

THOMPSON FREE LIBRARY

QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER

July 2020



Maine's Past Revisited by Kim Brawn

When TFL closed due to the pandemic, it looked like the Maine Bicentennial Speaker Series would have to be postponed or even cancelled. Fortunately, that was not the case. “We are grateful to the speakers for being willing to transition to the online format so that we could continue the series,” said library director Greta Schroeder.

The speakers weren’t the only ones who adapted; so did the participants (each session drew approximately 35 people—likely more than an in-person session would have) eager to join these engaging and interactive presentations.

On May 7, Mary Freeman, assistant professor of history at UMaine, spoke on “The Politics of Slavery in the Era of Maine Statehood.” She explored how the issue of slavery influenced Maine’s development and entrance into the U.S. as an independent state, delving into the Missouri Compromise, federal legislation that admitted Maine to the United States as a free state, simultaneously with Missouri as a slave state. This compromise maintained the balance of power between the North and the South in the United States Senate.

As she focused on African American political activism surrounding the issues of abolishing slavery and fighting for equal rights, Mary shined the spotlight on African American hackman and activist Reuben Ruby born in Gray, Maine in 1798. He owned and operated the first hack (taxi) business in Portland which helped propel him into a leadership position in the city's black community. He was instrumental in forming the Abyssinian Society (a church and cultural center for African Americans) and the building it constructed on Newbury Street. Ruby helped form the Maine Anti-Slavery Society in 1834 and the Portland Union Anti-Slavery Society in 1841. He also worked for abolition on the national level.

Hack Stand---at Elm Tavern.



REUBEN RUBY,
INFORMS the public that he has two good Coaches, one or the other of which may generally be found at his old Stand, at the Elm Tavern, where he will be happy to attend to any calls which are made upon him. Every attention will be paid to accommodate those who wish to be conveyed to different parts of the City, or elsewhere. His residence is the second house on the east side of Preble Street, from the head, where he may be found at any time in the night.



Like many others, these brothers shuttled between the U.S. And Canada to work in Maine’s mills.

In late May, Susan Pinette, Director of Franco American Studies at UMaine, painted an interesting portrait of a complicated legacy with: “The French People of Maine: Who are they and how did they get here?” She provided an overview of Franco American communities in Maine, and the history of their migrations to the state.

She described the tumultuous journeys of the Quebecois and Acadians who settled in Maine and their lineage, location, and linguistics as well as the long-standing struggles of Franco Americans, such as invisibility, assimilation, and class issues. During her lecture, Susan fielded many questions, especially around language and discrimination. “I find this fascinating,” said one woman, noting her own Acadian ancestry. She asked Susan for book suggestions to learn more.

Author Mark Alan Leslie revealed an uncomfortable history not taught in most Maine classrooms during “Maine Burning: the Ku Klux Klan Invasion” on June 18. He took us on a deep dive into a disturbing chapter in Maine’s history.

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“Mark’s whole talk was pretty surprising—I did not know that all of this happened in Maine. The history also hit close to home for some of our community members...I heard from a few people who had family stories about the Klan in this area,” Greta said.

I was struck by the effort they made to normalize themselves within the community (especially with the women’s offshoot group) while stoking and spreading hatred of the Irish, Catholics, and French (since there were few African Americans in the state).

According to Mark, “Milo, Dexter, Newport and Bangor-Brewer were hotbeds of KKK activity in the 1920s” He mentioned

Brownville Junction and Guilford too. It’s shocking to realize that the first daylight KKK parade was held in Milo in 1923 and that it made national news.

Mark traced the hate group’s rise and fall in a lively, eye-opening presentation that generated many questions from the attentive virtual audience.

The goal of this lecture series was to explore topics and perspectives sometimes overlooked in traditional narratives of our state’s history. This trio of speakers helped us meet and exceed that threshold.

Virtual World by Kim Brawn

“A good thing about using Zoom is that people have been able to attend from all over—for example people who live in other areas, family members of presenters, and family members of staff—my aunt has been attending from Northampton, MA and my parents from Orono,” said TFL director Greta Schroeder.

