

Dublin Historical Society

Dublin, New Hampshire 03444

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MEMORIES OF DUBLIN

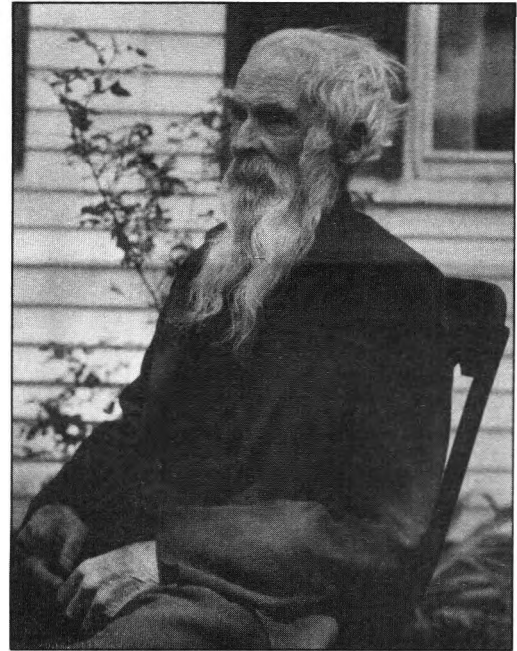
An Interview with Willard Pierce

By HELEN F. McMILLIN

The following is from an article published in The Granite Monthly for October, 1926. It is labeled an interview, and most of the text is in quotation marks, but the interview was conducted before the days of tape recorders, and Ms. McMillin must be presumed to have composed the piece from notes. Still, it reflects the attitudes of one of Dublin's senior all-year-rounders at a time when serving "summer people" was the only source of livelihood in town.

Willard Holt Pierce (1849-1934) was 77 when the article was published. After an account of his career, first as a laborer, then as a journeyman carpenter and finally as a building contractor, the article proceeds:

“I’ve seen a great many changes here,” he says. “I’ve seen old ox-drawn Mexican carts and the finest of automobiles in these streets. I’ve helped to build the simplest farm houses and the finest summer palaces. When I was a boy, Dublin was a simple farming community, a very homogeneous community, too, no rich, no poor, a pleasant quiet country town of about a thousand inhabitants. And today – well, you know what it is like today. If you stand on the top of Monadnock, looking east, you’ll see one acre of land under cultivation where there were five hundred when I was a boy. The population – the year round population, I mean – has



*Willard Holt Pierce, c. 1930.
D.H.S. Collection.*

dwindled to about four hundred – it was over three hundred in 1775 – and we live here almost exclusively on our summer trade.

“I am not saying that the change has been for the worse exactly, though I like to think back to the days when we were all neither rich nor poor here in Dublin. And it hasn’t been a case of the city people driving out the farmer. If the town had never been discovered by the wealthy people as a most ideal place for summer homes, probably Dublin would be little more now than an abandoned town of deserted farms.

“You see, the decline of the farming industry began before our visitors found us; it began before I was born.

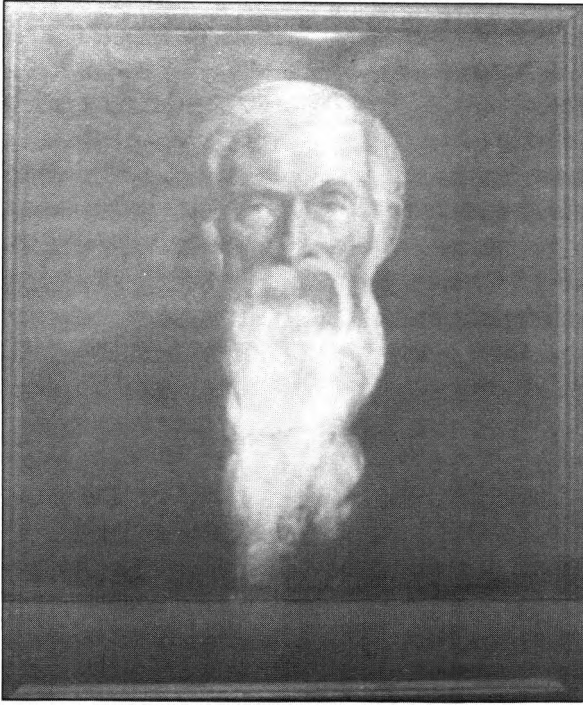
ANNUAL POT-LUCK SUPPER

FEBRUARY 19 – 6:30 P.M.

