

# NEWSLETTER



Holderness Historical Society

Fall 2014

Volume XXIX

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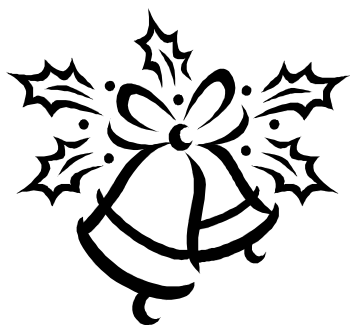
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## Helen Nicolay: Author and Artist

Though she never met Abraham Lincoln, Helen Nicolay's remarkable life was in many ways enriched by her father's association with him. John Nicolay, an immigrant from Germany, was selected by President Lincoln as his personal secretary and along with John Hay, another brilliant young man from Illinois, worked side by side with Lincoln during the perilous Civil War years. The integrity and compassion Lincoln displayed in the toughest of times cemented their love and loyalty to him as evidenced by their extensive writings on Lincoln after his death. Both Helen and her father spent a major portion of their lives crafting their image of him for posterity.

Pierce Beij's grandfather, Ulysses Grant Baker Pierce, a graduate of Harvard Divinity School, was the pastor of All Souls Unitarian Church in Washington, D. C. and Helen Nicolay, a communicant. Pierce said he wasn't sure if his family adopted Miss Nicolay or she adopted them but they were life-long friends. He, his parents and sister, Barbara Beij Benoit, spent every summer of his childhood at her cottage on Big Squam Lake. Pierce, his wife, Kay, Bob Benoit and his son, Peter, and my mother, Mary Elizabeth Nielsen, provided valuable insights and information for this article.

Miss Nicolay's mother died when she was a young woman and she became her father's hostess, as well as taking dictation in long-hand for him and John Hay as they wrote their books on Lincoln, and pursuing her passion for painting. Art was an endeavor shared and nurtured by her devoted and loving father. When he built their home on Shepard Hill an art studio was included on the property. She excelled in oil and watercolors and received recognition and acclaim during her lifetime with exhibitions in Washington, D. C. and Boston. She and her father traveled extensively and watercolors often documented their journeys. Pierce feels her watercolors are as good as many of the famous French Impressionists of the day.

John Hay was more politically ambitious than John Nicolay and he rose to be Secretary of State under Presidents William McKinley and Theodore Roosevelt. He discovered the beauty and serenity of New Hampshire and was responsible for introducing the Nicolays to Holderness. The Hay property, "The Fells" on Lake Sunapee, was eventually donated to various non-profits and his home and gardens are open to the public.

The patience and kindness displayed by Lincoln and her father extended to Miss Nicolay. She was kind, gentle and always a perfect lady. She befriended my grandparents, Tolford and Pattie Piper, and when they opened the Pied Piper Tea Room on Piper Road in Holderness gave them two complete Victorian silver coffee and tea sets. One of the sets was used by the Holderness Historical Society for an afternoon tea fundraiser.



St. Peter's in the Mount was adjacent to the Nicolay property and she and her father attended services there. Miss Nicolay did several watercolors of the property and my brother, John Nielsen and his wife Vicki were given an original watercolor of the steps leading up to the stone chapel by Barbara and Bob Benoit on the occasion of their

## The President's Corner

This summer we presented two programs, which were very well attended. We are presently working on the schedule for next year's programs. The schedule of 2015 Programs will be listed in our spring newsletter.

This summer the museum had a special exhibit of old photographs some dating back to the 1880s. The photos were displayed in albums and on poster boards by topics, such as town businesses, churches, lake scenes, steamboats, hotels, farms, parades, family albums, etc.

We have continued cataloging our books and pamphlets in our research/library area to make researching families, cemeteries, camps, and other historical events and places simpler. If you haven't yet checked out our website, please do so at [www.holdernesshistoricalsociety.org](http://www.holdernesshistoricalsociety.org).

Your continued support by way of membership dues and contributions helps preserve our town's history and maintain our building. If you have not yet renewed your membership, please use the enclosed envelope to do so. We hope that more of our members will become more active in the historical society. Your ideas, suggestions, and help will be enthusiastically welcomed. Please contact me, or any other member of the team, if you can help or for more information.

