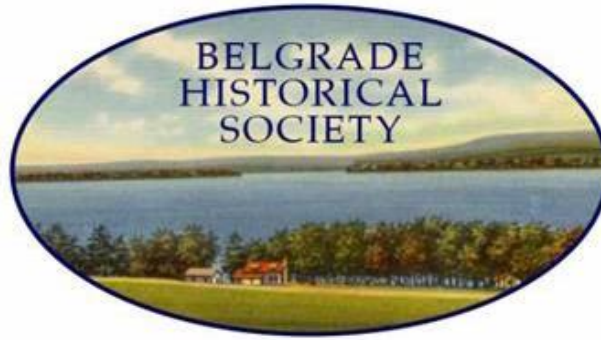




January 2019 E-Newsletter

Eric Hooglund, Editor

Published monthly for members of the Belgrade Historical Society

Dear Members,

Being away for a month during the holidays, I did not have access to the BHS's rich historical archive in order to write an interesting article. For that reason, I have decided to recycle one of my own childhood memories of summer in Belgrade during the early 1950s. I originally wrote it for the Belgrade Lakes Association Newsletter in 2016. Hope you all enjoy it, and apologies in advance to those who may have read it earlier.

In the summer 1968 several friends visited me while I was staying in Belgrade Lakes, and I thought it would be interesting to take them on walking tours of the village and car tours of the region (and I have been continuing these tours each summer). The drive to Blueberry Hill inevitably took us pass the Maine Chance Farm, the spa located on a small hill just beyond Castle Island and which the cosmetician Elizabeth Arden owned. I was aware that she had passed away a year or two earlier, and now the property no longer was functioning as a health resort for women of means. The grounds in front of the famous large yellow 'summer cottage' were being maintained, but the sunken gardens I remembered from the 1950s were gone.

I probably was 7 the first time I noticed that cottage. I recall that I was riding in the back seat of a car, probably the 1948 Dodge belonging to my Aunt Janet, and we were driving to Mt. Vernon, perhaps on an errand to get fresh corn from a farmer or maybe going to Vienna to get fresh blueberries. 'What's that big yellow house?' I asked. An adult--an aunt, an uncle, my mother, I do not remember who--answered very knowingly: "Oh, that's the famous fat farm." Fat farm? What is a fat farm and why is it famous? Is that where fat is made, I wondered? Fat is what my mom and grandmother put in baked beans. I did not like fat, and I did not like baked beans, because of the big chunks of fat in them! But fat was part of meat, and I knew it was on beef and pork (although I probably had not yet associated beef with cows or pork with pigs). "Is that house like a store that sells fat?" I wondered out loud. "Sell fat?" laughed one of my aunts, "That's where rich and famous women eat salads three meals a day to help them lose their fat!" My mother, corrected her sister: "They go there to dry out." I was confused. Grown-ups often talked in riddles that didn't make any sense.

The following summer, I picked up more tidbits of information. The farm's owner was Elizabeth Arden, who made perfume and lipstick and make-up. My

mother and aunts didn't buy any of them because they were "so expensive." According to my mother, who loved Coty perfume, Arden's 'cologne' was sold in fancy 'crystal' bottles at the Emery Brown department store in Waterville. My mind conflated this perfume maker with Eve Arden, the movie actress. I just was beginning to recognize the names of movie stars, although my knowledge was quite limited: actors Gene Autry and Roy Rogers; and actresses Eve Arden, Judy Garland, and Loretta Young. I also knew the name of Roy Rogers' wife, Dale Evans, mainly because my favorite cousin was named Dale. She was two years younger than I, and she was moving that summer to some faraway place called Indiana.

Another summer came, and now I was really into movies, even going alone to the Opera House in Waterville on Saturday afternoons, since it was but a 10-minute walk from my grandparents' house. The Opera House had a double feature—two movies, plus a serial, a newsreel, cartoons and previews of coming attractions. It was a great place to spend an afternoon in the winter when it was so cold outside! But when summer came, it was time to rediscover Belgrade. And that summer the buzz at the Lakeshore Hotel was about the movie actress Ava Gardner, who was staying at



the Maine Chance Farm. Her name was not one I recognized, even though I now knew the names of dozens of movie stars. But, since I believed that *Eve Arden* owned the Maine Chance Farm, it made sense that a movie star would be visiting her! And Ava Gardner came to the Lakeshore Hotel, where my family stayed, but not to eat in the dining room; rather she came to its Cocktail Lounge. I never got to see her there, or even see one of her movies later, but I sure heard about how 'adventurous' and 'glamorous' she was! My Aunts Celia and Tilly, who had not married yet and worked in Massachusetts, used to come home to Maine for a week or more during the summers,