in the Vestry of the Dublin Community Church

(snow date February 26)

Noted film maker John Karol will show excerpts from his forthcoming TV series on former President Calvin Coolidge.



Willard Holt Pierce – Portrait by Alexander James
Collection of the Thorne-Sagendorph Art Gallery

In 1820, the census showed 1260 residents here; in 1830, 1218; in 1840, 1075. Farming was hard work on these hills and the sons of the settlers were not willing to stay when westward lay fertile, level farmlands which were theirs for the taking. New York first, then the Middle West and then farther and farther even to the Pacific Coast the young people went and the farms of Dublin were left.

“Then there was the railroad fight about 1870. Dublin, except for two districts which now form part of the town of Harrisville, refused to appropriate money for the building of the road and consequently has no railroad station. This would have handicapped the town as a farming or industrial community, though it has been one of its assets as a peaceful summer residence.

Willard Holt Pierce was born in Dublin in 1849 and spent the whole of his life here. Through his mother, Abigail, he was descended from the Greenwood and Gowing families, and so was related to many, perhaps most, of his neighbors. His wife, Ellen Maria Simmonds, whom he married in 1872, came from Massachusetts.

Their grandson, E. Bertell Pierce, was Road Agent within the memory of many current residents.

In 1882 he acquired the house, now owned by Mary G. Doyle, on the northeast corner of Main Street and Monument Road, remaining there until his death in 1934. Pierce served the Town as Selectman in 1874, 1888 and 1889,

as State Representative in the 1918-19 legislature, and as delegate to the N.H. Constitutional Convention in 1912.

At the time of the *Granite Monthly* interview, he was a widower and apparently looked upon as something of a sage, an image he promoted by growing the luxuriant beard for which he was famous.

“Yes, the business and industry of Dublin would have gone even if the summer folks had never come.

“When did they begin to come? I don’t suppose I can answer that exactly. Some of the people up around the Lake took boarders when I was a boy. But I always think that the first of our summer residents was Professor Lewis B. Monroe of Boston. He came here about fifty-five years ago, I remember. He was a teacher of elocution and he and his family used to spend their summers in Center Harbor. One summer, he happened to stop over night in Dublin on his way home and he was so delighted with it that he bought some property and built himself a house. I remember his saying to me about that time: ‘It’s funny, you know, I’ve a wife and five little girls, and I have no home.’ Dublin was always home to the family.

“Of course, others came almost as soon as Professor Monroe. Friends of his from Boston, first, and for a long time our summer colony was almost all Bostonians. Then they began to come from New York and Philadelphia, then from farther west. I suppose we have more people here now from St. Louis than from any other one city. I don’t need to tell you what fine people have come here at one time or another – people like Colonel Higginson, Secretary Hitchcock, General Crowninshield, Abbott Thayer, George de Forest Brush. I don’t know where you could find a more distinguished list of summer residents.

“But here’s a funny thing about it all,” Mr. Pierce said thoughtfully. “So many times the children of people who have built beautiful places here don’t seem to care for them at all. Not always, by any means, for some of our families have been spending summers here for several generations. But very often the second generation wants to move on. It’s like what happened to the farmer’s sons a hundred years ago. I wonder sometimes, when I stand on the top of Monadnock and look over the valley, whether sometime the cycle will be completed. It’s just nature, you know. The land, which was tired out a hundred years ago with planting and cultivating, has had a long rest. It is growing up to timber, valuable timber,

now. And some day, perhaps the land will be cleared again, the timber cut, and Dublin become again a farming community.”

