

# THOMPSON FREE LIBRARY

## ASSOCIATION MEETING MEMBERS' UPDATE

JULY 2019

### TALES OF

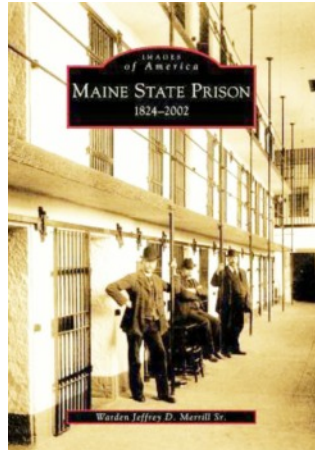


### TWO WARDENS

by Tom Lyford

#### A LOOK BEHIND PRISON WALLS

Native son of “Maine’s Most Boring Town,” Jeffrey Merrill managed to go out and find himself a more exciting life. And though I would never, even for a second, dream of trading my safe English teaching career for his daring one, I could listen to the hair-raising and humorous accounts of this (now retired) warden of two Maine state prisons all day long. With a History Channel documentary about the history of Thomaston’s prison, his visit in March to promote his book, *Maine State Prison: 1824-2002*, was informative and entertaining. One-time warden of Charleston Correctional facility, Merrill went on to become (the last) warden of the Thomaston State Penitentiary, famous inspiration for Stephen King’s Shawshank Prison.



The humanitarian marks that Merrill’s career left on the state’s correctional systems are inspiring. Inheriting what can only be described as the shockingly primitive living conditions for both the inmate population and the staff at Thomaston, Jeff spent his tenure installing improvements to help defuse the powder keg he found there: new plumbing (so the

water in the inmates’ toilet bowls would no longer freeze solid in winter); regular ‘open house’ days for spouses; shortening the guards’ eight hour shifts without bathroom breaks up on the prison walls; creating a rose garden and greenhouse for prisoners to maintain; and last but not least, successfully implementing an inmate smoking cessation program.

Of peak interest to us locals in the audience was Jeff’s recap of Dover-Foxcroft’s infamous jailbreak of 1998. On trial for robbery, aggravated assault and burglary, and accosting Secretary of Defense William S. Cohen’s brother Robert with a knife at his Brewer home, Michael Chasse made a brazen escape from the court house by discharging “a homemade ‘soap powder bomb’ into the faces of his escorts, Sheriff John Goggin and Chief Deputy Dale Clukey, and then bolted.” The massive manhunt that ensued saw Chasse taking a local woman hostage, stealing a vehicle, and injuring two officers before being apprehended on Sebec Lake in a stolen canoe. Years later, as Thomaston’s Maine State Prison warden, Merrill once again had dealings with Chasse involving his hostage-taking at knife point of the prison librarian and a fellow inmate that ended with only minor injuries after a SWAT team brought the incident to an abrupt resolution.

Sometimes life is like the movies...

#### NORTH WOODS LAW: A Good Man with a Dog

Roger Guay’s humor is joyfully self-deprecating, as illustrated by a story of the first challenge he faced as a recruit right out of game warden school. A little old lady phoned him for help, claiming a “gigantic and really mean” raccoon residing under her front steps was not allowing anyone in, or out, of her house. “Be right there, Ma’m,” he

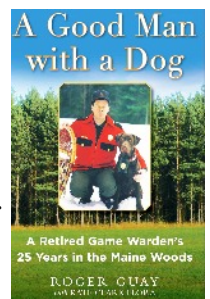


promised in his most confident Dudley Do-right voice. “But he’s really mean,” she said again for emphasis. “Don’t worry, Ma’m. You’ve called the right fella.” Pulling up calm and cool in her yard moments later, he stepped out of

his pickup and began sauntering down the woman’s walk when... out from under the house, the biggest and nastiest raccoon he’d ever seen came barreling straight at him, snarling and growling “like a Tasmanian Devil!” Safe by seconds back in the cab, wiping the sweat from his brow and beginning to second-guess whether he’d chosen the right career choice after all, he heard the woman yell at him from the front door, “That’s the one! Told ya he’s mean!”

Roger Guay visited TFL in mid-June to promote his autobiographical memoir co-written with Kate Flora, *A Good Man with a Dog*. His life story was filled with both humorous as well as some grim anecdotes from his twenty-five years as a game warden and certified K9 handler, along with some explanations on how dogs are trained to locate such specific items as discarded weapons, ejected shells, hidden fish, and missing people—living and dead. The raising and training of dogs are his passion and love. And not long into his talk, it became increasingly obvious that his favorite dogs are the brown labs like Reba, his first and most cherished, the one featured on the cover of his book.

