THE GUILFORD REGISTER

ADVENTURES & STORIES FROM THE MAINE HIGHLANDS

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FROM A NON-FISHERMAN

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IT WILL BE YOUR GUIDING LIGHT

THAT POT OF GOLD FEELING

By John McNamara

The rainbow, from a scientific perspective, is sunlight refracted and reflected by water droplets, separating white light into its spectrum of colors—red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo, and violet. Easy enough. But from a cultural and spiritual perspective, it is a symbol of so much more.

In the Bible, a rainbow represents God's covenant with Noah—a promise that the earth would never again be destroyed by flood; although one could argue we have had plenty of floods since. In Norse mythology, the Bifröst bridge connects the human world to Asgard, the realm of the gods (yes, think Thor). In Irish folklore, a leprechaun's pot of gold can be found at the end of the rainbow. In many Indigenous traditions, rainbows are messengers or bridges between the physical and spiritual worlds. And, in Hinduism and Buddhism, rainbows can symbolize transformation and higher states of consciousness.

Those are deep thoughts that justify or explain the rainbow. Depending on your religion or spiritual belief, or even if you have no spiritual belief but focus on the lore of other worlds, or you hope for that pot of gold, everyone loves a rainbow. Skittles' entire marketing campaign tells us to taste the rainbow. Universally speaking, the rainbow represents hope, renewal, and promise—especially after storms, which is why rainbows are often symbols of optimism or perseverance.

This month, the rainbow symbolizes more than just itself—pride, diversity, and inclusion. Sure, it symbolizes the LGBTQ+ community every month—every day—and has since Gilbert Baker designed the rainbow flag back in 1978, but June, being Pride Month, is a time when the rainbow represents more than it does the rest of the year.

For each of us, the rainbow can mean any of the above, and sadly, there are some of us in the world where the rainbow represents nothing, means nothing other than the scientific definition. It is those people for whom I am sad. A rainbow is beautiful—sure, it might be a little overused at times, but, at its core, its symbolism represents transition—the moment between difficulty and clarity, storm and sun.

And no matter who you are or what you believe, or how you present yourself to the world, there is no denying that a rainbow is stunning—a visual moment of magic. No matter how old or young you are, when you walk outside after or even during a rain storm, and you look up at the bright sky, and you see the vibrant colors for yourself—experience that moment of calm, of joy, of excitement, there is no denying that feeling you feel.

Sure, when I was a kid, I'd want to find the base of the rainbow—find that pot of gold. As I have gotten older, I have come to accept that the pot of gold itself symbolizes the feeling you get when you see a rainbow. That excitement you might feel at winning the lottery or getting some reward for something—that is the excitement you get when you see the rainbow—experience it, especially if you can experience it with friends, family, or a loved one.

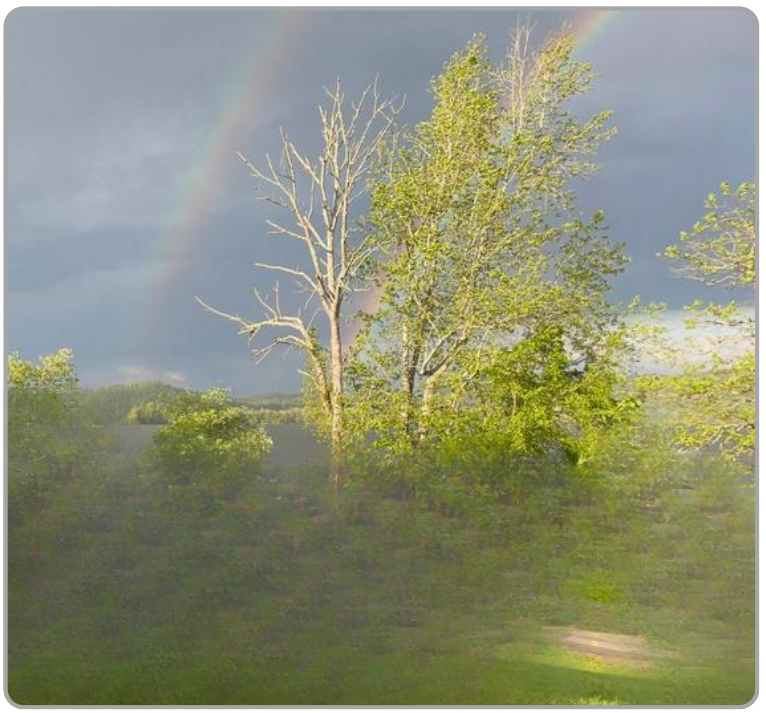
I recall being on a church retreat with my son—he was being confirmed in the Episcopal Church, and the weekend was all about learning the process and growing closer to God. For the group of teens, it was a weekend of glamping without their parents. I was a chaperone again. What made that weekend—that excursion with the kids, my kid, so much more wonderful and rewarding was the double rainbow we experienced. It was my first time seeing a double rainbow that I can recall. I think it was a first for all of us. To some, it strengthened their connection with God that weekend—a covenant between them. For others, it was just cool. For me, it was surreal—beautiful

In our divided country—the world —the rainbow has been beaten up. The symbol has been erased from our streets, even banned from our towns. Like books that are 'wrong' in the eyes of the few, the rainbow is being banned. I do not agree that we need the rainbow everywhere, but I will argue that it should be everywhere—be a symbol of hope, of beauty, of inclusion.

