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Sanford - Springvale Historical Society  
P. O. Box 276  
Springvale, Maine 04083

# SANFORD SPRINGVALE HISTORICAL SOCIETY



## NEWSLETTER

## SPRING 2019 VOL 13, NO. 1

### Historical Society Premieres New Movie Theater Exhibit



Two men roam the attic of a home filled with treasures. One of them owns the place. The other is the president of the local historical society. The homeowner has invited the president to the house to see if he finds anything there he would like to add to his organization's trove of local historic artifacts.

He does. Three large medallions stand out from the collection.

The president knows these medallions by heart and is thrilled to see them again after so many years. He was an avid filmgoer in his youth, and it is from these medallions that beautiful and elegant chandeliers hung from the ceiling of the old-time movie theater he attended as a boy. The president enthusiastically accepts the medallions for the local historical museum. Sounds like a

pitch for an intriguing new movie. Or, for the current exhibit at the Sanford-Springvale Historical Society.

The homeowner is Steve Shaw. The president of the historical society is Harland Eastman. Shaw called Eastman to the property he owned on Pleasant Avenue and invited him to take that look around in the attic. That's when Eastman spotted the medallions. That's when he got the idea for the historical museum's exhibit, which showcases the history of movie theaters in Sanford-Springvale from the earlier years of the twentieth century through the 1950s.

The late Ronald Morin, a longtime member of the Sanford-Springvale Historical Society, owned the home now owned by Shaw. With an eye toward history, Morin saved the medallions from the old Capitol Theatre on Main Street as it was being demolished in the spring of 1969. He kept them stored in his attic for nearly 50 years.

"Steve Shaw's gift of these medallions to the Sanford-Springvale Historical Society was the spark that led to this exhibit," Eastman said.

The exhibit had its premiere during a special presentation at the Sanford-Springvale Historical Museum at 505 Main Street on Thursday, Sept. 20, 2018.

The exhibit's special attractions include old movie posters, newspaper ads, and pictures of local theaters from yesteryear. Courtesy of City Councilor Fred Smith, one wall of the exhibit even features the wooden sign that greeted moviegoers

at the old Sanford Drive-In from 1950 through the late 1970s. The drive-in existed where Breary Farms Apartments on Main Street are now.

According to research on display at the exhibit, the first showing of a film in Sanford is believed to have taken place in a room above Shaw's Hardware on Main Street at one point in the early twentieth century. Films also were known to be shown as early as 1907 on School Street at the Knights of Pythias Hall that eventually burned down in the seventies.

Local businessman Frank Leavitt is said to have shown films on the top floor of his block at the corner of School and Washington streets well before 1908 – the year he converted his father's store on Main Street into the town's first known movie theater, the Theatre Comique, home to vaudeville and silent films. That venture proved so successful that Leavitt built and opened a bona fide theater with 1,300 seats on Main Street in Sanford two years later. Leavitt Theatre, as it was called, closed in 1929 and reopened late the next year as the Capitol Theatre, under the management of E.M. Loew. As mentioned, the Capitol closed and was demolished in the late 1960s. A 7-Eleven convenience store was built in its place in the late seventies and remained there at the intersection of Main Street and Route 202 until it too closed in early 2018.

"Leavitt was the real kingpin of the movie industry in Sanford for quite a while," Eastman said during a walk-through of the exhibit.

The exhibit chronicles the history of the movies in Sanford-Springvale up through the earlier years of E.M. Loew's drive-in during the 1950s. Eastman hopes to continue adding to the exhibit throughout its run at the museum and encourages anyone who has any memorabilia – movie posters, for example, or anything else from the first half of the twentieth century – to call him at 324-2797.

Back in those earlier days, you could see a movie for a dime. This new exhibit at the Sanford-Springvale Historical Museum is even more of a steal, if you can believe that in this day and age of ten-dollar movie tickets. Admission is free during the museum's hours, which are from 10

a.m. to 4 p.m. on Fridays and from 10 a.m. to 11 p.m. on Saturdays.

In the beginning, movies were shown at more venues in Sanford-Springvale than you might realize. Films were shown in the auditorium of the Sanford Town Hall, beginning in 1908. The Gowen Theatre on Butler Street opened in 1913 and was renamed the Colonial Theatre three years later. Sanford Theatre opened on High Street – near the corner of North Avenue – in January of 1928 and was destroyed by fire in January of 1937. Even the building that is now the historical museum itself showed films in the early 1900s and again in 1937.

