

View from Nell Berry's porch on West Main Street, circa 1940. Note the millstone lying in the front yard (see article on page 3) and Centennial Hall across the street.

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Centennial Hall Reborn

After standing vacant for decades, the Denmark Centennial Hall at 72 West Main Street, across from the Moose Pond dam, has been meticulously renovated and will open to the public once more this summer.

The Hall was built in 1876, the same year as the nation's centennial and most likely the reason for its name. The original builder and purpose of the Hall is unknown, and the trail of deeds is uncertain prior to 1907. Over the years it served as a dance hall, a venue for public events, a meeting place for a fraternal order, a coffin factory and, until 1982, the town post office.

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Curator Notes

The Curator and Board Members would like to thank those who generously donated gifts to the Denmark Historical Society archives in 2014 and 2015:

- **Otisfield and Hiram Historical Societies** various items from the Schwenke and Cotton families
- **Scott Baright** 400 digital images of Denmark scenes
- **Family of Malcolm and Sue MacDonald** books about local history
- **Terry and Carol Rhoads** Town Reports (1927, 1934, and 1938) found in the Bertram Jordan house
- **Ora Keller Brine** items related to the Ingalls, McKusick, Berry, Sanborn and Keller families
- **MSAD #72** six ledgers from 1899 – 1969 comprising three books of school district financial records, and three books of school board minutes
- **Elizabeth Harmon and Jane Chase** scrapbook and catalog of the Denmark Inn and documents related to Wyonegonic and Winona Camps
- **Hancock Sand Pond Association** DVD of the 1990 rebuilding of the dam on Hancock Pond
- **Bridgton Historical Society** postcard of the Denmark Inn and a program from the 1925 Denmark High School prize speaking contest
- **Loren and Patricia Largey** notecards from the Denmark Community Church and the book, Oxford County, Maine: A Guide to Its Historic Architecture

The Historical Society has responded to queries about the Colby, Cole, Evans, Kimball, and Trumbull families.

We are currently researching the mills on Moose Pond as well as businesses that were located in the Centennial Hall on Main Street. Please contact us if you have information about any or all of these topics,

The ongoing project to complete an inventory of cemeteries in Denmark is still in progress. If you would like to adopt a cemetery or help with our research, we welcome your assistance.

Gifts from the Birch Cove Fund and Denmark Lions Club have enabled us to protect our collections of photographs and postcards. We are in the process of digitizing the images, which will be available on the Maine Historical Society Maine Memory website later in 2015.

A group of dedicated volunteers continues to sort and catalog the Society's collections, digitize photos and postcards, transcribe documents and respond to queries. Many thanks to Astria Fatica, Carl and JoAnne Harbourt, Pat Largey, Cindy Lee, Dotty Osgood, Jolene Snow, Lyndsay Snow, and Allene Westleigh for donating their time and energy to improve the archives. The Society is grateful for all your hard work.

Thank you for your support!
Lee Ann Shand, Curator

Historic Gristmill Stone



The millstone in front of Ora Keller Brine's House showing the carved sickle cutting pattern.

The village of Denmark has many features common to small towns in rural Maine: the Civil War monument at the top of Mill Hill, the dam on Moose Pond, a fire house, post office, variety store, library, white clapboard church, and a former school converted to a municipal building. These are things that represent quintessential small town New England and we, as residents, all too often take them for granted. It is important that we recognize our unique local history and make efforts to preserve it for future generations.

One of Denmark's unique historical features is the large granite millstone that stands in front of Ora Keller Brine's house on Main Street, across from the Denmark Arts Center.

The stone is one of a matching pair once used in a grist mill that stood on the banks of Moose Pond Brook during the 19th century. It is 14 inches thick, 53 inches in diameter, and weighs approximately 3,000 lbs. The lines cut onto the surface to facilitate grinding are called a "cutting pattern" and this particular pattern is called "sickle". The stone's partner lay flat for many years in front of the Nell Berry home further along Main Street but it has since been sold and is, unfortunately, no longer in Denmark.

The existing stone is set vertically in the ground in front of the Keller Brine home. It represents a significant

era of Denmark's early industrial past when the local economy was fueled by the numerous mills dotted along Moose Pond Brook. Recognizing the stone's historical importance, the Denmark Historical Society, along with local residents Brian Grennan and Fritz Von Ulmer, and other members of the community, approached Mrs. Brine's caregivers to ask if she would be willing to donate the millstone to the townspeople of Denmark.