If we, as a people, would stop trying to ban a band of colors and start loving the feeling we got as kids (and hopefully still do as adults) when we see a rainbow in the sky, then maybe we can stop worrying about the little things in life and start enjoying the beauty that is all around us.

Beauty comes in all sizes, genders, colors, and languages. Beauty is in the eye of the beholder, and so I would challenge everyone—gay, straight, queer, homophobic, young, old—to stop seeing a rainbow and having any feeling other than joy. Next time you want to bash the rainbow, go outside after a rainstorm and stand there with someone—anyone, and look up and tell me that you are still mad, or angry, or have any negative feeling.

If you do that and still do not feel the joy, you probably need a hug, because I cannot think of a single person who does not love a rainbow.



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Cast Away: The Best Fishing Spots in Maine's Highlands Region

By John McNamara

Maine's Highlands region — a sprawling inland expanse anchored by Moosehead Lake and stretching across Piscataquis and Somerset counties — is one of the last truly wild fishing destinations in the eastern United States. With more than 400 lakes and ponds, hundreds of miles of cold-water rivers, and a forest canopy that seems to go on forever, this remote corner of Maine has drawn anglers for generations. Whether you're after trophy brook trout, landlocked salmon, or the elusive lake trout known locally as togue, the Highlands deliver.

Take from a non-fisherman when I say that there are plenty of places to fish in the Maine Highlands. This list highlights the more public spaces, but if you really want a one-of-a-kind fishing experience find a local or hire a guide. They will be sure to take you to the hidden gems—the places only locals know about.

Moosehead Lake: The Crown Jewel

At roughly 75,000 acres, Moosehead Lake is the largest lake in Maine and the largest mountain lake east of the Mississippi River. It is, simply put, the centerpiece of Highland fishing. The lake is renowned for its landlocked Atlantic salmon and lake trout, both of which thrive in its deep, cold, well-oxygenated waters. Ice-out fishing — typically from late April through May — is the most productive season, when salmon congregate near tributary mouths and can be taken on streamers, smelt-imitating lures, and light spinning gear.

The town of Greenville, at the lake's southern tip, serves as the region's basecamp, with guides, outfitters, and boat launches readily available. Rockwood, on the western shore near the mouth of the Moose River, is another popular launch point and offers access to the North Basin, where togue are frequently taken by trolling with lead-core line in summer months. A state fishing license is required, and there are seasonal regulations on salmon and togue that anglers should review before heading out.

The Roach River System

Flowing out of First Roach Pond and into Moosehead Lake near Rockwood, the Roach River is a fly fisherman's dream. Cold, clear, and moderately paced, this short but productive river holds excellent populations of wild brook trout and landlocked salmon. Catch-and-release regulations apply to salmon in portions of the river, helping sustain a healthy fishery over the years. The best action typically occurs in May and again in September and October, when salmon stack up ahead of their spawning run.

Access is straightforward from the Kokadjo area, and the surrounding forest roads — though rough — are passable with most vehicles in dry conditions. First, Roach Pond itself is worth a morning or evening of fishing, offering brook trout in the shallows during spring and fall.

Sebec Lake and the Dover-Foxcroft Area

On the southeastern edge of the Highlands, Sebec Lake offers a slightly more accessible alternative to Moosehead while still delivering quality cold-water fishing. The lake holds a solid population of landlocked salmon, along with lake trout and smallmouth bass — making it one of the more versatile fisheries in the region. The bass fishing, in particular, can be outstanding along the rocky eastern shoreline from June through August.

The nearby Piscataquis River offers a different kind of experience: wade fishing for wild brook trout in a classic Maine river setting. The stretch through and around Dover-Foxcroft is easily accessible and well-suited for beginners. At the same time, the upper reaches above Guilford require more effort but reward patient anglers with larger fish and fewer crowds.

Brassua Lake and the Upper Moose River

West of Moosehead and connected to it by the Moose River, Brassua Lake is a quieter, less-visited option that rewards those willing to make the drive. The lake holds good numbers of togue and some salmon, and its northern shallows can produce surprisingly large brook trout in early season. The Upper Moose River corridor above Brassua is one of the more scenic and productive stretches of moving water in the entire region, with brook trout plentiful throughout and a genuine sense of wilderness that feels increasingly rare in the modern world.

