



What's Happening?

at the Kingston Historical Museum

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THIS MONTH!

The Tramp House at the Kingston Historical Museum is a small building sitting behind town hall and it has an interesting story about the time after the Civil War and into the early decades of the 20th century. Read the story in Kingston Stories!

Earlier this year, the museum lost one of its volunteers. Dave Taylor brought skills and humor to our Wednesday work sessions. Please read the acknowledgement of his contribution to the Kingston Museum.

Were you able to identify last month's "What Is It?" object? Read the answer on page three.

Volunteers are the lifeblood of the Kingston Historical Museum. If you would like to help out at the museum, please contact us.

So you don't miss an issue of the "What's Happening" newsletter, just go the town's website and select to receive the newsletter by email. You can also download past issues at:
<https://www.kingstonnh.org/historical-museum-committee/webforms/whats-happening-newsletter-archives>

The museum is operating during its winter schedule. The 1895 Firehouse, the 1880s Cobbler Shop, the 1907 Tramp House and the 1833 Grace Daley barn will be closed during the cold weather. The Nichols Memorial Library is still be open for visiting. We are here on Wednesdays from 9:00 AM until noon! We can also be here by appointment. Call or email us using the information on page three of this newsletter.

Kingston Stories



The Tramp House at the Kingston Historical Museum

Standing behind town hall near the old firehouse is a small brick building. The sign by the door says "Tramp House" and do you know the history behind it? Indeed, do you know that there are by some counts as many as forty¹ tramp houses around New Hampshire? Besides Kingston, the towns of Richmond, Hopkinton, and Epsom had houses for wandering men between the end of the Civil War and the times of the Great Depression. But it wasn't just New Hampshire that saw the need to address tramps. From the east coast to California, wherever men could travel the railroads, there would be found tramps making their way across the country.

What was it about these seventy or so years that created this population of wanderers? Sources² describe men returning from serving during the Civil War who couldn't or didn't want to fit back into society. They found wandering, taking whatever jobs they could find or even not looking for employment, more suited to their needs. As the nation's rail system was expanding, many either found employment there or used the railroad as a means to go where seasonal jobs could be had. Other contributing causes were the several economic downturns during these decades along with returning veterans from the Spanish American war and World War I. It was not just men who were tramps, women and their children were also part of the traveler's life.

American popular culture found these times a tempting subject to depict these wandering men. In literature, Bret Harte's *My Friend the Tramp*, Jack London's *The Road* and Robert Frost's poem "The Death of the Hired Man", along with Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* are examples of the tramp as protagonist. Hollywood found the wanderers as subjects for movies. Frank Capra's *Meet John Doe* and William Wellman's *Wild Boys of the Road* are examples. Even television got in the act with the TV hobo—Red Skelton as Freddie the Freeloader and Emmett Kelly as Ringling Brothers' sad circus clown.

The Tramp House is continued on next page

¹ <https://www.facebook.com/thekeenesentinel/posts/some-viewed-tramp-houses-as-a-means-of-defense-others-viewed-this-practice-more-/10154789941441096/>

² Mitchell, Heather. "ALL...ABOARD!: Tramp House." Clio: Your Guide to History. July 27, 2020. Accessed March 19, 2023. <https://www.theclio.com/entry/107337>

Modern movies also depicted men making their way across country during the first part of the twentieth century. Two of the best, and most recent, movies of the tramp genre are [*Emperor of the North Pole*](#) and [*Bound for Glory*](#).³

Popular music from the Depression plays upon the fears and uncertainty and desires of those who have been separated from society's community. "No Depression in Heaven", "Breadline Blues", "How Can a Poor Man Stand Such Times and Live?", "Brother Can You Spare a Dime?", and "Keep Moving" tell the story in song of what it was like to be a road wanderer.⁴

Coming back to Kingston's Tramp House, what was its purpose and how was it used? A warrant article was proposed in 1906 for the construction of a suitable building for the storage of a road machine along with provisions of a suitable jail cell. In 1907 the brick Tramp House was built. With a number of wandering men without work passing through town, the policy was set to collect these vagrants and bring them to the Tramp House. They were given a free meal and allowed to sleep the night under a roof and on a bed. In the morning, the vagrants were expected to keep on going and get out of town. By 1920 the use of the Tramp House was funded in the town's budget. In 1922, James Daley, a constable in town, was paid \$18.00 for the care of tramps.⁵

With the economic changes in the country after World War II, tramp numbers decreased. However, the tramp wanderer still can be found in America. There are those who still find the open road a way of life.

