

# CORNISH HISTORICAL SOCIETY

## SUMMER 2020 NEWSLETTER

### From the President's Desk:

Dear Members and Friends,

2020 began with such excitement for special events, exhibits and celebrations planned for Maine's Bicentennial. We provided the historic photo of LeRoy Pike's Ferry in 1896 for the cover of Cornish's Town Report, but suddenly our March Town Meeting was cancelled (perhaps for the first time?) because COVID-19 was becoming a worldwide threat to life and health, even for our little town . This has been a worrisome time, but with careful precautions and protocols, we will get through this eventually. To put this in perspective, come see our exhibit when we reopen, on the Spanish Influenza Pandemic a century ago. It is a strange thing to see our schools, churches, libraries and businesses closed for awhile, just as in 1918-1919. We are so grateful for our first responders, local volunteers , new medical strategies and local essential businesses in these times.

To help keep our community safe, we have suspended events and gatherings for 2020, and will celebrate our Bicentennial with the entire State of Maine in 2021. Our volunteers will be happy to help you with your historical queries in the meantime, just give us a call. We are finding that quite a few folks have time on their hands, and are getting interested in their family genealogies! The outlying cemeteries can be cleaned up and documented too, a good outdoor activity. Sadly, our Annual Duck Derby was cancelled, and we cannot have Open House this summer, because we need to take precautions for avoiding community spread. However, keep your thinking caps on and save or document this historic pandemic's effect on Cornish by writing a journal, taking photographs or saving news items. These stories will be interesting for our children and grandchildren in the future.

A portion of our "Cornish in 1820" exhibit is on display at our Town Office, and the Bicentennial flag flies at our 40 Main St. home. We have several interesting events and speakers in mind for when it is safe, and though it may seem quiet there, we have been keeping busy in the Research Room. We have applied for a grant from the Maine State Archives to have an archival consultant advise us how best to preserve and organize our collections. Our longstanding Secretary - Anne MacIntyre, and Treasurer - Kate Benson, have decided to "retire " while continuing to be so helpful with the newsletter and events, THANK YOU for all your time and efforts! Our new Secretary is Cynthia Mason, and Treasurer is Dorothy Maxwell, elected at our June Annual Meeting. We know they will do terrific jobs! We are so grateful for our wonderful volunteers .

Thank you for your support. KEEP CALM AND CARRY ON!

Sandy Howe

# CORNISH HISTORICAL SOCIETY - ANNUAL REPORT

Annual Meeting Thursday, June 25, 2020 at 40 Main Street

Cornish Historical Society is holding its annual meeting in a strange and changing time, but we are looking back on activities during the past year which gave great satisfaction, and looking ahead to an eventual return to "normalcy" in a changing world.

6/29 Porch sale held during Strawberry Festival

7/30 Anne Gass women's suffrage program "Voting Down the Rose"

Thank you to the Bonney Memorial Library for completion of painting of 40 Main St. - it looks great!

9/28 Apple Festival serving apple pie slices for \$2 donation and also selling pies.

10/12 "Fashions by Thelma" presented by Thelma Lavoie & cheesecake served

Publication of our annual calendar "Stirring Up Memories", sharing the history of favorite recipes of CHS friends and families

11/5 Proceeds of bake sale donated to the Pike Hall balcony project

11/16 Book reading & signing with Val Egar "Oh No! Reindeer Flu"

12/7 Christmas in Cornish celebrated with costumed story teller Erik Jones.

January/ February meetings devoted to planning the 2020 season, including bicentennial activities. We purchased bicentennial flag which now hangs at 40 Main Street and Sandy created her wonderful dressed mannequins which made their debut at town voting. We purchased several old movies from Northeast Films to entice visitors to the museum and made tentative plans for varied programs, including apple cider making, jewelry, rug hooking, antique tools and a bicentennial speaker.

3/3 and 3/13 Bake sales at primary and town voting

Then the world changed! Our March meeting was held by phone and we did not have an April meeting . Finally our May meeting was held wearing masks and socially distanced. Our museum will probably not open this season and our bicentennial celebration will be 200 +1, as will be happening in the rest of the state. Bicentennial exhibit including mannequins will continue to be on display at Pike Hall.