Tips for Fishing the Highlands

The Maine Highlands are remote by design. Cell service is limited or nonexistent in many areas, forest roads can be gated or washed out, and weather can shift quickly — even in summer. Come prepared with paper maps (DeLorme's Maine Atlas and Gazetteer remains the gold standard), a full tank of gas, and a cooler stocked for a longer trip than you planned.

Hiring a registered Maine guide, especially for a first visit to a remote lake or river, is money well spent. Beyond their local knowledge of where the fish are holding, guides provide access to private timber company roads, know the current regulations inside and out, and can make the difference between an unforgettable trip and a frustrating one. Maine's Highlands are not going anywhere — but the fish, the solitude, and that particular quality of morning light on cold water are worth chasing properly.

Rooted in the Land: Farming in Piscataquis County, Maine

By John McNamara

There is something enduring about farming in Piscataquis County. Maine's second-largest county by area but least populated, it is a place of dense forests, quiet lakes, and wide-open skies — not the first landscape that comes to mind when one thinks of agriculture. Yet for generations, farmers have coaxed a living from its rocky soil and short summers, building a quiet agricultural tradition that continues to evolve and, in recent years, to thrive in unexpected ways.

The history of farming here is inseparable from the history of settlement itself. As families pushed north and west into the Maine interior during the 18th and early 19th centuries, they brought axes and plows with them. Clearing land was backbreaking work, and the rewards were modest. The growing season in much of Piscataquis County runs to only about 100 frost-free days — enough for hardy vegetables, root crops, hay, and grain, but unforgiving of mistakes or late frosts. Early settlers grew what they needed: potatoes, corn, beans, and squash, with dairy cattle providing both sustenance and a measure of economic stability. Butter, cheese, and whole milk became important products as dairying grew into one of Maine's most visible and important agricultural industries throughout the 19th century.

Through the 20th century, Piscataquis County farming reflected broader national trends—consolidation, mechanization, and the slow attrition of small family operations. By the early 2000s, the county's agricultural sector was modest in scale. The 2012 Census of Agriculture counted 203 farms in Piscataquis County, with an average size of 230 acres and net cash income of roughly $1.97 million across the county — up significantly from the 190 farms and $938,000 recorded in 2007. Those numbers tell a story of slow but steady growth, and of farmers finding ways to make the land pay.

Dairy programs have historically been among the most significant sources of federal agricultural support for Piscataquis County farms, with recipients receiving a total of $1.484 million between 1995 and 2023. Though the number of dairy operations has declined over the decades, those that remain reflect a deep commitment to the land and to the communities they feed.

What is perhaps most striking about farming in Piscataquis County today is the vitality of its organic and small-farm sector. A new generation of growers has found in this rural county not an obstacle but an opportunity — a place where land is affordable, community ties run deep, and an ethic of sustainable agriculture can take root.

Few farms better represent this spirit than Checkerberry Farm in Parkman. Jason and Barbara Kafka have been farming their 100-acre property for over 30 years, developing a solid, successful organic operation that serves as a model for others in the region. There are only about 100 frost-free days in the zone where Checkerberry Farm plants its seeds. Hence, the Kafkas added a production greenhouse and several high tunnels to extend the growing season — now totaling over 10,000 square feet of crops under plastic across seven structures. The farm sells vegetable starts to other farms, vegetables to Whole Foods and select vendors, and seedlings for Fedco's spring tree sale, with broccoli, parsley, kale, and chard among its most important crops.

Nightingale's Dairy is a small licensed dairy operation in Parkman, Maine, selling farm-fresh dairy products from a Jersey herd. Located at 178 Route 150, the farm sits in the heart of Piscataquis County's agricultural community, a neighbor to operations like Checkerberry Farm in a town with a quiet but genuine farming tradition. Their Jersey cows are prized for producing milk with a higher butterfat content than most other breeds, lending it a rich, creamy quality that sets it apart from commercial alternatives.

Marr Pond Farm, established in 2016 on historic farmland in Sangerville, has grown into a thriving certified organic vegetable operation, representing a newer wave of farmers committed to sustainable production and strong community ties. Ripley Farm in Dover-Foxcroft, operated by Eugene and Mary Margaret Ripley, is another MOFGA-certified organic operation that has become a valued part of the local agricultural network, benefitting from programs that facilitate networking and skill-sharing among area farmers, gardeners, and community members.

Perched along a ridgeline above a quiet neighborhood on High Street in Guilford, Helios Horsepower Farm is one of the more distinctive agricultural operations in Piscataquis County. The MOFGA-certified organic farm grows its vegetables with the help of draft horses Annie and Billy, who till and cultivate the fields as well as assist with a variety of other tasks around the property.

The farm offers a wide array of certified organic produce—from broccoli, kale, and tomatoes to leeks, parsnips, and winter squash — available through an on-farm stand and through wholesale channels. Products are also sold through the online Maine Highlands Farmers' Market. Beyond commerce, the farm is woven into the community's fabric. Helios partners with the Piscataquis Regional Food Center through the Mainers Feeding Mainers program, ensuring that its organic harvests reach neighbors in need across the region.