The Maine Bicentennial Series speakers were not the only ones to boldly go virtual via Zoom. Many regular programs have made the leap, including the philosophy and reading groups, and staff meetings (we’ve even done a hybrid one!). Greta has made it a point to work one on one with anyone needing a Zoom tutorial. She meets them in the virtual meeting room to show how this technology works. Most have adapted and like the convenience of it. The philosophy circle now meets twice a month instead of once.

The online format is also more accessible in other ways. “My Dad told me he liked Zoom because he could lean in close to get a better look at the slides,” Greta laughed. And when possible, we record the events, so those who missed it can view later.

Yes, there’s definitely a learning curve—as we figure out how to mute and unmute ourselves, switch our video on and off, deal with various glitches (oh no, she froze!) and get distracted by seeing ourselves and wanting to fix our hair or camera angle. (Cool bonus: animal cameos!)

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We 'Book' to the Woods by Tom Lyford

Too often I find myself worrying about our little, pocket-Medusa cell phone screens robbing today's children of the outdoor, woodsy magic and treasures that once blessed my generation: the jack rabbits and partridges and snakes, the pungencies of rotting leaves and pine needles, and the shapes and colors of jack-in-the-pulpits and poison ivy leaves. But when I stepped past the "Story Walk" welcome sign and entered "the forest" across the street from SeDoMoCha Middle School yesterday, I felt a resurgence of nostalgia and hopefulness.

What I found there, what I'd come to check out, was something I would have gone nuts over as a child. A blazed, "breadcrumb" trail of storybook pages wending off and away back into the trees and shadows, beckoning the reader to follow--separated and laminated pages of a children's book stapled onto stakes disappearing in a numbered sequence into the woods with a promise of allowing the whole story to unfold a single page at a time down and around the reading trail. There is a definite Alice's Wonderland's "READ ME" effect in play, as well as a hint of the scavenger hunt. The featured storybook at the SeDoMoCha site is *A Nest is Noisy*, written by Dianna Hutts Aston and Illustrated by Sylvia Long. A second story walk, constructed at the Law Farm, features the book *Because of an Acorn*, written by Lola and Adam Schaefer and illustrated by Frann Preston-Gannon.



TFL's Ms. Michelle and her cohorts from Piscataquis County Soil and Water Conservation District (PCSWCD) and SeDoMoCha have done something truly awesome in constructing their two Story Walks. And, what with Covid-19 shutting down so many traditional local activities, this couldn't happen at a better time. For here is a safe and healthy family opportunity, a chance to get you and your children out of the house and stretch your legs in the fresh air and sunshine. So please, take advantage of the picnic area near the nature trail at SeDoMoCha, or the story walk at the Law Farm. Both will be open and available through August.

Together by Tom Lyford

"Together" was the single-word prompt for our latest Friday evening Story Slam in May, the too-cool-for-school storytelling "open-mic" (*sans mic*) that we offer periodically under the auspices of *The Voices from Home Project*. But fearing that a single-word might not provide prospective storytellers with enough to go on, we followed it up with this more fleshed out version: "*Helen Keller once said, 'Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much.' How have you spent your time together? Have you worked with your community to make it better? Was there a time when you were feeling totally alone and then, surprise, someone showed up to fill the void? Or vice versa: were you the one who showed up when needed? Did someone or something bring you together with the love of your life? Have you worked to get your life together, alone or with others?*"



Once again an engaging, eye-opening, and satisfying evening ensued. Well over a dozen "Zoomers" zoomed in to join us online, some simply to watch and listen from "safe distance" comfort zones and some to throw open their memory vaults and share experiences. A diversity of personal anecdotes were told including a story of the importance of close friends when tragedy strikes, an odd one of a lonely G.I. during BASIC Training, and one that could only be titled, "Doctors in Love." As before, Bobby Keniston as host helped things move along seamlessly.

If you haven't tuned in to one of these yet, please consider it. If you do, I predict you will hear one or two stories that will rival what's available for canned entertainment on TV. Our story slams go from 6:00 to 7:15ish, and with Zoom, you can quietly slip away into the night at any time. Word on the street...well, word in the stacks...is that there's another one possibly brewing for July 24th, and that the prompt for this one might be "*Free*." Stay tuned to our website <https://www.thompson.lib.me.us> and Facebook page for details.

