

BATH HISTORICAL SOCIETY

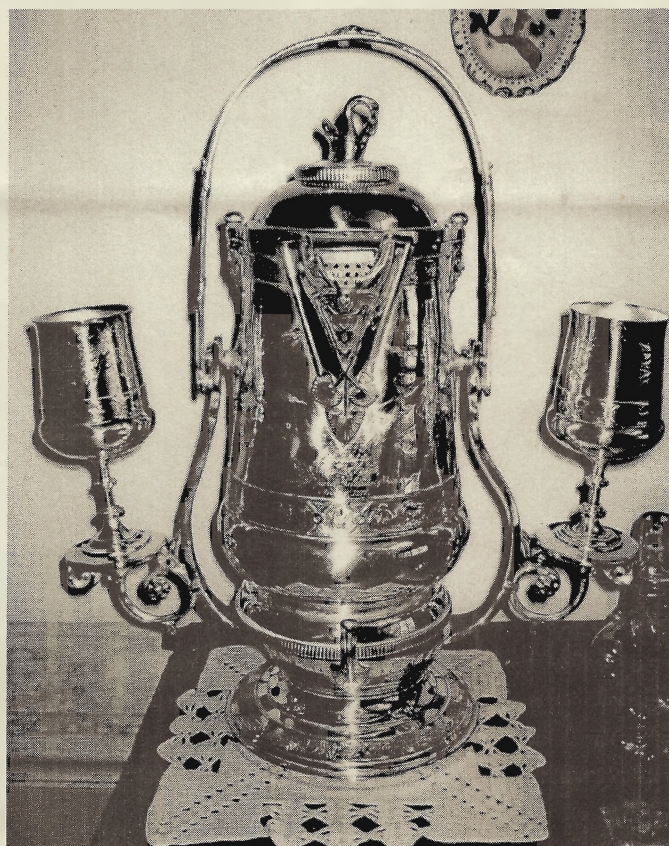
EST. 1989

A DAY IN THE HISTORY ROOM

The unpredictable quality of a day in the History Room is one of the pleasures of working there. On July 30th of this year, I had two out-of-state visitors to the History Room. The gentlemen told me that they were trying to contact St. Mary's Roman Catholic Church to correct some historical information on the church's website. When I asked how I could help them, they reached into an envelope for some photographs to show me. Looking at the images of a large silver vessel and cups, I suddenly knew exactly what they were and just who the visitors must be because of some earlier research, research for events that suddenly seemed very real and not so long ago.

When delving into assorted sources for a talk on the Irish in Bath, it seemed to me that much of Bath's Hibernian experience revolved around the burning of the South Meetinghouse, during the course of a riot apparently sparked by the preaching of a Know-Nothing-Party supporter in July of 1854. In his history of Bath, Henry Owen wrote of the heroic actions of one man, Oliver Moses, at that time. As discussed in the talk last March, the period newspapers were less clear on his role during the violence, but clearly the Catholics of the time felt that he was a champion for their fight for religious freedom. Owen wrote, "Many manifestations of friendly kindness ... were acknowledged by the presentation of a beautiful silver service to Mr. Moses which is still a valued possession of his grandson and namesake." This possession is still valued by his descendants who were

visiting the library that day, as one could tell from the photographs of the newly refurbished silver water tankard and cups, still declaring gratitude to Oliver Moses in the vessel's inscription, "Presented to Oliver Moses by his grateful friends, the Catholics of Bath, Maine. Nov. 3rd 1877."



Presentation Silver

This Newsletter is published by the Bath Historical Society, 33 Summer Street, Bath, ME 04530.

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Deeply involved with the development of this city, Oliver Moses (1803-1882) arrived in Bath in 1826. He and his brother William began a tinsmithing business, also owning a foundry that was purchased by Thomas Hyde and evolved into Bath Iron Works. Oliver Moses was instrumental in the construction of a large number of business blocks in Bath's downtown, while also being involved in local banking and shipbuilding.