(FARMS, continued on page 7)

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

I Know What You Remember

By Kevin P. Tremblay

Chapter One

"Good morning, Darleen. Get me the Henry file. I'm not staying long; we are closing on his property today."

Ron Blanchard looked at Darleen lustfully as he entered the office. Neither knew Mark Henry had committed suicide last night, nor that Henry's death would eventually lead to Ron's murder. For Darleen, Mark's death was the breaking point. She blames Ron for it.

Darleen always arrived early. She started the copier, brewed coffee, and sorted mail before Ron came in. She was paid from 8:30 to 4:00, with a 30-minute lunch at her desk. The office opened for a few hours on Saturday mornings. Most ad mail ended up in the trash. Darleen avoided official-looking mail from attorneys or the government. Ron's wife, Margaret, also received catalogs for expensive clothing at the office.

Darleen tensed as Ron walked in, sucking the air from the room. Ron despised most employees, thriving on their doubts and fears.

"Yes, Ron."

"I'll need the Foodstop grocery store income and expenses report," he added.

"Certainly, Ron, I'm just about finished."

"Thanks, don't bother with coffee this morning," said Ron.

"Yes, Ron, I'll be right there. I printed out a report for the state unemployment office. There were a few calls on the machine this morning. I put the slips on your desk, on top of the mail." She tried desperately to be the perfect assistant, a knot of tension in her stomach, but it was almost impossible to please Ron, leaving her in a constant state of nervous anticipation.

Darleen had worked for Ron for over three years and was better paid than most employees. Ron needed her, and they both knew it. Only his grocery manager, Robert Yearns, made more.

Darleen's desk intercom buzzed. Ron said he wanted the Henry paperwork immediately, but really sought her 'special attention' before his meeting. Against her judgment, Darleen always complied, performing better than Margaret did. Fearful of losing her job, she did as Ron asked. Outside work, an alcoholic husband and unruly children oppressed her.

"I've got it right here, Ron," she said, entering his office.

He rolled his chair out from the desk. "Close the door."

She felt dirty and guilty, the weight of shame thick in her chest as she anticipated what would happen next. Each time, Ron's demands left her feeling contaminated and powerless, knowing he would make sure she 'earned' her higher pay. Resentment swelled alongside her self-loathing, making every encounter a fresh wound.

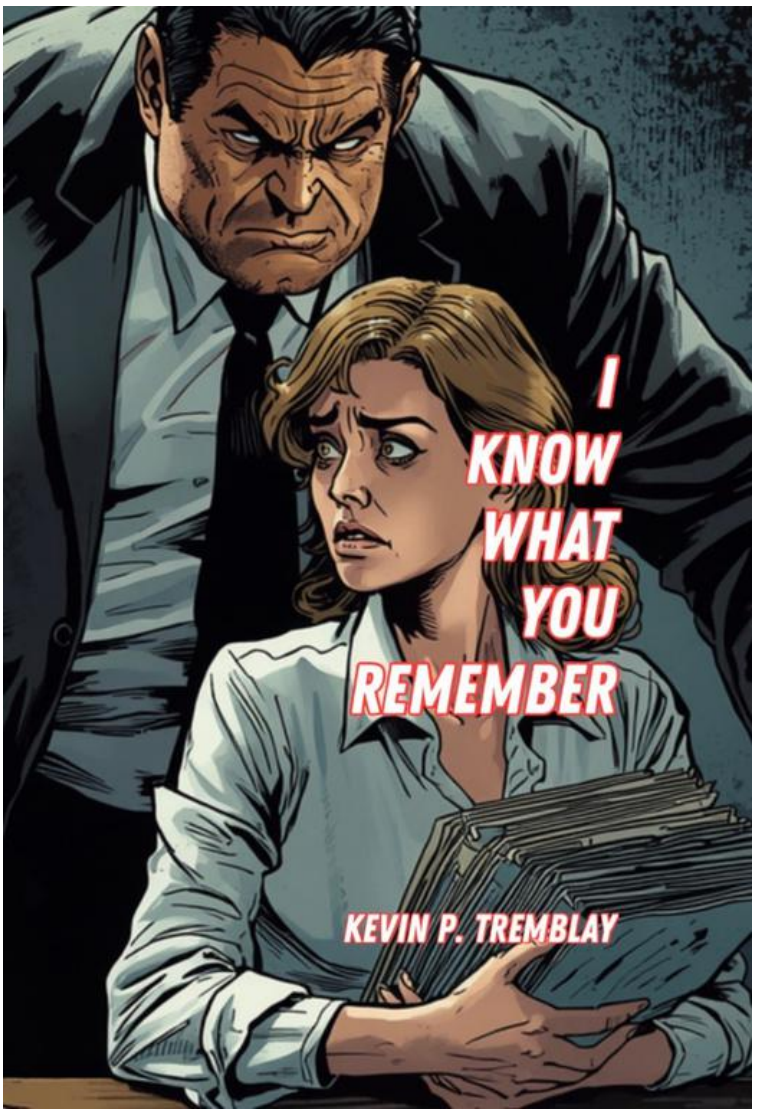
"I'm in a rush this morning, so let's get this done," Ron said hastily.