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No Time Like the Present by Kim Brawn

Libraries across Maine invite community members to contribute to the Maine COVID-19 Community Archives project. The Maine State Library is using CARES Act-LSTA funding to provide a web platform for this collaborative project, enabling libraries to build online collections that document the impact of COVID-19 on their local communities.

"This is a great opportunity for librarians across the state to work together as we build digital archives that are community-based and connected through a shared platform. This collaboration advances an essential service of public libraries, the preservation of local history," said TFL director Greta Schroeder who is also the project's collaboration coordinator.

Greta said, "I've loved the chance to get to know and work with other librarians and archivists. The Maine State Library has been really supportive. Everyone's story is important! Contributions will be preserved for history—and will help future generations understand and make sense of this really historic time we are living."



TFL is part of Heart of Maine Community Stories (<https://heartofmaine.omeka.net/>) teaming up with Hartland Public Library, Newport Cultural Center, Pittsfield Public Library, and Skowhegan Free Public Library. You can help us document life in Central Maine during the COVID-19 pandemic by contributing anything created including audio or video diaries, journal entries, letters, photographs, drawings, personal recollections, and interviews with friends and family.

Creative prompts play an important role in generating interest and sparking imagination, this one sums it up best: 2020 will go down in history as a year of great change. We have continued to adapt to the COVID-19 pandemic and explored what's possible in the new normal. We have learned new ways of looking at milestones, holidays, monuments, and practices that make our world. People across the country have advocated for essential civil rights. What have you learned in 2020? There is no time like the present to share your story by sending it to the library, or submitting it through the link above.

Michelle Fagan contributed "Helpers," a photo by Amy Fagan-Cannon that captures two firefighters (Pierce & his dad, Ben) after a long night cleaning up fallen trees during a powerful April snowstorm in the middle of Maine's COVID-19 stay at home order.

A Different Story Time: Behind the Scenes With Ms. Michelle by Kim Brawn

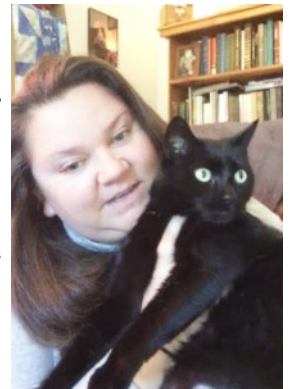
Youth services librarian Michelle Fagan describes what it was like to reinvent her popular in-person story time during the COVID-19 crisis:

So, when the library closed I took home stacks of picture books, you never know what mood you'll be in on story time day! Each Thursday morning I chose two books to read and engage with. I made the videos on my iPad. Some days I had so many tries before I got it right. Sneezing, pronunciation of words, phone ringing, camera falling off—all kinds of things make you need a retake!

Uploading to YouTube could be a challenge because of internet speeds, etc. I used the library wifi often but sometimes it would still take hours!

My cat Olive liked to lay under the table near my feet while I read. She is a great listener!

Michelle will continue her story time videos through the summer and assess re: any changes for the fall.



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Curb Your Enthusiasm by Kim Brawn

CURBSIDE SERVICE

Pickup hours: 9 am to 5 pm
Tuesdays through Fridays



Place holds using the online catalog at
www.thompson.lib.me.us
You can also call 207-564-3350 or email
thompsonfreelibrary@gmail.com



Call the library when you arrive, and
open the trunk or passenger-side door
so that a staff member can deliver the
materials safely.



Enjoy materials, then return them to
the book drop. Returned materials will
be quarantined for 72 hours before
being checked in.

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June 3, the Tuesday we started Curbside Service at TFL had that first day back to school in the fall feel. Or the first day at a new job. Because that's what it was really. After two and half months of working at home, it was both comforting and strange to be back.

Figuring out how to work together and stay apart, what mask worked best—when it was ok to pull it down or remove it, when to wear gloves, learning all the new protocols and procedures.

