THE GUILFORD REGISTER

ADVENTURES & STORIES FROM THE MAINE HIGHLANDS

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WAITING FOR SPRING
THE POEMS OF ERIK M. STUMPFEL

A BLEND OF BOOKS & ARCHITECTURE
THE CARNEGIE LIBRARIES OF CENTRAL MAINE

HISTORICAL PRESERVATION
THE GHOST TRAINS OF ALLAGASH

DOUBLE DOG DARE
AN ADDICTION TO ACCEPT

HOME AT THE GRANGE
THE ORIGIN STORY

DOUBLE DOG DARE

By John McNamara

Three little words with so much punch. I have heard them many times, even used them a few times, but I never knew the origin. It is a phrase I often heard as an adult living in the South. In fact, it was a phrase that my own wife has used on me many times, which explains a lot, actually.

In the little research that I did, the phrase is one more often used by school-aged kids, which tells you something about me... I have yet to grow up. To "dog dare" someone means you challenge them to do something—anything, and it usually is something small and innocent. Adding the “double” to the phrase heightens the pressure to accept the dare and makes you do more stupid things, like lick a frozen metal pole (as in A Christmas Story). I have known of the phrase for decades—most of my life, really, and I never really thought that much about it until two years ago.

For those keeping count, two years ago, I “retired” from the software world and did not know what I would do next. I was still young—still am young, so I suppose the logical next step for someone in their mid-50s should have been to look for another job, but instead, my wife looked at me and double-dog dared me to buy a bed-and-breakfast in New England and uproot our family. I bit. Looking back, she says that she never thought I would follow through with the dare, which is odd considering all of the dares we have made to one another through our marriage.

Now, as we meet hundreds of new people—new friends in our new life in Maine, we are almost always asked why we moved to the middle of Maine. Each time, one of us starts in with the double-dog dare story. We laugh about it and shrug it off as some silly joke, but really, something we both wanted to do—move to Maine. But recently, I started thinking about my life and the adventures I have had over the decades, and I realized that I crave the double-dog dare—maybe any challenge. I am addicted to it.

You should move to a country where you know no one. You should move to the other side of the country, where you know no one. You should open an art gallery. You should write a book, launch another new company, produce a festival, ‘buy’ an ice arena... the list of dares goes on and on. I realize that each one of these big moments in my life has not been a long, drawn-out, well-thought-out plan, but probably should have been, would have been if it were anyone else. These dares have included a discussion over a glass of wine or a few words in passing—nothing more —and yet each led me to make a big change in my daily life—the lives of my family—to pursue some idea—some challenge—some new conquest.

Some of these dares have been fruitful. Some of them have widened my knowledge and expanded my circle of friends. Some have added wealth, but the common thread among them all is that they all have made me a better person—a stronger, more confident person. And that result may be why I continue to sit on the teeter-totter in the schoolyard (figuratively, not actually) waiting for the next dare.

The conundrum that I find myself in, quite often, is that these dares, whether self-inflicted or not, are multiplying. As I look back on my life, I recall that each dare—each new challenge was a singular event. It was made, accepted, and executed. Then, while basking in the reward of completing one dare, another would be offered. These days, it is not that clear-cut.

Moving my family to Maine and running a B&B was a big enough dare that I did not need to add a magazine to that list, but I did. Of course, that magazine gave way to a publishing company that will launch four new titles this year, all from local Maine authors. But trying to write my own book, fill the role of CEO for a large non-profit in Bangor, and lead the charge on another non-profit in Piscataquis County has me wondering what my true dare threshold is, or should be.

I don’t know if I want to solve everyone's problem, I want to be the hero of the story, or if I really do have an addiction problem—unable to say ‘no’ to any dare. It is not just the dares, but it is the committees and boards that reach out, too. Maybe I am addicted to a challenge, or maybe it is that I am addicted to helping people—communities—achieve more, do more, be more. I guess it really depends on the dare.

They say the first step in recovery is admitting that you have an addiction, but I am not sure recovery is what I am looking for—wanting. I don’t feel exhausted by all of the dares. I don’t feel overwhelmed either. In fact, I find that these dares invigorate me—get me excited for something new.

