

# Maine History

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Volume 15  
Number 5 *Issue 4B*

Article 2

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7-4-1976

## When The Fourth Was The Fourth Preface

Maine Historical Society

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### Recommended Citation

Maine Historical Society, . "When The Fourth Was The Fourth Preface." *Maine History* 15, 5 (1976): 197-198. <https://digitalcommons.library.umaine.edu/mainehistoryjournal/vol15/iss5/2>

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# *Maine Historical Society Quarterly*

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Volume 15, Number 4/B

Fourth of July, 1976

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Published quarterly at 485 Congress Street  
Portland, Maine 04111

## *WHEN THE FOURTH WAS THE FOURTH*

It was during the final convulsions of the Nixon administration that plans were being made for this issue of the *Quarterly*. So deeply stained was the life of this nation by constitutional crisis and the Vietnam war that any thought of a cheerful, patriotic salute to the Bicentennial celebration seemed rather grotesque.

Was it only yesterday, or was it a century or more ago that The Fourth of July was an exciting, authentic, and most assuredly *Patriotic* event? We wrote to Dr. Lawrence A. Averill of Wiscasset for help. (It was Dr. Averill who contributed the poem on Wiscasset at the turn of the century for the Fall, 1973 *Quarterly*.) On May 17, 1975, we received the following reply: "You will recall that a year or more ago you expressed to me an interest in having me write for the *Quarterly* another bit of verse that would appeal nostalgically to memories of long-ago Fourth of July celebrations in Maine. The matter intrigued me, as I replied to your note, and, having recently finished a previous commitment, I have been working upon such a nostalgic piece, entitled: *How They Celebrated the Fourth in Sheepscot Village Seventy-Five Years Ago, Thursday, July 4, 1901*. All the incidents included in the verse took place just about as I have indicated. I was a very active boy of ten during the holiday observance; indeed, as you might conclude, it was I who, with a fellow juvenile, got the Methodist bell ringing at sun-up to alert the sleeping village to the dawn of the Glorious Fourth."

We found Lawrence Averill's manuscript as authentic

an historical document as one would likely find on the subject, and we are pleased to share it with readers of the *Quarterly*.

The second item appearing in this issue of the *Quarterly* is a biographical sketch of General Peleg Wadsworth by the late Clifford K. Shipton (1902-1973) librarian of the American Antiquarian Society from 1940, and its director from 1959 until his retirement in 1967. This biography, one of the last things Dr. Shipton completed, appeared in Volume XVII of *Sibley's Harvard Graduates*, published last year. It is reprinted here with the kind permission of the Massachusetts Historical Society, publisher of that distinguished, invaluable series. In this, of all years, it seemed essential that we honor the name of one of Maine's great Revolutionary War heroes, grandfather of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, and builder of the House on Congress Street which the Society preserves to this day. Clifford Shipton's excellent sketch in *Sibley's Harvard Graduates* is the only modern, scholarly account. What is still needed, of course, is a full-scale biography.

The last section of this *Quarterly* is devoted to the story of the capture and daring escape of Peleg Wadsworth and Benjamin Burton from the British in 1781. The chronicler, Timothy Dwight (1752-1817) was a Connecticut clergyman, author, and President of Yale College, 1795-1817. Two chapters in Volume II of *Dwight's Travels* record (in the form of letters) the author's visit with Peleg Wadsworth at his home in Portland. It was there that Timothy Dwight wrote down the narrative as told him by the General — yet another early case of what we now call oral history. We have reprinted these two letters in their entirety.

The original of the silhouette of Peleg Wadsworth reproduced on the cover of this *Quarterly* is still to be seen at the Wadsworth-Longfellow House on Congress Street. It is the only known likeness of the General.