Eventually, it was agreed that the stone would be given to the town and a vote to accept the gift will be held at the Town Meeting on June 5th. Fritz Von Ulmer, who was instrumental in negotiating the gift, has also arranged for Tim Brown from the Windy Ridge Corporation to move it to a new site as soon as ground conditions permit. The stone will be situated on town-owned property along Main Street, across the road from the dam and near the 19th century water-powered turbine, which also came from an early mill on Moose Pond. A plaque identifying the stone and acknowledging Ora Brine for her gift will be also be installed at the new site.

The millstone is historically significant to the town of Denmark but it is not known for certain from which grist mill it was removed. Ora Keller Brine was related to the Ingalls and Berry families, both of which operated mills on Moose Pond. Do you know which mill the stones come from? If so, we would love to hear from you. ✨

DENMARK
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The white, two-story clapboard structure represents a common late 19th century architectural style seen in many rural New England towns. The Hall is similar in form to the former Odd Fellows Hall (now the Denmark Arts Center) further up Main Street. It sits on a granite foundation and features a large, well-lit open room on the ground floor. Upstairs boasts a small stage graced with an elegant proscenium arch made of red oak.

From the first “grand ball” held to inaugurate the building in November 1876, the Hall was a center for local entertainment.

The Bridgton Quadrille Band, with Mr. Gee, have been engaged for the grand ball at the new Centennial Hall, Denmark Corner, which is to be dedicated with music and revelry, Thanksgiving night.

Bridgton News, NOVEMBER 17, 1876

It continued to be a popular venue for dances, holiday parties, and various “entertainments” during most of the latter 19th century. Bands from Bridgton, Fryeburg and Denmark played for balls at the Hall and local people performed plays, dramatic readings and “music tableaux”. Refreshments, particularly cake and ice cream, were usually served at events, and a “Hulled Corn and Milk repast” constituted part of one program presented in 1877. Sometimes the entertainment did not go so smoothly, as indicated in the following excerpt from the Bridgton News, June 21, 1895:

Mt. Pleasant Lodge, I.O.Q.T. gave a nice entertainment at Centennial Hall, Monday Eve., June 10. There was a goodly company present, and the programme was well rendered, and the ice cream and cake that was served at the close was most delicious, with the mercury about 80 degrees. The entertainment would have been a success in every way if it had not been for the unnecessary noise made by some of the young men present. We do not object to a reasonable amount of encore, but when it becomes almost a continual clapping and stamping, hooting an hissing, it is a nuisance, and is not only annoying to those who wish to see and hear, but very embarrassing to those who take part in the exercises. We understand that some of our order-loving citizens intend to make an example of the next disturber, and see if by that means that cannot stop this hoodlumism that has so long prevailed here.



Centennial Hall raised off its foundation during restoration in 2013.



Denmark post office, 1920.

At the beginning of the 20th century, and possibly earlier, the Hall was used by the Knights of the Maccabees, a benevolent fraternal organization similar to the Masons or Odd Fellows, and was known as “Maccabee Hall” by the generation of townspeople born around 1900.

The Hall apparently closed as a dance venue for more than two decades in the early 20th century and the U.S. Post Office occupied part of the ground floor from the 1920s. According to items in the Bridgton News, the Hall reopened for a dance in March 1929 and the ‘Girl Reserves’ reportedly hosted another dance there in April of that year. However, it seems the building’s revival as a dance hall was short lived. A coffin manufacturer was operating on the



Newly restored Centennial Hall today; Pat Jack farm on the right.

second floor during the 1930s and the large, rectangular hole used to transfer newly made coffins downstairs can still be seen today in the ground floor ceiling.

Mae L. Jack transferred the building and lot in 1948 to Winona Camps, which owned the abutting property that included the camp offices and the Potter and Ordway hardware store. In 1967, the building was transferred to the Post Mistress, Corice B. Fiendel, owner but not resident of the adjacent Jack farm on the west side of the Hall.

The Post Office, and possibly other businesses, continued to operate in the Hall until the Post Office moved to its present location on East Main Street in 1982. Centennial Hall was vacated the same year and fell into disuse until it was bought by the current owner in 2012.