Not everyone can take a dare, or even give one, and I am not saying that I am done accepting dares. Still, I will say that if you want to challenge yourself to do more, be more, give more, and accomplish more, then you owe it to yourself to accept a dare, even if it is one you give yourself in the mirror.

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THE GHOST TRAINS OF ALLAGASH

By John McNamara

Deep in the Allagash wilderness of northern Maine, where the forest presses in close and the nearest paved road can be fifty miles away, there are places where the ground still holds the ghost of iron. Depressions in the moss. Ballast stones half-swallowed by the bog. The occasional rotting tie, dark and soft as old bread, lying at the edge of a cedar swamp. These are the remnants of a railroad empire that once threaded through one of the most remote corners of the eastern United States — and left behind, when it vanished, something closer to legend than history.

The story of trains in the Allagash begins with timber. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the great logging operations of northern Maine were limited by geography. Rivers served as the primary highways for moving logs to the mills, but rivers have limits — they don't run in straight lines, they freeze, and they can't carry a locomotive. As the accessible timber near major waterways was exhausted and loggers pushed deeper into the interior, railroad companies followed. By the early 1900s, a web of logging railroads had spread through Aroostook, Somerset, and Piscataquis counties, penetrating country that had never before seen a wheeled vehicle of any kind.

The most ambitious of these lines reached into the heart of the Allagash watershed — a vast, lake-studded wilderness that drains north toward the St. John River and the Canadian border. Narrow-gauge tracks were laid over terrain that challenged every engineering assumption: through bogs that swallowed ballast, over streams that flooded without warning, across ridgelines that required switchbacks and grades that taxed even the most powerful logging locomotives. The men who built and ran these lines were legendary for their stubbornness—the country, equally legendary for its indifference.

While many Allagash-area railroads were private logging operations — built cheaply, used hard, and abandoned when the timber ran out — the Bangor and Aroostook Railroad brought a more permanent ambition to the region. Founded in 1891, the B&A expanded aggressively through the early twentieth century, eventually operating more than 600 miles of track across northern Maine. Its lines touched the fringes of the Allagash country, connecting the mill towns of Millinocket, Greenville, and Caribou and making possible the industrial-scale harvesting of the North Woods.

For decades, the sound of a steam whistle in the deep woods was as common as the call of a loon. Logging camps were supplied by rail. Sporting camps advertised a train service for visiting hunters and fishermen. This remarkable selling point suggests just how thoroughly the railroad had penetrated what we now think of as wilderness—passenger service, however sparse, connected isolated communities to the wider world. The trains were, in a very real sense, civilization's proxy in the Allagash.

The decline came quickly, as such things often do. The Great Depression devastated the timber economy. Trucks and improved logging roads offered cheaper, more flexible alternatives to fixed rail. One by one, the logging railroads fell silent — tracks pulled up for scrap, bridges left to rot, grades reclaimed by the forest with a speed that surprised even those who watched it happen. The B&A itself limped forward for decades before eventually being sold, restructured, and absorbed into larger rail networks. By the latter half of the twentieth century, the trains of the Allagash existed primarily in memory.

And memory, in a remote country, has a way of turning strange. Among the guides, trappers, and foresters who work the Allagash today, the old railroad grades are spoken of with a particular reverence. Hunters who follow the old rights-of-way report an uncanny sense of presence — the feeling that something large and mechanical is just around the bend in the alders. Old-timers in the camps at Umsaskis Lake and Churchill Depot speak of hearing, on still autumn nights, what sounds like a distant whistle carried on the north wind. No train has run these lines in generations. The sound, they say, is unmistakable.

For those willing to look, the Allagash still speaks plainly of its railroad past. The old grades — raised, arrow-straight corridors through the forest — are among the most distinctive features in an otherwise trackless landscape. They appear on topographic maps as faint dashed lines, labeled simply "old railroad" or "abandoned grade," and following them on foot or by canoe offers a strange double vision: the wild country of the present overlaid on the industrial country of the past.

(GHOST, continued on page 7)

Stone, Books and Beneficence: The Carnegie Libraries of Northern and Central Maine.

By John McNamara

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Andrew Carnegie embarked on what he called the greatest use a man could make of his fortune: giving it away to build libraries. From Scotland to California, Carnegie's philanthropic machine funded the construction of over 2,500 library buildings across the English-speaking world. In northern and central Maine—a land of logging camps, potato farms, and paper mills—a handful of these libraries took root in communities that might otherwise have gone without. They stand today as quiet monuments to an era when a steel baron's guilt and generosity reached even the most remote corners of America.

