

Jonesport Historical Society Newsletter

“Preserving Our Heritage”

Message from the President

One of the advantages of being JHS President is being a point of contact for anyone looking to research our local history. I had several inquiries this past year that caught my interest. One of them was from an author writing a book about extinct species, one of them being a sea mink that went extinct in the 1880s, and he believed that one of the last places it was seen was near Jonesport. Using our Archives database, I found that there was once a mink pelt industry in Jonesport, and that letters written to Daniel J. Sawyer in the 1860s concerning the mink industry were available to the author at the Maine Maritime Museum in Bath, Maine.

Last summer a psychologist researching his family asked if we had any information about Stephen Otis Johnson, Sr. Searching our Genealogy database, which contains a lot of information supplied by genealogists Leonard F. Tibbetts and Darryl B. Lamson, I found that Stephen Otis Johnson, Sr. was impressed into the British Navy to fight the American Colonists, but deserted and joined the American Army under George Washington.

And just last month I was contacted by a woman looking for information on her father, Ladwic Smith, who never knew his parents because he was only an infant when they both died. She discovered that her father was the grandson of Ida May Watts, who was taken by her parents to Jaffa Palestine in 1866 when she was only five months old, and at the age of six was returned to Maine by herself on a ship, carrying her belongings in a small wooden box, with a tag around her neck like she was a piece of luggage.

Switching topics, the JHS website www.jonesporthistoricalsociety.org has a new section called Photos of People. It has a list of last names in either compact view or expanded view, where you can click on a full name to see photos of that person. There is also a search box where you can enter any part of a person's name. Photos of about 1400 people pulled from the Archives database are included. Thanks to our web designer Deborah Bailey for developing this feature.

Bill Plaskon, President

Winter 2025

2024- 2025 Board of Directors

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Work of Humble Jonesport Woman Recognized in Famous Museum

By Mark Edwards

As the historian for my late wife's family, the Farnsworths, of Mason's Bay, I have been told by fellow JHS members that genealogical research is like going down rabbit holes. A rabbit hole usually leads to a series of tunnels, where you have no idea as to where you will end up, and it is entirely possible to follow a tunnel to find yourself where you started, when the tunnel ends with a backdoor escape above ground.

This past fall I received an email from my sister-in-law, after she learned that I was involved with the JHS, and so involved with family history. She related that her brother had inherited a quilt and subsequently donated it to the museum at Historical Colonial Williamsburg, in Virginia, where it is part of their permanent collection. She also added a photo of the quilt. Well, down the rabbit hole I went, and what a find was had at the end of the tunnel. The quilt is a crazy quilt. Crazy quilts were much as their names suggest, a crazy patchwork of assorted fabrics, gathered to create a usable, and decorative cover. In the frugal days of the past, where nothing was wasted, this was the perfect use for the remnants of previous sewing projects likely filling a drawer.

The quilt was made by Lena Coffin (1876-1951, photo at right), assisted by her mother, Augusta L. Gardner Coffin (1838-1909), both of Jonesport, Maine. It is believed that the quilt was made after 1890, in preparation for Lena's marriage in 1895 to Emery Farnsworth (1876-1961), a fisherman and farmer of Mason's Bay, Jonesport. The quilt descended from Lena Coffin Farnsworth to her daughter, Julia Farnsworth Elwell (1896-1983) to her daughter, Barbara Elwell Edmunds (1920-2011), to her son, Russell Jay Edmunds and his wife, Diane Roedel Edmunds, who donated the quilt to the museum.