*A Good Man with a Dog* explores Guay’s life as he and his canine partners were exposed to increasingly terrible events, from tracking down hostile poachers to searching for victims of violent crimes, including a year-long search for the hidden graves of two murdered babies buried in Baxter State Park by a Massachusetts cult. He witnessed firsthand FEMA’s mismanagement of the post-Katrina cleanup efforts in New Orleans, which left him scarred and disheartened. But he found hope with the support of family and friends, and eventually returned to the woods he knew and loved from the days of his youth.



A lively Q&A session followed his talk, and one book-buying customer was overheard assuring him, “You needn’t worry if book sales slow down. You obviously have a second career as a successful Maine storyteller.”

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## *VOICES FROM HOME*

by Kim Brawn

*Voices from Home* is a community-based oral history project coordinated by TFL and funded by a grant from the Maine Community Foundation.

At the end of May, library director Greta Schroeder and children's librarian Michelle Fagan took this ongoing project to the Maine History Festival at the University of Maine in Orono. The event was for community organizations to present their own research or planning for Maine's Bicentennial next year. Also lending a hand, Trisha Smith from Cooperative Extension Piscataquis County, they, along with the Commons at Central Hall and the Dover-Foxcroft Historical Society are partnering with TFL on this project.

"It was a chance to tell people about our project and for people to stop by and ask questions," Greta explained. "We brought our recording bag, display pieces, and audio clips of recorded interviews."

One those audio clips features a very familiar voice. All it took was Michelle asking, "What was the town like when you were growing up?" for Tom Lyford to be transported back decades ago, taking her on a walking tour of buildings around Dover-Foxcroft and what they used to be when he was a kid. "I was an explosion of memories just waiting to be tapped," Tom laughed.

Each month, *Voices from Home* hosts a recording event on a different theme at locations around the Heart of Maine region. TFL provides recording equipment and interview guides to help you conduct a brief oral history interview with a family member, friend, or neighbor. With permission, your recording will be stored at the library and shared via our online archive.

Two exciting events on the horizon:

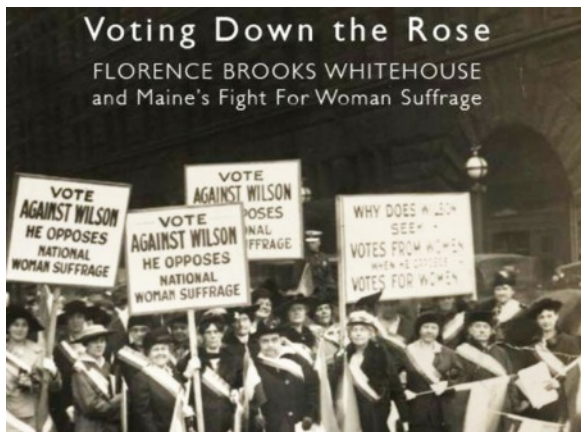
*Story Slam*, Thursday, August 1 at 7 p.m. at the Commons at Central Hall. The theme is "Upta Camp"—tell or listen to 6-minute stories about memorable camp experiences (Think NPR's Moth Radio Hour.) If you want to be a storyteller, please contact the library.

*Blue Ribbon Fairs*: Voice from Home will be setting up at the Piscataquis Valley Fair in August. "We'll record interviews with people about their special fair memories on Friday and Saturday (Aug. 23 & 24), explained Michelle. "Look for more details on our website and Facebook page."



## *VOTING DOWN THE ROSE*

by Kim Brawn



As part of the Maine Suffrage Centennial celebration author Anne Gass spoke to an attentive and curious audience of 35 in May about her book *Voting Down the Rose: Florence Brooks Whitehouse and Maine's Fight for Woman Suffrage*. Anne is the great-granddaughter of Whitehouse who was a suffragist, activist, and novelist from Maine.

"I don't remember learning much about the suffrage movement in school," said TFL's Greta Schroeder. "So, it was fascinating to see all that was involved in the process, especially the intersection of history and politics—it was not one unified movement and Florence was like a bridge between the different groups."

Anne did not know how instrumental her great-grandmother was in Maine's ratifying women's right to vote (in 1919) until she finally sifted through three boxes full of Florence's papers in 1999, leading to more in-depth research and investigation, culminating in her book. "Anne gave an engaging presentation, brought to life with lots of photographs," Greta recalled.

"It was very interesting," said Phyllis Lyford, who listened intently as Florence's story unfolded. "I was impressed that a woman back in those days felt that she could do something important and make a difference."

