be sold. The sale was paused to allow both sides to make their case.

In June 2001, after a lengthy process, the Declaration was ultimately deemed to be a public document and returned to the town of North Yarmouth and its historical society. North Yarmouth's original copy of the Declaration of Independence is currently on long-term loan to the Maine State Archives, where it is kept safely and securely on behalf of the town. You can view the document online through Maine Historical Society's Maine Memory Network: [www.mainememory.net/record/6049](http://www.mainememory.net/record/6049). Read it out loud and imagine hearing it for the first time that day in 1776 when it arrived in North Yarmouth.

*Katie Worthing is the Executive Director of Yarmouth History Center, Yarmouth, Maine.*



Above: The original copy of Ancient North Yarmouth's Declaration of Independence now in the care of the Maine State Archives.

# In and Around the History Center



**Above (left to right):** Princes Point neighborhood event; hosting the American Baptist Churches of Maine at the Meetinghouse; May through November sharing history on the street. **Below:** Sharing history at the Yarmouth Farmers' Market.



## Beyond the History Center

Last year the History Center found many opportunities to share history beyond the walls of the museum. In late August, the Center shared history with the residents of Princes Point. The staff and board members joined co-host Ann Miller at her home to share stories and the history of those who once lived, worked, and vacationed on Princes Point.

In August, the American Baptist Churches of Maine selected Yarmouth as the place to hold their 221st Annual Convention. The group worked with Director Katie Worthing to schedule a full day of events at the Old Meetinghouse.

History was also shared on the streets of Yarmouth and at the Farmers' Market. Walking tours offered history of the homes and businesses that once operated in the village. At the farmers' market we shared the history of Centerville, a turn-of-the-century plan to re-brand the Brickyard Hollow neighborhood and create a new town center. A great season of sharing history! Visit the Society's website [yarmouthmehistory.org](http://yarmouthmehistory.org) for the most up-to-date information about what's planned for the spring and summer of 2026!



**SAVE THE DATE! 6PM, April 8, 2026**

**Yarmouth Trivia Night #5 at Brickyard Hollow, Yarmouth**

# In and Around the History Center

## Spring Lecture Series

The Lecture Series is sponsored by the Leon and Lisa Gorman Fund

All lectures will be offered in person at the Yarmouth History Center, 118 East Elm Street

Lectures are free and open to everyone



**Wednesday, April 15, 7pm**

### ***Down the Road Apiece: Moving Maine's Buildings***

Aimee Keithan

Educational Programs Manager at Greater Portland Landmarks.

Before the wrecking ball, there was the moving crew. Join Aimee Keithan of Greater Portland Landmarks for a fascinating exploration of a once-common practice: physically relocating entire buildings rather than demolishing them. This lecture examines why Mainers and New Englanders moved structures, from practical concerns like land use and development to early preservation instincts.



**Saturday, May 9, 11am**

### ***The Dirigo Men of Henri-Chapelle Cemetery: Stories of Maine's WWII Service Members***

Aimee Gagnon Fogg,

Author and Founder of *They Speak*

Lt. Roger T. Lane of Yarmouth is one of Maine's 54 service members who are interred or commemorated at Henri-Chapelle American Cemetery in Belgium. Initially classified as MIA during the war, Lane's remains were located and identified in the 2000s. He now rests at the Riverside Cemetery in Yarmouth. Aimee Gagnon Fogg has collected the personal stories and photos of the nearly 8,400 men of HCAC. She will share Lt. Lane's story and the story of other Mainers interred or commemorated at Henri-Chapelle.



**Wednesday, June 17, 7pm**

### ***Shipwrecks of Casco Bay***

Seth Goldstein

Director of Development, South Portland Historical Society

Seth Goldstein has been fascinated by shipwrecks since his childhood. Join Seth as he shares tales of harrowing rescues and tragic losses in and around Casco Bay. In addition to hearing about the bay's famous shipwrecks such as the *Annie C. Maguire* and the *Bohemian*, audience members will learn about some of the region's lesser-known wrecks and the circumstances surrounding them. You'll be fascinated by Seth's recounting of horrific storms and lives lost to the sea as well as stories of inspiring rescues and the brave men that conducted them.

