



## **Belgrade Historical Society**

*March 2020 E- Newsletter*  
*By Eric Hooglund, Editor*

### **Time to Celebrate Maine's Bicentennial!**

This month marks the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Maine being admitted to the union as the 23<sup>rd</sup> state. The exact date was March 15. And celebrations of the bicentennial will be taking place throughout the state during the year, including right here in Belgrade.

As part of old New England and also having been settled by Europeans as early as the 17<sup>th</sup> century, some readers may be surprised that Maine only became a state in 1820, almost 50 years after the proclamation of the Declaration of Independence. Prior to 1820, however, no one considered Maine as a separate colony or state. Rather, from 1652 (by a royal edict) Maine was considered as part of Massachusetts. Thus, when the latter rebelled against British rule in 1775, Maine was included in the rebellion. The British, determined to punish rebels, sent a warship into Portland harbor (October 1775) on Casco Bay and demanded oaths of allegiance to the crown. When the citizens refused, the ship turned its huge guns on Maine's largest town, damaging or destroying an estimated 400 shops and houses, and leaving homeless more than 160 families, comprising about one-half the then population of about 2,500. Several more Maine towns, including Boothbay, Castine and Machias,

also experienced unpleasant visits by British naval ships, but by the autumn of 1781, the colonial militia under George Washington actually surrounded the British army in Virginia and forced its surrender, thus securing American independence.

The post-Revolutionary War decade was a period of growth for Maine, spurred in part by Massachusetts providing, in lieu of pensions, land grants to veterans to settle in its 'down east' frontier province of Maine. Many of Belgrade's original settlers were former veterans who had received these land grants—and ditto for many other Maine towns. As the population spread inland and far from the coast, getting to Boston became increasingly more difficult. Consequently, a movement to separate Maine from Massachusetts began to develop after 1800. Votes on the question of separating from Massachusetts actually were recorded in Belgrade for 1806, 1807, 1815 and 1816. Each time the yea votes outnumbered the nay ones. However, the Massachusetts legislature rejected any motion to separate Maine from its jurisdiction.

National politics intervened in 1819 when the territory of Missouri applied to join the union as a state. Some Missouri residents owned slaves, and slavery had become a major political issue after 1800. The 22 states in the union in 1819 were evenly divided: 11 were free, meaning the ownership of slaves was illegal; and 11 allowed slavery. Admitting another slavery state would tip the balance in the Senate in favor of slavery, which was unacceptable for the states that opposed slavery. A compromise was proposed: Separate Maine from Massachusetts and admit it as a free state alongside Missouri as a slave state. This solution, known as the Missouri Compromise, was crafted to preserve the balance in the Senate between free and slave-owning states. Massachusetts now agreed to let Maine separate if the people so desired. Voting took place in Maine on July 20, 1819. In Belgrade the vote to separate passed,

84 years to 8 days. Belgrade also elected the Rev. Elias Taylor as its representative to the state convention that met later in the year in Portland to draft a constitution for the new state-to-be. In early 1820, elections for Maine's first governor were held.

Belgrade men voted by a margin of 100 to 4 for William King, a Bath merchant and shipbuilder, who won a majority of the vote statewide. King was inaugurated in Portland, the capital of the new state of Maine (until 1832, when the capital was moved north and inland to the more centrally located Augusta, which had displaced Bath by 1830 to become Maine's second largest town!).

### **How many readers remember the 3 quiz questions that were in the last Newsletter?**

The answers can be found in the above historical narrative. Those three questions are as follows:

1. After Mainers voted in 1819 to separate from Massachusetts, whom did the Town of Belgrade elect to represent it in the 1819 Constitutional Convention to draft a constitution for the proposed new state of Maine?
2. Who was Maine's first Governor?
3. Where did Maine's first legislature meet? [Hint: Maine's first capital].

