

## Conway Public Library Art and Artists



"The Soap Maker"

by Benjamin T. Newman

Photograph by David Emerson

Article by Janet Hounsell

Artist Benjamin T. Newman was a native of Bath, ME. He was charmed with Fryeburg's local scenery and became a resident of the town in the early 1900's. He was a faithful draftsman and a skillful colorist and his paintings are realistic and charming. Newman made use of a trailer studio in winter so that he could paint "from life" even in very cold weather. "The Soap Maker," a large work by Newman, hangs in the lobby of the Conway Public Library. Like other taken-for-granted appointments of our day-to-day lives, it is too often ignored, despite the fact that it is a lovely character study which recalls a long-ago, humble, but necessary chore of family life. What is the patient looking, bent-by-toil woman doing, stirring in the big outdoor kettle? And the boy who is feeding the fire with twigs; is he anticipating a meal? Not at all. The woman has probably been making soap for household use

since she too was a child. The general stores carried no row upon row of brightly colored boxes of detergent, no box upon box of dainty hand soap. In order to clean bodies, clothing, bedding and houses, someone in each family had to periodically make soap. All of the winter's refuse fat was saved, along with wood ashes. Then in the spring an outdoor camp fire would be prepared, with supports to hold a heavy kettle, capable of holding perhaps four gallons of liquid. The grease was put in the kettle and a hot fire built under it. Close by, a hogshead would be raised on a platform and the wood ashes be put into it. This would then be saturated with pails of water from the spring to make a strong liquid-lye which could be drawn off from the spigot of the hogshead. The lye added to the boiling grease, evolved into "soft soap" - a strong mixture that had to be used with caution, for it not only removed dirt, but was so potent that it was rather hard on the skin! When "boughten" soap first came on the market, many old-time women thought it was a less effective, watered-down type of cleanser, compared to what they were accustomed to. Although it was not costly by today's standards, it also was what grandma called "dear," so many women of her generation continued to make soap for common household use, saving the bars of dainty white stuff for company. My grandmother poured her homemade soap into a large baking tin and then, when it was cool, cut it into bars or hunks. It was quite a long time before soap flakes were made available on the market, but I also recall when grandma would sliver a bar of homemade soap with a paring knife so that it would dissolve and be distributed more evenly

in her big laundry tub. Newman, who had studied in Paris, had a studio in Fryeburg Village. Its walls inside were "soft tinted steel" and the outside was shingled and stained green. His painting, "Lunch a la Bretagne in Bretagne," was admitted at the Paris Salon of 1887 and is now hung at the Fryeburg Women's Club Library. Sadly, Newman could not make enough money to live on and had to teach at Fryeburg Academy in order to make ends meet. Perhaps we should not say sadly for he must have imparted a great deal of wisdom to his students. If you chance to be in the Fryeburg or the Conway libraries, don't merely pass by the paintings on the walls simply because, like the traditional schoolroom portrait of George Washington, they have always been there. The work of those long ago talented artists deserves appreciation and so, we believe, do lost arts such as soap making!

### **"Willey House & Notch Looking South"**

**by Charles Codman**

The story of Charles Codman (1800?-1842) is necessarily brief, but one of meteoric success as Maine's greatest landscape painter of the 19th century. It is not known for certain where or when Codman was born, although some authorities believe he was born in Portland, perhaps a descendant of Deacon Richard Codman. Others cite Boston or its immediate environs as his likely birthplace. At any rate, it is known that Codman was trained as a painter of clock faces by Simon Willard of Roxbury and worked for a time with Boston artist John R. Penniman, a well-known painter of signs, fire buckets, and military standards. When Codman came to Portland in 1822, he established a small business similar to that of Penniman and soon had a fair reputation as a decorative artist.

Codman maintained his decorative emphasis until 1826 when he was commissioned to execute a large mural for the Elm Tavern at Temple and Federal Streets, an oil work in black and white after the fashion of French scenic wallpaper.

Local critic John Neal, returning from Europe in 1827, was so impressed by the work that he visited Codman at his studio commissioned him to create a similar work, and spoke so favorably of the young artist that many of the community's foremost citizens soon did likewise. Codman's first public exhibition took place in 1828 at the Boston Athenaeum, where he was to exhibit his works on three subsequent occasions, and in 1832 he exhibited at the National Academy in New York.