Linda Foerderer

[FPLinda@aol.com](mailto:FPLinda@aol.com) (603) 968-7487



Miss Nicolay, her daughter, Helen Nicolay, seated on the sofa

*Continued from page 1*

wedding there in June 1973. Our parents had married at St. Peter's 32 years earlier.

Washington, D. C. had a small town feel when Miss Nicolay lived there. The gardens and flowering trees were abundant until they began cutting them down to widen roads and build sidewalks. She knew personally or was aware of most everyone there and had a very active social and political life. In her time important government figures walked about freely and it was not unusual to pass them strolling about Lafayette Park. Washington was also much more non-partisan than it is today. Miss Nicolay, an ardent Republican, invited my grandmother to join her for tea at the Democratic White House hosted by President Harry Truman's wife, Bess. There were a few rules according to my grandmother. Don't speak to the servants and never butter the entire piece of any bread. The proper way to eat bread is to break it into smaller pieces and butter only the part to be eaten. To butter an entire piece of bread at once is a serious faux pas.

After her father's death in 1901 she devoted her time to continue and expand his work on Lincoln as well as writing biographies of famous people she was interested in. Many of these books were for children and my favorite is "A Boy's Life of Abraham Lincoln" a copy of which I discovered recently at a book store in Boston thanks to my nephew, Tom Maguire.

My first memory of Miss Nicolay was going for a visit with my grandmother. We rode up the long, winding dirt road to her home off Shepard Hill and at the end looking down toward Big Squam Lake was a rustic cabin with an art studio nestled below. She suggested we go to the Woodchuck's Hole and there we discovered presents from the woodchuck. The property seemed like a huge, magical playground with squirrels and chipmunks dashing about the pine trees. She painted a scene from the property on eight panel screens that are over eleven feet long and five feet high while in her late eighties. My grandmother selected me to be the lucky recipient of the screens and they grace an entire wall of my cottage on Christian Lane and are a source of great joy and contentment. Miss Nicolay spent summers in Holderness and often brought along some of her help. She had a cook, housekeeper and chauffeur. A favorite employee was Sophie, a former slave, who worked for Miss Nicolay well into her nineties. A chauffeur was essential for even a strong independent woman, as the cars needed to be hand-cranked.

As children we played on John Nicolay's massive wooden two-sided desk that he used in the White House. He would sit on one side and Abraham Lincoln the other when Lincoln visited Nicolay's office. The desk is now housed in a museum in Chicago. True to her nature, when she died in 1954 she remembered her staff, members of my family, the Beijs and Benoits. Miss Nicolay's ashes were scattered on the Shepard Hill land she loved and her urn is at the Benoit home in Center Harbor.

Patty Sue Salvador



## Treasurer's Report

Many thanks to our members and donors who have supported us and to our advertisers who fund our newsletter.

This summer we had several major expenses:

We were unable to get grants for our speakers from the NH Humanities Council but fortunately were able to use half of last year's grant from the Audrey Hillman Fisher Foundation to continue to offer programs to the community.

We updated our security system (a fire and burglar alarm) and moved to a local provider.

Our 1861 building had not had major work since it was moved from Perch Pond Road to Curry Place in 1994. The old windows were reglazed, caulked and painted and the shutters were redone as well. We also began work on restraining the exterior. That project will finish in June after some rotten boards are replaced.

Please consider a contribution to our building and collections fund. Thank You!

## Local Research

If you can help with any information on the following topics, we really would appreciate it!

What is the history of Kip and Joe's?

Has anyone seen a photo of White Oak Pond full of logs stored there after the Hurricane of 1938?

A photo of an ox cart dragging a mantel from the Concord Governor's Mansion up Coxboro Road?

Ancestors of Robert Kimball?

When did Mt. Fayal get its name? What are the dates of the observation tower which used to be there?

Please call M. Mason, 968-3334, or email [holdernesshistsoc@yahoo.com](mailto:holdernesshistsoc@yahoo.com) if you can fill in the blanks for us.

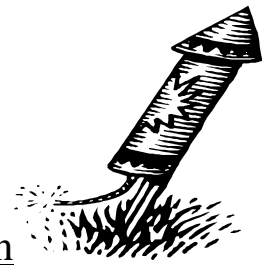
## Tink's Notes

\*\*Once the Plymouth Historical Society has repaired damage from the New Year's Eve ceiling collapse, they will be transferring whatever artifacts they have on Livermore Falls to us including a 3x5 foot mural of the last log drive on the Pemi.