Carnegie's library program was no simple act of charity. It operated on a strict formula. A town wishing to receive a grant had to demonstrate public need, provide a suitable building site, and—crucially—pledge to fund the library's ongoing operations at 10% of the grant value annually. This last requirement was Carnegie's way of ensuring communities had genuine skin in the game. He was not interested in building monuments; he wanted to build institutions. The grant covered construction; the town covered everything else, forever.

Applying for a Carnegie grant required navigating correspondence with Carnegie's formidable private secretary, James Bertram, a man whose terse replies and demanding questions tried the patience of many a small-town mayor. Towns in Maine were no exception. Applications had to be persistent, organized, and persuasive. The communities that succeeded in northern and central Maine did so through genuine civic determination. In all, there are more than 16 Carnegie libraries throughout Maine, including Auburn, Lewiston, Caribou, Fort Fairfield, Fairfield, Freeport, Gardiner, Guilford, Houlton, Madison, Milo, Oakland, Waterville, Old Town, Pittsfield, Presque Isle, Rockland, Rumford, and Vinalhaven.

Northern and central Maine presented particular challenges that libraries in more populated regions did not face. Winter was —and remains—brutal. Heating a stone building in Maine in January required serious effort and cost. A sparse population meant smaller tax bases, making the Carnegie requirement for ongoing annual funding a genuine burden for some towns. Distances between communities were vast. A family living ten miles from town might visit a library only a handful of times per year, if that. Bookmobiles and traveling libraries would eventually address some of these gaps, but in the Carnegie era, the library was a fixed anchor in the county seat or the larger mill town, and its reach had natural limits.

The lumber and paper industries that defined the region brought transient workers who rarely put down roots long enough to use a library. Logging camps were months-long undertakings far from any permanent town. The Carnegie library, as an institution, was designed for settled communities with stable civic identities—precisely the kind of community that northern Maine, for all its hardy character, sometimes struggled to become.

What distinguished Carnegie libraries from other public buildings of the era was their deliberate architecture. Carnegie and Bertram insisted on designs that communicated dignity and permanence. In a region where most structures were wood-framed and provisional—built to serve an immediate need and replaced when they wore out—a Carnegie library made of brick or stone was a statement of permanence. These were buildings that said, "We intend to be here in a hundred years." We expect our children, and their children, to walk through these doors.

That aspiration was not mere vanity. Communities that invested in lasting public buildings tended to invest in themselves in other ways too. A Carnegie library anchored a downtown, served as a civic pride focal point, and signaled to potential residents and businesses that this was a place worth inhabiting. In the intensely competitive landscape of early twentieth-century small-town America, where some communities flourished and others quietly faded, the presence of a fine public building mattered more than it might seem.

Piscataquis County—vast, sparsely settled, draped in forest and threaded by the rivers that powered its mills—received Carnegie grants for two of its communities: Guilford and Milo. Both grants came in 1908, the same year, and both resulted in buildings that remain standing today. Together, they offer a portrait of how Carnegie's philanthropy worked in practice across a single rural county.The story of the Guilford Memorial Library begins not with Carnegie but with a reading club. Around 1900, between forty and fifty residents formed a circulating book club, pooling their resources to share good books. The idea of a proper public library was considered a distant dream at first. They stored books in a small stack room adjoining the selectman's office in a local building, and the reading room was part of the selectmen's own office. It was a makeshift arrangement, but it worked well enough that enthusiasm grew.

By January 1903, thirteen members of the club met at the First National Bank to formally organize toward a free public library. Within a short time, local businesspeople had pledged $1,500. The circulating collection became a town institution and received state support. As the collection outgrew its cramped quarters, the trustees applied to Andrew Carnegie for funding to build a new building. The reply was favorable. The town voted to accept a $5,000 grant and to pay $500 annually toward the library's upkeep—Carnegie's standard condition. A local landowner, D. R. Straw Jr., donated a plot of land along Water Street in memory of his father, and the local community then raised an additional $3,000 to supplement the Carnegie funds.

