

August 2018 E-Newsletter

Eric Hooglund, Editor

Published monthly for members of the Belgrade Historical Society

Belgrade son was a master horseman in 19th Century

One of your BHS's special acquisitions earlier this summer is a copy of a long out-of-print book, *Kennebec Yesterdays* by Ernest Marriner (1892-1983), who was a history professor at Colby College. We are grateful to BHS member Harvey Gile, who donated his personal copy of this book, which he acquired in the mid-1950s, and which has the stamp of the former—and locally legendary--Farrow's Bookshop in Waterville. Marriner's account of the early 19th century stagecoach drivers of Central Maine focuses on Belgrade's Dexter Foster, and it is an interesting tale of how one Belgrade-raised lad became fascinated by the old WEST but also longed for the simpler joys of Maine, which kept luring him back home, as the excerpt below demonstrates:

Friends of Dexter Foster used to say that he could do anything with a horse. He never struck one with a whip. He had only to snap the long lash in the air to start tis six horses at a gallop. The horses even knew his nervous cough, and would whinny when they heard him approach the stable. Born in Belgrade near the present site of the Belgrade Lakes Hotel, Dexter Forster became quite a traveler. Before he settled down in Anson and later in Bingham, he made six trips across the country to California, five of them over prairies and mountains, and one across the Isthmus of Panama. He tried his luck at the "diggings" near Sacramento, but his real love was horses. With several different partners, he set up livery stables in California, was twice burned out. Five times he returned to Maine, and four times he couldn't resist the urge to go west again. Out there he drove some of the old Wells Fargo stages over routes endangered rugged mountains, rushing streams, and daring outlaws. Finally determined to stay in Maine, he became a driver for the stage line form Augusta to Bar Harbor.

The old-time stage drivers did all sorts of errands for the householders on their routes. It is obvious that a man driving six horses cannot very well write a note when a farmer yells at him "Bring me a new almanac next trip" or "Get me a bottle of ipecac." Yet, stage drivers like

*Dexter Foster never forgot an errand. They simply had to train their memories. Very often the driver didn't even know the name of the man who wanted something on the next trip, but he knew where the fellow lived and what he looked like. And on the next trip got the delivery.*¹

Dexter Foster certainly was a colorful character! His father, also named Dexter Foster, was among the early settlers of Belgrade, arriving here from Blackstone, Massachusetts, before 1800. If any fellow members have information about the exact year the elder Dexter Foster settled in Belgrade, please send it to us for our family files! We do know that this early settler died in Belgrade in 1816 and that son Dexter Foster was the eldest of four Foster brothers, his three siblings being John, George and Herman. George Foster (d. 1885) remained in Belgrade, and the family homestead passed to his sons. The old Foster house and barn still stands on Route 27, but now is the Winterberry Farm. Unfortunately, we have no record of what happened to Dexter Foster after he moved to Somerset County. We gratefully would welcome any information readers may be able to share!

Late 19th century stagecoach.
This one was used to transport passengers and their luggage between the train station at Belgrade Depot and the then new tourist lodgings in Belgrade Lakes village. Dexter Foster drove similar stagecoaches after he returned from California to Maine.



¹ Ernest Marriner, *Kennebec Yesterdays*, Colby College Monograph No. 21 (Waterville: Colby College, 1954; 3rd printing [revised], 1955), p. 76.



Building new Foster family, ca. 1897. 2 unidentified carpenters are on right, then, in back are Frank Chester Foster, grandnephew of Dexter Foster; boy in front is Frank's son, Vernon Lord Foster and next to him, seated, is Vernon's mother, Susan *Lord* Foster. Seated man on left is Edgar Leslie Foster, uncle of Frank and nephew of Dexter Foster.

Belgrade Historical Society's Capital Campaign Update



Rendering of Townhouse after Renovation

Sketch by Artist Erik Johnson

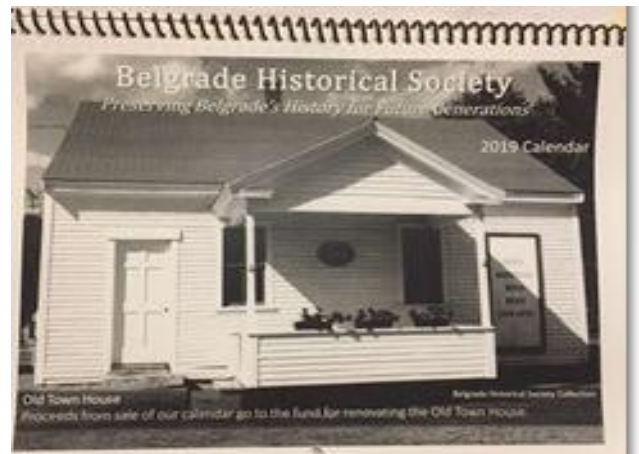
The **Capital Fund Drive** is going well! We have received several thousand dollars and returns are coming in on a daily basis. A friendly reminder to those who want to give and have not yet done so. Use your return envelope or send your own to BHS, P.O. Box 36A, Belgrade, Maine 04917. Use PayPal as an alternative by going to our website belgradehistoricalsociety@gmail.com.

