



FACTS AND LEGENDS CONCERNING THE UNDERGROUND RAILROAD IN TOPSHAM AND BRUNSWICK, MAINE

Compiled by: Mark Cheetham, Richmond, Maine

With the realization that in some cases the oral history passed down to us is the only record of certain historical events, and as well having a few facts that I know to be true, here record everything I know or have heard about the underground railroad in Topsham and Brunswick.

What is commonly called the Underground Railroad has become what may well be thought of as having grown to legendary status here in Maine. Despite this it may often be heard stated by a number of important and influential people that it in all likelihood never existed in this state at all. But to those of us who have seen some of the physical evidence that still remains from this endeavor, this statement merely indicates a lack of any reasonable research being done by the maker of the statement. For evidence of the Underground Railroad is all around, at least in the southwest corner of the state and that which exists in Brunswick and Topsham may well be some of the best there is still in existence. As known the Underground Railroad was not of course actually underground but was more a string of safe houses with secret passwords and secret signs to be recognized and utilized by the escaping slave to help them along their way to freedom in Canada. Despite this, it is thought that in Brunswick and Topsham, it was actually in parts underground, utilizing tunnels which ran between safe houses. These tunnels were constructed of carefully laid red brick with vertical side walls, an arched top and a flat brick paved bottom up to some 5 feet wide which would allow the easy passage of individuals on foot as well as a horse and buggy if desired, at least in the Topsham portion of the tunnels.

Concerning The Legends:

The legend of the tunnels, as I have been told them in bits and pieces by various people over the years, when put together, seem to provide a plausible explanation for this large and complex housing and transportation system. How much

of it is true will only be determined if the remnants which remain are carefully investigated and explored. It hasn't happened in the last 140 plus years, and the 'its there / its not there' argument rages on, but I still hold out hope this, which might just prove to be a national treasure, will sometime soon receive the attention it deserves. In order to at least preserve the bits and pieces of the story as I have heard them, will here attempt to record it, putting the many pieces together to form a consistent tale. Parts are known to be true, others are plausible, all needs research and study.

The population of Maine exhibited a wide range of positions on the Abolition question with both sides being well represented as well as throwing in a goodly number whose minds were not made up. With this divided view secrecy was necessary for any efforts to aid escaping slaves along their way to Canada and freedom. Brunswick and Topsham were a center of trade and transportation in the times due to its location at a falls in a large river, which prevented deep draft vessels from continuing upstream. Cargo must be unloaded from the large vessels to smaller, shallower draft vessels for continuation to towns upriver or provided to dealers and suppliers to be offered for sale in Brunswick / Topsham shops, which were well frequented by those that lived upriver - Durham, Lisbon, Lewiston, Auburn, etc.

Bath, as well a center of transportation, was pro-slavery as were most of the larger towns along the coast as the affluent of these communities were shipmasters and shipyard owners. This acceptance of slavery was the result of their reliance on the slaves of the south to produce the cotton so desperately needed by Europe. Their fortunes relied heavily upon the transportation of their produce which in part made many of them very wealthy for the times. Brunswick / Topsham though divided on the issue and as well a producer of ships for this trade, harbored many with a strong Abolitionist view and less of a population percentage which directly dealt with the south, this being a trade and production based area. The location of Bowdoin College and the influence it had over the area through the people it attracted as well is thought to have added to the anti-slavery feelings in the communities.

In the early 1800's the first runaways began appearing in the area and with but little concern for secrecy were aided on their way by caring individuals. Through time this traffic increased in the area with the Baptists, Friends (Quakers), Shakers and Masons all becoming engaged in aiding the escape of those in need and many filtered through Brunswick & Topsham. Safe houses sprang up scattered about the towns but with this increase in traffic those seeking the reward offered by southern owners began passing through on occasion and secrecy began to be of more importance. Along with this, strong divisions were developing concerning the aiding of these runaways about town. It became known that money could be made by turning these unfortunate individuals over to certain citizens about the area that would see they

were turned over to those which would bring them back to the south. Divisions between the Abolitionists and those in favor of slavery became more heated.

The Underground Railroad was evolving piece by piece to be an effective system but a major problem was faced by the northern towns supporting them. Where the initial steps of the escapee from the slave holders was a matter of when the proper opportunity arose, the season of the year was left to be dealt with after the flight north had begun. Once winter had well set in, further movement north towards Canada from this region became increasingly more difficult and dangerous the further the season progressed. With Brunswick/Topsham being at the outer fringes of the transportation of the time and safe houses and guidance or help along the way becoming much less frequent further north, the keepers of safe houses became reluctant or unable to send them on until the season improved or opportunity presented itself. And still later in the season, in the dead of winter, they would continue to straggle in, cold, hungry, rags wrapped about their feet and nothing but the cloths upon their back, with no means of continuing their journey. The dangers of holding a runaway possibly for months without detection were many and if the pace continued either better facilities must be found Or more of them would be found out and returned south, the provider and family as well being faced with possible retribution.

By the 1830's the situation had reached a boil and separate vocal and active but strongly opposed factions had taken shape. With this, the secrecy of those aiding the escapees northward became paramount. An Antislavery Society was soon formed which included some influential and well off individuals from the two towns. It was determined that drastic steps must be taken by them to make the situation about the towns in regard to harboring escaped slaves safer. This as well as to increase the local capacity as probable continued increases in the numbers of those seeking help were foreseen, as the situation only seemed to becoming more intense in the southern part of the country with no action on a federal level seemingly forthcoming.

It was determined a large, interconnecting system was in order that the effort could be more performed as an interrelated undertaking. The abilities of the group to provide for and maintain the secrecy necessary in place of the current method of every man, woman and child for themselves was thought to be the only direction available. Two operations were began, one in Topsham and one in Brunswick. In Topsham tunnels were constructed from the Granny-Hole Mill on the Androscoggin River up to the Samuel Veazie House, passing through the Charles Thompson House and the Walker Homestead on the way. A branch was built from this tunnel to the cellar of a barn on the Tripp Farm east of the village to provide for a remote place to continue the journeys on north with little chance of being observed. A number of the houses of those in the Antislavery Society were remodeled with hidden places and passages

provided to hide those staying over there as well as further improvements to the existing safe houses in the neighborhood.

In Brunswick tunnels were as well constructed which began at a boat house on the Androscoggin River and then south along Federal Street with entrances into a number of houses along that street which it passed by. The tunnel continued on to Bowdoin College where it divided to enter several College buildings as well as to two houses of the west side of Maine Street from the College. The construction of these tunnels, which required a pit be dug in order to allow for the building of the brick tunnel enclosure, provided a secrecy problem while being installed. To address this problem Italian Bricklayers were hired from Lewiston where employed building the mills there. As long as they were fairly paid for their work they would ask no questions. The main runs of the tunnels were billed as a drainage project but the entrances into individual houses was done underground or in the dark of night to prevent the real reason the tunnels were being built from being determined. Some local inhabitants observing this massive undertaking complained of the amount of labor and materials being used for a drainage they did not feel was necessary, but where it was all privately funded in secret through the Association nothing came of it. An outcry as well arose from local bricklayers that this work had not been offered to them but the questions were ignored and the project was soon complete and buried, out of sight, out of mind.

With the completion of this system a large and secure station of the underground railroad achieved its goal in Brunswick and Topsham. With it numbers of freedom seekers could be held in relative comfort, held for longer periods of time, and kept in a very secret manner. The major stage stop in Topsham of the time was the Walker Homestead which now provided immediate access to the system. In Brunswick Moorhead's Tavern was the principle stage stop and within a few hundred feet were access points to the system. Those arriving by boat had access on the Topsham shore by way of Granny-Hole Mill right there on the shore, while Brunswick had a boat house on the opposite bank which provided, access to the system. Those traveling in this direction on foot would have arrived first at outlying safe houses, where they would have received instructions on where to go and how to contact those supporting their efforts when they got here, the Friends Meeting House in Durham, Maine was one of these. Not until the 1850's did trains come into the area but the locations of the railroad stations in the two towns provided access to the system within but a block from either.

The tunnel system allowed the transfer of those coming into the system to houses having space for their stay. Transfer could occur at anytime and then in the dark of night the transfer to a safe house not connected to the tunnels would take place, putting them yet another layer away from possible discovery. Transfer across

the Androscoggin was accomplished by crossing the bridge between the two towns if possible but if this did not seem safe, the boat in the boathouse on the Brunswick shore, or a boat tied up at the Granny-Hole Mill would be utilized to get across. All staying within the houses directly connected to the tunnel system could be taken through the tunnels to safer areas if discovery seemed imminent, as well as a means of escape if discovered and pursued from within the house they were being sheltered. By pulling the planks bridging the occasional pits dug into the floor across behind them as they passed through the tunnels, they may well provide the time necessary to make their escape into the woods or the river when they came out the far end. If none of the runaway slaves were found, then the house owners were clear as it violated no ordinance having a tunnel.