(CARNEGIE, continued on page 10)

More Than A Place: The Meaning of the Grange

By Walter Boomsma

One of my greatest pleasures in life is attempting to explain the origins and purpose of this organization called “the Grange” to excited third graders as part of our “Words for Thirds” program. I start by attempting to determine what they already know about the Grange, and I’ll always remember the young girl who waved her hand enthusiastically and announced, “I was born there.”

It took a little thinking to realize she’d heard me say “LaGrange” – one of the small, rural communities here in Maine. Her answer was certainly amusing, but it was also insightful and telling. Like the organization she was learning about, she was proud of her roots and heritage. She announced her connection and kinship to LaGrange just as enthusiastically as I announce my connection to the Grange.

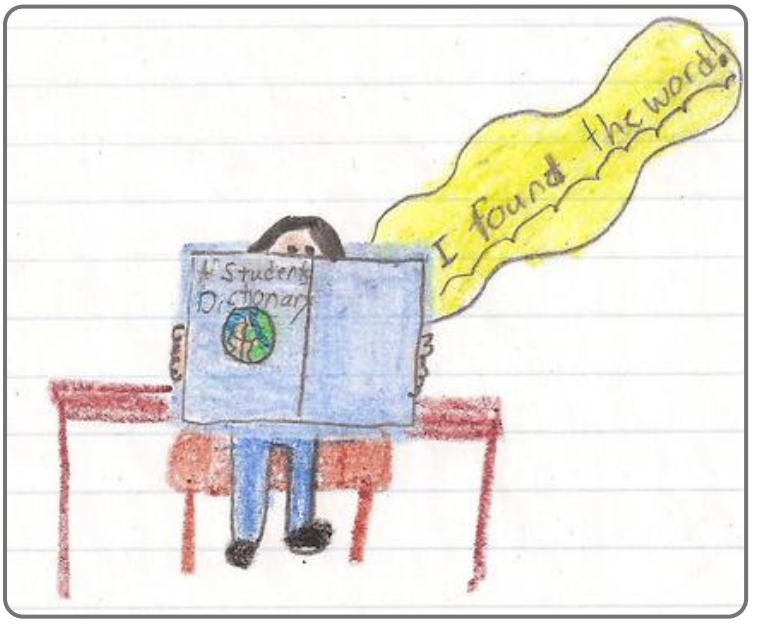
For those unfamiliar with it, the Grange, officially known as the Patrons of Husbandry, was founded in 1867 to revitalize American agriculture and foster a sense of belonging among rural families following the Civil War. By establishing local Granges, the organization provided a vital social hub that offered educational lectures, cooperative buying power to lower costs, and a rare space for men, women, and youth to participate equally. This focus on mutual aid and collective improvement transformed isolated farmsteads into tight-knit networks, cementing the Grange as a cornerstone of rural social life and civic engagement for over a century.

A sense of connection often attracts people to small-town rural America. But even small towns are experiencing a “social disconnect” as things like regional school systems and social media change the traditional model of community. We now have cell phones, tablets, and computers to stay “connected” with people – in many cases, people we rarely see and certainly can’t touch.

But beneath all the communicating, we still want to see people – to touch and be touched – and to feel a part of something. People will claim their families are going “in a million different directions” but not really consider why. Some of it must be the search for connections and a sense of belonging. At the Grange, families find unity, shared purpose, and a sense of community regardless of geographic boundaries. Being from “LaGrange” is not enough. Being from “the Grange” offers more. The Grange, with its fundamental principles and practices, is one place where the entire family can not only be together but also feel connected to other like-minded people and families. The Grange's rich heritage as an organization with shared values and missions remains relevant today. One hundred years ago, it was about farmers coming together and overcoming rural isolation. Today, it is about a larger and redefined community, but it is still about coming together and overcoming isolation.

In a study, psychologists McMillan and Chavis identified the four elements required for a "sense of community": 1) membership, 2) influence, 3) fulfillment of needs, and 4) shared emotional connection. An in-depth study isn’t required to see how an active Grange contributes to those elements and builds a sense of community. From potluck suppers to community service projects, Grange members and friends feel a sense of kinship and demonstrate a cooperative spirit.

There are several crucial factors that distinguish the Grange from other civic and community organizations. The family orientation is one notable difference. Grange families find occasions when they don’t go in a million directions. Another is the diversity of programming and interests. The Grange offers social, economic, and educational benefits to all. You can’t be born there, but you can belong.