### **Update on the Old Town Meeting House**

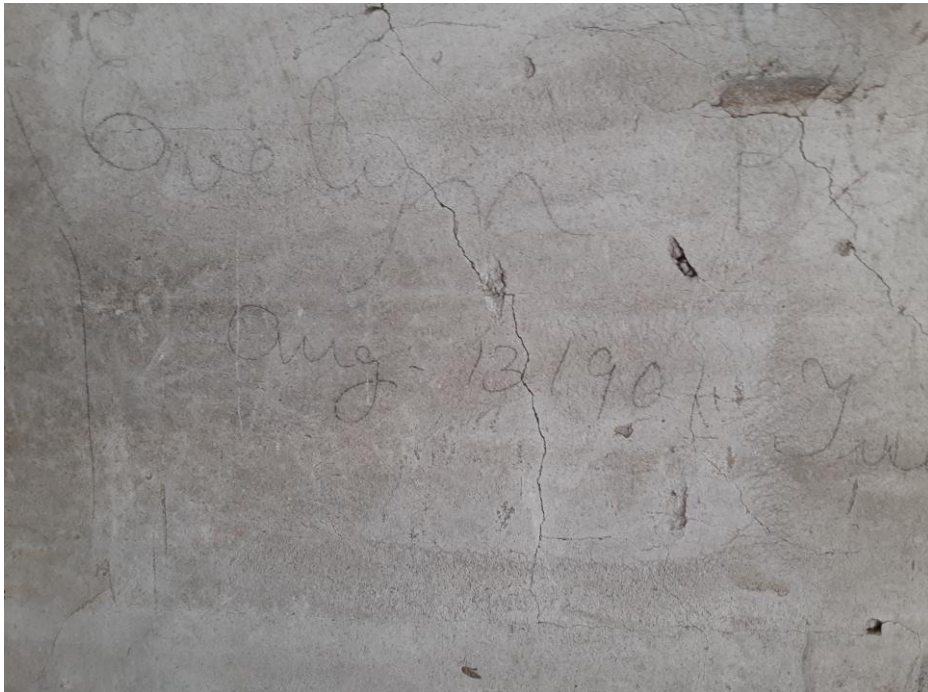
The first phase of restoring the Old Town House was completed during December 2019. This phase involved removing the 20<sup>th</sup> century wall paneling and revealing the original walls and support beams so that BHS could obtain a professional assessment of the early nineteenth structure with the aim to preserve as much as possible of the 1814 interior. That original interior is amazing, and even includes some graffiti, the earliest of which is dated 1844! Below are some photographs of the original interior. That solid and carefully crafted interior seems to be a primary reason

why our Old Town House has survived intact for over 200 years. Our goal is to ensure it survives for another 200 years!

Photo 1: Interior of Old Town House



Photo 2: Graffiti on original wall of The Old Town House



**SAVE THE DATE: Thursday, M A Y 2 8, 2020**

**BHS Bicentennial Program**

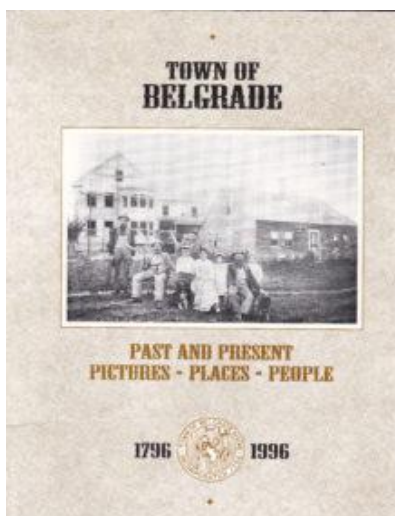
**The Belgrade Historical Society in collaboration with  
Seven Lakes Alliance  
Presents a special program:**

**The Historic Maine Chance Farm**

Historian Lisa Walker will talk about the health and beauty spa established by legendary cosmetician Elizabeth Arden on Long Pond. The Maine Chance Farm operated for over 30 summers, employing many Belgrade, Mt. Vernon and Rome residents as chauffers, handymen, housekeepers, gardeners and kitchen staff. And it also bought most of its food from local farms, as Madame Arden was into natural and organic healthy meals long before they became a fad. Its legacy lives on, as the Travis Mill Foundation has lovingly recycled the Maine Chance Farm as a very special spa for veterans with service-related disabilities. This is one program not to be missed. Bring along family and friends.

**Place: Seven Lakes Alliance/Maine Lakes Resource Center  
Main Street, Belgrade Lakes Village  
Time: 7 pm**

**Looking for gifts, don't forget our Reproduction Past & Present Books.  
Available at the Center for All Seasons BHS History Room!**



***Past and Present Books*** More than 140 unique and priceless photos of Belgrade's past, all with historical captions  
***Town of Belgrade Past and Present Pictures of People and Places***  
A special hardbound photo and text book for the coffee table!

# Capital Fund Drive



## 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](mailto:belgradehistoricalsociety@gmail.com).

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

**Don't forget that BHS is a non-profit 501 (3) 2 organization, so all contributions to its capital campaign to renovate the Old Town House are tax deductible. Any donation you make to BHS can be deducted from your income tax to the extent allowable by law. Please think of making an end-of-year donation to our worthy cause and help to preserve our history.**