# Thank You For Supporting the Annual Fund!

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*Continued on the next page*

Gifts from February 21, 2025 to February 21, 2026. 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!

Adam Stickney and Sharon Wee  
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## In Memoriam

*In memory of Margaret W. Soule*  
From Mary LeMaistre

*In memory of Mark Storms*  
From Hazel Currier

*In memory Bill Keith*  
From Hazel Currier

*In memory of Bob Knott*  
From Frances Thayer

### Digitization of *The Shopping Notes*

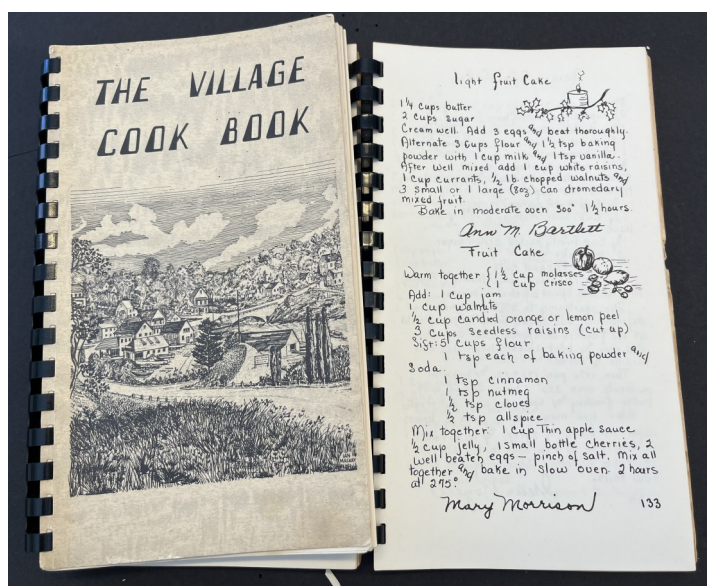
Thank you Rosemary MacKay and the Local Buzz Attendees

## A Culinary Quest

Every year the History Center receives a number of research assistance requests from members of the community as well as from folks around the state, country, and world. Last year we were contacted by a team of archaeologists at a university in Buenos Aires. They were seeking information about the Yarmouth-built vessel *Admiral* and a possible connection of that vessel to a shipwreck they were excavating. It's exciting to be able to contribute to academic research but not all research requests that come to the Center are of a scholarly nature.

Recently Yarmouth Historical Society member Mary Stuart took advantage of her membership benefit of an hour of free research to search for a recipe. The History Center may seem like an unlikely place to search for a recipe, but Mary had one recipe in mind. Mary was searching for a particular fruit cake recipe she believed may have been from the kitchen of June Bourne and published in one of the many community cookbooks produced throughout the years by Yarmouth organizations as fundraisers.

The Society's collection has preserved a number of these community cookbooks published by organizations like the Village Improvement Society, First Parish Church, North Yarmouth Academy, Coastal Manor Nursing Home, and Yarmouth Colts to name a few. Mary was unable to find the exact recipe she was searching for, but she was able to find fruit cake recipes by two different contributors to help her along



Above: Two volumes of *The Village Cook Book*, 1956 (left) and 1952 (right) sponsored by the Village Improvement Society and created to fund a scholarship for an NYA senior.

with her culinary quest. It is rewarding to see the Society's collection in action and witness how preserving the past helps serve us here in the present.

### Yarmouth Trivia Night HINT!

For your support as a member, we offer a quiz question answer worth 1 point. The answer is BELL. Receive 5 POINTS if you bring a new member (new in 2026) to Trivia Night... What a boost! That's an entire round of points!



For the joy of gardening!  
**Estabrook's**

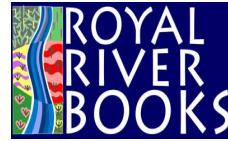
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