



Sebago  
HISTORICAL SOCIETY

# SEBAGO ECHOES

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## “WE WERE THERE” IN EARLY SEBAGO

Do you remember the “We Were There” books? They were fictional accounts of historical events written in the 1950s and ’60s for children and young adults, featuring an adolescent hero/heroine who just happened to witness some important event. For many young readers, they inspired a life-long interest in history.

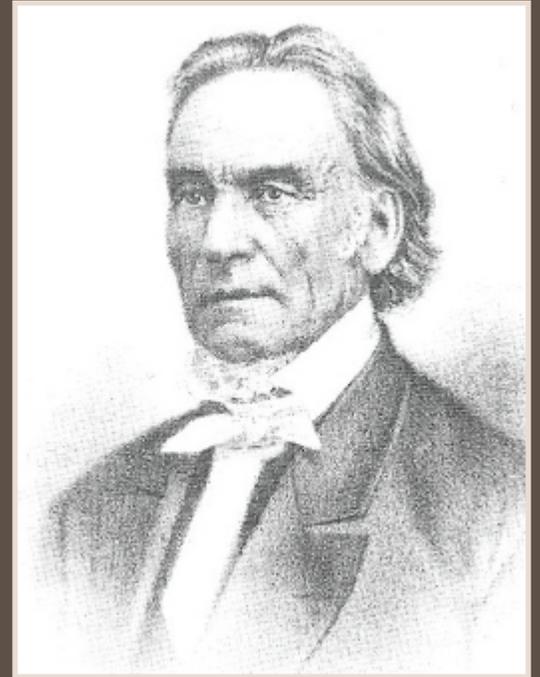
Recently we have discovered a “We Were There” account from Sebago’s early days – but this one is real! A minister named John Stevens, who got his start preaching in Convene in 1821, published his memoirs late in life. In them, he gives us a first-hand look at life here in the 1820s and ’30s.

The book recounts his journey from a Quaker upbringing in Limington, Maine, through his conversion and call to ministry, to a half-century of preaching for the Freewill Baptist denomination. Stevens gave his first sermon in 1821 in a schoolhouse located in the Convene section of Sebago. This schoolhouse, which no longer exists, sat west of the present Convene Church, which was built in 1844.

John and his wife Louisa, with their baby daughter, moved to Sebago in 1821, and settled down in a log house on “a piece of wild land” in what we call Convene, known then as New Limington. He noted that his neighbors were “sparsely settled about us.” We can deduce from evidence in the 1820 census and the Registry of Deeds that Convene then had 62 residents in 10 families: the households of Nicholas Davis, Daniel Dyer, William Haley, William Irish, John Libby, Oliver Pike, John Pugsley, John Shaw, Amos Storer and Francis Strout.

Stevens writes vividly about his first preaching experience. “When the Sabbath came, nearly the entire community came out to see and hear the new preacher. The school-house was nearly full when I arrived. I went in, took the minister’s stand and surveyed the congregation. Among them were two of my neighbors, O. Pike, Esq., and Wm. Haley, the blacksmith. These men loomed up before me as giants. I was on terms of intimacy with them in worldly matters, and they were leading men of business in the community, and thought much of by the neighbors. Had they been out of the congregation, it would have been a great relief to me; but here I was . . . I had not proceeded far before all fear of man was gone, and I ventured to look for Pike and Haley. These men, mountains as they had seemed to me, were bathed in tears, and I lost all fear of them.

(CONT'D P. 2)



*The Reverend John Stevens*

***His book, *Memoir of the Life and Character of Rev. John Stevens*, was published in 1878. It gives a first-hand account of Sebago in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. You can read it at [books.google.com](https://books.google.com).***

## “WE WERE THERE” CONT’D

“I continued to hold meetings in the place on the Sabbath, and sometimes during the week, with good success, witnessing some revivals, and was refreshed and encouraged in my labors...” Stevens and his family returned to his parent’s home in South Limington after living in Convene for a year and a half. He was ordained in 1823 at the age of 22, and then spent “five years as an evangelist, preaching and witnessing the outpouring of the Divine Spirit, and a glorious ingathering of souls.” He mentions that at this

time “my education was very limited, my wardrobe of a course texture, my library small, consisting of a Bible and hymn book.”

During this five-year time frame, Stevens returned to Sebago to preach, baptize and organize the Convene Church, which came together on November 19, 1826. He recalls: “In the midst of the interesting revivals in various towns, I was impressed with the duty of going back to Sebago, where I commenced to preach. I went, and the Lord poured out his Spirit upon the people. That same William Haley was again aroused and powerfully wrought upon. His wife became most earnestly engaged, and was very faithful in duty. He became so much awakened that he finally came to the conclusion that he must either submit to God, or stay away from the meetings. So, to settle the matter, he swore that he would never go to a meeting again where John preached.” Stevens continues this narrative in his Memoir, relating how Haley, when seeing his wife on her way to a meeting, stopped plowing his field and followed her, but “true to his promise, sat on the door-step and listened to the sermon.”