We sort of nervously danced around one another as we got used to each other again in this very different world, but Greta had a plan in place, she showed us what to do, we asked questions, made mistakes, tweaked things, and kept going.

Turning the key to the book drop and finding a gazillion books inside—wow, the word had spread to start returning materials. We were off and running.

More patrons were placing holds through the catalog, a positive sign, while many called and asked us to check if we had a book (or books) they wanted or for

recommendations on what to read next.

The process fell into place: pulling the holds list, collecting the items, calling patrons to tell them books were waiting for them, checking the books out, and placing them on the table. Before long we expanded our pickup hours to Tuesday-Friday 9-5.

The awkwardness and trepidation faded quickly once we saw so many smiles (or smiling eyes above masks) on familiar faces as we approached cars, carrying shopping bags filled with books—placing them in trunks and back seats.

They were glad to see us and even happier that they could hold actual books in their hands. And seeing that “New” sticker on the cover seemed to give them a much needed and appreciated boost.

Once again, we found ourselves surrounded by books, not just on shelves, spread out on tables too. The returns in quarantine, piled high on the table formerly reserved for puzzles. Our impressive antique display table turned into PPE central with masks, gloves, and cleaning supplies. Another table in front of it covered with pick-up orders—handwritten white slips in each.

Soon, the phone rang again. “I’m out in the parking lot,” said a friendly voice.

“Ok, I’ll be right there!” turned out to be slightly wishful thinking on my part as I struggled to put on rubber gloves in a speedy fashion. But Tom was at the ready, gloves on, books in the bag, walking out the door. Happily chatting with patrons, who like us, longed for a brief taste of the past in this uncertain new time.

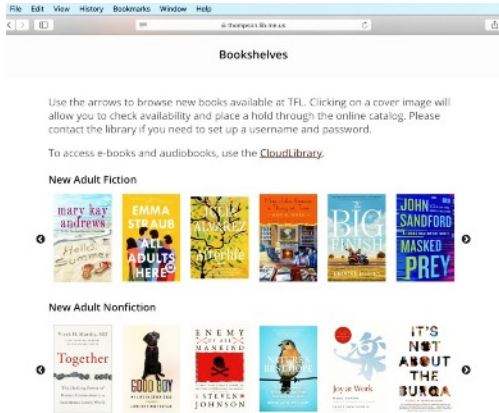


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Browse Book Shelves by Kim Brawn



Of course, curbside service can't replace actually coming into the library, scanning the shelves, and pulling out a book to look at. That visual piece is missing. You know, when you're captivated by a cover. (That old saying isn't always true! 😊)

To help with this, our website has a cool tool called Browse Bookshelves (<https://www.thompson.lib.me.us/bookshelves/>) which showcases TFL's newest materials. Featured categories are adult fiction, adult nonfiction, children's, tween, teen, and graphic novel. (In the works: adding other virtual bookshelves that highlight books in the collection that patrons and visitors may have missed.)

Director Greta Schroeder, who works with Maine Balsam Libraries' Stephen Wills to implement this great resource said, "I think it's fun to browse the titles

and hope that it can help people discover new reads, even after we reopen, we still encourage people to use the catalog on our website to find and request books from home." (Please contact the library if you need to set up a username and password.)

All in a Lather by Kim Brawn

Thankfully, Brooke Isham from Land of Milk and Honey Farmstead in Sangerville was game to do Soap Making 101 via Zoom. She has been making beautiful, natural soaps for several years, selling them online (<https://lomahfarmstead.com>) and at various Farmer's Markets (including Waterville, Bangor, & Orono).

In June, Brooke shared her detailed how-to video that took us step-by-step through the soap making process. She pressed pause throughout the hour+ video to answer many questions and provided resources, including a soap calculator and the coconut oil soap recipe that she used. Brooke also allowed us to share the video on TFL's Facebook page. (The video combined a slideshow and footage of her actually mixing, blending, and finishing the soap.)



She made cold processed lavender and lemongrass scented soap using local ingredients when possible or Fair Trade and organic ones. Brooke underscored the need to be very careful when using lye—soap's key element. (Use 100 %—don't breathe in fumes; have good ventilation, wear protective goggles, & a long-sleeve shirt!).