So goes the story as best as I can put it together. With the Emancipation Proclamation being passed in 1863 the use for the tunnels and the safe houses came to an end. But of it all one surprisingly long lasting effect was accomplished which I think would have been well beyond the imaginations of the builders of the system, that being that some *150* years after they built it, the system is still regarded as a secret that one dares not speak of. Much has been lost since its time, parts of the tunnels have collapsed, parts have been lost in development, some houses have been rebuilt, some have been lost. In scares in the past that the existence of the tunnels was going to be made public the bricked in cellar portals were covered over to hide them from view. But large pieces remain to be explored and the history they contain or provide needs to be recorded that this incredible and proud piece of the towns histories not be lost. Nor more of it destroyed without at least the recording of its existence.

Topsham

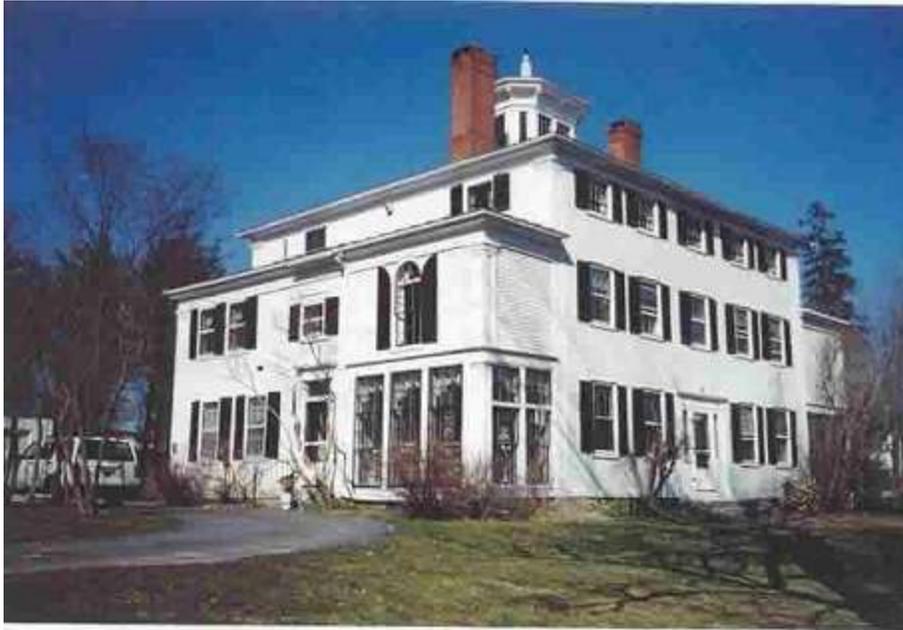
In Topsham this tunnel system began at a Grist mill on the bank of the Androscoggin River which was near to Granny Hole Stream. This site has since been filled in and was located beneath where the Topsham Fire Department is now. From here it went uphill underground to the Charles Thompson House at 2 Green Street where it entered into the cellar through a brick arch in the foundation wall. On the opposite wall was another arch with the tunnel leading from here to the Walker Homestead which was located where the Baptist Church Parking Lot at the corner of Main and Elm Streets is now. Passing through the cellar of this building it continued beneath Elm Street and uphill parallel to Main Street to the General Veazie House at 41 Main St., ending there; A long, straight and fairly level branch turned east from the section between the Walker Homestead and the General Veazie House and continued on to the cellar of the barn of the Tripp Farm located near the fairgrounds where this branch ends.

Much of this tunnel system remains today and the cellar arches, though long ago bricked up, exist in the buildings which still stand and with some level of inspection the brick work forming the arch can be still observed where it passed into the cellar of these buildings where not purposefully obscured from view by recent owners. In the long section between the tunnel that ran up the hill along Main Street and the Tripp barn existed a large pit. This was located but a short distance west from the barn and ran from wall to wall of the tunnel and much further across than one could jump. Legend has it that this was bridged over when in use by planks which were pulled across after passing to prevent any from following if the entrance was discovered. It has long been told that within the tunnel which goes up the hill along Main Street there is an alcove built into one side which housed a wagon.

Some of the older residences in this area contain false walls and other similar structures for the hiding of those freedom seekers staying over there. The General Veazie House has many of these including a stairway inside an interior wall on the north side of the house, this leading to spaces between the walls on the upper story. The Holden-Frost House on Elm Street near the fairgrounds also contains a stairway in the wall and false walls providing hidden spaces between the walls. Much of this was recently brought to the public's attention once again by an article in the Times Record August 14, 2001 complete with pictures. A house north of the General Veazie House, known as the Walker-Wilson House, located on the corner of Main St. and Melcher Place, as well had false walls in it.

Other houses suspected to have been utilized as Safe Houses in Topsham though not directly connected to the tunnels are the: David Scribner House at 20 Elm Street, Dr. James McKeen House at 14 Green Street, Brigadier General Samuel Thompson House at 53 Elm Street and First Parish (Congregational) Church formerly located at the corner of Elm and Green Streets, this burned down in 1963.

Underground Railroad Features in Topsham:



Holden - Frost House, 24 Elm Street, Topsham. Built in 1804 - 1806. Masonic Hall 1806 - 1816 and Franklin Family School for Boys 1857 - 1889. Legend has it that this was a safe house.

Holden - Frost House -

Located at 24 Elm Street near the fairgrounds, was built for Daniel Holden and the Freemasons 1804 - 1806. It was first used as a private residence as well as

containing the first Masonic Hall of the town, the masons having established Lodge No. 8 in Topsham in 1801. In 1807 the house was acquired in its entirety by the Masons who continued to hold meetings there until 1816 when the Lodge moved to Brunswick. It was used as a dance school and then as a Tavern and Inn 1831 - 1836, owned by Nathaniel Green. Major William Frost purchased the building in 1837 and lived there the rest of his life. In 1856 it was sold by the Frost family to Warren Johnson, who in 1857 established the Franklin Family School for Boys there, a boarding school. This closed in 1889 and the house has been utilized as a private residence since that time.

- *Daniel Holden* - Member of Masonic Lodge #8 in 1801.
- *Nathaniel Green* - Came to Topsham in 1804. Delegate for Topsham to meeting in Portland in 1819 to develop a State Constitution. State Senator 1820 - 1826 and served 1838 - 1840 and 1846 in the House of Representatives. Involved in lumbering and shipping 1822 - 1840, operated an Inn in Topsham 1814 - 1836 and was as well the Topsham Postmaster 1826 - 1831, Topsham Town Clerk in 1840 and Selectman for Topsham 1827- 1830, 1839- 1840 and 1842-1844. Moved to Augusta in 1845 opening the Palmer House there. Died at 66 years old.
- *Major William Frost* - Was born in 1781 and lived at 6 Pleasant Street, Topsham in 1811, the William Frost or later the Amos Wheeler House. Amos Wheeler was the father of George and Henry Wheeler, authors of

the “History of Brunswick, Topsham, and Harpswell, Maine” published in 1878. Major Frost donated an organ, the first in town, to the 2nd First Parish Meeting House, built in 1821 at about 22 Elm Street, on the same lot as the Topsham Academy. This building was torn down in 1855. Was involved in general trade in Topsham 1822 to 1844, having a store in town 1822 - 1825, and involved with lumbering and shipping. Was a Representative to the Legislature 1823 - 1830 and in 1843 became the 2nd President of the Union Bank of Brunswick. He died in 1857.



General Samuel Veazie House, 41 Main Street, Topsham. Built in 1819 - 1820. A tunnel entered the cellar leading from the Walker Homestead.

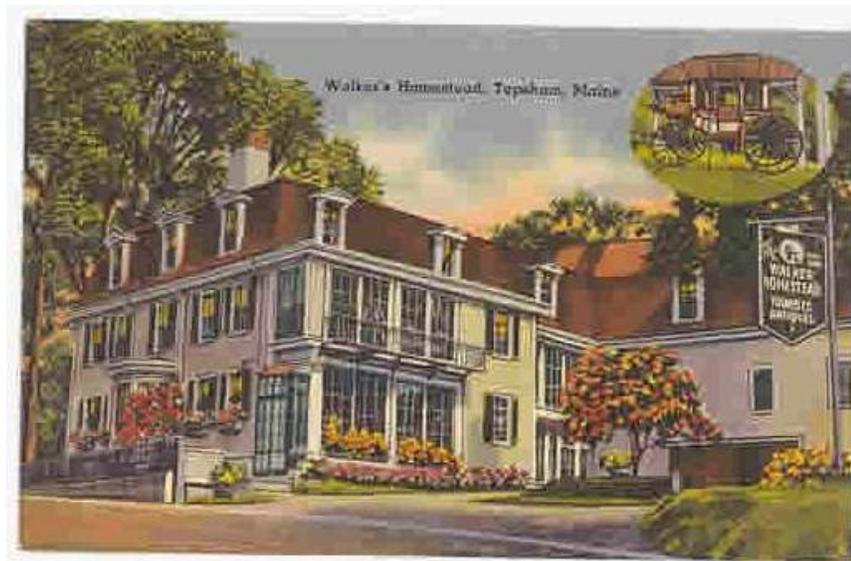
- *Warren Johnson* - Graduated from Bowdoin College in 1854. Was a financial supporter for the Topsham Academy which burned in 1857, then establishing the Franklin Family School for Boys in Topsham the same year. He at times gave lectures about the area including the Topsham Farmers and Mechanics Club in 1859 and a meeting concerning the assassination of President Lincoln which was presented at the First Parish Church in Brunswick in 1865. In 1861 elected Supervisor of Schools for Topsham.