Respectfully submitted, Anne MacIntyre Secretary

## CORNISH HISTORICAL SOCIETY

President	Sandy Howe	(207) 625-4813
Vice President	Diann Perkins	(207) 625-3281
Treasurer	Cynthia Mason	(207) 671-6354
Secretary	Dorothy Maxwell	(207) 787-1478

# "CORNISH IN 1820"

Our newest exhibit created for the State Bicentennial won't be open to the public until 2021. BUT in the meantime here is a preview for some of the topics covered :

Travel and roads, with maps, in the 1820s

Businesses, Mills, Government, Mail Delivery, Church and Schools

Story of the Honorable Thomas Ayer Johnson of Towle's Hill

A "middling-sort" of family in a room setting depicting cooking and foods, farm activities, clothing and furniture of the time

Linda Griffin connected with Skyline Farm: a wonderful carriage/wagon/sleigh museum in New Gloucester this January. We have confirmed that they have the actual "gig" that Dr. Benjamin Thompson used from 1820-ish to visit his patients in Cornish! (photo below) Please check out the museum: [skylinefarm.org](http://skylinefarm.org).

In doing the 1820 research, I found that year's Agriculture Statement shows Cornish as producing 150 lbs. of HOPS, and no other town in York County documented such a crop. (Was Cornish a big beer production center? Just about every farm brewed their own anyway) Interesting trivia!

Information about an early apple variety called Cole's Quince.



TABLE I.

Statement of the amount of Agricultural Capital and Products, as exhibited in the returns made by order of the Legislature in the year 1820.

YORK COUNTY.	FIXED CAPITAL.						ACTIVE CAPITAL.						ANNUAL PRODUCTS.									
	Acres.						Number of						Bushels.						Tons of Hay.			No. of Cows the pasture will keep.
	Tillage.	Orchard.	Mowing.	pasture.	Marsh.	Salt.	Number of Farms.	Horses 3 yrs. old & up w'd.	Oxen 4 yrs. old & up w'd.	Cows & Steers 3 yrs. old & up.	Swine 6 mo's. and upwards.	Indian Corn.	Wheat.	Rye.	Oats.	Barley.	Peas and Beans.	Pounds of Hops.	Upland.	Fresh Meadow.	Salt.	
TOWNS.																		150				
Alfred	460	1105	334				750	136	84	250	438	233	3119	584	339	271	21	117	623	165		362
Berwick	1153	1794	1530				6120	361	233	620	1290	627	9719	279	42	65	2095	217	1794	1530		1657
Biddeford	456	1621	429	172	1969		205	100	230	495	273	3108	41	41	12	1702	30	1203	308	116	489	
Buxton	971	2521	670		3796		294	181	528	988	557	9674	403	416	3539	981	320	1956	670		1872	
Cornish	451	1486	50		891		133	82	201	392	311	3870	561	201	119	34	159	921	40		358	
Ellot	591	1130	1325		51	3430	218	96	209	674	369	5620					1000	95			868	
Hollis	583	1309	226		808		217	103	314	623	392	3685	260	912	145	239	226	889	138		354	
Kittery	402	1133	932	172	3691		226	82	270	465	241	2753					5	15	1018	32	587	
Kennebunk	646	1614	449	178	2105		216	121	310	515	327	4626	311	319	666	1165	92	1118	351	127	499	
Kennebunk-port	554	1776	674	298	3001		303	128	389	733	265	4822	236	88	57	1981	235	1501	623	216	815	
Lebanon	911	1863	826		1883		246	172	213	989	515	5246	164	86	146	433	179	1251	667		1212	
Lyman	551	1392	223		904		171	103	306	498	272	470	199	538	128	193	166	715	112		222	
Limerick	315	1693	196		1714		142	93	242	501	320	4523	421	334	76	10	140	807	135		545	
Limington	545	2752	113		2298		225	171	409	791	505	7666	1043	481	177	1	84	1481	102		765	
Newfield	452	1822	181		1339		136	85	190	438	280	4368	556	189	60	66	53	708	156		396	

186

AGRICULTURE.



On March 13, Cornish citizens were voting in our town election and CHS was co-sponsoring a bake sale with the Fairgrounds Committee. It was almost business as usual - but the disinfectant wipes were already on the voting clerk's desk and it was soon decided that it was no longer safe to hold Town Meeting three days later. In the following days we all became familiar with new phrases, such as shelter in place, social distancing and curbside pick-up.

First, we want to thank all the Cornish services and businesses that helped to keep our lives as normal as possible - we were able to buy groceries, fill our prescriptions, and shop for other "essentials". The mail was delivered, the trash was picked up as usual - and there was a lot of it as so many people cleaned house to pass the time! There were meals for take-out and curbside pick-up, and we could feel secure that our first responders were available if needed. Pike Hall was open by appointment. Many small businesses found creative ways to use social media to reach out to their customers until they were again able to open their doors.