"I love artfulness," said Brooke on why she likes the cold processed technique. It allows you to achieve various textures and artistic designs. Of course, we do need a bit of patience to get the best results as the soap needs to cure for 4-6 weeks.

Brooke encouraged the would-be soap makers at this well-attended event to share their adventures and results on social media and to contact her with questions.

(Big thanks to Greta, our Zoom pro/tech hostess with the mostest, for her help & guidance! 😊)

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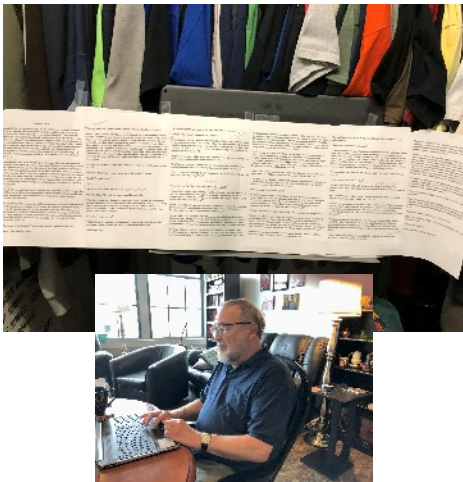
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How Did We Keep Our Sanity While Staying Safe at Home?

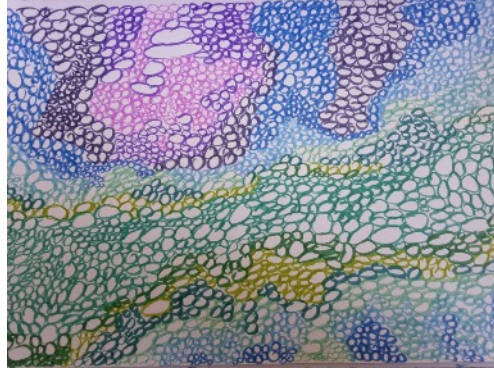


Val: Speaking just for myself, of course... How does someone keep what they never had in the first place? I listened to audiobooks and knit the most complex patterns I could find and never really noticed the time go by. Made several things and never bothered to block them, just put them in a pile and started another one—it's never about the having, just the doing. (She also sewed cool masks for people, like this one she made for me. --KB)



Tom: The pandemic has coaxed me back to writing in an unexpected way: "podcasting," writing my memoirs in "episodes" and recording them as 'Boomer Monologues' (in my high-tech "sound studio tee shirt closet"). You can tune in to my podcast at this link:

<http://anchor.fm/tom-lyford7>



Michelle: My Zoom meeting doodles. I create doodles while I listen.



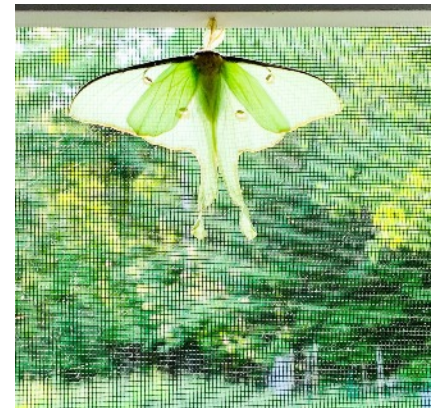
Greta: Working on my small (but growing) garden has been fun. I dug up the yard by hand and bought veggie seedlings from Ripley Farm. I also planted some flower seeds and had some gift plants—including lemon thyme (smells so good!) and rhubarb from Ellie Leary.



Pat: I'm not sure I kept my complete sanity. I still struggle from time to time, but I tried limiting exposure to network news and substituted calming vibes from Mozart, J.S. Bach, and some of Vivaldi's music. Also, my knitting always brings me peace, and Dan's sense of humor has lightened up many "dark" days.



Phyllis: How I spent my Covid-19 staycation...



Kim: Think I agree with Val & Pat. That grip is tenuous at best these days, but I digress. Watching backyard creatures & wildlife & walking in the woods has given me some peaceful moments during this trying time.