General Samuel Veazie House - Located at 41 Main Street overlooking Elm Street from the North. It was built for General Samuel Veazie 1819 - 1820. A tunnel enters the cellar of this house through its south wall and leads to the Walker Homestead.

- *General Samuel Veazie* - In 1817 he operated an Inn in Topsham and by 1822 he was the owner of a sawmill and shipyard in Topsham. Married Susanna Walker, daughter of Gideon Walker (see Gideon Walker blw.).

In 1832 he closed his businesses and moved to Bangor.
General Veazie donated the bell for the steeple of the First Parish
(Congregational) Church in Topsham. The town of Veazie, Maine was
named in honor of the Generals efforts there.

Walker Homestead - Was located at the corner of Main Street and Elm
Street at 1 Elm, on the south side of the street. Built by Major Nathaniel Walker
1808-1809 who lived there until his death in 1851 operating
an Inn. Col. Wildes P. Walker took over the business after the Major's passing.
A French roof was added to the structure in 1867 to house a picture-gallery.
The building was demolished in the 1960's. A tunnel entered through the north
cellar wall of this building and lead to the General Samuel Veazie House and
another entered through the south cellar wall which lead to the Charles
Thompson
House.



Walker Homestead, 1 Elm Street, Topsham. Built in 1808 - 1809 and used as an Inn.
Tunnels lead from the cellar to the Charles Thompson House and the General
Samuel Veazie House. Torn down in the 1960's

- *Major Nathaniel Walker* - Was born in 1781 and came to Topsham as a boy, later serving in the War of 1812 and was in 1814 the Captain of the Topsham Artillery Co. In 1818 was part of a committee for Topsham to determine how the poor and destitute of the town would be cared for. It was determined that they should be brought together and provided for by an overseer. He was Topsham Town Clerk 1820 - 1828, Topsham Postmaster

1831 - 1841 and 1844 - 1845, a Justice of the Peace, member of Citizen's Fire Company and Surveyor of Lumber. The Major died in 1851.

- *Col. Wildes P. Walker* - Was the Proprietor of the Walker Homestead from 1851 until well after the period. In 1875 became president of the Topsham & Brunswick Twenty-Five Cents Savings Bank.

Baptist Church - Located at 3 Elm Street and built in 1835. The bell for the steeple was bought in 1836 through the efforts and donations of David Scribner, a Deacon of the Church and Vice-President of the Topsham Antislavery Society established in 1838 (See David Scribner below). William Barron, also a Deacon of the church, presented it with a complete silver communion service in 1862. Edwin R. Warren of Topsham was the pastor from 1837 - 1841 and a delegate to the Maine Antislavery Society meeting in Augusta in 1838. Legend holds that escaped slaves were housed

here having been sent from the Walker Homestead which was located next door but no tunnel was thought to have led to it from the Homestead.

It was rebuilt and enlarged in 1870. In 1896 it was repaired and a Vestry built.



Baptist Church, 3 Elm Street, Topsham. Built in 1835, Rebuilt and enlarged in 1870. Legend has it runaways were housed here.

- *William Barron* - Was born in 1797, the brother of John Barron, and moved to Topsham in 1816. With his brother he went into the lumbering business meeting with great success. Was a Deacon of the Topsham Baptist Church and presented it with a complete silver communion service in 1862. In 1865 made President of the Pejepscot National Bank in Brunswick. He died in 1866.
- *Edwin R. Warren* - Pastor of the Topsham Baptist Church and delegate to a meeting of the Maine Antislavery Society in Augusta in 1838.

Grist Mill - This was located on the bank of the Androscoggin River near Granny-Hole Stream. The site has since been filled in and was located beneath where the Topsham Fire Department now stands. Built in 1802 and from 1802 to 1808 was used as a flour mill with a fulling mill owned by Joseph Haley in its basement. This was afterwards purchased by John & Isaac Brown, Haley moving into a larger mill upriver. Later this became known as the Granny-Hole Mill when rebuilt as a sawmill with Major William Frost being part owner in 1817 (see Major William Frost *abv.*). A tunnel lead from the north cellar wall of this building to the Charles Thompson House.

Charles Thompson House - Located at 2 Green Street and built by Isaac Johnson about 1800 for Charles Thompson. A tunnel passed through the south cellar wall of the house and lead to the Granny-Hole / Grist Mill and another tunnel passed through the north cellar wall which lead to the Walker Homestead.



Charles Thompson House, 2 Green Street, Topsham. Built about 1800. A tunnel passed through the cellar, one branch leading to the Walker Homestead and the other towards the River.

- *Charles Thompson* - Served in the War of 1812 and 1812 - 1820 was the Adjutant of 3rd Regiment, 1st Brigade, 11th Division of the State Militia. 1822 - 1829 was involved in general trade in Topsham, becoming very successful through shipping. In 1831 was elected Representative to the Legislature for Topsham. He was one of the chief financial supporters of the Topsham Academy and became the President of the Androscoggin Bank in Topsham in 1834, holding this position until 1854. He died in 1866 having sent 2 sons through Bowdoin College and being the wealthiest man in Topsham at

the time of his passing. The Topsham Academy was located in the former Court House, located at about 22 Elm Street, and built in 1800. Was remodeled in 1835 by the town for use as a town hall. In 1848 the building was sold to the Topsham Academy and was used as such until it burned down in 1867. At the time of its loss it was owned by Charles Thompson, Joshua Haskell, W.B.Purinton, William Dennett and Warren Johnson.

Tripp Farm Barn -- This was located north of Elm Street and west of the fairgrounds. A tunnel passed through the west cellar wall of this barn and lead to the tunnel which ran between the General Samuel Veazie House and the Walker Homestead. The barn has now been torn down. A house located on Elm Street in 1940 was owned by William L. & Jennie C. Tripp. William was employed as a milk dealer at the time and the barn still stood at this time.

[Walker-Wilson House](#) - Located at 2 Melcher Place at the corner of Main



Walker - Wilson House, 2 Melcher Place, Topsham. Built in 1802 - 1803. Legend has it that this was a safe house.

Street and Melcher Place on the north side of the street. Built 1802 - 1803 for Gideon Walker, who then gave it to his son, Major Nathaniel Walker (see Major Nathaniel Walker above.). Later purchased by Johnson Wilson.

- *Gideon Walker* was born in 1751 and moved to Topsham in 1789. Married Mary Perkins in 1777 and had 4 children: Hannah - born 1780, Nathaniel - born 1781, died 1851, Lucy, born 1786, died 1802 and Susanna - born 1792, died 1852.

Beginning in 1803 Gideon Walker lived on Main Street near the corner of Elm Street in Topsham, just south of the Walker Homestead, which was owned by his son, Nathaniel Walker. The building located on Main Street was operated as an Inn by Gideon Walker from 1792 to 1803. He died in 1828.

- *Johnson Wilson* - Owned a mill on Shad Island in the Androscoggin River between Topsham and Brunswick. Married Hannah Walker (born 1780), daughter of Gideon Walker and widow of James Stone (1764 - 1802).

David Scribner House -

Located at 20 Elm Street and built in 1840.

- *David Scribner* - Was a Deacon of the Baptist Church on Elm Street in Topsham for a number of years and in 1836 paid for most of the cost of the Bell for its steeple. He was the Vice-President of the Topsham Antislavery Society established in 1838 and President of the Topsham Temperance Society established in 1857. Topsham Selectman 1838 - 1841.



Daniel Scribner House, 20 Elm Street, Topsham. Built in 1840. This building is suspected of being a safe house.

Dr. McKean House - Located at 14 Green Street and built in 1828.

- *James McKean, M.D.* - James was the son of the

Reverend Joseph McKean and brother of Joseph and John McKean. Graduated from Bowdoin College in 1817. Established a practice in Topsham in 1820 which he continued to his death in 1873. He was an overseer of Bowdoin College and 1825 - 1839 was the Professor of Obstetrics at the Medical College of Maine located at Bowdoin College. Helped fund the building of the Congregational Church in Topsham in 1836 and was the President of the Topsham Antislavery Society founded in 1838.