But whatever Dublin is and whatever Dublin becomes, it remains, according to Mr. Pierce, the one place on earth to live. He lives happily in the house where he has lived for many years, tramps his beloved hills with an energy many younger men would envy, cultivates a garden where peas and beans and beets and carrots and corn and squash and pumpkins flourish with no compet-

ing weeds to hamper them, and scarcely a day goes by that someone does not stop at the door of the little house to talk to the old man of Dublin's history, to listen to his wisdom and wit.

“No,” he says thoughtfully, “It never has entered my head to abandon Dublin. I've been about some. In 1893 I went out to the Chicago Exposition. It was wonderful and I only wished I could have stayed longer. I tried to see the world in 17 days and it couldn't be done. But I was glad to get home to Dublin, even then.”

President's Letter

Do people in very small and isolated places put more value on history than those of us in more sophisticated communities? Is it possible that the less history you have, the more you value it? On a recent cruise to the South Atlantic your ever-conscientious president visited historical societies in some out-of-the-way places: some of them so out-of-the-way that it was something of a surprise to find that they even had historical societies. But they all did, and all gave evidence of lively interest and hard work on the part of a substantial group.

Concern for history need not be an extension of ancestor-worship. **Ascension Island**, for example, has never had a permanent population. The inhabitants are there on limited tours of duty, being about equally divided between U.S. Air Force personnel and employees of Cable & Wireless, Ltd. Nevertheless, there is an active historical society, which has a gallery displaying documents and photographs as well as rooms in an abandoned fort with a well-labeled collection of artifacts, dating principally from the days when the island was garrisoned by Royal Marines.

St. Helena, of course, has quite a lot of history, mainly centering on the years (1815-1821) when Napoleon was interned there, so it is perhaps not surprising that its museum should be of high quality. The population is about 5,000, or roughly the same as Peterborough, and I would rate its museum almost on a par with Peterborough's, which is high praise indeed.

Fewer than 300 people live on **Tristan da Cunha**, mainly the descendants of ship-wrecked sailors. The principal exports are frozen rock lobsters and

postage stamps. It is one of the most isolated spots on earth, with only four scheduled ships calling each year. The arrival of a cruise ship is consequently something of a local event, but there is a fine, though small, historical museum preserving the memory of a past distinguished mainly by hardship.

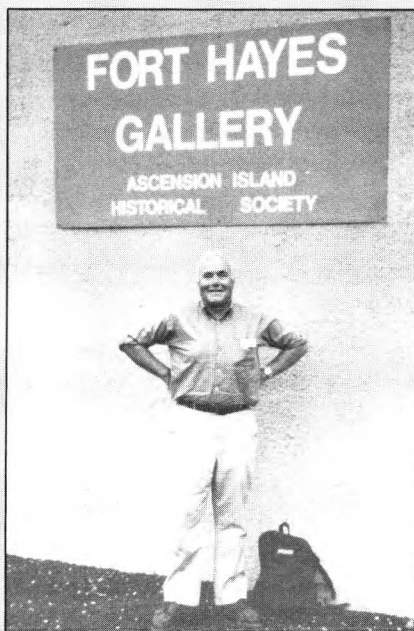
South Georgia, like Ascension, has no permanent population. Grytviken, once an active whaling and sealing station, was abandoned in the early 1960's and now presents a vista of rusting metal and rotting wood. Some years ago it was discovered by Tim and Pauline Carr, who were captivated by the dramatic scenery and bird life, and now live there on their yacht, *Curlew*. As a labor of love, the Carr's have created a museum in which are preserved artifacts from the whaling days, as well as exhibits on the island's wildlife.