Over the past two years, the Hall has undergone a rebirth. It was raised off its old foundation and a new concrete foundation was poured below ground level. Stone slabs were placed on edge over the new concrete exposed on the exterior to replicate the appearance of the original granite foundation. Almost 75% of the sills have been replaced, new interior floors and walls have

been constructed and insulated, and a state of the art heating system has been installed. A new roof was also put on and the windows have been refitted, complete with wavy, antique glass panes.

The newly refurbished Centennial Hall is ready to serve the community once again. It will house a museum of early local industry downstairs and upstairs will be used for temporary exhibitions, meetings and other public events. The current owner also hopes to collaborate in various ways with the Historical Society and Denmark Arts Center.

Instead of a “grand ball”, this time around the Hall will be inaugurated on June 28th with a performance by renowned Maine storyteller Jo Radner, sponsored by Ace Insurance of Denmark. It promises to be a fun event and, hopefully, devoid of any pesky “disturbers”! ❄

Some information for this article was obtained through the Oxford County Registry of Deeds (Western District) in Fryeburg, ME, the Denmark Historical Society archives, and the Bridgton News archives on line at <http://www.bridgton.lib.me.us/digital-services/bridgton-public-library-archives-online>.



The mill scene mural on the Community House stage curtain.

Community House Stage Curtain

Inside a large white clapboard building on Route 117 in Denmark, not far from the Civil War monument at the top of Mill Hill, hangs a hand painted mural that served as a stage curtain drop during the building's heyday as a Grange Hall and the Community House. This local treasure has been hidden from view for more than 40 years but, in the (hopefully) not too distant future, it will be relocated and on public display once again.

The building where the curtain now hangs was originally constructed around 1830 as the Denmark Universalist Church. The Crystal Spring Grange bought it in 1903 and used it until 1931, when it was purchased by the Congregational Church and became known as the Denmark Community House. The building was used as a venue for public suppers, bazaars, plays, rummage sales and other community events. In 1971, it was sold to a private owner and has been used as a storehouse since then.

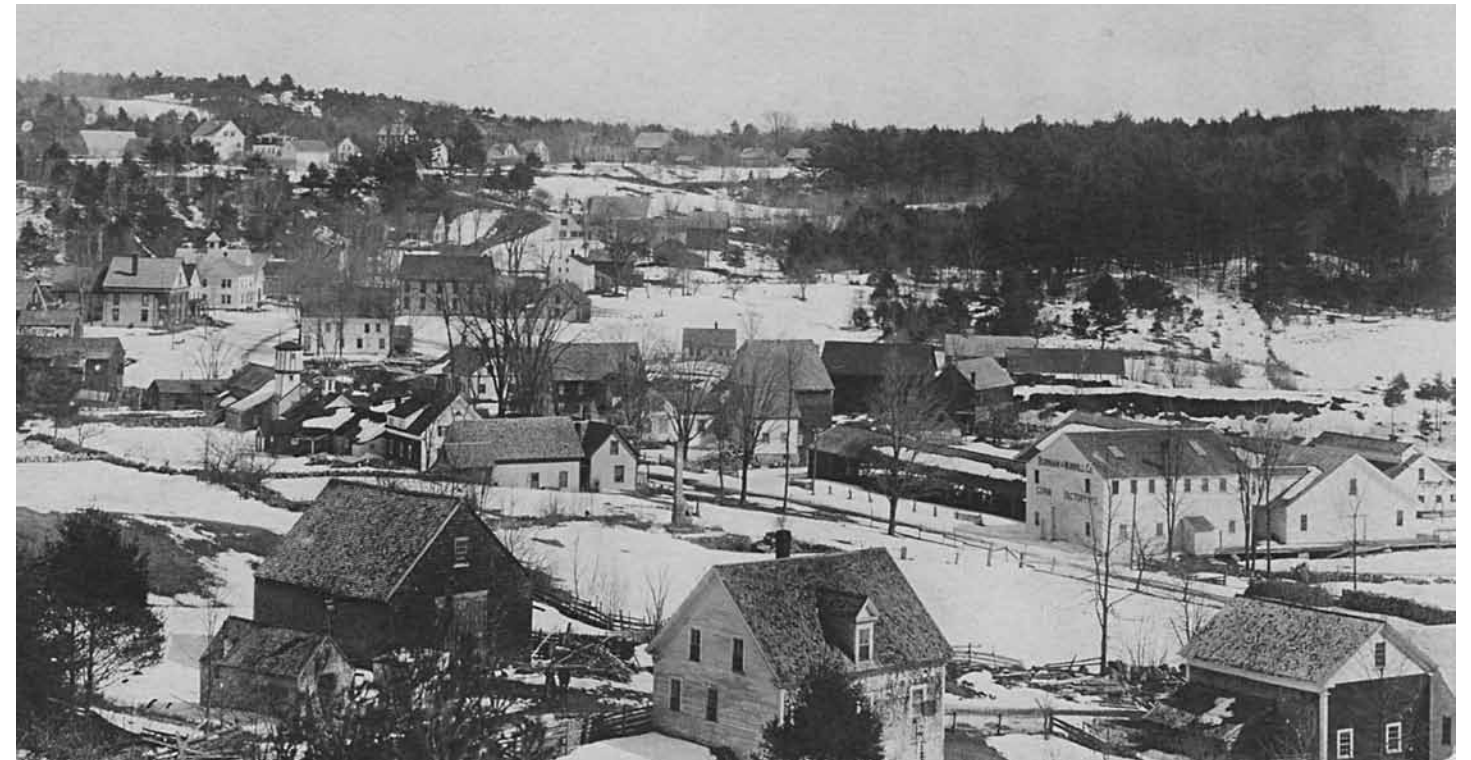
The curtain, measuring about 16 feet wide and 11 feet tall, was commissioned by the Grange shortly after it bought the building in 1903. The mural depicts a sawmill near the old dam in Denmark, which was copied from a period photograph by the L.L. Graham and Sons Company in Brooklyn, New York. The image is an accurate representation of the original photograph (now in the Denmark Historical Society archives) with the addition of voluptuous drapery featuring very large, exuberant ball fringes painted at the top and on either