Doctor McKean House, 14 Green Street, Topsham. Built in 1828. This building is suspected of being a safe house.

Brigadier General Samuel Thompson House - Located at 53 Elm Street and built in 1784.



Brigadier General Samuel Thompson House, 53 Elm Street, Topsham. Built in 1784.
This building is suspected of being a safe house.

- *Brigadier General Samuel Thompson* - Was born in 1735 and lived in Brunswick, operating an Inn at New Meadows which had formerly been owned by his father. He was a Selectman for Brunswick in 1768 - 1771 and member of the Provincial Congress. Served in the Revolutionary War and in 1774 was made Lieutenant- Colonel of the Militia, soon advancing to full Colonel. In 1776 was Representative to the Legislature for Brunswick and was made Brigadier General of the Cumberland County Troops. Moved to Topsham in 1783 and ran a public house as well as being chosen as the Representative for Topsham to the Legislature / General Court for 12 terms from 1784 - 1797. In 1785 and 1786 he was a delegate to a convention in Falmouth to consider the separation of the District of Maine from Massachusetts. In 1788 he was chosen as a delegate to Continental Congress for the ratification of the Constitution in Boston. In a statement to those at this gathering he said: "Mr. President, shall it be said, that after we have established our own independence and freedom, we make slaves of others ? O Washington, what a name he has had. How he has immortalized himself! But he holds those in slavery who have as good right to be free as he has. He is still for self, and in my opinion his character has sunk fifty percent." He voted against acceptance. Was one of the original overseers of Bowdoin College and died in 1797.

First Parish (Congregational) Church - This was located at the corner of Green Street and Elm Street. It was built in 1836 - 1837 and General Samuel Veazie donated the bell for its steeple (see General Samuel Veazie *abv.*). The Reverend Thomas N. Lord of Topsham was the pastor from 1837 - 1842. Joseph Barron, secretary of the Topsham Antislavery Society, was one of the financial supporters for building this church as were John Barron and James McKeen M.D. (see James McKeen, M.D. *abv.*). A tall spire was added in 1868 though was later removed and replaced with a bell tower. The church closed in 1911 and the building was sold to the town who used it as the Topsham Town Hall until it burned in Jan. 1963.

- *Joseph Barron* - Lived in Topsham and was one of the financiers for the building of the First Parish (Congregational) Church. In 1838 elected Secretary to the Topsham Antislavery Society. Representative to the Legislature 1856 and State Senator 1859- 1860.
- *John Barron* - Born in 1792, the brother of William Barron, and moved to Topsham in 1827 buying the house at 17 Summer Street in Topsham. Was involved with lumbering and was one of the financiers for the building of the First Parish (Congregational) Church. State Senator in 1850 and died in 1860. The Barron family remained at this house until 1917.
- *Rev. Thomas N. Lord* - Pastor of the First Parish (Congregational) Church in Topsham 1837 - 1842. Delegate from Topsham to the Maine Antislavery Society in Augusta in 1838.

My reasons for believing the existence of the tunnels and safe houses in Topsham:

Unfortunately the only written record of the tunnels I have found was in a Pamphlet published in 1995 by the Topsham Historic District Commission. It provided for a walking tour of the Topsham Historic District and described which houses the tunnel which roughly parallels Main Street entered. The revealing of the tunnels was met with strong opposition by some living in the District for the fear that the publicity of this long guarded secret may attract unwanted attention to the neighborhood, and the tunnels have not been reported on since except for an article in the Times Record August 14, 2001 which references this publication. This article as well talks of the stairway in the wall and the hidden passages between walls of the Holden-Frost House. One other source that documents the existence of the tunnels is a

web site recently put on line by the town of Topsham. This can be found at <http://www.topshammaine.com> under the section Historic & Natural Areas. It appears that the descriptions of the historic houses given here is from the 1995 Walking Tour of Topsham, which talks of the tunnels leading to some of the historic homes in the historic district.

In the mid-1960's while in Boy Scouts my Patrol Leader lived in the Samuel Veazie House and after a Patrol Meeting which was held there I was permitted to see some of the artifacts still existing there. I was shown the stairs behind the door frame in the northwest kitchen wall, with spaces large enough to easily pass through between the walls on the second floor and the tunnel portal in the cellar which was bricked up but with the removal of a few loose bricks was able to look with a flashlight into the tunnel, a damp place with a slight breeze coming through our viewing hole.

In the early 1960's access to the tunnel could be gained through a hole which had been broken into the top of the tunnel arch immediately behind the site of the Walker Homestead where it had passed through the cellar wall. This hole was a result of the equipment used in tearing down the building and some years later used telephone poles were laid over it, blocking the entrance. It has now been covered by fill with a later enlargement of the parking lot.

In my fathers childhood, this would have been in the 1930's, access was gained into the tunnels through the barn of the Tripp Farm near the fairgrounds, this portion of the tunnel then being a place to play for the children of the neighborhood, without parental knowledge I expect. The most vivid memory he has of it is its length and straightness. They could only go a little ways into the tunnel because of the pit across its width. He at one time was shown and went into some unusual spaces formed by false walls in the Walker-Wilson House, north of the Samuel Veazie House.

My grandmother lived at 5 Elm Street, next door to the Baptist Church which was next door to the Walker Homestead. It was long stated that escaping slaves were often housed at this church in its cellar though the tunnel did not lead over to it, they being brought over from the Walker Homestead when capacity or secrecy required. For many years after the removal of the Walker Homestead there remained a rectangular gray granite block with a date cut into the street side next to Elm Street in front of where the Walker Homestead had stood. It had originally acted as a step for Guests to step down onto from the carriages arriving and departing the Homestead. Legend had it that directly beneath this block was the tunnel. One day while visiting at my grandmothers we heard a loud crash and the house shook. A dump truck of dirt had stopped at the intersection at Elm and Main Street and the rear wheels must have been positioned directly over the tunnel as this pair of wheels crashed down into the

road, with the collapse of the tunnel beneath, and the back of the truck left laying on the road. Some of us kids couldn't resist the big action so went outside to see what was going on. Sure enough, it was the brick tunnel which had collapsed. We could look right down into it. The truck was removed and the hole (tunnel) filled in with dirt and the road resurfaced. This was right across from the Granite step, and another piece of the legend proved to be true. The granite step was some years later removed.

Brunswick

The tunnel system in Brunswick is to myself much less well known, with but little physical evidence I am aware of. It was claimed to begin at a boat house on the bank of the river, across but a little downstream of the Grist mill the Topsham tunnel began in. From here it angled over to the David Dunlap House at #1 Federal passing through the cellar of that residence and then paralleled Federal Street. It had passages into a few houses along this Street and passed through the barn of the Harriet Beecher Stowe House. This main tunnel ended at Bowdoin College where it divided to several branches ending in the cellars of some of the houses along upper Maine Street as well as some of the College buildings. Scattered amongst these buildings which had access to the tunnels were many more safe houses which did not have access to the tunnel system. A number of brick lined tunnels, in most respects identical to those in Topsham, exist beneath the campus and are now utilized to house wiring and piping used to provide services to some of the campus buildings. Have heard that the main tunnel has an iron gate built across it, blocking further passage from the direction of the college, where it passes beneath the Old Bath Road.

About 1980 my wife while working at the Perry-McMillan Artic Museum was shown a tunnel beneath the campus by a custodian at the college. Though I have not seen any of the tunnels in Brunswick, from her description it seems to be similar to those I have seen in Topsham. The Packard - Smyth House, now the John Brown Russwurm African American Center at Bowdoin College is thought to have been a part of this network of safe houses as is the Lyon House, now the Brunswick Elk's Hall and the David Dunlap House, now removed. History shows that an early zoning requirement was applied to development along the east side of Federal Street. This required a setback of 20' from the street and that the structures be at least two stories tall. Old timers claim this was so that when foundations for new houses were dug they wouldn't dig into the tunnel running along the street. They go on to say the height rule was just to throw one off of the true reason of the requirement. If one is to look down this side of Federal Street taking into account only the buildings that would have existed at the time it seems the rules were well followed. Unfortunately this is all the information I am aware of for the Brunswick section.

Suspected Underground Railroad Features in Brunswick:



Harriet Beecher Stowe House, 63 Federal Street, Brunswick. Formerly the Parson Titcomb House, built in 1807. Legend has it that a tunnel ran through the barn of this home.