People in Cornish were encouraged to take part in the Teddy Bear Hunt which was happening in many other states. When children (and adults) went out for a walk, they could look for the bears. Some were pinned up outdoors - this little bear was more of a challenge to find as he was still indoors keeping warm.

Sacopec Valley class of 2020 graduation parade!





Some activities did continue. Pictures taken before the pandemic show the theater curtains at Pike Memorial Hall being taken down for cleaning and fireproofing - thank you to the Sacopee Valley Festival Assoc. for donating the cost of this procedure and to Chris Calnan for taking them to New York. The signature of Mrs. Lincoln B. Copp was found on the painted valance. Curtains are now safely back in Cornish and ready to be installed when things get back to normal. How often do we hear that phrase!



The wheel had been off the Village Jewelers building for repair/restoration during the winter. Cliff Whitney was busy rebuilding it during his time at home. Reinstallation is a work in progress and we look forward to seeing this town landmark in place again.

Now almost all our businesses are open and traffic has returned to Main Street. The warm weather has been wonderful, local farmstands are open and we have a new Farmers' Market in Cornish at the Fairgrounds.

We always say that history is not just in the past - we are living it now. Sandy is encouraging everyone to write down their pandemic experiences. We would especially appreciate contributions from children. In 2018 when she set up the Spanish Flu exhibit, it was something most of us were only vaguely familiar with - now it resonates with all of us and we hope you will come to 40 Main St. next year to revisit it.



*Friendly Reminder ~  
Your dues were due January 1st.*

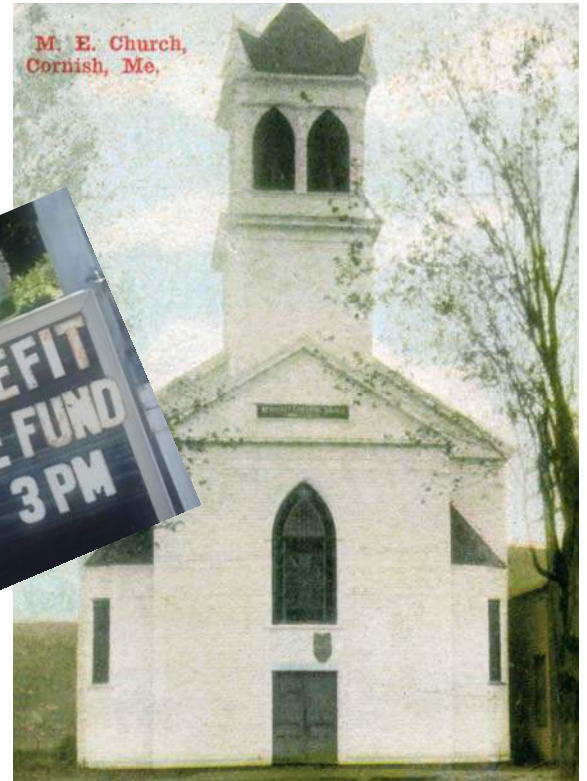
Let's all enjoy the summer in a new way and stay safe. We look forward to celebrating the State of Maine Bicentennial in 2021.

*Patience is not the ability to wait, but the ability to keep a good attitude while waiting.*  
(unfortunately we do not know who wrote this—but it's true!)

The Cornish Historical Society cemetery committee is unofficially made up of Gary and Cynthia Mason, Eleanor Pansar, Scott Cecil, Connie Forbes and Sandy Howe. The past few years we have been busy mapping and clearing the numerous outlying cemeteries. Its been a rewarding and fun experience. This year not much has been done mostly because of the pandemic. We recently received a generous donation to help with the repair/restoration of outlying cemeteries. We are hoping to start up again this fall, and are always looking for help. If you are interested please contact me at [mason.garyb@gmail.com](mailto:mason.garyb@gmail.com) or 749-3461.



Cornish UCC steeple fund will benefit the repair and restoration of both church steeples.