Just a few doors down from the Capitol, the State Theatre opened behind the Gendron Block on Main Street under E.M. Loew Management in the fall of 1929. Its nearly 1,000 seats made it Sanford's second-largest theatre after the Leavitt. During the late 1930s and early 1940s, children flocked to the State to see such silver screen icons as Wild Bill Hickock, the Green Hornet, Flash Gordon, and the Lone Ranger in the latest installments of their ongoing serials.

Eastman, a youngster during this time, said he was a "movie-holic" as a kid, taking a bus to Sanford from his Springvale home and catching a show at either the Capitol or the State on Saturday afternoons. On some occasions, he ended up attending movies at both theatres, adding a film in the evening "if there was something that couldn't be missed."

"I got a 50-cent-a-week allowance," Eastman said. "I could go to Sanford for five cents, to the State Theatre for ten cents, and then, if I was going to stay and go to the Capitol Theatre, I could get a hamburger, a Coke, and a doughnut for 20 cents, and then I had ten cents for the evening show, and five cents left out of 50 to take the bus home."

and Springvale that were in the Ralph Benton Emery, Sr. negative collection recently purchased by the museum. (See related story in this newsletter.)

Local history teacher Paul Auger's proposed November program on World War I and the impact of the Spanish flu on the citizens of Sanford was postponed due to inclement weather. Auger presented the program in February of this year.

The museum's programs are open to the public. There is handicapped-accessibility and all are welcome.



Tick Tock

Earlier this year, David Small, of Wells, donated to the Sanford-Springvale Historical Society the wall clock that belonged to his grandfather. Seth Thomas was the maker of the clock.

The clock is now on a wall inside the Goodwin House and "looks splendid," according to Historical Society President Harland Eastman. Eastman added that the clock beautifully matches the woodwork of the room in which it is displayed.

## In Memoriam

The Sanford-Springvale Historical Society lost three of its friends and most avid supporters in the past year.

Linda Pence passed away in May of 2018, and her husband, David, passed away five months later, in October. The Pences were major donors toward the restoration of the old town hall and its conversion into the current Sanford-Springvale Historical Museum at 505 Main Street.

"When we acquired the Edmund E. Goodwin House, they literally adopted it by meeting every request for financial support and suggesting and underwriting other things they thought should be attended to," Harland Eastman, the president of the historical society, said. "Over the years, they became our most loyal and generous benefactors."

A memorial plaque honoring the Pences will be unveiled in the Goodwin House at 503 Main Street on Friday, May 24, at 3:15 p.m.

Wayne Hartford passed away earlier this year. In a letter to a couple that donated to the Historical Society in Hartford's memory, Eastman described Hartford's interest in local history as "all-encompassing and practical."

"He loved every aspect of our past and took it upon himself to record in photographs significant developments," Eastman wrote. "Thanks to him, we have hundreds of photographs of the restoration of the old town hall in Springvale and its transformation into our Historical Museum."

Hartford always wrote a description of what was happening in a photo on the back of it. He included the date on which he took the picture.

"He made similar records of the moving of the Springvale Library and its expansion, the restoration of the Nason College Gymnasium and Little Theatre, and other noteworthy developments," Eastman added. "His work has become a valuable record for future generations."

funding came to \$500,000, or the equivalent of \$5.8 million in 2019.

The Sanford War Memorial Gymnasium was dedicated January 29, 1950.

Deering Principal (and SHS Alumnus) Carl L. Wiggin was a featured speaker at the dedication. Following the ceremonies, a dance was held with music provided by Vic Firth's orchestra. Mr. Firth would later become one of the world's most famous percussionists.

The first game at the gym was St. Ignatius' Junior Varsity against Sanford's, with Sanford prevailing, 32-14. The varsity teams played next. The crowd, estimated at 2,500, was believed to be the largest crowd to ever attend an indoor sporting event in York County. The second contest saw St. Ignatius defeat the rival Sanford High, 34-31.

The Sanford Tribune reported that, "Despite the intense rivalry between the two schools and the highly charged atmosphere and the large crowd, there were no signs of any poor sportsmanship or unruliness by the players or fans."