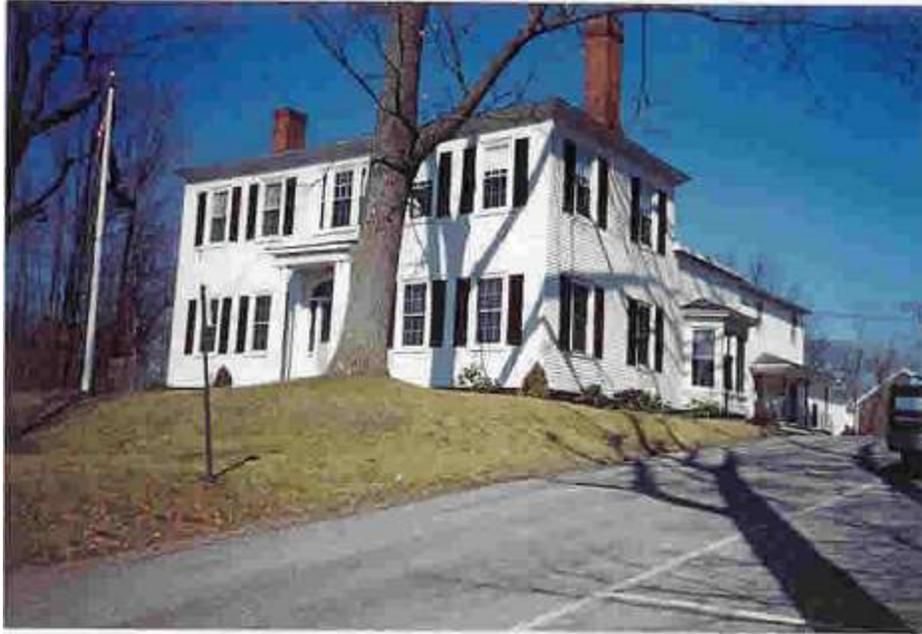
Harriet Beecher Stowe House

- Located at 63 Federal Street and formerly known as the Parson Titcomb House was built in 1807. The Reverend Benjamin Titcomb lived here until his death in 1848. Harriet Beecher Stowe lived there from 1850 to 1852 and began writing her famous book, "Uncle Tom's Cabin", while residing there as well as at her husband's study in

Appleton Hall at Bowdoin College. Her husband was Calvin E. Stowe, the Professor of Natural & Revealed Religion at Bowdoin College. Legend has it that a tunnel that parallels Federal Street passed through the cellar of the barn of this house.

- *Reverend Benjamin Titcomb* - He was born in Portland in 1761 and became a printer. In 1785 he changed professions suddenly to a Baptist preacher at the Portland Baptist Society. In 1794 was one of the founders of the first newspaper for the District of Maine, the "Falmouth Gazette." In 1804 he moved to Brunswick and became pastor of the Brunswick Baptist Church. He retired from the Baptist Church at 83 years old, after 40 years in the Brunswick pulpit. He lived on Federal Street in Brunswick and died in 1848.

Lyon House - Built for David Dunlap 1816 - 1817 and located at 179 Park Row. Later sold to William Weld, then Professor Thomas C. Upham. The house was next bought by Captain Robert Skofield. It was used as a hospital in the 1930's and then an apartment building until 1957 when it was purchased for the Elk's Hall which use continues to this date.



Lyon House, 179 Park Row, Brunswick. Built in 1816- 1817. Utilized as the Brunswick Elks Hall since 1957. Legend has it that this was a safe house.

- *David Dunlap* - A son of Captain John Dunlap and brother of Robert P. Dunlap, was born in 1778. He was the Representative for the District of Maine to the Massachusetts General Court in 1810 -1817, going to the Maine Legislature in

1820, 1831 - 1833 and 1837. In 1821 married Nancy McKeen, the daughter of Rev. Joseph McKeen, first president of Bowdoin College. In 1825 David Dunlap became the 1st President of the Union Bank of Brunswick, holding this position to his death. In 1828 the Tontine Hotel in Brunswick was built through "The Brunswick Tontine Hotel Company." of which David Dunlap was one of the incorporators. In 1837, along with a group of 8 others had built the New Wharf Shipyard at Maquoit in Brunswick. In 1838 he was chosen as a delegate to a meeting of the Maine Antislavery Society in Augusta. In 1841 was an Executive Councilor and was as well an overseer of Bowdoin College for many years. He died in 1843.

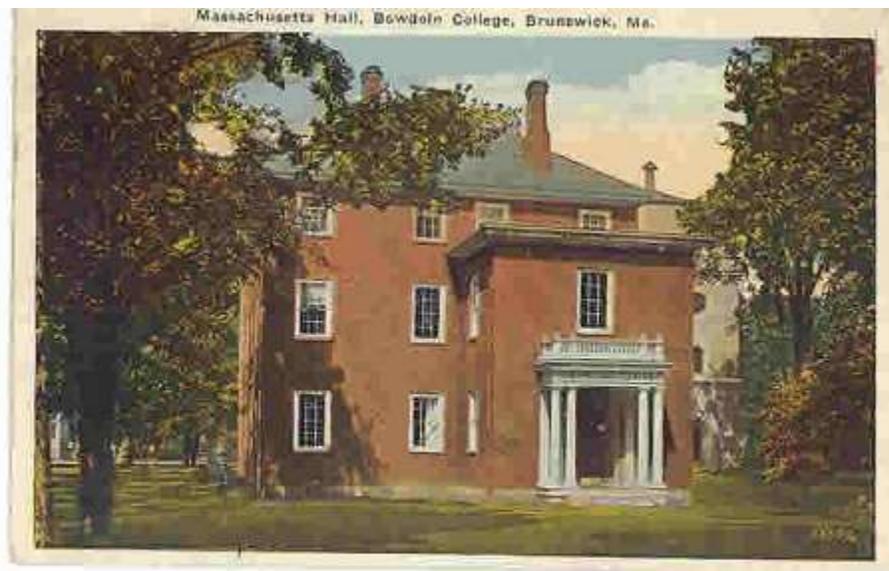
- *Professor Thomas Cogswell Upham* - Professor Upham taught at Bowdoin College 1824 - 1867 and was known as one that would harbor and aid escaping slaves. He was born in 1799 and married Phebe Lord in 1825, daughter of Nathaniel Lord, claimed to be the richest man in York County. Prof. Upham was the Professor of Metaphysics and Ethics as well as a teacher of Hebrew. Stowe records that Professor Smyth sent an escaping slave to Professor Upham who fed him, gave him money and had him put up for the night. Professor Upham died in 1872.

David Dunlap House - Formerly located at #1 Federal Street and built for David Dunlap 1823. The house was torn down about 1961 for the highway ramp. (See David Dunlap info. abv.). Legend has it that a tunnel passed through the cellar of this

building which ran from near the river to Bowdoin College paralleling Federal Street for much of its distance.

Bowdoin College - The College was chartered in 1794 but a site was not selected for it until 1799 when Brunswick was chosen. It was named for James Bowdoin II, a statesman, scientist and Governor of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts 1785 and 1786. He died in 1790 and his son, James Bowdoin III, was to become the major early benefactor to the college. James Bowdoin III died in 1811. Samuel Thompson of Topsham and John Dunlap of Brunswick were overseers of the college from its very beginnings with Rev. Joseph McKeen becoming its first President in 1801, the college opening in 1802. In 1820 the Medical School of Maine was established at the college and Doctor James McKeen was appointed the Professor of Obstetrics, a position he held until 1839. The Medical School of Maine closed in 1921 having graduated some 2000 young doctors in its time.

College Related Buildings predating the Civil War:



Massachusetts Hall, Bowdoin College, Brunswick. Built 1799 - 1802, renovated 1872 - 1873. The original building of the College.

Massachusetts Hall - Foundation laid in 1799, completed in 1802, renovated 1872 - 1873. This was the original building of the college with various uses over time including class rooms, a dormitory for students, the original College Presidents apartment and the

Medical School of Maine. Early in its existence a cupola was added in the center of the roof but this proved structurally unsafe and was later removed.