Each month we will highlight a short story, poem or serial written by a Maine author. If you are a Maine writer, or know of one who would like to be showcased here, reach out to us at john@theguilfordregister.com

Tracks

By Erik M. Stumpfel

Mainers snowshoe. Being “from away”,
I strap on skis to take my Winter sport.
Cross-county, mind you, not the downhill kind;
I'm far too old to mend a broken bone.

I broke new trail on an old logging road,
to find a camp I'd seen upon a map.
I meant no harm and did not venture in
but poked around then, having seen the view,
reversed my route and headed home again.

Around a bend, I halted, came up short,
surprised and somewhat anxious at the sight
of a coyote standing in my path
on fresh ski tracks that I'd made in the road.

Though not quite fearful, but a bit unnerved,
and wanting to continue on my way,
I banged my ski poles, urging her to go.
Coyote held her ground and gave a stare,
then sauntered off my road into her woods.
I traced her tracks back for a mile or so
to find the spot where she had found the road
and started tracking me--superimposed
her paw prints on my tandem, fresh-made tracks.

I don't think she was hunting; I'm a size
a lone coyote wouldn't quite take on,
and new snow showed she'd followed me alone;
though at the time, it pleased me she had gone.

I wonder had she, Winter-bored like me,
set out to see a spirit in her woods--
a man with boards strapped on his feet and poles
move spider-like along the humans' road?
And did she trace my track on her mind's map
as I had done to find the hunters' camp?

I'll never know; coyotes don't talk much
except in dreams, the Wabanaki kind;
but she gave me a daylight spirit dream
to lift the Winter's boredom from my mind,
and left me with a dreamer's tale to tell.
I hope it was the same with her, as well.

Ice Out

By Erik M. Stumpfel

The ice melts first along the northern shore,
Except where freshets, brooks and streams come in;
These melt before the shores, though north or south,
And each year, fools will drown in some brook's mouth
By going out on ice that's grown too thin
Where snow-melt freshened Springtime flows come in.

But back to northern shores: The south-sloped sun
In gaining azimuth when the Winter's done
Will cast its rays upon the starker strand,
To grow a gap 'twixt edge of ice and land,
Show glacial drop-stones, pushed as if by hand
To shallow depths, by Winter's ice now gone.

The southern shores are last to feel the sun;
Dense spruce, fir, pine and larch all screen its warmth
And leave a half-moon, crescent, eyelid, rind
Of ice on ponds half open, and half blind.

While Winter lingers on the northern slopes
It also tarries on the southern shore
As if to say, life may fulfill our hopes,
But not just yet; we have to wait some more.

Come Bide With Me

By Erik M. Stumpfel

Come ride with me to Garland Pond
And in a cedar strip canoe
We'll paddle there an hour or so
And catch a speckled trout or two
And watch the sun play in your hair.
I'm going there now.

"I'll come."

Please do.

Come hide with me, we'll steal away
To Borestone's trail or Barren's peak
And spend this bright October day
Amid the foliage, gold and gay;
We'll listen to the ravens speak
And watch a hawk soar in the sky;
We'll live the life that others seek
While shadow clouds go scudding by--

(*STUMPFEL, continued on page 8)*

(*GHOST, continued from page 3)*

Near the town of Allagash at the northern end of the famous waterway, sections of the old B&A roadbed are still visible where they cross the river corridor. Iron bridge abutments, massive granite and concrete structures built to last centuries, stand in the water and on the banks with nothing between them — the bridges themselves long since gone, leaving only the foundations as monuments to an infrastructure that once seemed as permanent as the mountains. Moose use the old grades as travel corridors; so do deer, bear, and the occasional Canada lynx. The wilderness has reclaimed the railroad, but the railroad still shapes the wilderness.

Something is fitting about the way the Allagash has absorbed its railroad history — completely, quietly, and without apology. This is a landscape shaped by wave after wave of human ambition: the fur trade, the log drives, the railroad boom, the pulp and paper era. Each left its marks, and each was eventually subsumed. What remains is a place that feels genuinely ancient, even where it isn't — a wilderness that wears its industrial past lightly, like an old scar.