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## *ON THE STREETS WHERE YOU LIVE*

by Tom Lyford



*The Public*, a powerhouse of a movie written, directed by, and starring Emilio Estevez along with Alec Baldwin, Taylor Shilling, Jenna Malone, and Christian Slater, was shown at Center Theatre in April (if you haven't seen it, you should... and you can rent it at TFL). On April 19, TFL hosted a pre-screening presentation on Penquis area homelessness by Archie Curry, the program director of the Bangor Area Homeless Shelter. Curry was accompanied by Logan from Shaw House, Bangor's intake organization for area homeless teens. Here are just a few of the staggering facts from the Shelter in 2018: 134 homeless families received help finding permanent housing; 13,575 bed-nights were provided; 10,237 meals were served; the Shelter has only 38 beds

year round but open "overflow beds" (floor space) in the winter; and 449 households were served in the Food Pantry. Just 29% of the Homeless Shelter's funding comes from State and Federal programs, while the rest comes from grants, foundations, private contributions, and fundraisers. One of the most common biases about the homeless population is that they are all mentally ill or deadbeats; in reality, so many normal people these days are just a paycheck away from becoming homeless during any week. People like Archie Curry are angels for the homeless. For more facts like these, simply google the Bangor Homeless Shelter and/or the Shaw House.



The movie set the stage for a further informational, and emotional, follow-up discussion. It is titled *The Public* because its setting is a Cincinnati public library that is beset by a homeless population that does not want to leave when the doors close at day's end. The freezing winter winds and temperatures plummeting at or below -10 degrees is taking its toll. Familiar homeless acquaintances of the library staff are beginning to freeze to death on the sidewalks right outside the library, so when 40 or so homeless individuals refuse to leave one night, a stand-off ensues. The film portrays both the moral and legal issues as food for thought, and for library staff workers like myself, it was tremendously educational.

## *THE ICE MAN COMETH*

by Tom Lyford



On Thursday, May 23<sup>rd</sup> Lucas Butler from Pineland Farms, Inc. and spokesperson for the Libra Foundation, visited TFL for a Q&A with the Dover-Foxcroft area residents concerning that big, yellow edifice rising like the phoenix out of the ashes of what was once Brothers' Chevrolet.

The Libra Foundation is a private foundation established by Elizabeth B. Noyce, activated in 1989. It is authorized by the Internal Revenue Service to make grants and contributions to charitable organizations other than political organizations. Its stated mission: "We believe that all people are born with equal and inalienable rights and

fundamental freedoms, and have a right to live in a healthy environment and in peaceful, just and equitable societies. Promoting these human rights is the highest purpose we can envision for the grantmaking of The Libra Foundation."

Besides morphing Monson, ME into an art colony, the building pictured above is the \$5.5 million ice hockey facility to be managed by Foxcroft Academy. "It will have a pro shop, rentals, everything you need to be successful on the ice," Butler said. "The building is primarily ice, however ice is really expensive to make in the summer so we are building the building to be an event center, to give ourselves the flexibility to do something else in there in the summer. We will have room for 150 spaces in front of the arena with space on the side of the building for a dozen buses," he said. "We are, fingers crossed, having that arena up and running in August or July... We have a dedicated group of hockey enthusiasts in this area who have taken the reigns." Butler went on to say the Penquis Youth Hockey Association is already involved with the Piscataquis County Ice Arena. To a question raised as to the affordability of ice hockey for area youth, Butler said, "We are committed to getting these youth sports up and running," mentioning equipment swaps as an example.

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### *TFL'S 101 SERIES*

by Kim Brawn

#### *SOUP'S ON*



Mary Margaret Ripley recruited slicers and dicers to help out during her informative, fun, and tasty Veggie Soup 101. Her friendly, no-nonsense “you can do it too” demeanor and interactive approach made everyone feel that they could conquer the amazing universe of soup.

She talked ingredients, tips and techniques and gave us several recipes to take home. She also shared lots of ideas—with plenty of give and take and questions—and showed us step by step how to make her go-to creamy squash soup and then a miso soup. My favorite part: the sampling of the soups. (Squash: incredible flavors! Miso: not usually a fan, but I really liked it.) Let’s just say, the community meeting room has never smelled that aromatically diverse.

#### *JOURNALS FROM JUNK*

To say that Greenville Junction’s Holly Johnsen is passionate about junk journaling is an understatement. She’s kind of obsessed—but in a good way—and she shared that infectious vibe with an intimate group in May. What a kind and caring teacher—and she brought enough supplies to share with an entire Rachael Ray studio audience!

Delightful and chatty, Holly guided us step-by-step through the process of making our own junk journals, bringing us charming packets of awesome accents to add to our creations. Holly really does collect and save what others might toss or let go (she literally finds and acquires “junk” everywhere she goes!).

Junk journals are a means of expressing your creativity, a place to save mementos, or write your stories. They can be decorative and practical—or simply an objet d’art.