Moorhead's Tavern - Built in 1802 - 1803 was located near the corner of Maine Street and the Old Bath Road in the northwest corner of the campus. It served as the College's Boarding House



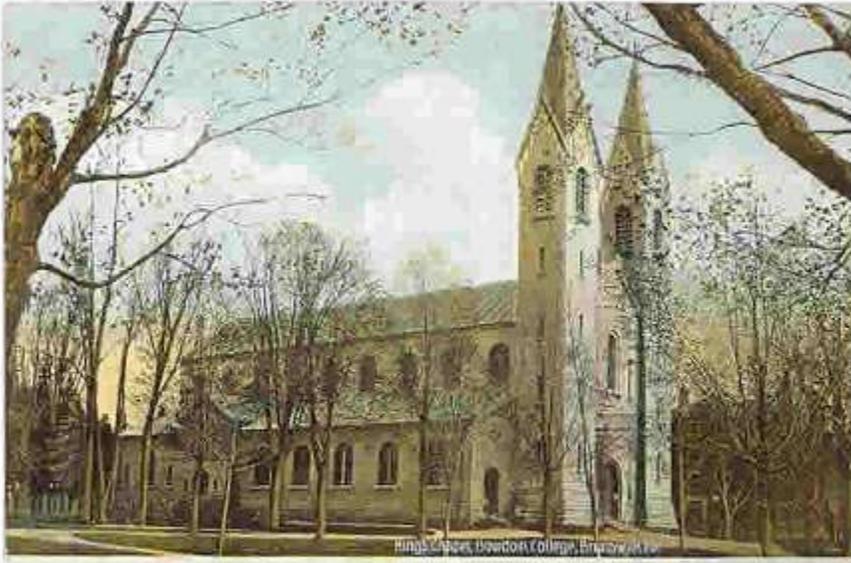
Moorhead's Tavern Building, 23 Noble Street, Brunswick. Built in 1802 - 1803. Rebuilt at current location in 1847. Formerly Moorhead's Tavern located on the Bowdoin College Campus.

for students as well as containing a tavern and stagecoach office. It was removed in 1847 to 23 Noble Street where it sits today with a good bit of modification. Through the time of its existence at its previous location it was utilized as a public house being the principal one in town in its earliest times. By the time of its purchase by the college it was one of only 4 public houses in the village, The Tontine, The Maine Hotel, Stinchfield's and Moorhead's. Next door just north of Moorhead's Tavern was a building owned by Timothy Weymouth in 1802. Timothy Weymouth, a wheel wright, employed a freed woman, Sarah Mingo, as a house-keeper. She had previously been a slave, utilized as a house-servant in Brunswick and owned by Captain Benjamin Stone in 1767. Beside this building and bordering the Bath Road was Colonel Estabrooks Bakery. Col. T. S. Estabrook was born in 1777 and moved to Brunswick in 1801 opening a bakery. He was a Major in the Militia during the War of 1812.

Managers of Moorhead's Tavern:
1802 - 1809 Ebenezer Nichols
1810 - Col. T.S.Estabrook
-1818 Coffin
1818-1820 IsaacDow
1820 - William Hodgkins
- 1831 Alexander Moorhead
1831-1833 JohnL. Seavey
1833- 1839 James Elliot

1839 - 1842 Alexander Moorhead
1842 - 1847 Bowdoin College Overseers

Presidents House - Built 1801 - 1803 located near what is now the south end of Searles Hall. It was enlarged in 1823 and burned down in 1839.



Kings Chapel, Bowdoin College, Brunswick. Built 1845 - 1855. The Chapel is also known as Bannister Hall.

Chapel - Built in 1805 and torn down in 1847 being replaced by the current chapel, Kings Chapel, known as Banister Hall, which was started in 1845 and completed in 1855. The cornerstone for this building was laid in 1845 with Masonic Ceremonies.

Maine Hall -
Built in 1808 and originally known



Maine Hall, Bowdoin College, Brunswick. Built in 1808 and originally known as the College. Rebuilt in 1836.

as The College. It had class rooms below and a dormitory for students above. Was partially rebuilt in 1822 and completely rebuilt in 1836 due to fires.



Winthrop Hall, Bowdoin College, Brunswick. Built in 1821 - 1822 and originally known as the North

Winthrop Hall -
Built in 1821 -
1822 and
originally known
as North College.
It had class rooms
below and a
dormitory for
students above.

Commons Hall - Built in 1828 -
1829 and located on the north
side of Old Bath Road across
from Adams Hall. It was built as
the Dining-Room for the
students, later becoming a
chemistry Lab. An addition was
added later which connected it



Commons Hall, Bowdoin College, Brunswick. Built in 1828 - 1829 and originally the
College Dining-Room.

to Rhodes Hall and it is now utilized as the Carpenter Shop



Appleton Hall -
Built in 1843 and originally known as South College. It was used as a dormitory for students.

Appleton Hall, Bowdoin College, Brunswick. Built in 1843 and originally known as the South College.

Adams Hall - Built in 1861. It contained lecture rooms and the Medical College of Maine.

Newman House -

Built in 1821 for Professor Newman at the corner of College Street and Maine Street in the southeast corner. The building was later moved to South Street. Samuel P. Newman was chosen



Adams Hall, Bowdoin College, Brunswick. Built in 1861 for the Medical College of Maine.

in 1824 as Professor of Rhetoric & Oratory and also spoke on Civil Polity & Political Economy at Bowdoin.



Packard - Smyth House, College Street, Brunswick. A double house built in 1827 and later becoming the John Brown Russwurm African American Center. Legend has it that this was a safe house.

Packard - Smyth House

- A double house built in 1827 at 6-8 College Street on the south side of the street, next door to the Newman House. Professor Alpheus Spring Packard and Professor William Smyth were the first to live here. This building later become the John Brown Russwurm African American Center named for

the first black graduate of Bowdoin College, Class of 1826. He was the coeditor of "Freedom's Journal," the first Black newspaper in the United States and in 1836 become Governor of Liberia, holding this position until 1851.

- *Prof. Alpheus Spring Packard* - Born in 1798, graduated from Bowdoin College in 1816 and in 1825 was chosen as Professor of Languages and Classical Literature. In 1842 chosen Professor of Political Economy. The passage of the Kansas - Nebraska Act in 1854 repealed the Missouri Compromise and instead it required that the inhabitants of prospective territories vote on whether they would enter the union as a slave or free state. The idea came of organized emigration from free states to Kansas to provide that the vote would be for a free state. The New England Emigrant Aid Society was founded, to aid free stater to relocate to Kansas, and some 728 moved there from Maine by 1860. Prof. A. S. Packard of Bowdoin College was one of the promoters of this effort in Maine. In 1869 became the college librarian, holding this position until 1881. Was the acting President of the college for a year. He spent 58 years at Bowdoin College and died in 1884.
- *Prof. William Smyth* - He was born in 1797 and became a strong and vocal abolitionist. Graduated from Bowdoin College in 1822 and in 1824 taught at a private school on Maine Street in Brunswick. In 1825 was chosen Associate

Professor of Mathematics & Natural Philosophy for Bowdoin College; made full Professor in 1828. He was chosen as a delegate to a meeting of the Maine Antislavery Society in Augusta in 1838. There he was chosen as the Secretary of that society. Was the editor of the Advocate of Freedom, an antislavery newspaper published in Brunswick 1838 -1839, in Hallowell thereafter. He was in 1851 on the Building Committee for Brunswick's Village School District and Chairman of the Board of Agents. Prof. Smyth died in 1868.

Timeline:

1562 - British Slave trading to the New World begins.

1619 - Dutch Trader brings ship cargo of slaves to Jamestown Colony.

1675 - 1678 - King Philip's War (First Indian War). All English settlements in the District of Maine except for those in the southwestern part of the region are destroyed by the Wabanaki. 360 settlers are killed in the District of Maine. French settlement follows the westward advancement of this destruction. The war ends with the signing of the Treaty of Casco.

1688 - Fort Andross is built on the river in Brunswick, for use as a trading post for fur trappers.

1688 - 1699 - King William's War (Second Indian War). Wabanaki destroy English settlements and drive all English west to Falmouth. In 1690 the French destroy Falmouth and Berwick driving all English west of Wells. Fort Andross in Brunswick falls to the Wabanaki. The war ends with the signing of the Treaty of Mair Point (Mere Point) in Brunswick in 1699.

1691 - The Bay Colony (Massachusetts) is given control of the District of Maine by the Crown.

1700 - Fort George is built on the site of Fort Andross in Brunswick for the protection of settlers from the Wabanaki.

1703 - 1713 - Queen Anne's War (Third Indian War). A few Wabanaki raids occur in 1703 but there is little additional action in the District of Maine for the remainder of the war. The war ends with the signing of the Treaty of Portsmouth.

1705 - Massachusetts outlaws interracial sexual relations and marriage.

1715 - Fort George is built in Brunswick and resettlement begins.

1716 - First Saw Mill in operation in Topsham

1717 - Brunswick and Topsham designated as townships by vote of the House of Representatives of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts in 1717. Maine Street in Brunswick, then known as the twelve-rod road, laid out from Fort George on the Androscoggin to Maquoit Bay.

1717 - 1735 - Andrew Dunning of Brunswick holds slaves.

1721 - 1727 - Lovewell's War (Fourth Indian War, Dummer's War or Rale's War). Area is abandoned except for about 10 families living in fortified houses. Massachusetts declares war on the Wabanaki with an attack on them in Brunswick in 1721. In 1722 the Wabanaki burn Brunswick but this begins their being driven north to Canada. The war ends with the signing of Dummer's Treaty.

1730 - Resettlement in area begins.

1735 - Brunswick population 35.

1737 - 1739 - Brunswick Incorporated.

1738 - 14 families live in Topsham.

1739 - William Black and family, a freedman, settle at Baileys Island.

1740 - Brunswick population 160.

1744 - 1748 - King George's War (Fifth Indian War). Massachusetts declares war on Wabanaki and attacks French strongholds that support them. War ends with the Treaty of Falmouth.

1746 - Topsham population 36.

1750 - 18 families live in Topsham.