Raymond J. "Red" Nadeau officiated the JV game, with Bob Blouin refereeing the varsity matchup.

The final girls game was played at the gym on February 6, 2018, against Deering High School, with Freshman Abby Toothaker scoring the final basket. Ethan Shain scored the last basket for the boys two days later against Noble. Now games are played at the new Sanford High School, which opened in October of 2018.

### 2018: The Year in Programs

The Sanford-Springvale Historical Society began its year of programs in March with a presentation by Juliana L'Heureux entitled, "World War II: The L'Heureux Brothers." During the presentation, L'Heureux recounted the war experiences of the four L'Heureux brothers who fought in Europe and in the Pacific during World War II. All four Sanford natives experienced the war as front-line fighters and survived the odds of being victims of the battles in which they fought. The four brothers were interviewed several years ago in order to capture their memories about fighting against the Germans in Europe and the Japanese in the Pacific. A fifth brother, who served in the military but not in Europe, had passed previously.

L'Heureux has been involved in supporting programs for veterans and writing about their histories for several years. She is a freelance writer and a frequent contributor to newspapers and blogs, writing on various topics, including Franco-American culture.

In May, the history of Sanford and Springvale was presented by our local preeminent historian, Harland Eastman. Those who missed the program may access the hourlong talk on YouTube. Eastman is long considered Sanford and Springvale's "go to" person for questions pertaining to the origins of our city, as well as its development through the years.

The Historical Society's annual meeting in September consisted of a brief business meeting, followed by a talk on the history of movie theaters in Sanford and Springvale by Eastman. The museum currently has an exhibit, including memorabilia and photos showcasing our local movie entertainment history. (See related story in this newsletter.) Following the talk, Eastman was honored with the dedication of the museum library in his name as the Harland H. Eastman Research Library.

The October program consisted of a slide show featuring never-before-seen images of Sanford

### Carpenter Family Donates 19th Century Sampler



The sampler is admirably embroidered, a testament to the skills and talents of the young girl who created it. It is a small piece that features elegant successions of numbers and letters of the alphabet. At the bottom of the small fabric square, on the right-hand side, a name is stitched: Nancy G.

The sampler, embroidered sometime between 1805 and 1810, is now on display in an exhibit at the Sanford-Springvale Historical Museum at 505 Main Street.

Nancy G. is Nancy Gilman, born in Gilmanton, New Hampshire, during the presidency of George Washington in 1795. Gilman married Abel Smith in Buxton, Maine, in 1831. Nancy and Abel had three children. One of them, a son, Abel Gilman Smith, was born in 1837. His granddaughter, Mabel, married Oscar Carpenter, of Deering Neighborhood here in Springvale, Maine. Mabel and Oscar Carpenter's farm became Carpenter's Dairy, which operated locally for many years.

So now you have the idea how that sampler found its way to the local historical museum. A member of the Carpenter family here in Springvale donated it in the hopes that it will be preserved for generations to come.

The exhibit features other items donated by the Carpenter family. There's a small, black-and-white photo of Mabel Carpenter, tucked into

one corner of the display case that Harland Eastman, the president of the Sanford-Springvale Historical Society, secured from DeWolfe & Wood Rare Books in Alfred. Next to it are two other photos, one of Abel Gilman Smith as a middle-aged man and another of the Smiths' family home in Buxton.

The small exhibit also features Abel Gilman Smith's Certificate of Membership to the Moderation Lodge of Masons in Hollis in May of 1863. As well, there is Nancy G. Smith's memorial card, marking her passing in January of 1891 at the age of 95. Her life spanned the first 23 presidents of the United States; Benjamin Harrison was in the White House at the time of her death.

The exhibit also showcases a blue dress and white bonnet that Abel Gilman Smith wore as a child. Such clothing was customary for infant boys during that time, according to Eastman.

You can visit the exhibit at the museum during its regular hours of operation, which are from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. on Fridays and from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. on Saturdays.

### Sanford, Through the Eyes of Ralph B. Emery, Sr.



Last summer, a retiring photography hobbyist offered to sell his entire collection of Sanford-Springvale negatives to the Sanford-Springvale Historical Society. The collection had once been owned by Ralph B. Emery, Sr., a local businessman and a member of the Sanford Park Commission from 1932 until his death in 1943.