“While I was preaching,” Stevens continues, “a very heavy shower came over us, and in the midst of thunder, lightning and rain, he (Haley) was glad to come in.” William Haley was “hopefully converted” that day and went on to live “a devoted Christian life,” becoming the Deacon of the Convene Church.

Stevens preached and pastored in many places in Maine over the next half-century, finally moving to Biddeford in 1860. In concert with many political and religious leaders of his day, he was opposed to slavery and the use of alcohol. “I advocated from the early days of my ministry, the right of every human being to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, without respect to color...” His convictions being well known across the state, he recounts that he “sometimes called out the hottest fire (from) the enemies of reform. Open opposition and private scheming, with threats of personal violence by anonymous letters, made up of language too vulgar and obscene to appear in print, were addressed to me, declaring what would inevitably be the result of my persistence in publicly denouncing the pro-slavery, rum drinking and rum selling practices of men, thus evidently thinking to spike my guns or drive me into silence. It was quite evident that the enemies of reform had mistaken their man.”

After Stevens’ departure from Sebago, Deacon William Haley led the Convene Church as a man of stature, a giant in the community, for the next fifty years. Stevens commented regarding the circumstances of Haley’s conversion, “I have loved the appearance of a thunder-cloud ever since.” 🌩️

## CURATOR’S CORNER



### WHAT IS IT?

*Our President, Sherrill Brown, metal detecting with Skip Brown near the Tyler Poor homestead on the Northwest River, discovered this iron object. It was later identified as an ice oxshoe or “pork chop.” Oxshoes are wood or iron plates nailed to an ox’s hooves to protect them from wear while hauling heavy loads. Oxen have cloven hooves, so two shoes are needed per hoof. Ice oxshoes have a calk (cleat) on the toe and/or heel to provide traction on ice and snow. Oxshoes are still used today.*

*Metal detecting is a great way to uncover our history! See a demonstration at our Fall Festival on Oct 15th.*

# RECENT EVENTS

## PINK STREET TOUR

The library was packed for Diana Letellier's talk about the buildings on Pink Street and the people who lived there through much of the 20th century. Di, who grew up there and has a phenomenal memory, brought out all her liveliest stories, illustrated with many of her photos. After the talk, despite the scorching heat, most of the attendees followed her up Pink St as she pointed out landmarks from her talk. Her display of photos remained at the library for another couple weeks.



*Sanborn's Store at the corner of Pink St and Rt 114, circa 1930*

## PORCH TOUR: DOUGLAS MT COTTAGES

Another brutally hot day! Nonetheless, we had a good crowd up on top of Douglas Mountain to take in the spectacular views and learn about two of the lovely homes built there during the height of the summer visitor era. A few of the hardest attendees climbed up to the Stone Tower and came back to the cottages panting for water; the rest of us stayed in the cool of the porches, enjoying lemonade and cookies while hearing stories of the two houses. Many thanks go to Andy and Jean Anderson of Breeze Lodge, and Joan Morford of Windfall Cottage, for opening their homes.



*Jean and Andy Anderson on the porch overlooking the hills and Sebago Lake*



*Joan Morford and Di Letellier on the porch at Windfall Cottage*

## OUR NEXT EVENT FALL FESTIVAL 2022

**Saturday, Oct 15, 1:00-3:00,  
Outside at 347 Convene Rd, Sebago**

Coming back at last after a two-year Covid break: our annual Fall Festival! This is a family-friendly event held outside the museum on Convene Rd., featuring hands-on demonstrations of skills and equipments used in former days. We'll be showing spinning, weaving, and the ever-popular sock-knitting machine. Kids can help churn butter or take a few cranks on the ice-cream freezer or the cider press. We'll be showing how to use a metal detector to locate hidden objects around old properties. And much more . . . The museum will be open for tours, and we always welcome any questions about town history! Hope to see you there.



*Scenes from our last Fall Festival in 2019*

## OUR MISSION:

To encourage and promote an interest and appreciation of the history of the Town of Sebago through the collection, research, and preservation of such information, materials, or items and to develop educational programs of historical or genealogical importance relating to Sebago's history.

## MEMBERSHIP FORM - PLEASE PRINT & MAIL

NAME(S)

MAILING ADDRESS

CITY/TOWN

STATE

ZIP

PHONE NUMBER

EMAIL

Your contact information is used only to send you information on upcoming events, volunteer opportunities, and our newsletter.

***Please make checks payable to Sebago Historical Society and mail to:  
Sebago Historical Society, PO Box 59, Sebago, Maine 04029***

Membership Level

\_\_\_\_\_ Individual: \$10

\_\_\_\_\_ Family: \$15

\_\_\_\_\_ Student: free

Donations

\$ \_\_\_\_\_ Thank you for your support!

If you would like to donate an item relating to Sebago's history, please describe it, and we will be in contact:

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*Sebago*  
HISTORICAL SOCIETY

### MUSEUM

347 Convene Road  
Sebago, Maine 04029

### MAILING ADDRESS

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