1750's - Friends (Quakers) prohibit slave ownership by any member.

1752 - 12 homes in Topsham.

1753 - First dam built between Brunswick and Topsham.

1754 - 1760 - French and Indian War. In 1758 Fort St. Georges is unsuccessfully attacked followed by scattered raids about the area for about a month. The war has little other effect on the District of Maine.

1760 - York County, previously comprising the entire District of Maine is split up with Brunswick ending up in Cumberland County and Topsham ending up in Lincoln County.

1761 - First roads built in Topsham.

1764 - Topsham Incorporated.

1765 - District of Maine population 23,686 white and 322 black. Topsham population 326 white and 1 black. Brunswick population 502 with 4 slaves recorded as being held in Brunswick and 14 in Harpswell.

1767 - Elm Street in Topsham laid out to Cathance.

1768 - Regular Ferry service between Topsham and Brunswick established. First carriages appear in area.

1771 - 2 slaves are recorded as being held in Brunswick.

1775 - Maine population 47,000.

1775 - 1781 - Revolutionary War. 44 Topsham residents in service for the war.

1776 - Declaration of Independence issued. Topsham population 657; Brunswick population 867.

1783 - Quock Walker case in Massachusetts Supreme Court results in the outlawing of slavery for Massachusetts including the District of Maine.

1784 - Flood destroys 3 mills and 3 houses in Topsham.

1788 - Samuel Thompson, delegate from Topsham to the state convention to ratify the Constitution, expressed strong disapproval of George Washington for continuing to hold slaves who "have as good a right to be free as he has."

1790 - First U.S. Census: 3,900,000 Citizens, 700,000 Slaves. Population for District of Maine is 96,540 with 27 freedmen and families totaling 110. Portland has a population of 2,367 including 21 freedmen. Brunswick population 1387. Main Street in Topsham laid out.

1791 - Bill of Rights enacted.

1793 - Fugitive Slave Act passed outlawing any efforts to impede the capture of runaway slaves.

1796 - First bridge built between Brunswick and Topsham.

1798 - French / American War.

1799 - Green Street in Topsham laid out.

1800 - Topsham becomes a Half-Shiretown.

1801 - Tripoli / American War.

1803 - Regular Stages from Portland to Brunswick begin. Federal Street in Brunswick, then known as Back Street is laid out.

1804 - Slavery abolished in the northeast United States.

1806- Road then known as the King's Turnpike built from near Bowdoin College to Bath.

1808 - U.S. bans the importing of African Slaves though some 250,000 slaves are illegally imported 1808 - 1860.

1809 - Brunswick Cotton Manufacturing Company begins operation, producer of cotton yarn.

1810 - Topsham population 1,271; Brunswick population 2,682.

1812- Maine Cotton And Woolen Factory Company begins operation in Brunswick, producer of cotton cloth and woolen broadcloth.

1812- 1814-War of 1812.

1814 - Flood destroys 21 saw mills in Topsham.

1820 - Missouri Compromise provides for admission of Maine as a free state separating from Massachusetts and forbids slavery in any new territories north of latitude 36 deg. 30 mm. The Piracy Act of 1820 is enacted which places slavers and pirates under the same rules, a death penalty for any caught. Regular stages

between Augusta and Brunswick begin. Topsham population 1,429; Brunswick population 2,931.

1821 - Maine Legislature outlaws interracial marriage. Regular stages between Bath and Brunswick begin.

1825 - On Dec.13th the Great Fire occurs in Brunswick burning 33 buildings between the river and Mill Street. 68 people were left homeless and 50 jobs were lost. The temperature was negative 13 degrees at the time of the fire. Both the Brunswick Cotton Manufacturing Company and Maine Cotton And Woolen Factory Company are lost to the fire. Afterwards the Eagle Factory is built on Shad Island in the Androscoggin River, a producer of dressing cloth.

1826 - Greater Portland area has about 600 black residents.

1828 - Abyssinian Religious Society established in Portland.

1830 - 1865 - Nationwide 60,000 slaves escape to Canada. Topsham population 1,564; Brunswick population 3,547.

1831 - 1837 - Family Pioneer And Juvenile Key, a newspaper advocating the abolition of slavery published in Brunswick. It was published by Joseph Griffin and from 1831 - 1833 it was called the Juvenile Key, being renamed the Family Pioneer & Juvenile Key 1833 - 1837. Joseph Griffin was born in 1798, came to Brunswick in 1819 and set up a printing shop. He printed publications for Bowdoin College for a number of years as well as works by Prof. Upham, Prof. Smyth, Prof. Packard and Prof. Newman. He opened a bookstore in Brunswick in 1822 in addition to his printing business and operated it to his death in 1874.

1834- Maine Antislavery Society founded in Augusta.

1835 - Southern states expel abolitionists and forbid the mailing of antislavery materials into the south.

1836 - Regular stages between Lewiston and Brunswick begin. In Brunswick there are about 400 houses, 40 stores, 30 mills and 7 daily stages.

1838 - Meetings to discuss the Antislavery Movement and what position the town should take on this was held in Brunswick and Topsham in January. Prof. William Smyth of Brunswick, David Dunlap Esquire of Brunswick, Rev. Thomas N. Lord of Topsham and Rev. Edwin R. Warren of Topsham were appointed as delegates to the Maine Antislavery Society meeting in Augusta. At this meeting in Augusta Prof.

William Smyth was elected secretary to that organization. The January meeting in Brunswick had proven that the population was strongly divided on this issue. The same year the Topsham Antislavery Society was founded with James McKeen, M.D. elected President, David Scribner elected Vice-President, Joseph Barron elected Secretary and made up of some 58 members. In November Mr. Coddling of the Maine Antislavery Society presented several lectures promoting the abolition of slavery in Brunswick and Topsham. Much opposition to his views was met with in Brunswick.

1838 - 1839 - Advocate Of Freedom, a semi-monthly newspaper advocating the abolition of slavery was published in Brunswick. It was edited by Prof. William Smyth of the Bowdoin College and was published under the direction of the Maine Antislavery Society. In 1839 publication was moved to Hallowell and it became a weekly.

1840 - Maine population 500,000 with 1,355 black citizens. Topsham population 1,883; Brunswick population 4,259.

1841 - Maine & New Hampshire Historical & Agricultural Society is established by blacks with a convention in Portland.

1842 - Prigg Vs. Pennsylvania decision by Supreme Court determines that states do not have to aid in the return of runaway slaves. The same year the Webster-Ashburton Treaty between Great Britain and the United States establishes the northern boundary of Maine as well as requires each country to patrol by ship the African coast to prevent the trade of slaves.

1844 - Macon B. Allen, a black man from Portland, admitted to the bar as an attorney.

1846 - 1848 - United States / Mexican War.

1848 - Topsham becomes a Shiretown.

1849 - Train service for passengers and freight comes to Brunswick.

1850 - Compromise to the Fugitive Slave Act passed, giving slaveholders the right to organize a posse anywhere in the U.S. to aid in the recapturing of runaway slaves. Courts, police and private citizens obligated to assist in the recapture of runaways and any caught assisting runaways to serve a term in jail and pay fines and restitution to the slave owner. Cabot Mill, a textile manufacturer, is built in Brunswick with a dam which goes completely across the river. Maine population 583,169 including 1,356 free blacks; Topsham population 2,010; Brunswick population 4,977.

1852 - "Uncle Tom's Cabin", written by Harriet Beecher Stowe published, selling 300,000 copies in first year. She lived at 63 Federal Street in Brunswick 1850 - 1852.

1854 - Kansas - Nebraska Act passed repealing the Missouri Compromise and instead substituting that the inhabitants of prospective territories vote on whether they will enter the union as a slave or free state. The idea came of organized emigration from free states to Kansas to provide that the vote would be for a free state. The New England Emigrant Aid Society was founded, to aid free staters to relocate to Kansas, and some 728 moved there from Maine by 1860. Prof. A. S. Packard of Bowdoin College was one of the promoters of this effort in Maine. In 1861 Kansas was given statehood as a free state. Maine Daughters of Freedom founded, an antislavery women's group. Lincoln County is split up with Topsham now being in Sagadahoc County.

1856 - Portland integrates black students into public schools ending the separation of schools by race.

1857 - Dred Scott Decision by the Supreme Court determines Congress does not have right to prohibit slavery in any territory of the United States, that blacks can never become citizens of the U.S. and slaves do not become free upon entering a free state.

1860 - The ship Erie, captained by Nathaniel Gordon of Portland, is captured by the U.S.S. Mohican off of Cuba with a cargo of 890 slaves which were picked up near the Congo River. Of the cargo 172 are men, 106 are women and 612 children. They are freed in Liberia and Captain Nathaniel Gordon is convicted of piracy under the law of 1820 and hanged in 1862 for his crime. South Carolina secedes from the Union in December.

Topsham population 1,605; Brunswick population 4,723.

