



YOUR SUPPORT IS ESSENTIAL

The 2024 season is behind us and we have a very exciting slate of programs to look forward to this year. Firstly, though, we would like to say a sincere thank you to everyone who has donated in the past year. The society would not be able to continue without your help!

We are especially grateful to the Town of Otisfield for granting us a hefty donation as well as the Norway Savings Bank Community Giving Program. Without these funds, we would be adrift in our plans to replace our aging front entrance, making the 1905 Town House safe for all once again.

A SEASON TO REMEMBER

Our slate of programs began last year as we took a walk down memory lane, revisiting the life of Forrest Edwards. Known for his hard working demeanor and shrewd mind, what had been slightly forgotten to history was his incredible kindness. With the help of Forrest, many local families were able to take loans that helped them survive The Great Depression.

The annual Strawberry Festival in July was once again a record breaking event. We enjoyed a beautiful day at the Bell Hill Meetinghouse, serving over 200 guests delicious shortcake and enjoying the artwork of local artist, Annie Gregoire. Make sure to add us to your calendar for this year!

We were joined by talented musician, Katherine Rhoda, in August, learning more about Otisfield's Granges and the songs that would have been popular and performed at them. Even Forrest Edwards attended a local grange and performed music!

October saw the return of one of our most popular events with a tour of the South Otisfield Cemetery in Dunkertown. Many friends braved the cold and wind with us as they learned more about the history of South Otisfield and those who were laid to rest within the Cemetery itself.

Things are not slowing down for 2025! We are in the planning stages for many programs this season, including a visit from Dr. Barry Rodrigue, an archaeologist who conducted a study last fall right in Otisfield! We also hope to be joined by Anne Fritts, current owner of Camp Arcadia, as she presents the

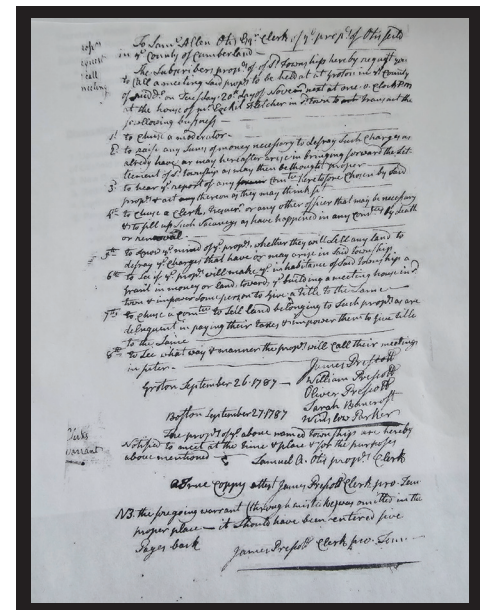
history of the camp, opened by her grandfather many seasons ago. The Strawberry Festival will return again at Bell Hill Meetinghouse, be prepared to have lots of room for our decadent Strawberry Shortcake! We also have other potential programs planned, so make sure you are signed up for our emails!

PROPRIETORS RECORD BOOK

Did you know that the original Proprietors Record Book is currently stored in the Otisfield Town Office? The 157 page volume, which dates to the very beginning of our town, has been meticulously scanned by Janet Gastil, daughter of Dr. Hankins, assisted by Dave Hyer, Jim Howard, and Jean. It took her less than 2 hours to accomplish this feat! The next undertaking will see Dr. Hankins take the time to go over this volume and attempt a transcription.

Within the pages, you'll find the records of the first meetings of the Proprietors of Otisfield, held in a tavern in the late 1700's. By 1773, all of the 21 Proprietor's, who had never stepped foot in Otisfield, had sold out of their investment in the town. By 1783, fourteen families had braved the journey to become settlers in the wild woodlands of Western Maine.

Those interested in digital copies of the original Proprietors Record Book can reach out to us via email at otisfieldhistorical@gmail.com. Until a full transcript is complete, the task of deciphering the original 18th century text will be up to you!



A page from the original 18th Century Proprietors Book, now fully scanned and soon to be available to the public

MEMORIALIZING GEORGE PEIRCE



Dr. Jean Hankins reads the history of Otisfield's founder, George Peirce, at the dedication for his gravestone behind his former home in Naples

In September of last year, members from our board of directors joined members of the Naples Historical Society as they dedicated the gravestone placed in honor of George Peirce, founder of Otisfield and present-day Naples. His masterfully constructed home still stands on Rt. 302 in Naples and the gravestone sits at his suspected grave site behind the privately owned home. Dr. Jean Hankins was on hand to present a short history of George Peirce, excerpts of which are included below. To view the history in its entirety, please visit our website.

George Peirce was the first settler of Naples and also Otisfield. He arrived in 1775, shortly before the start of the American Revolution. He served as agent for a group of Boston proprietors to whom the Massachusetts General Court had given a township of unoccupied territory in the district of Maine as reward for their predecessors' service in the disastrous 1690 expedition against Quebec. That territory now includes the towns of Naples and Otisfield. The man responsible for dividing, laying out, and even selling the new township was this first settler, George Peirce. He was born in Watertown, Massachusetts in 1734. His father, also named George, was, like him, a surveyor and in fact at one time had worked with an earlier group of proprietors whose 1734 grant, it turned out, was invalid because it was located in New Hampshire.

Creating the infrastructure for the new town was a huge job. It involved laying out and building the first bridge across the Crooked River in 1776, thus allowing for the expansion of the new settlement into what became Otisfield.

During all the years of the American Revolution, Peirce spent laying out lots and establishing town lines as settlers trickled in. Although he had little medical training, he also served as local doctor, even setting bones and amputating limbs when necessary. Over the years he acquired several hundred acres of land in the new township.

The citizens of Otisfield continued to look to Peirce to fill the leadership positions in the new town. After that town's incorporation in 1798, he became the first constable and first tax collector. In 1792-3 Peirce built the large brick-ended house a mile north of Naples Village which one historian has called "one of the best houses ever built in this section of the country". About 1945, almost 80 years ago, William Spurr wrote this rather scathing comment on how Peirce's burial site and gravestone had been treated: "Now, George Peirce, the founder of the towns of Otisfield, Harrison, and Naples, lies in an unmarked grave, and it should be a reproach to the people of those towns that he lies there without anything to mark his resting place". Certainly his grave now serves as a lasting memorial to George Peirce, that remarkable pioneer and town founder.



An 1899 picture showing school children in front of the South Otisfield Schoolhouse

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