side of the mill scene to give the impression of a stage. A historic preservation expert also noted that this mural is unique because there are no advertisements for local businesses painted around the borders, as is common among similar curtains.

The mural is painted on a lightweight material, similar to sheeting, instead of the more usual heavy canvas. It is also attached to an interesting mechanism that allows it to be rolled up and down by pulling ropes on both sides. The painting and the rollers are in remarkably good condition, despite hanging open in a building with no climate control for more than four decades. The colors are still vibrant and there are few signs of wear. There are also no obvious holes in the fabric and no evidence of damage from insects or vermin.

The Monson family, who currently own the Community House, has generously donated the curtain to the newly renovated Centennial Hall on Main Street, where it will eventually be on display to the public. However, moving the curtain presents a significant logistical challenge because of its size and fragility. Its physical condition also needs to be properly assessed to determine the best way to preserve it.

Many local residents will remember the mural hanging as a backdrop for public suppers and events held at the Denmark Community House. Hopefully they will be able to see it again soon on display in its new home at the Centennial Hall. ❄



Denmark lower village, 1906.

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SYLVIA (SUE) MACDONALD

It is with great sadness that we note the passing, in June 2014, of one of our founding members, Sylvia (Sue) MacDonald. Sue and her fellow members of the Bicentennial Committee, Blanche Anthony and Rita LaMountain, compiled *Denmark Past and Present*, which was published in January of 1976. Funds raised from the sale of the book were used to purchase the first copy machine for the Town of Denmark. Over the years, Sue worked in local schools and in real estate, and also volunteered for various organizations in the community. She enjoyed art, painting and researching local history and genealogy. Sue is survived by her children, Lorinda, John and Nathan, and their families.

We are currently building a website. Please check it out at www.denmarkhistoricalsociety.org.

We plan to add content, notifications and updates often. This will allow us to keep up with the changing times and rely less on producing a physical newsletter.



PO BOX 803
DENMARK, ME 04022

We welcome you to join us to celebrate the opening of Centennial Hall with renowned Maine folklorist and oral historian, Jo Radner.

Ms. Radner will present her latest performance "Yankee Ingenuity: Stories of Headstrong and Resourceful People" at the Hall, 72 West Main Street, Denmark, on Sunday afternoon, June 28th (exact time to be announced later).

Come along and learn about the inventive, self-reliant and sometimes "boneheaded stubborn" folks who contributed to the colorful history of our region.

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