1861 - Six additional states secede from the Union, forming the Confederate States of America, and the Civil War begins. Topsham supplies 145 men for Civil War service. 88 Bowdoin College alumni fight for the Union, 18 fight for the Confederacy.

1863 - Emancipation Proclamation enacted freeing all slaves.

1864 - At a Citizens Meeting at the Congregational Vestry in Brunswick it is voted by a majority that aid will be provided to any freedmen found in need.

1865 - Civil War ends and the 13th Amendment to the Constitution is added which outlaws slavery.

1870 - Brunswick population 4,687.

1873 - Survey in Brunswick reveals that of the 4,057 citizens, 477 are French and Catholic, 131 are Irish and Catholic and 59 are black and Catholic.

Related Items

TOPSHAM RELIGIOUS SOCIETIES

1764 - 1836 - First Parish Church Society of Topsham, Congregational. In 1824 membership includes Col. Samuel Veazie, Dr. James McKeen and Nathaniel Green, all of Topsham.

1794 - 1832 - First Baptist Church of Topsham, membership includes Gideon Walker, Daniel Holden and Nathaniel Green, all of Topsham.

1824 - Baptist Church Society founded in Topsham. Membership includes David Scribner (Deacon), William Barron (Deacon) and David Dunlap. In 1835 a new church is built with 4 pews reserved as free pews. In 1837 Reverend Edwin R. Warren is chosen pastor. He resigns the position in 1841.

1830 - Unitarian Society formed in Brunswick. Membership includes Robert P. Dunlap of Brunswick and Major William Frost of Topsham.

1835 - Topsham Unitarian Society forms in Topsham made up of former members of the First Parish who were Unitarians, the Brunswick Society splits away from the Unitarian view as Universalists. Membership includes William Frost and Charles Thompson, both of Topsham. The Unitarian Meeting House is torn down in 1853 and the society moves to Brunswick.

1836 - First Parish Church Society of Topsham disbands and the Orthodox Congregational Church of Topsham takes its place. Prof. William Smyth of Bowdoin College acts as pastor for 8 mos. In 1842 -1843 the slavery question was discussed and several resolutions were adopted against slavery. A few members left the Society due to this but the Church held to its position. In 1852 Prof. Aipheus S. Packard of Bowdoin College served as the interim pastor.

1850 - Unitarians and Universalists merge as the Mason Street Religious Society with Amos D. Wheeler of Topsham pastor, a Unitarian. He held this position until 1865 when he took a position with the American Unitarian Association.

LEGEND OF BATH UNDERGROUND RAILROAD

Bath was a strongly pro-slavery town in the times due to its reliance on shipping and ship building. Without the product of the southern slaves their riches would soon be lost. But the businesses along the waterfront were more than pleased to hire freedmen to work on the piers and at the shipyards for next to nothing wages at jobs no one else wanted. These black laborers though were not welcome in town and not allowed to live amongst the white population so instead had a little town of shacks that they had built up on Witch Spring Hill which lies west of town, West Bath. Between the huge number of ships coming to this port and the willingness of many of the coasters and fisherman to smuggle runaways for a little hard money many found their way to this unfriendly port. Some were apprehended and brought back south for a bounty but a good number were helped along their way by the black laborers on the waterfront. They would be sent up to the little town on the hill and there would be shown the direction to Brunswick where they could get across the river. A few mile walk along Merrymeeting Bay and the Androscoggin River would bring them to those that would help them continue their escape.

McKEEN FAMILY

The McKeen's were an important family in Topsham and Brunswick during the period as well as to the history of Bowdoin College. In addition to James McKeen, M.D. discussed above, some other noted family members are:

Reverend Joseph McKeen, D.D., father of James and Joseph McKeen, was born in 1757 and moved to Brunswick taking up residence at 6 McKeen Street. This house was built in 1776 by Samuel Stanwood who lived there until it was sold to the Reverend. Reverend Joseph McKeen, D.D. was the first President of Bowdoin College from 1801 until his death in 1807. The McKeen family lived at the family home through the period.

Joseph McKeen, James brother, was born in 1787, living at the family home at 6 McKeen Street in Brunswick. He later bought the Van Cleve House, formerly the Dunning McKeen House, at 76 Federal Street in Brunswick which was built in 1807 by Andrew Dunning. In 1819 Joseph McKeen was the Representative to the Legislature for Brunswick. and became the Cashier for the Union Bank of Brunswick in 1839, working for David Dunlap and then Major William Frost. Upon the opening of the Second Union Bank in Brunswick in 1851 he became President, holding this position until 1863. In addition he was the Treasurer for Bowdoin College for 36 years and the Director of the Kennebec & Portland Railroad Company.

John McKeen, Joseph's brother, was born in 1789. He graduated from Bowdoin College in 1811. Was the Secretary to the Board of Overseers for Bowdoin College and the Brunswick Town Clerk for 23 years. He died in 1861.

DUNLAP FAMILY

The Dunlap's were one of the most important and influential families in Brunswick during the period. In addition to David Dunlap discussed above, some other noted family members are:

Captain John Dunlap, son of Rev. Robert Dunlap, was born in 1738. In 1772 he built a large house at the corner of Lincoln Street and Maine Street in Brunswick in which he operated a public inn until 1799. Talleyrand stayed there in 1796 or 1797. In 1778 he was a Brunswick Selectman. From 1799 to 1805 he was the Brunswick Representative to the General Court of Massachusetts during which he was also a member of the delegation that went to Boston to determine if the Constitution would be accepted. In 1800 he built a large house on Union Street, near the Mill Street end. This was for many years the most opulent house in Brunswick. He was the builder and owner of several vessels which were used in transporting boards and shingles to Tobago, Grenada and Barbados. He was one of the original overseers of Bowdoin College and in 1803 was thought the richest man in the District of Maine through his work in lumbering and shipping. Died in 1824

Robert Pinckney Dunlap, a son of Captain John Dunlap and brother of David Dunlap, was born in 1794. He graduated from Bowdoin College in 1815 and became a member of the Masons in 1816, eventually becoming the Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of Maine. He was a Representative to the Legislature for Brunswick 1821 - 1822, State Senator 1824 - 1832 - twice President of the Senate, an Executive Councilor in 1833, the Governor of Maine 1834 - 1838, a Representative to Congress 1843 - 1847, Trustee of The Brunswick Seminary in 1845, Brunswick Postmaster 1853 - 1858 and the Portland Port Collector. He died in 1859.

Reverend Robert Dunlap, father of Captain John Dunlap, was born in Ireland in 1715, moving to Brunswick in 1747. He was the first settled minister of Brunswick but was dismissed from the Presbyterian Church in Brunswick in 1760 over a pay dispute with the town. He died in 1775.

GRANDMA'S STORY

This leaves me with but one insignificant piece of information, and that is a tale a child of long ago was told when he just asked too many questions of his grandmother in Topsham:

The tunnel was built by a very rich man that lived upon the top of the hill. He didn't like having to go out in the rain or the heat and winter was just out of the question. So he built a tunnel so that he could drive his horse and buggy to the Mill he owned on the bank of the river right from the cellar of his house, and not have to venture out into the weather every early morning and late evening. He also liked to frequent a local tavern along his journey for his meals so he built the tunnel right through his favorite dining place. His assistant at the mill was prone to be late to work on many a morning so he had the tunnel pass through his house as well so he could wake him up when he drove his horse and buggy through in the morning on his way in to work. This left him only the problem of feeding his horses and cleaning up after them which still required that he venture outside daily, so he built a branch of the tunnel to a farm near the fairgrounds where he had his horse looked after. No, I don't know if he lived happily ever after as hardly anybody ever saw him anymore.

References

“History Of Brunswick, Topsham, And Harpswell” - George Augustus Wheeler And Henry Warren Wheeler, 1878, Reprint of 1974

“A Small College In Maine - Two Hundred Years Of Bowdoin” - Charles C. Calhoun, 1993

“Brunswick, Maine - 250 Years A Town, 1739 - 1989” - Paul Downing, 1989

“Topsham, Maine - 200th Anniversary” - Topsham Bicentennial Committee, 1964

“The Early Architecture Of Bowdoin College And Brunswick, Maine” - William D. Shipman, 1973

“Topsham, Maine Historical Walking Tour” - Topsham Historic Commission, 1995

“A Distant War Comes Home; Maine In The Civil War Era” - Donald W. Beattie, Rodney M. Cole & Charles G. Waugh, 1996

“Maine - The Pine Tree State, From Prehistory To The Present” - Richard W. Judd, Edwin A. Churchill & Joel W. Eastman, 1995

“The Times Record” - August 14, 2001, Mansion’s Link To Underground Railroad Suggested, Sarah Holt

“The Times Record” - February 22, 1999, Stowe House Gave Slaves Safe Harbor Historians Say

“The Brunswick Record” - January 31, 1963, Fir Levels Topsham Town Headquarters