The ghost trains of the Allagash are not really ghosts, of course. They are history — specific, documented, and traceable. But history, in a place this remote and this beautiful, has a way of becoming something larger than fact. The old grades run on through the forest. The bridge abutments stand in the current. And on certain cold nights, if you're camping far enough from the nearest road and the wind is right, you might hear something that doesn't quite fit the catalogue of wilderness sounds you've been keeping all your life. The old-timers will tell you exactly what it is.

(*STUMPFEL, continued from page 6)*

Come with me there.

"That peak--how high?"

Come glide with me on sylvan streams
That flow below our hopes and dreams;
A forward tide, or so it seems
Until we come up on the falls
That seethe and surge through slate-bound walls
And give our timid hearts a pause.
But even as we taste the spray
And see the rocks before our bow,
We'll yet continue on our way--
We would lose all to turn back now--
We'll risk the raging torrent's flood
With might and muscle, bone and blood,
'Til yielding all, at last we find
The calmer currents of the mind.
Come join this dance.

"You are so kind."

Come bide with me, and rest a while.
We'll sit and talk, or take a walk
At evening, as the sun goes down,
Then dream beside a fire warm,
Away from pond and stream and wood
And reminisce of all the good
That's come to us throughout our day.
And in the dimming firelight,
As our last embers fade away,
We'll share our memories of delight
And then, together, face the night.
Come bide with me. Will you?

"I might."

Tree Rentals

By Erik Stumpfel

In Spring, I tap
my neighbors' trees and my own,
and barter the sap to Bob, for syrup;
the sweet solace of a Maine Winter.

Sugaring is Bob's profession.
With me, it's just a hobby;
a mere passion.

To Bob, the sugar's the thing:
one point eight is low;
two point four is good;
four point oh is magic, like a 4.0 at school
but harder to attain.

These large, old, full-crowned roadside trees test high,
most years at three point oh.
Three point eight one year, on one batch,
the first full run in February,
the earliest run of any recent year.
Full crowns, healthy trees test high.

We call them "Eva's trees."
Her grandfather's, really;
he planted them all up and down the road
a mile almost, each way,
many years ago.

Eva Burgess, who lived fifty years
in the house we now own
and fifty more years after that,
in the house her husband built for her
just three doors down the road;
and two other years, before either.

Eva Burgess, who as a girl
packed Dutchess, Milding and Courtland apples
in barrels shipped all the way to England.

Eva, though, stayed at home,
raised five sons; taught Sunday school
at the East Sangerville Union Church for sixty years;
and saw 76 of her own descendents
to the fourth and fifth generations.

One oh two is a pretty high test as well,
in human terms, graded on our curve;
to flank a century at both ends, with your life –
with a clear mind and bright spirit to the last
that takes some pretty good sap.

Eva's grandfather planted these trees
as he and his sons and brothers built this house:
with their own hands.
We find their pencil signatures on joists
when we take a ceiling down,
and on newspapers, older than Eva,
hidden between the floors.
Six generations of Lelands
and Burgesses lived here.

Eva's grandfather built this house
as he planted these trees: by eye.
Only, trees don't need a level or a plumb.
No matter.
A hundred years of taps haven't felled these trees,
and a hundred years, and more, of life
haven't felled this house.

(POEMS, continued on page 9)

(*POEMS, continued from page 8)*

Bob measures up the sugar with a float.
Two point eight this time.
“Not bad” Bob says.

We started small, that first year in the house;
a dozen taps in our own trees,
just for a lark.
We cooked our own syrup on the stovetop
to show the kids how
(Hint: Don’t try this at home).
We replaced two burners
and the wallpaper that peeled
for half a gallon of our own home-made syrup
and a $200 electric bill
(but worth the cost, that year).

Then the season really started.
What do you do with 100 gallons of sap?
We found Bob,
and ferried buckets of clear, pure liquid
to his shop, in the car trunk, at night,
just to give away;
with visions of moonshine whiskey
and revenuers swimming in our brains –
a Yankee “Thunder Road” –
only to find that our work had a worth
beyond mere novelty.
Cash or syrup, as we pleased,
fair trade for clear, bright sap.

With 200 taps set out this year,
Bob now comes to us.
The bulk tank in the barn
converted from its dairy use,
now serves to hold our sap until Bob comes
with tank truck, pump and float.

