

Skowhegan Area Middle School

SAMS

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Save the Skowhegan Grange & Granges in General

written by Eric Axelman

The Maine Grange was created on February 16th, 1876 and other town Granges were built soon after. Before I jump to conclusions, you may be asking yourself, "What is a Grange?" Well, a Grange is "America's foremost Volunteer and Grassroots Organization." The first Grange was organized on December 4th, 1867. It was made so farmers could have a say in politics across America. Through most of the 1900s, the Grange flourished and had power within America. The Grange had a very important role in community life in this small town of Skowhegan. In the past, this historic building was alive with meetings held by farmers, plays being performed, traveling entertainers, and dances offered for the community. The sad fact is, this historic Grange building may soon be torn down.



Skowhegan Grange Hall

The historic building was the home of community meetings, theatrical plays, different kinds of musical dances, and traveling performers. In Skowhegan, this Grange building may be closed down.

In the last few years, Skowhegan Savings Bank has bought out the Skowhegan Grange. At the moment it is being used for storage. This was told to me from an employee of Skowhegan Savings Bank.



Bryant Pond Grange Hall

Granges were made so farmers could have a say in politics across America. Through most of the 1900's, the Grange flourished and had power within America.

In the last few years, Skowhegan Savings Bank has bought out the Skowhegan Grange. At the moment it is being used for storage. This was told to me from an employee of Skowhegan Savings Bank. The employee also said that in the future "the Grange building will probably be torn down to make room for a new parking lot for Skowhegan Savings Bank in Skowhegan." But, now I ask you, is this sacrifice going to be good for the town of Skowhegan? Is getting rid of the Grange building worth building a new parking lot? In my opinion, the answer is no. The Grange building could be useful for the community by providing a place for the hosting of charitable dinners, fundraisers, contra dances, and other projects to raise money for different organizations.

The Grange members currently have another

building for their meetings, but it will not be the same in my point of view. They were forced to get a smaller building due to the costs of running the older building with far fewer Grange members. They sold it to the Skowhegan Savings Bank.

Bill Clark, active in the Grange, helped us understand the purpose and history of the Skowhegan Grange. If it were up to me, I would have kept the Grange right where it was, and supported a community tradition that has been around for decades. The Grange Hall has great memories for the people in Skowhegan and it gives them a real link to our past here in town. Even if the Grange members couldn't keep it up, we townspeople can work together to help keep it a part of our community.



Grange Hall at Atkinson Mills

Granges were very important because with competition from the west, farmers had to organize and decide how to survive.



In conclusion, we hope that this structurally sound building, with its new chimney and roof, will not go the way of other beautiful and stately buildings of our town. One should remember the former Victorian home on Madison Avenue that was torn down to build MacDonalds which has been vacant for a number of years now.



L.A. Weaver store, post office and grange hall

Grange members met together and discussed local and national politics. They had ceremonies at their meetings. Dances and community suppers were held at the Grange Halls across Maine.

Other buildings meeting this fate were the old McClellan home on Elm Street, now a bank drive-through; the scenic Motor Lodge and cabins on Madison Avenue, now a WalMart; the oldest tavern in Maine, the Heywood Tavern, torn down for car lot; and last but not least, the Methodist Church on the Island, with its beautiful cobalt blue stained glass windows, replaced by a red barn-type building next to the Skowhegan Fire Department.

Community history is important and the buildings help make the town what it is. Please make an effort to help save the Grange Hall, write to the Skowhegan Savings Bank and tell them what you think about preserving our past.

Eric Axelman is an eighth grader at Skowhegan Area Middle School.



Skowhegan Railroad Station

This photo shows girls on their way to a Grange event in Skowhegan, Maine. Barbara Rowell found this picture in her attic and gave it to us.