Your President arrived at Stanley, capital of the **Falkland Islands**, with a (somewhat tenuous) introduction to Jane Cameron, the Islands' archivist. She had just moved into a brand-new,

purpose-built archives building about three times the size of ours with an array of equipment which would be the envy of any New England historical society. And all this for a population of 2,200 and a history dating back only to the middle of the last century. In addition to the archives, there is a fine museum.

These faraway people, with limited resources, seem more committed to preserving their historical records and objects than the average New England community. Shouldn't we, with our far richer heritage, be doing at least as well?

—John W. Harris



Your President being conscientious

Society News

Recent Accessions to the Archives

Maria Boynton of Ithaca, N.Y. has presented a halftone print of Abbott Thayer's pencil drawing of his daughter, Mary. Mrs. Boynton is the granddaughter of Louis Agassiz Fuertes, a student of Thayer's who became distinguished as a painter of birds. **Richard Meryman** has given us a draft of his article on Abbott Thayer, destined for the May issue of *Smithsonian Magazine*, together with other Thayer materials.

While cleaning out her garage, **Ann Walsh** came across several boxes of papers once belonging to the late Henry D. Allison. Some of these were properly Town records, including a whole file on the publication of the Town History in 1920. Others have come to the Society, shedding light on the Emerald diner and on Henry Allison's Florida business interests, among many other subjects. As the result of a similar house-cleaning project, **Beekman Pool** has contributed a number of useful maps, including a copy of the Dublin page of a Cheshire County atlas published in 1877.

As these examples illustrate, there is an enormous amount of valuable historical material in attics and garages. **Please – don't throw it out, throw it here!**

We are grateful for other welcome gifts from **Nancy Shook Bender, Brantwood Camp, Nancy Campbell, Diana Wolfe Larkin, William Morgan, John Nelson** and **Thomas P. Wright**.

Forthcoming Exhibitions

Exhibitions of the work of two major Dublin artists will take place in 1999.

Beginning on February 26, the Thorne-Sagendorph Gallery at Keene State College will present **Egyptian Paintings by Joseph Lindon Smith**. This exhibit will include a number of large canvases on loan from the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston. These works are from a group of over 150 paintings of Egyptian subjects which Smith executed for the MFA between 1900 and 1940.

Also on display will be photographs and objects from this Society's collection, including a series of photographs taken in 1905 of objects taken from a tomb which Smith helped excavate. Paul Tuller, our Vice-

President, is assisting the Thorne-Sagendorph staff in organizing and hanging this show, which will remain open until August 4.

An opening reception, to which all members of the Society are cordially invited, will be given at the Gallery on February 26 from 5:30 to 7:30 p.m.

Another important exhibition of special interest to Dubliners will be at the National Museum of American Art in Washington (a division of the Smithsonian), beginning on April 23 and running to September 6. Entitled **Abbott Thayer: The Nature of Art**, the show will, in the words of its curator, Richard Murray, "emphasize the underlying unity of his vision and purpose in apparently disparate groups of works: idealized figures, self-portraits, landscape studies and works exploring theories of perception."

A Keene native, Thayer settled in Dublin in 1901 and for twenty years painted idealized portraits of women and children, many of them depicted as angels, as well as landscapes with Mt. Monadnock as a recurring theme. At the same time, he was developing his theory of concealing coloration, which became the basis for the science of camouflage.

In his lifetime Thayer was sought by fellow artists as a teacher. Among the students who spent time with him in Dublin were Frank W. Benson, Barry Faulkner, Rockwell Kent and Richard Meryman. During the past seventy-five years, when any painting with a recognizable subject was automatically despised, Thayer, like his contemporaries, has been underrated. As the cycle of taste turns, however, he is being rediscovered and reassessed.

It is hoped that there will be sufficient interest in the Thayer show to warrant an organized excursion perhaps in conjunction with the Friends of the Dublin Art Colony from Dublin to Washington sometime in late spring or early summer.

C R E D I T S

This issue of the Dublin Historical Society
Newsletter was edited by John Harris.

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