#### *HEAD SPACE*



Wellness educator and author Alicia Randolph-Lucchesi’s spun personal stories illustrating the role mindfulness plays in our lives and gave specific ways for us to cultivate more awareness, illuminating all the benefits that mindfulness can bring. Each narrative in her Mindfulness 101 program offered an insight: about the choices we make, being open and curious, how we only need a few minutes to feel better, and that repetition, as when learning anything new, is key.

Alicia explained the importance of mantras (they can be as simple as “inhale/exhale”) and guided us into a 5-minute meditation to wonderful music composed by her husband Rob that left us feeling noticeably more relaxed and focused. She gave us a detailed, info-packed

handout that makes a good reference guide to mindfulness and simple meditation.

“It’s about progress, not perfection,” she reminded us.

### *WATCHING THEM GROW*

by Kim Brawn

Under the skillful tutelage of Ms. Michelle, and eager to get their hands in the dirt, these little ones planted three types of sunflowers, including mammoths. The budding gardeners took home some seedlings while the rest will be donated and planted in the Children’s Garden at the Piscataquis County Soil & Water Conservation District’s Law Farm in August.



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### *SEEDS OF CHANGE*

by Kim Brawn



An old idea found new life at our rural library in April. Seed bombs started in the 70s to help beautify neglected plots of land in cities—or as Ms. Michelle says, “To fill the concrete jungle with flowers.”

Earth Day Seed Bombs proved a big hit with all ages (with 20 kids and adults attending). Michelle teamed up with Carole Boothroyd, from the Education and Outreach Committee of the Piscataquis County Democrats.

Michelle read about and explained pollinators—what they are and their significance. Carole told me that the seed bombs were infused with 19 wildflowers and created by ripping up paper, soaking it in water, and then blending it into pulp. Then, participants took them home to toss in a sunny spot that will get lots of water and keep watch as wonderful flowers bloom.

### *ARTIST OF THE MONTH*

by Kim Brawn



Pam Pultz of Sebec began working with stained glass in 1996 and has never stopped. She decided to try her hand at metal overlays. The results—combining glass and metal—are beautiful, especially when viewed with light behind them.



Dover-Foxcroft's Michelle Fagan grew up on MDI, surrounded by art. From age 9-14 she went to a camp called Summer Festival of the Arts where she learned dance, fiber arts, painting, and more. As a young adult she became interested in photography, mostly landscapes and still life. When this busy mom is not at TFL she loves to snap artistic shots like these and paint vibrant silk scarves.



Incredible, creative artwork from a group of very talented students at SeDoMoCha and Foxcroft Academy.



Atkinson native Jo Eaton, painter and fiber artist, has crocheted since age seven and delights “in the colors and textures of all landscapes, flowers and fibers.” She has transformed her landscape paintings into inventive and impressive hats. And her vivid hearts capture ours.



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### *FOR THE BIRDS*

by Kim Brawn



Birders flocked to the library to hear Kate Weatherby, a Maine Bird Atlas regional coordinator, speak about their 5-year Citizen Science project. She talked about how to observe and record birding behavior (especially breeding) in your own backyard and showed those attending how to navigate the Maine Bird Atlas website, the eBird website, and how to download and use the eBird app. Library director Greta Schroeder said that she was happy to see that “our community has such enthusiastic birders.”

Keep in mind: Glen Mittelhouse, Director of the Maine Natural History Observatory in Gouldsboro, will host a Maine Bird Atlas training event on Thursday, August 22 at 5:30 p.m. at TFL.

### *WOCKETS IN POCKETS*

by Kim Brawn

Ms. Michelle beaming like a Cheshire cat in the hat, surrounded by kids enjoying the Dr. Seuss event that celebrated the fantastical Seussical Jr. which ran in May at Center Theatre. Bobby Keniston, who directed the musical, helped out during the well-attended (approximately 45 children and adults) proceedings which featured games, crafts (wockets for pockets!), snacks, and a costume contest. (The winner took home eight Dr. Seuss books donated by Center Theatre.) Everyone had fun and didn't want to leave, but as the famous author himself wrote: Don't cry because it's over; smile because it happened.



### *SPRING IS IN THE AIR!*

As always, a warm thank-you to Barbara Lockwood for another colorful and creative bulletin board that brought a breath of fresh air to the children's section.

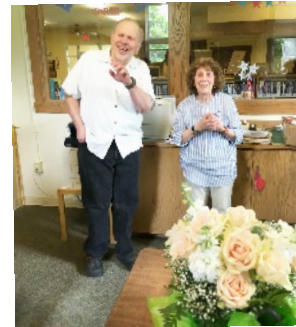


### *A SINGLE PIECE SHOWING*



by one of our young, very talented freelance pop artists, Clay Washburn.

**CELEBRATE**  
*HAPPY 50th ANNIVERSARY!!*



An important little party in the workroom to observe and honor the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of our wonderful friends and co-workers, Pat and Dan Juska... Congratulations, you two!!