Darleen got on her knees under Ron's desk, scrunched against his safe, and began the 'great unzipping'—her private name for this duty. One night, drunk, she confided in her girlfriend about Ron's disgusting demands. Later, sober, when the topic returned, she lied and blamed the alcohol. She hadn't lied.

Afterward, Darleen stood up, wiped her face, and took the list of tasks Ron gave her. He dismissed her like a cheap hooker. It was Friday, which meant cutting checks: vendors, accounts payable, and mortgages. Ron specified which vendors not to pay this week.

Ron liked it when vendors begged for payment. It gave him a sense of power to have sales reps and owners call for money already owed. He thrived on this control, negotiating lower prices on goods already delivered. He was skilled at negotiation, business psychology, and manipulation. Ron used tricks, fast talk, and even neurolinguistic programming to his advantage.

(REMEMBER, continued on page 6)



(REMEMBER, continued from page 5)

Darleen knew everything about the office and Ron's private life, but was powerless to stop his crimes. Fear kept her silent. Ron's influence reached beyond her family and deep into the community. He called Pleasantville "My town."

Chapter Two

On the surface, Ron Blanchard was everybody's friend. He was no one's friend, ever. It didn't matter if you were related to him by birth or marriage. He cared about his wife, but only because she was the co-owner of his real estate holdings. He cared about the memory of their son—a product of youthful indiscretion and blackmail. Margaret was 14 when she got knocked up. Ron was 20.

Margaret's mother told Ron and his parents that if he didn't marry Margaret before the child's birth, she would have him charged with statutory rape. Either way, Margaret would be taken care of. Margaret was useful, and for Ron, it launched an exciting business. She forced Ron to marry her. When caught with other girls before Margaret, Ron paid for their abortions—too many times for his age.

Ron's arrogance was notorious. For a good time, he was the man to see. He sought gratification whenever he had an urge, favoring young, attractive women above all.

Some girls never told Ron about their pregnancies, surprising him after giving birth. He wrote their monthly support checks himself from a personal account, not from Darleen's account. No one dared speak against his family; the risk was too great. Ron could have almost anyone fired, calling fellow Lodge members to strike deals. He really was a bad person.

People feared Ron. If a business owner wasn't a Lodge member or refused Ron's demands, he would pull his business and call in favors. Ron could close or harm most businesses. If a business owner refused to sell, Ron eventually bought the business at a steep discount, either by waiting them out or driving them out. He always got his way.

It was no different with real estate purchases. Ron liked to invest in real estate. He had a few brokers who fed him information about homeowners or business owners in financial or personal trouble. If a property Ron was interested in was listed with a real estate brokerage, he would simply wait for the listing agreement to expire to avoid paying a commission. Immediately upon expiration, Ron would approach the owner with cash, working around the agents.

If there were loopholes, Ron knew them. His favored brokers rarely presented his offers through their brokerages. Most deals occurred privately, with under-the-table compensation in the form of gift certificates or trips. Brokers could swear they received no money, flying under the IRS radar.

Honest brokers or business owners were bypassed by Ron's associates, who lied on his behalf. It became a circle of dishonesty. You were either with Ron or against him, and in Pleasantville, standing up to him often ended in ruin. Families suffered.

Anyone seeking justice against Ron, no matter how solid their case, were often disappointed. Ron had all local attorneys on retainer. An honest lawyer declined to take on cases against Ron to avoid a conflict of interest. Dishonest attorneys shared case details with Ron after consultations, giving him insider knowledge and time to prepare his defense. The system favored Ron.

I Know What You Remember is now available for purchase. To learn more about Kevin Tremblay and to purchase your copy of this exciting fictional story, be sure to visit the Genthner House Publishing Co. website :

www.genthnerhousepublishing.com/kevin-tremblay

(FARMS, continued from page 4)

Rogers Farm is a family-owned agricultural business rooted in the heart of Atkinson, Maine—a community with a long and proud farming tradition. Like so many farms in this part of Maine, Rogers Farm reflects the values that define rural agriculture in the region: hard work, a deep respect for the land, and a genuine commitment to feeding neighbors rather than distant markets.

Specializing in sustainable farming practices, the farm produces a variety of crops and livestock for local distribution, operating in a county where the growing season is short and success demands creativity, resilience, and close attention to the soil. Sustainable methods aren't simply a marketing point here—in a landscape of rivers, wetlands, and forests, responsible land stewardship is a matter of community obligation.