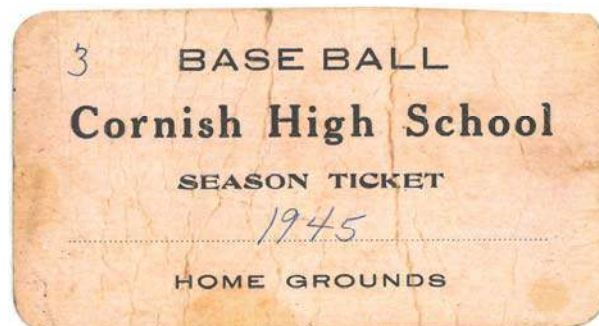
The Hillside Church organ has been repaired and is expected back by the end of July - watch Your Weekly Shopping Guide for details of how it will be welcomed home!

From our historian, Linda Griffin...

Cornish Historical Society is not open to the public at this time but we are still busy behind the scenes. When I have been at the CHS office I have been filing clippings from years of Shopping Guides! I am not sure who she is but a local lady had cut them out for decades and her family gave them to us. How wonderful to have birth announcements, marriages, anniversaries and deaths filed in dated envelopes for the past 30 +/- years. We don't have her name but if you know who it is please let us know. We are putting the clippings in our genealogy files.

**New England Vintage Base Ball Festival  
has been cancelled for 2020.**

**Hope to see you in 2021!**





# Graduation Exercises Scene of Near-Panic

1894

A terrifying incident occurred one hot afternoon late in June of 1894. It was at the Cornish High School graduation exercises in Union Hall. In the midst of an edifying essay that a fair girl graduate was delivering there came a terrific crash. It seemed as if the very foundations of the big building were being crushed into splinters, and there was a tremor all through the building. The hall is on the second floor, and the ground falls off at the rear, where the entrance is up a flight of steep stairs with a light wood rail. Braces support the stairs from the side of the building. From the door to the ground is a sheer drop of thirty feet.

## PANDEMONIUM

When the awful rattle and smash-sounded forth with an ominous suddenness, the entire audience rose, and scores dashed for the door. A few realized that there was no disaster within the building, and the Superintendent shouted from the platform. Finally the Sicilian Quartette from Portland advanced to the front of the stage and began to sing. Meantime, many had pushed and crowded over the chairs and had all but gained the door. A few, near to it, had the presence of mind to wrest it from the panic-stricken few who thrust it back to dash out and down the steps. They

closed it, and backed up against it to prevent the wild rush outward. Had a score of people run out in a mass, the stairs would either have broken down or the rail been demolished, and then it would have meant a fatal fall for all who rushed after.

## WHAT REALLY OCCURRED

The door being closed, it became at once apparent that the hall floor had not collapsed. So the audience gradually grew quiet. A messenger came in and announced that the stock of fire-crackers which George H. Parker had stacked up in his drug store window had exploded in rapid succession, and the front end of the store, which is a few steps from the hall, was demolished. It was near enough to a panic to suit the most adventurous spirit.

Reprinted from *Early Cornish (1666-1916)*

Sent  
Post  
Paid  
\$1



**This \$5.00  
Lace Set For \$1**

To introduce the products of our factories, sold direct to consumers, we offer this beautiful embroidered lace collar and cuff set, retailed throughout the country for not less than \$5.00. This set consists of one collar and two cuffs, size in proportion of illustration on which is also shown back view. The set is heavily embroidered with a highly lustrous mercerized cotton. Choice either in white or ecru. Sent \$1 prepaid upon receipt of price. Neatly boxed suitable for Christmas presents.

**Our Guarantee** If the above coat set is not exactly as represented or for any reason does not give entire satisfaction, we will cheerfully refund your money and reimburse you for mailing expenses, etc.

**NEEDLEWORK & LACE SUPPLY CO.**  
111 Spring St., New York City





## **A HISTORY OF A GRAND HOUSE ON TOWLE'S HILL AND ITS FIRST OWNER: HONORABLE THOMAS AYER JOHNSON**

Thomas Ayer Johnson, Esquire (1766-1825) has been rediscovered by Cornish Historical Society just in time for Maine's Bicentennial, and what an important Cornish figure he was! This judge came from Epping, NH accompanied by some of his NH seacoast family and neighbors about 1793, an early settler. He bought a hundred acres from his brother in law Simeon Barker atop Towle's Hill and built a large high-style Federal house there. From the little bits uncovered while researching, Thomas figured in many town capacities, and was an attorney. The estate inventory after his death shows he had a library, 2 looking glasses, fine furniture and silverware, a carriage and horse, livestock and 295 acres, very impressive for the time. There were four children with his wife Hannah Barker Johnson ( 1767-1825) of Stratham, NH: Sarah P. born 1796, Olive born 1797, William born 1803, and Augustus born 1807. Where and when did he study law? Travel was extremely difficult yet he was affluent enough to have horse and carriage, rather unusual in Cornish then. By 1796 he was a Selectman (also served in 1800, 1804-1806, 1814-1820). He travelled to Portland in 1819 as Cornish's Delegate to the Maine Constitutional Convention. The result was Maine became an independent state from Massachusetts, and Thomas served as our State Representative to the very first 1820-1821 State Legislature, the capital at that time being Portland. He was also an Associate Justice of the Court of Sessions in the County of York. You have to wonder how much he was home considering the slow travelling to Portland and Alfred; thank goodness Hannah had relatives on the Hill to help her. (cont. next page)