Meanwhile, progress is well underway in documenting the historic iron bridge (see page 6) over the gorge, recording actual witness accounts of those who worked in the mill there, and completing a geological description of the exposed gorge wall on the east side.

The Livermore Falls chapter/Friends of the Pemi, upon which HHS is represented, meets monthly in Holderness.

\*\*A Native dugout recovered from Squam Lake in 1939 resides in the vault of the Shelburne Museum in Vermont having been exhibited only briefly. A request has been made to have the dugout moved to Holderness to be displayed.



## Summer Celebration

The historical society joined with the Town to have a celebration of summer with music and fireworks. On August 29th the celebration was thoroughly enjoyed by all. We thank those of you who supported the celebration with contributions. We are hoping to keep the tradition going with another Summer Celebration next year.

## Membership Report

November is the month for membership renewal. Individual membership is \$15 and family membership is \$25. Your membership fee helps with the financial day to day running of the historical society. You do not have to live in Holderness to be a member, just a lover of its beauty.

## The Year Without a Summer

The Ashland Historical Society is planning to celebrate the legacy of Reuben Whitten who had a farm up what's now Highland Avenue back in 1816. (It was Holderness at that time.) Mt. Tambora, Indonesia, had erupted and filled the atmosphere with enough ash so that weather was wintery across the summer in both America and Europe and farmers had no luck with harvests.

Whitten's south-facing slope produced forty bushels of wheat. He shared with his neighbors and was renowned for his generosity. When he died in 1847 his neighbors erected a gravestone for him near where his farm was located. His house was moved near the woolen mill in the 1870s and then, in 1974, was moved behind the Whipple House. Funds are needed to preserve the house. Anyone with an interest should contact Katie Maher, [katiemaher@comcast.net](mailto:katiemaher@comcast.net) or 215-630-3369.

## Shepard Hill Named to National Historic Register

A committee chaired by Betsy Whitmore has been working under the auspices of the Squam Lake Conservation Society on nominations to the National Register of Historic Places. Elizabeth Hengen, Concord historian, has prepared documentation for properties within the Squam Lakes "viewshed." "Squam: The Evolution and Preservation of a Lakeside Community" was accepted in 2012 as background for nomination of multiple properties. Shepard Hill has now joined that list. The nomination covered summer homes on the hilltop as well as Saint Peters in the Mount, the Episcopal Church built in 1888 which now serves as a private home. A written report is available at the Historical Society.

**THE COTTAGE PLACE**  
on Squam Lake

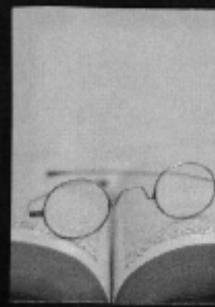


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## The Historic Bridge at Livermore Falls Gorge

It may be the only bridge of its kind left in the United States; a once double-spanned, wrought iron, inverted pumpkinseed-style structure reaching 263 feet across the gorge from the Holderness side into Campton at 103 feet above the raging Pemigewasset River below.

This stretch of the “Pemi” occupies one of the state’s most spectacular geological formations and scenic sites, first listed in the 1870 edition of *The White Mountain Guide*. But for years before, it was well known to locals and, surely, Native populations well before there was a New Hampshire. But water power was its main attraction.

Walls of the gorge are where the rock form *Camptonite* was first discovered, a unique geological schist formed millions of years ago and now recognized worldwide. Just as noteworthy are the gorge’s many past human features: a grist, saw, and pulp mill on either side and surviving as late as into the 1950s. Livermore is also the site of the state’s very first fish hatchery.

Built by the Berlin Bridge Company in East Berlin, Connecticut, the iron structure replaced two previous wooden spans constructed further upstream by Campton. Following a lawsuit brought by Campton against Holderness and Plymouth, reimbursements totaling \$3,800 for the latter bridge were forthcoming. Crossing the river at that point was seen as crucial to commerce between Plymouth and towns north for all the industry that was underway at Livermore Falls. The last operation to close was a pulp mill on the Campton (west) side where logs were beaten into pulp, then wrung between rollers to squeeze out water and ultimately transported by rail to the paper mill at Lincoln. A working rail line today passes within feet of the west side rim but the pulp mill is mostly gone.