Supporting these and so many other farms (too many to list here) is a robust network of organizations. The Piscataquis County Soil and Water Conservation District serves as a leader in agriculture, forestry, and natural resource education, providing assistance and coordination of resources to promote practices that sustain the region's way of life. The University of Maine Cooperative Extension maintains an active presence in the county, publishing a monthly farming newsletter and connecting farmers with soil testing, forage analysis, and market resources.

Challenges remain real and persistent. The short growing season demands creativity and investment. Rural infrastructure can be thin. Climate variability—wetter winters, hotter summers—is beginning to reshape what is possible on the land. And like farmers everywhere, those in Piscataquis County navigate the constant tension between the economics of small-scale production and the cost of doing things right.

Yet there is a resilience here that runs as deep as the county's roots. From the dairy farmers who have worked the same hillside pastures for generations to the young organic growers building new operations on old land, Piscataquis County farming endures—adaptive, community-minded, and quietly essential to the character of this corner of Maine.

And the best part of all this farming is the public access to the fruits of the farmer's labor. Scattered throughout Piscataquis County, and beyond, are a plethora of open-air farmer's markets and roadside vegetable stands working to ensure everyone has access to locally grown, fresh produce. Starting in June of this year, the Piscataquis Farmers' Market will open along the Piscataquis River in Guilford on Sundays from 11A - 3P.

Winning By Losing

By Walter Boomsma

A small gaggle of middle school girls approached me at first somewhat shyly. They know whining isn't allowed in my classroom when I substitute, but we weren't at school; we were at the Piscataquis River Festival. I suspect they also would have claimed what they were doing was actually begging, not whining.

For those who don't know, the Piscataquis River Festival is a truly awesome annual event that's extremely family and kid-friendly. The girls were offering a competition based on a game we sometimes play at school. "Are you smarter than a PCMS student?" They were having trouble getting contestants and begged me to visit their setup and play. Violating yet another school rule, they grabbed me by the hands and dragged and pushed me to their setup.

When I arrived, the girls and their game host immediately disappeared to "strategize," triggering a certain amount of suspicion in my mind. Upon returning, they all had a noticeable "cat that swallowed the canary" look.

The game host explained the rules and process carefully and quickly. I think I heard him say that the game was "only slightly rigged." I would be competing against the girls, but I had the first chance to answer the questions. If I answered the question wrong, they could "take the point" by answering correctly, proving they were smarter.

The questions were of a historical nature and not too difficult, but my suspicions were at an all-time high, so I thought long and hard before answering. I could almost hear the clock ticking and the music playing. The first question required a date for an answer. When I answered, the game host called "Wrong! and the girls huddled. After some whispering, they shouted an answer in unison. "Billy Bob!"

"Correct!" Since the audience was small, the girls provided most of the applause for their nonsensical achievement.

The second question required a person's name for an answer, and I admitted I was tempted to answer "Billy Bob," but went with what I was sure was correct. Again, my answer was declared wrong. Again, after huddling, the girls answered nonsensically, and the host declared them correct.

(WINNING, continued on page 10)

Atkinson, Maine: A Small Town's Long Journey

By John McNamara

Tucked into the gentle hills of Piscataquis County, just east of Dover-Foxcroft, the community of Atkinson carries more than two centuries of Maine history in its soil. From the first axe-strokes of a lone pioneer clearing forest to a 21st-century vote to dissolve its own government, Atkinson's story is one of quiet perseverance, rural industry, and the slow, stubborn rhythms of life in the Maine interior.

Atkinson's first settler, Bylie Lyford, arrived in 1802, cleared land, built a log cabin, and raised crops. In 1804, he brought his family. That same spring migration that carried Lyford's family north also brought others into neighboring townships, as the entire Piscataquis region was slowly prised open from its forested interior.

The birth of Lyford's son Thomas in Atkinson on November 11, 1804, marks a quiet milestone: Thomas Lyford was the second child born in the county, born just a few months after the first child, Charles V. Chase, in Sebec. It was an early sign that Atkinson was becoming not just a place men passed through, but a place families intended to stay. Atkinson was something of a corridor community — a throughway for the broader settlement of Piscataquis County, and a natural gathering place for new arrivals pushing deeper into the Maine wilderness.

By 1807, the township was beginning to take on the texture of a real community. The Colcord brothers from Bangor used the power on Alder Stream to establish a grist mill and a sawmill. These were not merely commercial ventures—in a frontier settlement, a grist mill meant the difference between subsistence and starvation, and a sawmill meant permanent homes in place of log cabins. Alder Stream had provided the power; ambition and necessity provided the rest.

Around the same time, Judge Atkinson, the major landowner, had many one-hundred-acre lots laid out in 1807. The judge, a New Hampshire resident, never appears to have lived in the township that bears his name, but his influence was felt in its very layout. He also left a more personal mark: Atkinson donated a small library to the community. In a place where books were scarce and winters were long, it was no small gift.

By the time Maine achieved statehood in 1820, Atkinson was ready to stand on its own. It was incorporated as a town on February 12, 1819. The population was growing steadily. In 1810, there were 169 inhabitants, and by 1820, 245.