Our Thomas played such an important role in Cornish's history. He died in February 1825 of a "sudden fit of apoplexy (stroke)" while harnessing his horse in Parsonsfield, and Hannah died in October of 1825. His obituary was printed in the Boston newspaper "Columbian Centinel" 2/16/1825. Both have beautifully carved slate headstones in a long-forgotten burial ground near the farm which was not even named in our outlying cemetery lists. His son Augustus went on to serve as Town Moderator for many years, and both sons served in the Maine House of Representatives like their father. What a well-educated, prosperous and interesting family that somehow faded from our local early history, except for a quote from Lauriston W. Small: "To Towle's Hill came the famous Squire Johnson of whom enough good stories are told to make a book...". WHAT WERE THOSE STORIES? Are they lost forever?

The photograph, taken about 1901 of the house shows Silas West, a Civil War Veteran and farmer who bought the homestead in 1863. The box in the window on the left of the photo is actually his weather station. He was a volunteer weather observer for the US government, and his five logbooks of carefully handwritten data show each day's temperature, precipitation, wind speed and observations of northern lights, birds, crops, hail, floods, frosts etc. Imagine the high, wide view he must have had from his hill, and no light pollution at night! These records from 1857-1921 were donated to Cornish Historical Society last summer by Silas' great grandson and they are fascinating reading!

The Pike family now owns most of this area. Allaire Palmer remembers this was called "the Johnson Field" but had no knowledge of our famous Squire Johnson. She recalls seeing the impressive central hall staircase, and Jon Carr found fancy interior woodwork and Moses Eaton stenciling on the plaster walls before it fell to ruins. Nothing remains but cellar holes of the house and outbuildings and the well; sweet Jersey heifers graze over this peaceful field. If only those walls (foundations!) could talk, what stories would they tell?





When you have the time, it's always fun to look through old scrapbooks . . . thank you to Kathy Carr for sharing some of her scrapbook clippings!



Nary A Miss <sup>1963</sup>

Jolene Cross of Cornish will graduate from Gorham High School Thursday with what is believed to be a perfect attendance record. As far as she or her parents, Mr. and Mrs. William Cross, know, Jolene has never missed a day of school the entire 12 years of her elementary and secondary school education. (O. B. Denison Jr. Photo)



John H. Lyle Jr.



O. B. Denison Jr. Photos  
Susan Carr

Susan Carr, John H. Lyle Jr.  
Delegates To Girls, Boys States

# CORNISH FOLKS TERRORIZED BY PYROMANIAC

## More Than Half Dozen Fires Within Past Three Months— Board of Selectmen Offer Re- ward For Capture of Fire Fiends

About 1000 inhabitants are spending restless nights and guards are patrolling the unoccupied building district here in an effort to capture the pyromaniac responsible for the destruction of more than half a dozen structures, within the past few months.

The Board of Selectmen are to meet in emergency session to offer a reward for the capture of the phantom fire fiends. While some believe the fires are being set by an insane man, others believe it the work of "a man of higher society."

Without leaving any clues but crosene soaked waste and kindling, the firebug has led the authorities a

merry chase since his activities first aroused the peaceful little community.

Nothing will be left undone in bringing about an arrest so the Selectmen state.

Unoccupied farm houses, barns and sheds have been the objects of destruction of the fiend.

On May 2nd, he hurled a burning torch onto the roof of D. W. O'Brien's barn on Main street and the structure became a mass of flames. The building was saved by the prompt work of the town's fire fighters; May 9th, however, the fiend conquered and only the smoldering embers of the O'Brien property remained when the flames had taken their toll.

The next outbreak was Oct 15th, the Lewis Hunt place, which had been unoccupied for some time was badly damaged by fire which was of incendiary origin. The structure was saved from entire destruction, but the fiend returned Oct. 30th and completed his work.