Most surviving crazy quilts were smaller, for use as parlor throws. Lena's quilt, however, is more utilitarian, intended for everyday use as a full bed covering, being 86 1/2" x 73 1/2". What makes the quilt further unique, is the fact that it consists of forty-two blocks of woolen and cotton flannels and sturdy fabrics with a backing of plaid flannelette, while most surviving crazy quilts are made of silks and velvets. Further, one block in the bottom right corner is stamped with the makers' name of Coffin. As stated, the quilt is composed of 42 blocks. Each block is created with odd-shaped patches and put together to appear random in their piecing. The pieces are embroidered with various fancy stitches and outline-embroidered motifs using silk threads. The designs include baseball players, the Statue of Liberty, and a prominent rooster, along with other animals. The cover is bound with a three-fourths-inch folded strip of brown cotton and backed in plaid flannelette. It is not quilted. Stitches used include buttonhole, chain, cross, fern, fly/feather, herringbone, knots, outline, satin and bundled satin, seed, and stem.

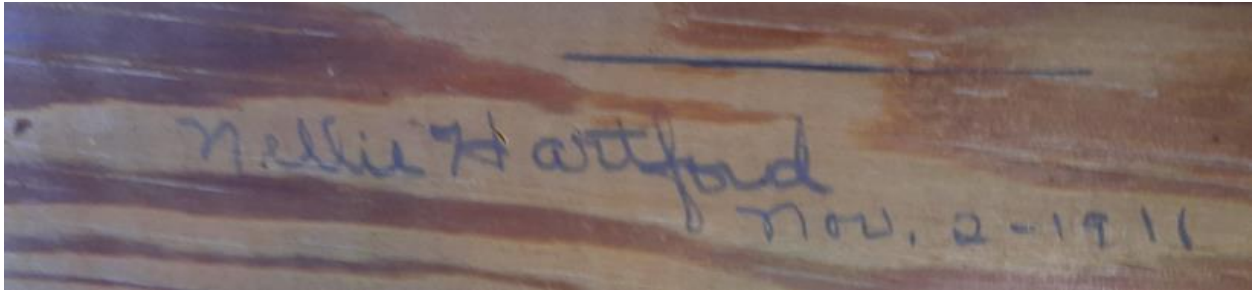
While it is doubtful that Lena ever visited Virginia herself, she is honored for her unique work, and Jonesport, Maine is represented, permanently, within the internationally known Colonial Williamsburg Foundation Museum, in Williamsburg Virginia.

Nellie's Autograph

By David Crook

My wife and I live in an old farmhouse in the Lower Bay on Mason Bay Road, near the former Seaside Chapel. For much of the 20th century the Newell White family lived in this house. Although the two-story house has been expanded and renovated several times over the decades since it was built sometime in the 19th century, the second floor remains an uninsulated time capsule—retaining the original spruce paneling, doors and wide floorboards.

A few years ago, I took down a small wall shelf in one of the upstairs bedrooms and found a surprise. Just under the original edge of the shelf on the wall was this neatly scripted autograph: *Nellie Hartford, Nov. 2-1911.*



Who was Nellie? I have been curious ever since my discovery, and now retirement leisure together with new familiarity with the extensive records maintained by the JHS and other resources have made it possible to bring Nellie to life. My first step was to search the archive database in the JHS [Heritage Center](#), which contains many thousands of items including photos, documents, and video clips. The moment I hit the search button, Nellie's autograph was transformed into a person—Nellie Hartford Smith. The archives contained two photographs donated by her son, Alvin Smith Jr.—one of Nellie as a young woman, and a second of her and her husband, Alvin Smith Sr. at home on their porch in their later years.



After this discovery, I had to learn more about Nellie. A Google search unearthed a trove of additional information on [Findagrave.com](#). From this source I learned that Nellie (1885-1972) had become Nellie Hartford Smith, when she married Jonesport resident Alvin Smith Sr (1878-1959) in 1912, the year after her stay in this house. This rich source also contained genealogical data as well as her and Alvin's obituaries. Nellie was born in the town of Columbia, graduated from the Washington Academy and the Eastern State Normal School in Castine, and pursued a career as a teacher. Nellie and Alvin were married for 46 years, until Alvin's death in 1959. They lived next to Sandy River Beach and raised four children in addition to Alvin Jr.: Reginald, Margery, Janetta, and Grace.