What qualifies the remains of this bridge for possible inclusion on the National Register of Historic Places is its unique construction consisting of up-and-down bowed lenticular trusses **below** the travel deck. Thus the term “inverted.” These supporting iron members give the distinct impression of a pumpkinseed when viewed from up or downstream. Bridges of this day, 1886, were made to order to specs submitted by the buyer, then assembled on site like the pieces of an Erector set. U-Mass Professor of Civil Engineering, Alan J. Lutenebgar, has done the most extensive research into this bridge.

In closing off the bridge to all traffic in 1959, the east span was cut loose and allowed to fall into the gorge so that no one could cross. It remains there to this day. It is not clear why the remainder of the bridge was not sold for scrap and removed, except steel had replaced wrought iron years before. There are many today who can recall crossing over, especially with heavy loads of logs which, some claim, would make it sway.

In 1978 this writer submitted legislation to the N.H. General Court to establish a Livermore Falls Gorge Study Commission. It was enacted. A project to preserve the falls, gorge and bridge is now well underway. The historical societies in the three towns, the towns themselves, State Division of Parks (they now own the area) and Plymouth Rotary have come together to further the cause. So stay tuned.

Tink Taylor

## Flowers on the Bridge

Spring, Summer and Fall bring a great many tourists to the Holderness bridge and the flowers receive many compliments from them and our residents alike.

The “show-off” season is over and the boxes are ready for the winter with the help of Walter Johnson’s crew who removed the root bound soil from the boxes. It was a tough job and we thank them very much.



We would also like to thank all of you who have contributed to the *Flowers on the Bridge* Fund.

Thank You!!

Liz Greason & Cynthia Murray

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If anyone has an interesting, historical story that you would like to see printed in our newsletter, please let us know.

### 3<sup>rd</sup> Graders from Holderness Central School

#### Visit Historical Society

On October 15<sup>th</sup> the third graders from the Holderness Central School accompanied by their teacher, Mrs. Beth Allain, visited the Historical Society. They had an opportunity to explore the museum and the building. They learned some of the history of our building and town and were able to explore the many exhibits, including our special 2014 Photo Exhibit. After returning to their classroom they discussed what they had experienced during their visit and sent us a few items to add to our scavenger hunt, which had been created by a previous third grade class.



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**See the Ice Harvest**

The ice harvest at Rockywold-Deephaven Camps to gather ice for ice boxes used in summer is a long-time local tradition. It takes place sometime between mid-January and mid-February. Decision on the date is made just a few days ahead. Anyone interested in watching is invited to attend from the second day on. Missy Mason will keep tabs on the date for any historical society members who want to see the process. Call 968-3334 if interested. Prepare to dress warmly and stay back!





## Some Artifacts donated in 2014

Sandra and Thomas Perkins: Stereopticon, 1907 calendar, 2 pair old ice skates, old fire warden's geodetic map, Asquam House brochures, scenic photo card collection, 1933 librarian's report

Larry Mowbray: old photos of Holderness in winter

Lisa Lovett: old photos from Ruth Taylor of the Cummings-Barker-Taylor house which was at the corner of East Holderness and Coxboro Roads until it was demolished in February 2014

Janet Hoit: Asquam House program cover 7/4/1905, Asquam Transportation booklet

Tink Taylor: White Mountains-Sweetser (1894 edition), 4x6 blueprint showing Asquam Hotel location and schools along Coxboro and Winona Roads, New Hampshire: Frank Sanborn: An Epitome of Popular Government published 1904, photo of Davey McDonald helping with duck dynasty relocation

Missy Mason: Groton School Camp-K. Bingham (on Squam Lake in 1893, later became Camp Mayhew on Newfound Lake)

Jane Grant: copy of an article on "Priest Fowle and Early Holderness"

G. Noyes: copy of John Minary obituary (NY Times 2/97)

Joyce Rogers: old phone with ringer box, old children's chalkboard, old mortar and pestle

## Need Gift Ideas?

Consider these items for sale at the Holderness Historical Society:

*History of Holderness* by George Hodges \$20

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