Orrin Thompson's home was the next property marked. This building, unoccupied fell victim to the torch early Saturday morning. The structure was quickly consumed by flames.

Townfolk are terror stricken. They do not know where the fiend will strike next and according to the Selectmen, the "people are sleeping with one eye open."

The Selectmen of which Leon M. Ayer is chairman, state that there are several unoccupied buildings in the business district of the town and fear is expressed that these will be destroyed unless sufficient protection is provided.

Thursday, September 5, 1968

# Cornish

BY  
MRS. RUTH H. SANBORN

## Store Theft

More than \$800 worth of cigarettes were taken from Rines grocery store some time between 6 p.m. last Thursday and 7:30 a.m. Friday.

Entrance was gained by breaking wire and glass in the heavy double door at the rear of the stock room and removing a bar across the doors. The cigarette rack was near the front of the store, which was lighted, at the check out counters.

Two empty chocolate milk cartons were found outside the building.

An attempt was made to open the safe, but without success.

State Trooper Reginald Cram of Limerick is investigating.

The store is owned and operated by Mr. and Mrs. Walter Rines.



Outstanding Batter

Alan Wentworth was presented the Edward Carleton Trophy as the "outstanding batter of the Cornish Little League team" for 1959. The presentation was made Sunday by Rodney Parker, team coach and athletic officer of the Francis Sullivan Post, American Legion, donor of the statuette. The award is given annually in the name of the Asbury Park, N.J., resident who coached the team for many years. An informal party was given team members Sunday in the Legion Home. Alan is the son of Mr. and Mrs. Herbert Wentworth. (O. B. Denison Jr. Photo)



# CORNISH HISTORICAL SOCIETY, INC.

P.O. Box 404  
Cornish, ME 04020

What we'd like you to know about Cornish Historical Society . . .

Being a member can be much more than attending our monthly meeting - in fact you don't need to attend a meeting at all!

There are many ways to be a member. Maybe you would like to learn more about our town's history by spending time in our archives - or share your own memories of growing up in Cornish so that we can all learn from your experiences.

Maybe you and your family would like to share in the fun of our annual Daffodil Duck Derby in the spring or listen to our storyteller as we celebrate Christmas in Cornish.

If being outdoors is more your style, you might be interested in one of our more recent projects locating, documenting, and caring for some of the small isolated cemeteries in Cornish.

If you have a special interest or area of expertise, would you like to speak at our museum in a casual atmosphere, or write a few paragraphs for our newsletter? We are always looking for new ideas for programs, exhibits, or contributions to the newsletter.

Would you like to help with a yard sale? Maybe you like to bake and could contribute to one of our bake sales held during voting - or have some old photographs you would like to identify. You get the idea - being a member of Cornish Historical Society can be what you want it to be!

----- MEMBERSHIP FORM -----



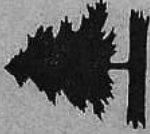
Name (s): \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_ City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_ Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

Email Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Sign me up as a member \_\_\_\_\_ \$10.00 for single member \_\_\_\_\_ \$15.00 Family  
(Annual Dues)

Please mail your dues and membership form to: Cornish Historical Society,  
P.O. Box 404, Cornish, ME 04020 – Thank you for joining!



We journeyed to VIENNA  
To PARIS and to WALES,  
To NORWAY and to DENMARK,  
By auto and by rail.

To EGYPT and to SMYRNA,  
To CHINA and PERU,  
To SWEDEN and to POLAND,  
Explored them thru and thru.

We traveled on to NAPLES,  
To LISBON and to ROME,  
To DRESDEN and to ATHENS,  
And there felt quite at home.

We stopped awhile at BELFAST,  
At CALAIS and at YORK,  
At ARGYLE and at LIMERICK,  
To hear the natives talk.

We hid away to MILO,  
PALERMO and MADRID,  
To COREA and to GILEAD,  
By big green forests hid.

To CORINTH and to BRISTOL,  
To STOCKHOLM and to LEEDS,  
To CARTHAGE and to CORNISH,  
All famed for noble deeds.

Then back by way of MEXICO,  
In sunshine and in rain,  
And throughout the entire journey,  
NEVER LEFT THE STATE OF MAINE.

*Maine Travelogue*

Your Membership dues are important to us—please mail today

CORNISH HISTORICAL SOCIETY  
Post Office Box 404  
Cornish, Maine 04020