The mystery remained: Why might Nellie have been staying in the upstairs bedroom of our house in 1911? My first step was to unearth information about the history of the house. JHS member Mark Edwards provided some helpful clues by sharing copies of several deeds from this period (available from the Washington County Registry of Deeds). In 1911 our house was owned by Reuben and Lydia Rogers. I was able to find the Rogers in the 1910 census. Data on their household suggest that there was likely plenty of room available for boarders: In addition to Reuben and Lydia, only 13-year-old Frank Rogers lived in the house at that time. So, one possibility is that Nellie stayed with the Rogers while teaching just up the road at the Lower Bay School, the current site of the Seaside Chapel. In 1910, the year before she autographed our wall, she had been living with her parents in the Town of Columbia, according to census records. The 1910 census also shows her future husband, 33-year-old Alvin, residing near the Rogers with his parents Enoch and Rebecca Smith. The youngest of their five children, Alvin was working that year for the United States Life Saving Service, which a few years later was merged with the Revenue Cutter Service by President Woodrow Wilson to create the U.S. Coast Guard.

Some readers may have known Nellie and her family. If you did, we would welcome your memories to round out this sketch: jonesporthistoricalsociety@outlook.com.



Washington County

By Eileen Lenfestey Beal

We, in Washington County,
Like the way we live;
We wouldn't exchange it with anyone,
And all that they could give.
Our county has been branded,
So everywhere we go
We hear "poverty stricken," "tarred-paper shacks,"
From those who believe it so.

Of course, we do have poor folks—
Can you name one city or town
The length and breadth of our nation
Where poverty does not abound?
And, yes, there are run-down houses
We're proud to call our own;
But there's a heap of living within those walls,
Which makes a house a home.

A husband and wife are sitting alone—
A lifetime they have shared—
Now rocking and reminiscing
'Bout the good times and the bad,

In a farmhouse way out in the country
That looks like it might not survive—
But memories of the patter of little feet
Help to keep that old farmhouse alive.

I can see a small house down the road a piece,
With tarred-paper cover, I'd say,
Where a mother cares for her little ones
Since their dad was taken away.
There are love and respect in this modest home,
For God, for country, and fellow man.
Oh yes, they are poor, but they also have pride
In the county in which they were born.

I recall a spacious and elegant house
That stands stately, high on a hill,
With paint and shutters now weatherworn,
But the elderly live in it still—
It has sheltered many a traveler,
From the wrath of rain and snow,
With Downeast hospitality
That many do not know.

There are many houses such as these,
Observed by those who pass by,
Who recall only the ugly exterior
Which does not please the eye.

Each house has a different tale to tell
Of beauty that lies within –
If only those old walls could ring
With laughter and music again.

You'll find a huge and well-kept house
Just does not make a home –
It's living and loving, smiles and tears,
And memories all your own;
A bannister worn from sliding,
Initials carved in trees,
A little miss who cut her curls –
A home is made of these.

Our county has so much to offer
Of which many cannot conceive,
Such as boating, fishing, and hunting,
Gorgeous sunsets and fresh air to breathe.

Each family is known by his neighbor –
He's called by name, not by "Mr." or "Sir."
That's the way we live on the "Rockbound Coast,"
The "Land of the Pointed Fir."

ELB October 1971



*Eileen Lenfestey Beal
1917-1987*

**Membership Form
2025 (Q)**

Please print all information clearly. Use a separate form for each person. Membership is 5.00 per year per person.

Name _____

Maiden Name (optional) _____ Phone (required for ID) _____

Mail Address _____

Town _____ State _____ ZIP _____

E-Mail _____ Contact me about volunteering

\$ <u>5.00</u> 2025 Membership	Make check payable to <i>Jonesport Historical Society</i>
\$ _____ 2026 Membership (\$5.00)	
\$ _____ 2027 Membership (\$5.00)	Mail to: Jonesport Historical Society P.O. Box 603 Jonesport, ME 04649
\$ _____ Tax Deductible Donation	
\$ _____ Total Amount	

NOTE: The above form is for new JHS members only. If you are an existing member, you will receive a renewal form with our annual newsletter in April.

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