

WILSON MUSEUM BULLETIN

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LIFE AS IT WAS

Around 1857-8 two young brothers, Rufus and Alvin Ames, journeyed from the Midwest to join their mother and aunt who had recently settled in Castine. They and their parents, Valentine and Sabra Coombs Ames, had left Maine, in 1844, to settle in Illinois. The boys' paternal grandparents had left Maine earlier to join the Mormon Church and lived near Nuavoo, a city founded by the thousands of Mormons who were ordered out of Missouri in 1838. Shortly after the young family arrived in Illinois the grandparents sold their property and moved into Nuavoo. It was an unfortunate move for the Mormons soon left for Salt Lake City and the grandparents, still raising a family, were left homeless and with little money. Valentine gave over his land claim and log house to his parents and, from then on, the young Ames family was fraught with a series of unsuccessful attempts to relocate. The last endeavor took the boys into Black Swamps situated across the river from Toledo, Ohio. There they lived for five years while their father earned a good income of three to four dollars a day making staves. Then, the cholera raged in its worst form and Valentine, staying behind to nurse the sick, sent his family to live with the boys' aunt, Hannah Whilley, in Kirkland, Ohio. When they returned to Black Swamps it appeared as if everything had been deserted for years. That fall their father went to Grand Traverse Bay in Michigan to search for work. He had nothing to do with the family thereafter. Spring arrived and, hearing nothing from Valentine, the boys were boarded out and Sabra and her sister returned to Maine. This fascinating story continues with the journal kept by Valentine and Sabra's older son, Rufus Coombs Ames, born in Vinalhaven, Maine, May 13, 1839:

... Alvin and I went to live out and Aunt and Mother come on to Maine. In July Mother sent for us and we went to Castine I went to work on Nautilus Island to Uncle Jessie Coombs a making Fish I had 7 [dollars] per month & stoped there untill late in the Fall. I then went over to the vilage and lived with John Bridges, and went to school. The next

spring I went back on the Island to work. Alvin was living with Lawyer Abbot. In the Fall I went to live with Richard Mccluskey to learn the Taylors trade, Alvin went to live with John Dennett to learn the Sailmakers trade. I staid to Mcc untill the next Fall then I left and shiped in the schooner Magnet¹ of Castine bound to the Bay a Mackerling and while down there we undertook to make a harbor on Prince Edwards Island in a gail and lost her. Six including myself hired two one horse teams and went to Sholotown about 20 miles from where we were Tragedy Harbor. We arived there in the midle of the night and stoped at the Welenton Hotell. We stoped there one week and then shiped on a Brig bound for Boston. The first night out we had a strong breeze and was up all night pumping. When I got to Boston I got aboard of a coster and went home. The next March I went to Gloucester and went 7 trips on Georges Bank with uncle Bigor Coombs and then went to the Bay mackereling. We don very poorly and late in the Fall I came home and the next spring I shiped in the Glendwar² of Castine with Capt. Fredrick Coombs, Jessie Coombs son, and went to the Grand Banks. We was gone about 5 months. I had 14 Dollers per month. The next spring on the E. L. Thompson³ of Castine went one trip on Seile Island Bank. The next trip on the Grand Banks I had 22 Dollers per month. This was the summer of 1860 and during the winter we lived on Main St and I went to dancing School. Alvin was bording at home and working in the Sail Loft.

In the Spring of 1861 the Rebellion broke out and April 25 Alvin and I sined in a Company geting up in Castine to serve three months and we was routed up on the night of April 27 by the firing of a big gun and we assembled at the Jarvis House got brakfast and at sunrise we fell in to march to Buxsport. The Company consisted of 80 or 90 but before we got to Buxport we was reduced to 60. We got dinner at the Roberson House then took the Boat for Bangor, where they had an escort of a Company and a Brass band that afterwards went South with us. We was escorted one mile back of the City to the



Rufus Coombs Ames 1839 -1923

Barcks of the 2nd Maine and we became Co B of the same, our stacion on the extreem Left. Field officers were Charles D. Jameson, Bangor, Colonel Charles W. Roberts, Bangor Lieutenant Colonel George Varney, Bangor, Major John E. Reynolds, Bangor, Adjutant. Ofisers of Co. B. Castine Light Infantry Seth H. Devereux, Captain, Charles W. Tilden, First Lieut, David D. Wardwell Second Lieut of Castine, James C. Collins Order Sergeant. We had signed for three months but got to Bangor the Government would not except us for any time short of two years. All belonging to the Castine Company agreed to go for two years excepting Charles W. Veazie and myself. We went home getting to Castine Friday evening. The next day I hunted up Veazie and told him I was a going back and sign for two years. He said if I would wait untill Monday we would take the Stage for Bangor. It was very lonesome in Castine for all the boys that I cared for had enlisted . . .