Visitors Richard Moses and his son Michael left the photographs with the History Room, to be shared digitally with the local parish, which has been done. In subsequent communications, the Moses family has provided copies of photographs of later Moses family members and a particularly interesting letter written by

Father Peter McLaughlin to Oliver Moses in July of 1855. In the letter McLaughlin requests Moses' assistance in purchasing land in Bath for a church, explaining the reluctance of local landowners to sell land to the society at a reasonable price and, therefore, needing the help of an intermediary. These assorted items provide information on an important Bath family, a significant event in the state's political and religious history, and the cultural attitudes of a growing nation.

This visit of the Moses family brought the distant past unexpectedly to vibrant life in the middle of a hot afternoon.

—Robin Haynes

A BATH FAMILY

The box that the mail carrier left on our porch last spring was addressed to "The New Owners of 376 Front Street." Inside was a photograph of Minnie Brown as a girl and a Class Day book from Yale University that had belonged to her brother David. These items were sent to us by a couple who had previously rented our house, the former home of the Brown family.

The father of Minnie and David, Harry Brown, was an immigrant from Russian Poland. He moved to Bath in the 1890s, where he owned a pawnshop and tailor's shop at 183 Front Street (where Brackett's is today). He also owned a "tenement" at 261-267 Front Street and the Eagle Hotel at 12 Front Street. [See the article in the current issue of *The Times of Bath* for more information about this hotel.] Harry was one of the founders of Bath's Beth Israel Synagogue and served on the Bath City Council. His wife Celia Epstein was born in Vilna, Poland (today in Lithuania); they married in 1897. They lived with their five children, at first over or near the store, and then from 1921 at 376 Front Street (which at that time had the address 2 Pearl Street). Harry died in 1925 and Celia in 1955, both of them in Bath. They are buried at Beth Abraham cemetery in Auburn.



Minnie Brown in 1919, age 9

Their oldest son Arthur worked in Atlanta, Georgia, and then for Bath Iron Works, and never married. He died in 1972. Oldest daughter Bessie worked for the Pejepscot Paper Company and BIW and was unmarried. She died in 1967. Both of them lived in the family home most of their lives. Their sister Mary was a teacher at the Dike School for many years. In the mid-1950s she married Herbert Marston and moved to Gardiner. She died in 1980 in Fort Lauderdale, Florida.

David moved to New York City after graduating from Yale in 1928 and was a correspondent for Reuters during World War II; he was on the USS Missouri when Japan surrendered. Later he was Chief of the European Office, Press Service, United States Information Agency, headquartered in Paris. In this position he traveled in the press corps with Presidents Eisenhower and Kennedy and with senatorial and congressional delegations. He married Paulette Vallot, a Belgian who still corresponds with our neighbor Gene Moll; they had no children. He died in Paris in 1989.

Minnie, the youngest, also worked at BIW and was secretary for Defense Housing at Lambert Park. She never married and continued to live in the family home until her death in 1997 at the age of 87. Gene Moll describes Bessie as fun, with a great sense of humor. According to Gene, the three siblings had pooled their resources during the years they lived together. Minnie left a sizeable estate. She willed money to Beth Israel Synagogue so that they were able to purchase their education building at 609 Washington Street, named the Minnie Brown Center in her memory, and create an endowment fund. She also left more than \$500,000 to the Patten Free Library, which at the time had come up short in its fundraising for the second addition to the building. This gift enabled the library to complete its building project.

Minnie was buried at Mt. Sinai Cemetery in Portland, where Bessie and Arthur are also interred. On Sunday, July 11, 2010, a headstone was unveiled for Minnie Brown at Mt. Sinai. Beth Israel's Cantor Daniel Leeman led a ceremony to commemorate the event. John Voorhees, the executor of her estate, had arranged for the purchase of the headstone. At the conclusion of the ceremony Mr. Voorhees presented a 7-branch menorah that belonged to Minnie Brown to the congregation.

There were members of this Brown family in Bath for more than 100 years but they left no descendants. Today we remember them when we see the two buildings in the Washington Street area that they helped to fund. And my husband and I are reminded of them when we see the historical marker on our home reading "Minnie Brown House."

—Sandy Whiteley

SESQUICENTENNIAL HISTORY

A few copies of *The Sesquicentennial of Bath, Maine 1847-1997*, are still available in the History Room at the Patten Free Library for \$15.

To order by mail, send a check made out to the
Bath Historical Society
for \$18.00 (which includes \$3 shipping and handling)

to

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