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*The Sad Tale of Father Rasle
Friend of the Abenakis of Norridgewock
Maine*

MY ESSAY

ABENAKI

ENGLISH

ITEMS

RASLE

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An Abenaki Story from the desk of Father Rasle....
by Matthew Spencer

Father Rasle came to America from France in the year 1689 and was sent to work with the Wabanakis of the northeast. He was a Jesuit and lived among the Abenakis. A strong bond grew between Father Rasle and the tribe. He opened up their religious side and they respected him so much that they constructed a chapel and they came to Father Rasle for guidance on such subjects as their jobs, their marriage, and their personal lives. Father Rasle also aided the sick . He remained with the Abenakis for 30 years.

Father Rasle was somewhat like a body guard for the Abenakis because he stood up for them against the English who wanted more and more land along the Kennebec River. He traveled down to Swans Island to meet with the British VIP;s and represent the wishes of the Abenakis. The British viewed Father Rasle as a threat and they eventually raided the village in 1721. He evaded them and was not captured but they did steal his strongbox that contained letters. It consisted of a secret panel on the back and when you opened it up there were two compartments where he stored his documents and letters. These letters were incriminating because they showed how he was helping the Abenakis with their negotiations or legal matters. This is a letter from Father Rasle to his nephew residing in France:
” For thirty years I've lived in the midst of the forest and with the savages. I have instructed them and informing them to their Christian virtues. I'm in the district that lies between Acadia and New England. By mixing berries with an equal quantity of tallow, you can make beautiful candles that are firm and excellent for use. I have composed some prayers to alter the minds of the savages. These prayers are of the natures. I teach catechism to the children and young people. The rest of the morning is set for listening to the people that need to talk to me. Usually people want to talk to me about their pains, their anxieties, jobs, their marriage and personal affairs. In the afternoons I visit the sick and check the cabins to check who needs some special attention. At night, for dinner we have huge feasts, which whoever is invited MUST bring one plate of wood or bark and then I give the benediction upon the meats. Some nights I hardly have time to say my

prayers and get rest. The savages go to the sea in pursuit to find geese and birds. Then they build a church on the island, which is next to their little cabin for their residence. My food is simple and light. I've never been able to taste meat and smoked fish, my nourishment is nothing, but Indian corn."

The Abenaki had their own beliefs about nature and their place on earth but they also accepted the beliefs of Father Rasle because he was kind and became a role model for them. At the time Father Rasle was with the Abenakis the British were coming to Maine to obtain land and establish villages. The French, on the other hand, traded with the native americans and worked as missionaries. The land deals caused the Native Americans to be angry because they could no longer travel freely to hunt and move around. They raided English establishments and killed many settlers. A man named Moulton saw his family being killed this way.

In 1724 the same Captain Moulton and another man, Captain Harmon came up the Kennebec river from Swan's Island to massacre the Abenakis. They brought soldiers and not one was killed but over 80 innocent men, women and children were slaughtered. On this day Bomazeen, an Indian was keeping watch with his wife and child and suddenly he spotted English troops heading towards the village of Nonrantsouack meaning Norridgewock, ". As he ran to alert them, his wife and child were killed. They shot him in the back and the place where it happend is called Bomazeen Rips today. They went to the village and found most of the men were gone hunting for food though the women, children and elderly Abenakis were left in the village. The British opened fire and the scene that followed will never be forgotten. The British took a few young boys captive.

They took 28 scalps back to Boston to parade and gloat about their victory over the infamous Father Rasle. His scalp was among those placed on a tall pole and paraded as well.

After the raid, the Abenakis went to St. Francis in Canada and returned briefly although the village was not the same. They went to different parts of Maine to live.

Father Rasle was a friend and a negotiator for the Abenakis. The destruction of the Abenakis was inevitable whether or not he was among them. His presence may have complicated matters, but the conflicts between the British and the Natives Americans were beyond the control of Father Rasle.

Thank you for your time.