The two returned to Bangor and enlisted. Their regiment did not leave for Washington until May 14; Rufus turned twenty-two the day before, weighed 140 pounds and stood 5 ft. 9 inches. His service is a story for another time. Rufus and his

brother mustered out in Bangor, June 1863; Alvin re-enlisted the following February and died, June 23, 1964, of wounds in-curred in the Battle of Cold Harbor.

. . . After I had Lofed a while I enlisted on board of the Schooner Isaac Tonsey, a Revenue Cutter, stationed at Castine and cruized from there to Eastport. I enlisted for one year at \$30 per month but when I had served 21 days I run away from her. I could not beare to be tied up so soon after getting home. About this time I had commenced to go with Miss Sarah Francis Patchen of West Brooksvill. She was living in Castine and working in a taylors Shop and bording with her Grandmother. The first time that I see her was the night of the Ball that was got up for Company B. Just before dark I went after my Pordries and as it was early we went on a walk and when we got to the Fort St George I met Miss Patchen but there was nothing in the atmosphere or in my hart that told me she was soon to be my wife.

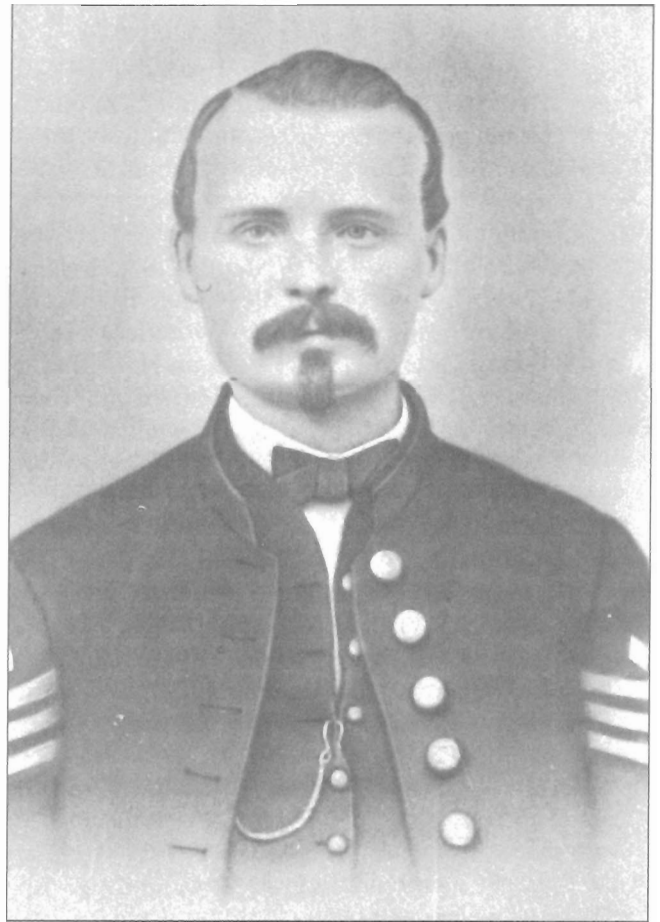
After leaving the Cutter Alvin went on board. While we was in the Army Mother bought a house [now owned by Joan Harris] that stood clost to Uncle Benjamin Coombs house at the South End of the Town and after we got home we bought a Quarter of acker of land a few rods to the Eastard of where it was standing and moved it building a seller the bigness of the house. After that I went to work for Government on a five gun Battery that was being built at the South End just bellow where I lived.

On the 15 of December 1863 John Veasie and I with our Girls concluded to get married and at 7 oclock that eve we met on the shore just below where I lived where there was a Boat hollid up and turned over. There was lots of snow on the ground and it was very cold, we shoved the boat into the water and started for Brooksvill intending to be married at Decators Grays then no one in Castine would know of it. For Quite a while it was customary there to sirenade and taking this cause we should beet the Boys. The River is one mile wide where we had to cross and before we got half the distance the Boat commenced to leak and we had no bailing dish. When we got acrost to Bridghams Island the boat was half full of water, we landed on the bar that connects the Island to the main land turned the water out and hollid her over with the help of the Girls. We then rowed to the bar that connects Moors Island to the main land and hollid over that. Then we was clost to Grays but did not know it. I told John he would have to go Pilot as I did not know where Gray lived. He said that he did. After rowing up Smiths cove about half a mile we went ashore and while the Girls run the Beach down to

keep warm John and I waded over the surrounding Country the snow knee deep in search of Decators Grays. Finding no house we would go back to the boat get in and go a piece farther and then try again. After trying a number of times we concluded that we must have gone by it. We then went back and when we got clost to the last bar we had crossed we found Grays. We went to the door and knocked and soon the bed room window was lifted and Gray asked who was there. We told him who we was and our business. Well gentlemen I am sorry that it is so but my lisince run out two days ago and I have not had it renewed. Although this was very sad news it was very amusing.