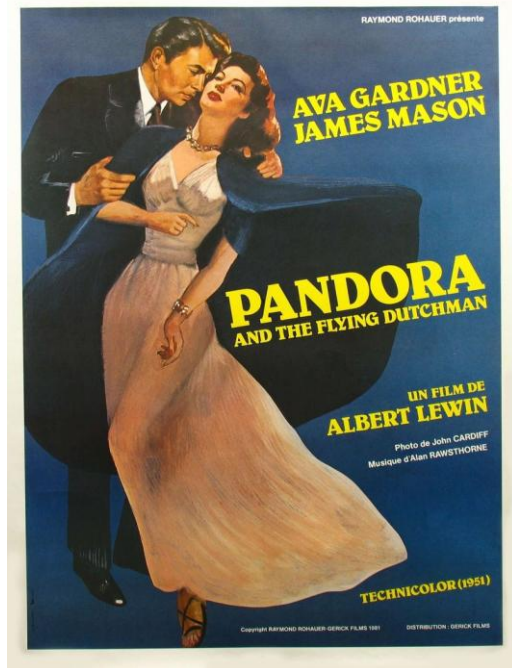
when the family was at 'camp,' and they sometimes would help out in the Lakeshore's Cocktail Lounge. The week my Aunt Tilly was helping out there was the very week that Ava Gardner came at night by canoe. What a feat! The main Maine Chance house--the big yellow cottage--overlooked Long Pond, but at its very 'end' near Castle Island. And right next to the island was a narrow channel that divided the lake into Upper and Lower Long Pond. But you could not see this end of Upper Long Pond from the Lakeshore Hotel docks. As an 8-year old, I was mesmerized by the idea of a movie actress rowing a canoe by moonlight and the sparkling stars all the way from Castle Island at the southwestern end of Long Pond to its central eastern shore, with the night silent except for the cries of loons.

But what made Ava Gardner so glamorous? Aunt Tilly said that she always dressed beautifully and always ordered martinis (for many years I never knew exactly what a martini was, other than an exotic cocktail with a green olive in it). "But why does she want a martini," I would ask. "When the movie stars and wives of rich men stay at Miss Arden's spa, they all are on a very strict diet and must not drink any alcohol,"



responded Aunt Tilly. I knew what beer and wine were, but alcohol? Wasn't that the smelly colorless liquid that Aunt Tilly—who was a nurse--rubbed on sore muscles and dipped on needles before removing splinters from my fingers or legs? Adults are so confusing! My aunts would whisper about Ava Gardner and Frank Sinatra, whom I knew as a singer and actor. They were married and probably in the process of getting unmarried, a taboo subject that adults did not discuss in front of children in the early 1950s!

Many years later, I learned my fantasizing about Ava Gardner rowing alone across Long Pond by moonlight was really a fantasy. She actually hired local high school boys--the same ones who met passengers at the Belgrade Depot train station and drove them in taxis to the Maine Chance Farm or the hotels--to row her across the lake and back, or to take her to the Cocktail Lounge by taxi. But I also learned why my aunts thought she was so glamorous: Despite her reputation as a tough woman who married and divorced easily, she was kind to staff people: After receiving her drink—each martini cost 75 cents, Ava Gardner always would put \$2 on the little tray with the bill, smile and say, “Please keep the change, Honey.”



The Lakeshore Hotel in the late 1920s. Following the end of Prohibition in 1933, its Cocktail Lounge was created in the first floor of the 2-story building on right. Hollywood actress Ava Gardner (1922-1990) enjoyed evenings at the Cocktail Lounge when she stayed at the Maine Chance spa in the early 1950s.



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.

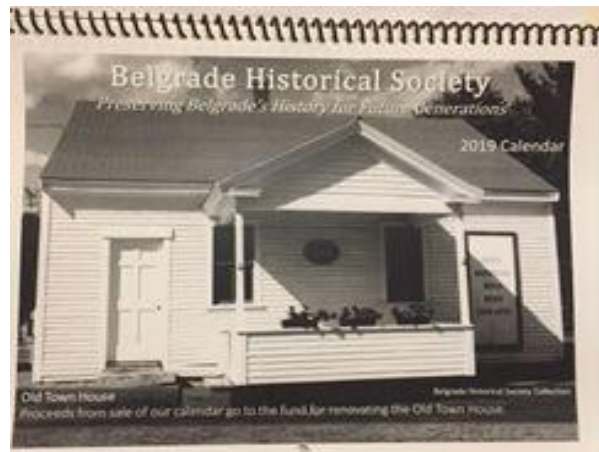
Thanks to those who have already donated, all donations will help the bottom line!

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.



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