Thanks to those who have already donated, all donations will help the bottom line!



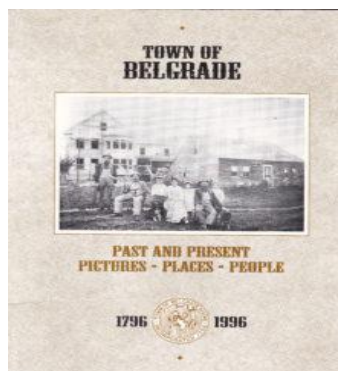
Enjoy history throughout 2019: Order a copy of the new 2019 BHS Calendar, with an assortment of 12 old photographs of Belgrade from 1890 to 1950. Only \$15 each, and all proceeds benefit our capital fund to preserve the Old Town House. They make great gifts, too, so order several 2019 calendars

All proceeds to benefit capital fund to preserve Old Town House!



Visit Your History Room

The Belgrade Historical Society's History Room, located in the Center for All Seasons on Route 27, is open Wednesdays and Thursdays, 10 am to 2 pm, May 1 to August 31. All are welcome to come and view our exhibits of historical artifacts and photographs and/or to explore our archives of old camp and family photographs and our ever-expanding genealogy files, Do research on history of old Belgrade families or view the 3,000-plus old photographs of people and places stored on our computer.



***Looking for gift ideas?
How about one of the reprints of the Belgrade Past &
Present!
All proceeds support the BHS!***

The books have lots of information about old Belgrade and many of the families who resided here as well as pictures of many of the old buildings that make up this historic town. **The 2nd printings of the Town Of Belgrade Past and Present, Pictures -Places -People 1796-1996 available for sale at the Belgrade History Room, Day's Store and the Belgrade Town Office. Pricing for these books are \$30.00 each or \$27.00 for members.**



REMINDER: September 2018 programs

Still not too late to sign up for **walking tours of historic and picturesque Belgrade Lakes village!** Entertaining way to learn about the many historic houses and businesses in this 200+-year old village. We are requesting a \$10 per person donation, all of which goes into our capital campaign to preserve the Old Town House. Call Eric Hooglund to arrange: 207-495-2310

Thursday, September 20, 2018: *The Life and Mysterious Death of Mane-born Millionaire Sir Harry Oakes* by local historian David Leigh. This promises to be a fascinating presentation about Harry Oakes, who was born in Sangerville, Maine in 1874, educated at Foxcroft Academy in Dover-Foxcroft and Bowdoin College and became one of the world's wealthiest men after discovering gold in Ontario and developing a major gold mining operation. His brutal murder in the Bahamas in 1943 still remains unsolved. You don't want to miss this unique opportunity to learn about the spectacular rise and grisly demise of one of the most famous men in the word in the early 20th century. Presentation is at the Maine Lakes Resource Center in Belgrade Lakes at 7 pm. Program is free, but donations to the BHS capital campaign to preserve the Old Town House are appreciated.



Remember...history not recorded is history lost!

Oldest Photograph of the

OLD TOWNHOUSE

One of the oldest extant buildings in Belgrade is the Old Townhouse on Cemetery Road beside the Woodside Cemetery. Built in 1815 and in use as the location of the annual Town Meetings until 1873, the facility has a long and interesting history.

Dennis "Denny" Keschl, of the Belgrade Historical Society's Board of Directors, has been researching this historically significant building. One thing he's not been able to find is a photograph showing the building without the front porch, which was added in the early 1940s. With his deep interest in the Old Townhouse, Denny is personally putting up a prize of \$100 for the oldest known picture of the building prior to the porch's addition.

If you have an old photograph of the Old Townhouse, please send us a copy with descriptive information to verify its provenance to:

Belgrade Historical Society

P.O. Box 36A

Belgrade, ME 04917

After reviewing the photo and information, our Collections Committee will make a determination as to which photograph will win the reward. If more than one copy of the winning photograph is submitted, then the one that we receive first will be the winner. The society will keep copies of all the entries



submitted for our use. If an original is submitted, we will make a copy and return the original unless it was given as a donation. The reward will be made immediately after the oldest photograph is selected. If you have any questions, please contact Denny at: keschl@yahoo.com tel: 207-495-2973 ~ cell: 207-441-3701