We went back to the boat and told the Girls the news and started for home intending to row around the Islands when it commenced to snow and was so thick we could not see but a short distance and we lost sight of the land, and about this time we hered a sirenading party and we thought it was in Castine so we followed the sound untill we got into shorle water, then we see we was mistaken. for we was acrost Smiths Cove and was in West Brooksvill. Then we turned and started for Moors Island. Where we arrived the boat so full of water that we could hardly manage her. We haled the boat up and turned her over expecting that we should be obliged to stop there all night and as there was no one living there it was not a very encouraging thought. but in a few minutes it stopt snowing and we see lights in Castine and we took to the boat again. When I got my girl to her Grandmothers the old lady thought she knew that we was married and she busied herself in getting the best room redy she thought we was bashful. We rested until the 17 of December and then we four went to the Methodist Minister and was married and I took my wife home. A few evenings from that some one come to our door and knocked and when I got there there was no one there but there was a box about one foot square which I carred in and examed. In it was a stock of provisions and some household [undecipherable] a sample of every thing that was needed to eat and accompanied by a letter as coming from parents to their children naming the articles in the box and their use and coushend to be very saving through our lives and lie up something for a rainy day.

Sarah Francis Patchen who became my wife was the Daughter of Robert Patchen of Castine Maine. He was the son of David of Castine. David and his Brother Wheeler came from Scotland. David settled in Castine. Wheeler left there and they never knew what became of him. David married Sarah Jane Dugless and had three children. David Thorp, Robert and a daughter. She died young. David



Alvin Gwinn Ames 1841- 1864

Thorp settled in Castine and raised up a large family. Robert run a way from home when he was 9 years old and went in the Navie where he served untill he was 24 years old. He then came home and married Abie Snowman and lived during his life in Castine and West Brooksvill. They had six Children Sarah Francis, James, Elizebath, Annie, David Thorp and Mary. She died when a year old, James was drowned off the wharf on Nautilus Island when he was four years old. In 1862 Robert Patchen died with a feavor on bord of the Brig Abinor Taylor⁴ on the pasage from the West Indies to Philedelphia and was buried at sea. His wife was living in West Brooksvill at the time and in 1864 married Joel Varnum of the same place and has raised up another family.

In the Spring of 1864 I shiped on bord of the Schooner Cabnet⁵ bound to the Grand Banks. We got a good fair of Fish and got back August 18. Two days after Virginia Etta was born. I then went on this shore one trip a mackereling on the Eler Rose⁶ goin about six weeks and did not do much. A short time after I got back the Town was thurly excited over a supposed attack on the Fort at the South end of the Town . . . to be continued.

FOOTNOTES

1. Schooner Magnet, built in Cohasset, MA, 1829 or 1839; length 59' 4"; breadth 16' 5" ; depth 6' 8" ; tonnage 57 52/95"; owners: James Christian, John and Olive Coombs, Joseph Stearns, George Webb; Master John Coombs.
2. Schooner Glendower, built in Orland, 1840; length 76'; breadth 18' 10"; depth 8' 8"; tonnage 111 74/95"; owners: Charles Cate, Benjamin Gay, Warren Hibbert, William Witherle. In 1855 - William, George H., and William H. Witherle (Castine), James Cook, Charles Bowden, Henry Partridge, Josiah Hill (Orland), Thomas Adams (Boston); Master David Patchin. In 1855 - Josiah Hill (Orland).
3. Schooner E. L.Thompson, built in Surry, 1853; length 60'; breadth 17' 6"; depth 7' 1"; tonnage 64; owners: Joseph Dennett (Castine), Asa Carter (Brooksville); Master Joshua Dodge. Wilson Museum has a fishing journal of two trips on this schooner in 1854, captained first by Hiram Thompson and second by A. J. Tibbets.
4. The Brig Abeona, built in Castine, 1811, for total cost of \$8,528; owners: John Blodgett, John H. Jarvis, Thomas Hale, William Witherle.
5. Schooner Cabinet, built in Essex, MA, 1839; length 65'; breadth 18'; depth 7' 9"; tonnage 80; owners: Alfred and Samuel Adams (Castine), Jonathan Hill, Ephraim Cooper (North Haven). In 1870 - Calvin Leach, Jerome Sellers.
6. Schooner Ella Rose, built in Castine by Alexander Noyes, 1857; length 67.5'; breadth 18.3'; depth 7.3'; tonnage 79; owners: David Patchin, James Weeks, William and George H. Witherle; Master David T. Patchin.

Information taken from "Ships Built or Owned in Castine, Penobscot, and Brooksville" and "Sea Captains & Owners of Castine, Penobscot, and Brooksville," compiled by the Wilson Museum, 1980s.

WILSON MUSEUM

May 27 - September 30, daily, except Monday, 2-5 p.m.

Special programs held on Saturdays and Sundays, July - August

JOHN PERKINS HOUSE, BLACKSMITH SHOP, HEARSE HOUSE

July - August, Sundays and Wednesdays, 2-5 p.m.

Guided tours through the historic home - Blacksmith at the forge.

Fireside cooking - Sunday, July 14 and August 18



Castine, Maine 04421