Three point oh. The season’s in full swing.
“Hitting your mark again this year” Bob says.

Two hundred taps in maple trees will yield
six tons of sap in six weeks time.
We scurry ‘round at night to bring it in.
It’s drudgery at times,
after a long day’s work,
to slog through hip-deep snow
and lift 30 pound buckets that fill and overflow.

But, sometimes . . .

I have been out on nights so clear
they steal your breath away.
A galaxy of stars, unseen by city-dwellers
and those who watch TV;
and, one year, the bright trail of a comet
blazed against the sky.
And I haven’t yet mentioned the northern lights,
or the sweet stillness of the earth
wrapped in a mantle of new snow.

“It gets me out of the house” I tell my wife.
And she smiles
at secret we share
in a place words cannot go.

Six tons of sap at three percent will make
seventy three gallons of syrup.
Give or take a pint.
Our share from Bob is sixty quarts this year.
(Bob has to make a living, after all.
Those plastic jugs do not come cheap, you know;
and, oil’s up again this year,
and, who knows where the market will go
with all those taps up in Quebec
competing at the wholesale end?)

Even so. . .

Sixty quarts of maple syrup!
Old Croesus never felt so rich as we.
Who do you know who could afford to buy
a washtub full of liquid gold
to have around his house?
This is extravagance for us;
In this, we are like kings.

The children help with sapping when they can
but tire soon and much prefer
the product at the end when all is done.

But we drive ‘round in early May
and drop off syrup at our neighbors’ homes;
some thirty quarts in all: it’s their return
for our taps in their trees.
My children like that part.

And here, they’ll take a lesson, so I hope,
to guide their lives:
Bring in your sap in season, when it comes,
and make sure that you give back something sweet.

Erik M. Stumpfel is a retired lawyer and poet living in Sangerville, Maine. His complete book of poems, “Waiting for Spring and other poems” will be published later this year.

(CARNEGIE, continued from page 4)

The resulting building, designed by Bangor architect Frank A. Patterson, is a single-story Renaissance Revival structure of red brick with a slate hip roof, set on a rise overlooking the Piscataquis River. Granite steps lead up to a recessed arched entrance, and granite slabs beneath the windows add a note of dressed refinement to the facade. The town dedicated the building in January 1909, and in 1986, it joined many other distinguished buildings on the National Register of Historic Places. It is one of the few libraries in Maine to hold the designation of a Star Library from Library Journal—a recognition of exceptional service relative to the size of the community it serves. Patterson's design is his only known library; the building is considered one of the more architecturally distinguished Carnegie libraries in the state.

Milo's Carnegie library came together through a different kind of civic organization. The town, settled in 1802 on the banks of the Sebec River, was a working mill community—sawmills, shingle mills, a woolen factory, and eventually the spool-block mills that would define the region's manufacturing identity for decades. In 1902, members of the Women's Christian Temperance Union secured a traveling library from the Maine State Library and kept the collection in a private home. By 1909, the books had been moved to a room in the Odd Fellows Building. The newly formed WCTU Public Library Association took on the task of sustaining the collection and, eventually, obtaining a permanent home for it.

That effort succeeded in 1921, when the Carnegie Corporation committed a $10,000 grant to the town. The town guaranteed a plot of land and $1,000 in annual maintenance and formed the Milo Free Public Library Corporation. The building's design came directly from James Bertram's Notes on Library Buildings, the standardized guide Carnegie's office distributed to applicant towns. So closely did the Milo library follow that guide that its exterior closely resembles a Carnegie library built around the same time in Hartington, Nebraska, which received the same grant amount and was assigned the same plan. Construction began in May 1922, and the library opened its doors on January 6, 1923.

The resulting building is a small rectangular brick structure on a tall foundation, with a gable-on-hip roof and a round-arched entrance topped by a semicircular fanlight. It sits on a triangular lot in the main village, bounded by Park Street and Pleasant Street, adjacent to Milo Town Hall. Like its counterpart in Guilford, the Milo Public Library was recognized for its historic significance and added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1989. It continues to serve the community today.

Andrew Carnegie died in 1919, but his libraries lived on. In northern and central Maine, as elsewhere, many Carnegie buildings are still standing and still in use—some as libraries, others repurposed as municipal offices, museums, or community centers. Their endurance is a testament to both the quality of their construction and the stubborn attachment that communities develop to their most dignified public spaces.