The 1820s brought new enterprise and new ambitions. In 1820, Oliver Crosby, one of the two principal proprietors, moved into town and commenced farming on a large scale, holding 700 acres for his own use. His buildings were large and elegant, his adjoining orchard and grounds were tastefully laid out, and his farming was skillful and successful. Crosby, a Massachusetts native and member of the bar, represented the educated, capital-bearing settler who helped bring a measure of polish to the frontier.

In 1818, the town's first doctor, E.W. Snow, arrived. With a physician finally on hand, residents no longer had to rely entirely on folk remedies and neighborly goodwill when illness struck.

The township of Atkinson, like many rural Maine communities of the early 19th century, never coalesced around a single center. Instead, it developed two distinct nodes of settlement, each shaped by a different force—one by water, and one by roads.

The older of the two villages almost certainly grew up around the mills on Alder Stream. In 1807, the Colcord brothers from Bangor used the power on Alder Stream to establish a grist mill and a sawmill. This was the classic New England pattern: find a reliable fall of water, harness it, and watch a community accumulate around the noise and commerce of industry.

As the settlement of Maine moved inland from the coast in the 18th and early 19th centuries, hamlets often sprang up on or near a source of reliable waterpower. Water-powered industries —grist mills, sawmills, carding mills, tanneries, shingle mills, and woolen mills—proliferated in each of these towns and villages. Harnessing the power of rivers and streams was essential to the development of small town economies, and the mill often became a linchpin of the community. For Atkinson, Alder Stream was that linchpin.

Sawmills provided off-season jobs for farmers, and wood operations consumed their hay, oats, beans, and potatoes. Lumber shipments provided capital for these isolated communities, allowing mill owners to diversify into grain processing, wool carding, tanning, and metal forging, and to edge these communities into the industrial age. Atkinson Mills followed exactly this trajectory, evolving from a single milling operation into a small but functioning industrial village. By around 1900, Maine Memory Network photographs show the sawmills at Atkinson as an active, established operation—clustered structures along the stream, evidence of a community built around the sound of water and saw.

The Atkinson United Methodist Church, still associated with the Atkinson Mills area in historical photographs, anchored the village's social and spiritual life alongside its industrial identity. The church and the mill together gave the place its character: a working village where people earned their living by the stream and gathered for worship nearby.

(ATKINSON, continued on page 10)

THE SOUTHERN BELLE

LISA MCNAMARA

Finding Your Passion

Why is finding your passion important? I am not talking about finding something you enjoy, or a fun pastime, but a real pull, something that makes your heart race, a constant presence in your mind, something you can never leave behind.

For me, finding my passion came a little later in life and in the most unexpected way. Anyone who has known me for most of my life would also agree that my passion is not what they would have expected either. My young adult life had a strong focus on living in the moment and on the pursuit of fun and instant gratification. I love to travel, shop, wine and dine with my friends. My purpose for working was to sustain my inner quest for my own happiness. I imagine that's not unique to me, but I clearly hadn't found my passion.

I think my first spark was when I found myself working on a political campaign in Georgia. It was my first experience working for a cause that reached far beyond me. It felt good, and I found a need "to make some kind of contribution to the greater good." For a while, I found political work very satisfying. But then I got married, and then the greatest gift arrived: our son Jack. I felt a love so strong, so beyond myself. And suddenly my political career didn't feel as exciting or satisfying. It's not that I didn't think it was important, but I needed something closer to home. And that is when I found my passion in the most unexpected place, in the most unexpected way.

Jack had started pre-school at a highly sought-after Episcopal Day School in Atlanta. This preschool had an amazing Director who brought the school fully into the Reggio Emilia approach to educating children. It was an eye-opener into children's minds, their natural intuition, and their ability to understand beyond what had previously been recognized. And it made me look at children in a whole new light. When there was an opening at the Church for a part-time director of Children's Ministries, John really encouraged me to apply. At first the motivation was to be closer to Jack, and to have flexible hours to accommodate his schedule. But it didn't take long for me to realize this was something I really enjoyed, something that was igniting a hidden passion. What started as a 10-hour-a-week job soon grew to 60-plus hours a week, not because of the demands but because of the opportunities I created. My initial job was to recruit Sunday School teachers and make sure the nursery workers showed up for work. I wanted more for the littlest saints. I decided they needed a fun Reggio-inspired Vacation Bible School, a Parent's Morning Out program, and the best Christmas Pageant ever. I wanted children to participate in a Lenten program, not just an egg hunt during the Easter season. During the summer, we created a movie night for families beyond our Church membership. I wanted church to be place where every child felt an invitation to be there. I left this Church when they hired a new Rector who didn't match my energy or vision for children. They were not a bad Rector, but this is when I think my love for the job became more than a love of the work and became a passion. I didn't realize it at the time.