After looking through the images, the Society realized that nearly all of the scenes were unique views of our two villages and agreed to purchase the collection.

Some of the negatives were glass. The rest were celluloid. The glass negatives were probably the work of Fred Philpot. The later celluloid negatives were no doubt taken by Mr. Emery.

The collection shows Memorial Day parades; the former American Specialty Manufacturing Company, now the site of the American Legion post on Main Street; the last known image of the Hosea Willard House in Central Square; Clem Seavey and his crew developing the Sanford Airport; and an Elks picnic at the Acton Fairgrounds.

The collection also includes photographs of many Public Works Administration (PWA) construction projects in the late 1930s. Some of these projects include the construction of Elizabeth Benton Park, the Gowen Park Bandstand, the Lafayette School playground, and the Springvale Playground.

Other unique photos include the 1937 soap box derby on Kimball Street.

Paul Auger, a member of the historical society's board of directors, presented the photographs during a special presentation at the museum last October.

Prints of all the pictures are now in albums in the historical museum's library.

### As Seen in the Sanford News ...

The Sanford-Springvale Historical Society has acquired 22 boxes of pictures taken by Photographer Kevin Byron for the Sanford News, a weekly newspaper that published from March of 1980 through September of 2017.

Byron's photos appeared in issues published from the mid-1980s through the early 2000s.

The Historical Society is able to reproduce any one of the photos for anyone from the public who may want one.

### Music at the Museum

The Sanford-Springvale Historical Society's new concert season is well under way. Cellist Sergey Antonov and Pianist Ilya Kazantsev performed works of the masters, Von Weber, Brahms, Liszt and Schumann, at the museum on Saturday, March 23.



As well, the Southern Rail Bluegrass Band returned to the museum for an evening of toe-tapping bluegrass music on Saturday, April 6.



Even more concerts are planned at the museum, now through the late summer. All shows will start at 7:30 p.m.



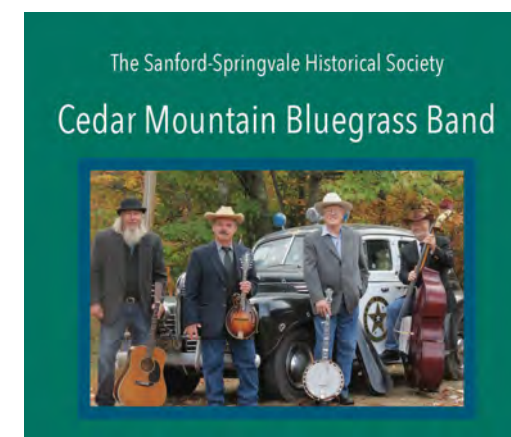
Portland Piano Trio  
Saturday, May 4, 2019  
An evening of great piano trios by composers of the 18th and 19th centuries.



Milltown Roadshow  
Saturday, June 15, 2019  
A unique blend of "Americana" music from a variety of genres.



La Famille LeBlanc Band  
Saturday, July 13, 2019  
An evening of Franco-American folk music.



Cedar Mountain Bluegrass Band  
Friday, August 16, 2019  
A welcome return of this exciting purveyor of bluegrass music.

This concert series is being funded in part by grants from Stephen and Cristi Eastman, Lawrence Furbish and Barbara Sutcliffe, Joseph Hanslip, Kennebunk Savings Bank, Law Offices of Charles Nickerson, Dr. and Mrs. John McGuckin, the Nason College Alumni Association, Bonnie and Albert Pollard, Dr. Muriel A. Poulin, Sanford Institution for Savings (soon to be Partners Bank of New England), and the Sanford-Springvale Rotary Club.

### Memorial Gym Has a Rich History

Following World War II, Sanford residents discussed what type of memorial they wanted to make in honor of the many local veterans who lost their life in the war.

At the time, Sanford High School was located on Main Street and did not have a large gymnasium nor a central kitchen for the relatively new school lunch program. In 1947, the town approved construction of a "War Memorial Gymnasium." The chairman of the Sanford War Memorial Building Committee was George S. Willard. Public donations also came through families who had children attending St. Ignatius High School, as they also had no large gymnasium. The combined donations and town.