The Carnegie library program represented something rare in American philanthropic history: a systematic, large-scale effort to provide free access to knowledge to ordinary people in ordinary places. In northern Maine—remote, cold, economically precarious, easy to overlook—that effort produced buildings that have quietly served their communities for over a century. They are the visible remnants of a compact between a robber baron who wanted to redeem his wealth and a scattered collection of small towns that wanted, more than anything, to matter. On both counts, the bargain largely held.

LOCAL EVENTS

THINGS TO DO IN THE MAINE HIGHLANDS

Each month we will highlight a Maine artist or art gallery. If you are a Maine artist or art gallery, or know of one who would like to be showcased here, reach out to us at john@theguilfordregister.com

LOST & FOUND MARKET
April 18, 2026

Join 100+ vendors of curated vintage clothing, decor, records and other treasures on Saturday, April 18th at the Cross Insurance Center in Bangor from 11A - 5P. Free entry.

KIWANIS PISCATAQUIS RIVER RACE
April 25, 2026

JThe 52nd Annual Kiwanis Piscataquis River Race will be here before you know it, and it's shaping up to be one of the best yet! Whether you're racing down the river or rooting from the shore, this long-standing community tradition is all about fun, friendly competition, and supporting a great cause. Grab your crew, dust off those paddles, and join us for a day of excitement on the water. Let's make year 52 the biggest splash yet! Registration opens at 7:30A and the race begins at 10AM. This event is at King Cummings Park in Guilford.
Learn more at: ***www.doverfoxcroftkiwanis.org***

MOOSEHEAD MARATHON
April 26, 2026

Run through the heart of Maine's wilderness and discover what you're truly made of. Moosehead Marathon and Half awaits you on April 26, 2026. Join us for a race through one of Maine's most picturesque regions—the heart of Greenville, along the stunning shores of Moosehead Lake.
Learn more at ***www.mooseheadmarathon.com***

BLACK FLY FESTIVAL
June 6, 2026

The Black Fly Festival is an annual event held on the FIRST Saturday in June every year in Milo, Maine with crafters, vendors, businesses and food vendors. Learn more at:
www.facebook.com/BlackFlyFestivalMiloMaine

MAINE WHOOPIE PIE FESTIVAL
June 13, 2026

Experience all that Piscataquis has to offer. The Maine Whoopie Pie Festival is the largest annual event in Piscataquis County. Piscataquis Valley Fairgrounds, June 13, 2026 from 10am to 4pm - Rain or Shine! Learn more at:
www.mainewhoopiepiefestival.com

PISCATAQUIS FARMERS MARKET
Sundays in June - August, 2026

Whether you live in Piscataquis County or are traveling through, you will want to stop at the Piscataquis Farmers Market in Guilford. With upwards of 40 farmers and artisan vendors offering fresh fruit and veggies, meats, cheeses and so much more. Enjoy this outdoor market along the Piscataquis River. Learn more at:
www.piscataquisforward.org/farmers-market

SANGERVILLE DAYS
July 11, 2026

Come out and celebrate Sangerville for a full day of fun in the sun. The festivities include a parade, car show, fire trucks, food and craft vendors and live music. To learn more, volunteer or register as a vendor, go to:
www.piscataquisforward.org/sangerville-days

RIVERFEST
July 25, 2026

Join us for a day filled with live music, craft vendors, fun activities for the kids, an expanded beer garden, a community run, fireworks, and so much more. It all kicks off with the annual town parade. Come for the fun, stay for the friendships. Learn more and sign up at:
www.piscataquisforward.org/riverfest

RED HOT DOG FESTIVAL
August 8, 2026

The Maine Red Hot Dog Festival is a DDA fundraiser designed to attract a large number of people to the town where they will see all that Dexter has to offer, and to simply have fun! Learn more and sign up at:
www.redhotdog.org

PISCATAQUIS FORWARD

INNOVATION • GROWTH • COMMUNITY

Together, We Can Save the Ice Arena!
DONATE TODAY!

Putting Community First!

Piscataquis Forward, a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization, has the opportunity to take over the Piscataquis County Ice Arena and run it with year-round programs. For more information about our organization and our initiatives, visit **www.piscataquisforward.org**.