Of course, this led me to my beloved Cathedral. I had left the church work and taken what I thought would be an easier path: a corporate job. But a few months into my new gig, I got a call from the vicar of the Cathedral. They needed a Director of Children's Ministries. As soon as I got the call, I knew it was where I needed to be. I loved that job, the people, the leadership, the gift of "yes" to every vision and opportunity for children, the embrace and welcome of the sounds and presence of children in church. It was my passion! It fed my soul and brought me closer to the divine like I had never experienced. It was my purpose, it was my contribution to society, to give and love beyond myself. For me that is passion.

I was excited about our families decision to move to Maine and start a new "family adventure." But I was also devastated to leave behind my beloved Cathedral family and life. I grieved heavily for months and still to this day feel an absence of my days with my little "nuggets" and their parents.

Flash forward two years. I am finally reconnecting to my passion in new ways. John has started a non-profit in Maine called Piscataquis Forward. Its purpose is to revitalize and support this struggling, large in size but small in population, county in Maine. It has taken me a while to figure out where I fit into this new venture, but through my passion, I have found it. Children, beautiful, smart, intuitive, spiritual children who need an advocate. Someone to make them an important piece and mission of this new organization. My purpose, my passion, is to be a voice for the littlest saints; they deserve to experience all the opportunities and love that God has provided for all of us.

Why is it important to have a passion? Because passions make us live beyond ourselves. Passions lead to contributions to God's creations. Whether your passion is art, science, helping, learning, farming, animals, gardening, mechanics, or whatever ignites your soul, you are making a contribution to others even when you don't know it. Passions are important because they are what makes us shine, they bring us closer to the divine.

(ATKINSON, continued from page 8)

Atkinson Corners developed along a different logic—not water power, but road convergence. “Corners” is a classically New England designation for a settlement that formed where two or more roads met. A road leading westward from Atkinson continued through Garland and Dexter, and a passable road was constructed through the Charleston area to Bangor. These two axes of travel intersected in the township, naturally attracting services for people passing through—a store, a tavern, and eventually a post office.

The division between the two villages reflects a pattern common across rural Maine: the industrial village down near the water, and the civic or commercial village up on higher ground where roads crossed. Neither village was ever large. Together they constituted the human geography of a small, self-sufficient farming and milling community in the Maine interior. The mills have long since gone quiet on Alder Stream, and the roads that once funneled travelers through Atkinson Corners now carry far fewer people. But both place names endure—a quiet testament to the two forces, water and roads, that shaped life in Piscataquis County from its earliest days of settlement.

Like many small Maine towns, Atkinson never recovered from the demographic forces that emptied rural New England through the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Young people left for the cities. Farms consolidated or fell into disuse. Today, the town has two small settlements, Atkinson Corners and Atkinson Mills, and less than half its 19th-century population.

By the early 21st century, the remaining residents faced a pragmatic question: was the cost of maintaining a formal town government still worth it? After deliberation, they decided it was not. Following three town votes to deorganize, the state legislature approved the town’s efforts with a law that took effect on April 12, 2018. The town’s residents confirmed their desire to deorganize by a vote of 187 to 19 on November 6, 2018, and Atkinson officially deorganized on July 1, 2019.

Atkinson is now an unincorporated township within the unorganized territory of Southeast Piscataquis — no longer a town in the legal sense, but very much a place with a story. From Bylie Lyford’s first cleared acre to a lopsided vote in a town meeting, Atkinson’s two centuries tell us something essential about the character of rural Maine: determined, self-reliant, and unafraid to change when change is necessary.

(WINNING, continued from page 7)

Atkinson Corners developed along a different logic—not water po I suppose some would have felt cheated, but I found myself laughing and having fun. Maybe it wasn’t just about the contest questions. Remember, the original question was “Are you smarter than a PCMS student?” It was becoming clear that I was not–they were outsmarting me and reminding me that some things aren't to be taken seriously.

The process continued with the girls winning all the points and me being skunked. It was at that point that the game show host indicated I shouldn't go away empty-handed and presented me with a t-shirt from the sponsoring local business. My response was genuine: “This is definitely worth losing for.”

I may be risking over-analysis, but the experience left me not only laughing but also thinking. Winning and losing are words. People give meaning to words–it’s not the other way around. Sometimes we win when we lose. I knew I'd enjoy that shirt and the memory of losing to a gaggle of giggling girls who did, in fact, outsmart me. So, thanks to the girls and their sponsor for hosting the contest I won by losing.

Walter Boomsma is an educator, writer, and the author of several books. With a background in teaching and public speaking, he blends practical wisdom with a deep appreciation for lifelong learning. His work often explores themes of personal growth, communication, and community engagement, encouraging readers to think differently and discover meaning in everyday experiences. Through his writing and outreach, Walter strives to spark conversations that lead to understanding, empathy, and positive change.

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

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

riverfest
PISCATAQUIS RIVER FESTIVAL

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SAVE THE ICE ARENA!
DONATE TODAY!

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**.