Nichols Memorial Library Celebrates its 125th Anniversary

This year, the Nichols Memorial Library will be celebrating its 125 years at the center of town. Donated by J. Howard Nichols (1837- 1905) in memory of his parents, the Nichols building served the town as its library until April 28, 2012 when the new Kingston Community Library opened. The Nichols building now is the headquarters of the Kingston Historical Museum.

The museum volunteers are planning a birthday party for the Nichols building this June 10th at 1:00 pm and the town is invited!

Mark your calendar to be here and wish the building another 125 years of service to the town.

Did You Know?

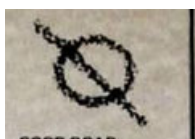
There is another Nichols Memorial Library, donated by the same J. Howard Nichols, in the town of Alabama City, Alabama!

J. Howard Nichols' son, Howard Gardner Nichols (1871- 1896) was put in charge of building the Alabama mills of the Dwight Manufacturing Company. In the process of overseeing the construction of the mill village, he was killed during an accident at the site. In memory of their son, the Nichols family built the Nichols Memorial Library there. This library became the first lending library in the state of Alabama. Today, the building is owned by the Northeast Alabama Genealogical Society.

³ MacGregor, Jeff. "The Last of the Great American Hobos". <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/arts-culture/last-great-american-hobos-180971913/>

⁴ Smithsonian Foldways Recordings. Songs from the Depression. <https://folkways.si.edu/the-new-lost-city-ramblers/songs-from-the-depression/american-folk-historical-song-old-time-struggle-protest/music/album/smithsonian>

⁵ Kingston New Hampshire: Our History and Stories (1694-2019). Great Life Press, Rye, NH. Pp 56-59.



Donations Needed

If anyone has left over lumber and white paint, we could use these items for our maintenance and exhibit programs. Pre-lit Christmas trees 6 - 7 feet tall as well as Christmas decorations are also needed.

Spotlight on a Volunteer

The museum is always looking for interesting articles and stories about Kingston's history. Perhaps you have a story to tell or would like to write up a contribution for the next issue!

What is it?

Long time residents of town may remember seeing this wooden box once or twice a year during town meetings! This is an old ballot box. The ballot box was a gift from Gertrude and Rodney Wilson.



Photo by Lesley Hume

Volunteer Hours Contributed

Spring seems to be just around the corner. The museum is working on planning for the new exhibit season and the 125th anniversary of the Nichols Library. For the month of March, the volunteers have contributed 87 hours and 184 hours for all of 2023. Thank you all so much.

**The Kingston Historical Museum headquartered at the Nichols Memorial Library
169 Main Street,
Kingston, NH 03848**

The Museum is open each Wednesday from 9:00 AM until 12:00 noon and on the second Saturday, June through October, from 1:00 to 4:00 pm. Appointment to conduct research or a tour can be arranged for another date.

For more information, please call Ruth Albert at 603-642-5508 or email us at museuminfo@kingstonnh.org.

Dave Taylor



The Museum wishes to acknowledge the passing, early this year, of Dave Taylor. Like many of the museum volunteers, Dave brought his skills and talents along with stories every day he walked through the museum's doors. He built several display stands and other items the museum needed to showcase parts of the collection. Dave was a member of the group of volunteers that began assisting in 2012 when the museum moved into Nichols Memorial Library. He was a member of the "Fab Four" working to maintain the Nichols Library, the cobbler's shop, the Grace Daley barn that houses the museum's carriage collection, the Tramp House, and the old Kingston Firehouse. These "guys" were always busy fixing the multitude of issues old buildings presented. When a farming or woodworking object was donated to the museum, Dave's background could be counted upon to identify an odd item or to explain a process or technique specific to that object. We all have had many opportunities to have sat with Dave to listen to his stories and chuckle at his wry sense of humor. Recently, Dave's time at the museum became less as health issues began to take a toll on him, but he would attempt to show up at the museum whenever he could. All the volunteers are saddened by his passing, but we are all richer for having known him.