An Awesome Report

by Ben Axelman



Benedict Arnold was a great man. He was extremely courageous, a brilliant leader, and extraordinarily smart. He saved the revolution at its early stages, but became infamous as a traitor when he joined the British because he didn't get promoted for the revolution.

During the early stages of the revolution, George Washington gave orders for Benedict Arnold, a 35 year old colonel, to co-lead an expedition to conquer Quebec with 1,100 men. These men were to get to Quebec by following the Kennebec river upstream. Someone informed George Washington that the only way to travel on the Kennebec was in bateaux, or long, thin boats that you move by pushing long poles against the bottom of the river. So many boats had to be built quickly, that the boat builders had to use fresh, or green, wood to build them. The wood was still wet so the planks on the bottom of the bateaux didn't stay together and leaked.

On September 13, 1775 Benedict Arnold and the army left to go on the expedition. Everyone was in a cheerful mood, but this did not last for very long. The army split up, four men to a bateau. Two men would pole the boat, while the other two would walk on shore to relieve them later. The bateaux held the men's guns, ammunition, food and supplies. Their first major obstacle was the Ticonic Falls. Bateaux are very heavy boats and hard to maneuver, so they are mainly used for paddling in slow water, not the fast rapids of the untamed Kennebec. So the army people had to take the bateaux apart, carry the pieces over the falls, and then they tried to put them back together. Due to the green wood of the boats, the pieces no longer fit together right. "A puking baby could build better boats out of blocks!" one man on the expedition is quoted as saying.

Benedict Arnold tried the best he could to fix the problem, but when he realized that he couldn't, he made them press on to the Skowhegan Falls, which, according to the men, was "made by the devil for the torturing of racked bateaux." The bateaux had to make it past a triple whirlpool before they got to the falls, smashing against rocks and scraping the bottom to pieces. After this, came half a mile of intense rapids, followed by a vertical waterfall 6 times as tall as a man. Somehow, the men got past that obstacle, losing a lot of

food due to exposure, and a lot of musket powder, too. Benedict Arnold remained optimistic, however, and had them press on. Actually, Colonel Arnold stayed optimistic under most situations, except when he could not go forward.

The army had to carry their bateaux around the Norridgewock Falls. By now, food was running out and many people were developing illnesses. However, the next big stretch of water, from Norridgewock Falls to Caratunk Falls, was very peaceful and full of food, the best stretch of water on the whole trip. Then they got to Caratunk Falls, which was easier than the Norridgewock or Skowhegan falls, and then went on the trail known as the Great Carrying Place, which took them to the "Dead River," or the branch of the Kennebec which led up to Quebec, instead of dying out in Moosehead Lake. The men thought that their worries were now over, but they were wrong. Dead wrong.

The Dead River was mostly all swamp, hard to pass through normally, but now all the bateaux were leaky, there was a sick man in every boat, no food, and their clothes in tatters. The men were forced to walk through the swamp, pulling their boats. The floor of the swamp was covered by tree branches, which ripped up their shoes and their feet. The men were catching various diseases, like rheumatism, poisoning from the water, and the flux. Benedict Arnold thought that they would be almost there, but realized that the river wound around mountains and they still had a ways to go. Then the river narrowed and the wind picked up. Most of the men were ready to give up, and many of them were deserting. They were completely out of food, exhausted, with more sick than healthy. But Arnold never gave up.

"...Even when everything's gone, we can't help but find food in these forests and the waters we'll cross. I believe we should have a shot at it. If we're successful, it will be a feat remembered for a thousand years to come..." Colonel Arnold is quoted as saying.

Arnold made them press on to the Great Falls, where they found food enough to survive. They made it to the Village of St. Mary, where they rested up and attacked Quebec December 31, 1775. Hardly any muskets fired, due to exposure to tons of water. In the attack, Arnold was wounded but escaped, and almost the entire army was either killed or taken hostage. Arnold survived, however, and was known for his bravery and cunning in bringing the Revolutionary army to Quebec.

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