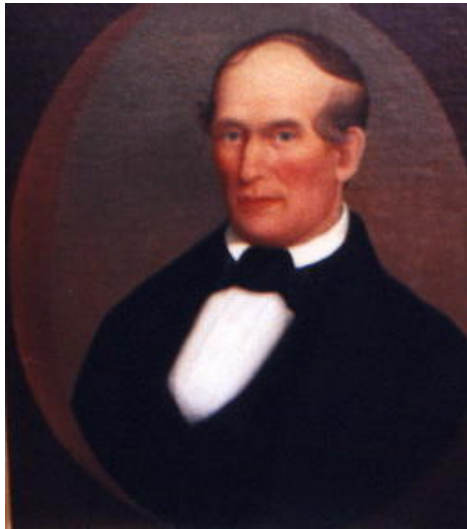
Codman's favorite subjects were the immediate environs of Portland, particularly the islands of Casco Bay. His "View of Diamond Cove," completed in 1829, is perhaps his most famous work and has been reproduced many times. In the mid 1830's Gov. Robert P. Dunlap commissioned him to execute a painting of the capitol in Augusta, but the islands, mountains, and forests of Maine continued to be his most beloved subjects until his death from tuberculosis in 1842. The marker above Codman's grave in Eastern Cemetery speaks eloquently of his achievements: "a Child of genius whose Pencil has earned for him a cherished and enduring Reputation."



**Portraits of Nathaniel Abbott (1796-1863),  
Nancy Lovejoy Abbott (1801-1865 ), & Fanny C. Abbott  
by Albert Gallatin Hoit painted 1831  
1809-1856  
Photographs by David Emerson**

Albert Gallatin Hoit was born in 1809, son of Daniel and Sally Flanders Hoit of Sandwich, New Hampshire. He entered Dartmouth College in 1826. In 1828 the president of the college wrote to Daniel Hoit suggesting that his son be removed from college. Despite numerous problems at college, Albert somehow managed to graduate in 1829. In 1830 he moved to Rochester, New York to pursue a career in the arts. There is no evidence that Albert received any formal instruction or that anyone else in his family exhibited any talent for painting. By December of 1831, he had moved to Portland, Maine and was painting portraits and miniatures. He continued to pursue his career by moving first back to New York and then to Philadelphia, then on to Bangor, Maine in 1835. He finally established himself in Fredericton, New Brunswick, but also painted in Halifax, N.S. By 1837, he was earning enough by his painting to send money to this father. He was painting the prominent people of his era and earning as much as \$200 for a portrait. It is speculated that he wished to complete all available commissions and return home, as he had been engaged to Susan Hanson (1814-1875) of North Conway, New Hampshire for some time. On October 16, 1839, he and Susan were married in North Conway, and then moved to Boston where Hoit set up a studio. He exhibited his portraits at the Boston Atheneum in 1840 and was a founding member of the Boston Artists' Association. In May of 1840, Hoit traveled to Cincinnati, for the purpose of getting William Henry Harrison to sit for him. Armed with letters of recommendation, he persuaded the General to allow him a sitting. This portrait is the best ever painted of the President, and hangs in the National Portrait Gallery. He now planned to travel to Europe, which was an essential step for a successful artist. He spent two years in Europe commissioned to copy some of the old masters as was the expected norm of the era. Upon returning to Boston in 1844, the public attention was focused on the novelty of the daguerreotype and the Boston collectors were now beginning to demand landscape painting. Hoit was acquainted with many of the White Mountain painters, and accompanied them on trips to the mountains. During these hard times he returned to the Maritimes to paint during the summers of 1847 and 1848. It was during this time that he was building a house in Jamaica Plain and Susan

was expecting a baby. His first child, Anna Maria was born on October 22, 1848 in Conway, New Hampshire. His second child, Albert Hanson Hoit was born in 1850 in the new house in Jamaica Plain. An important commission came when Hoit painted two portraits of Daniel Webster sometime between 1850 and 1852. A large full length portrait of Daniel Webster now hangs in the New Hampshire State House after being purchased in 1861. At the height of his artistic achievement, Hoit's health began to decline. His last two years produced little artistic achievement. He died at his home in Jamaica Plain on December 18, 1856. His works were auctioned by his widow in February, 1857, including landscape paintings that were never exhibited. Hoit is buried in Sandwich, New Hampshire beside his father and mother. Susan Hanson Hoit returned to North Conway where she raised her two children. She died in Minneapolis in 1875 where she had gone to visit her married daughter.



### **General Samuel Stark**

General Samuel Stark was born August 18, 1794 and died September 23, 1847. He served in the war of 1812. He married Sally, March 14, 1794 - February 2, 1878.

### **Recent Additions to Our Collection**



A local illustrator, Karel Hayes painted a mural at the entrance to our new children's room.

Karel, a watercolor artist and illustrator has had exhibitions throughout the United States. Her drawings have appeared in Several magazines and she has illustrated more than twelve books, including *Time for the Fair*, and *The Winter Visitors*.

She lives in Center Harbor, New Hampshire, has written and illustrated numerous books.

We feel fortunate that she agreed to design such an inviting wall mural for the entrance to the children's room.

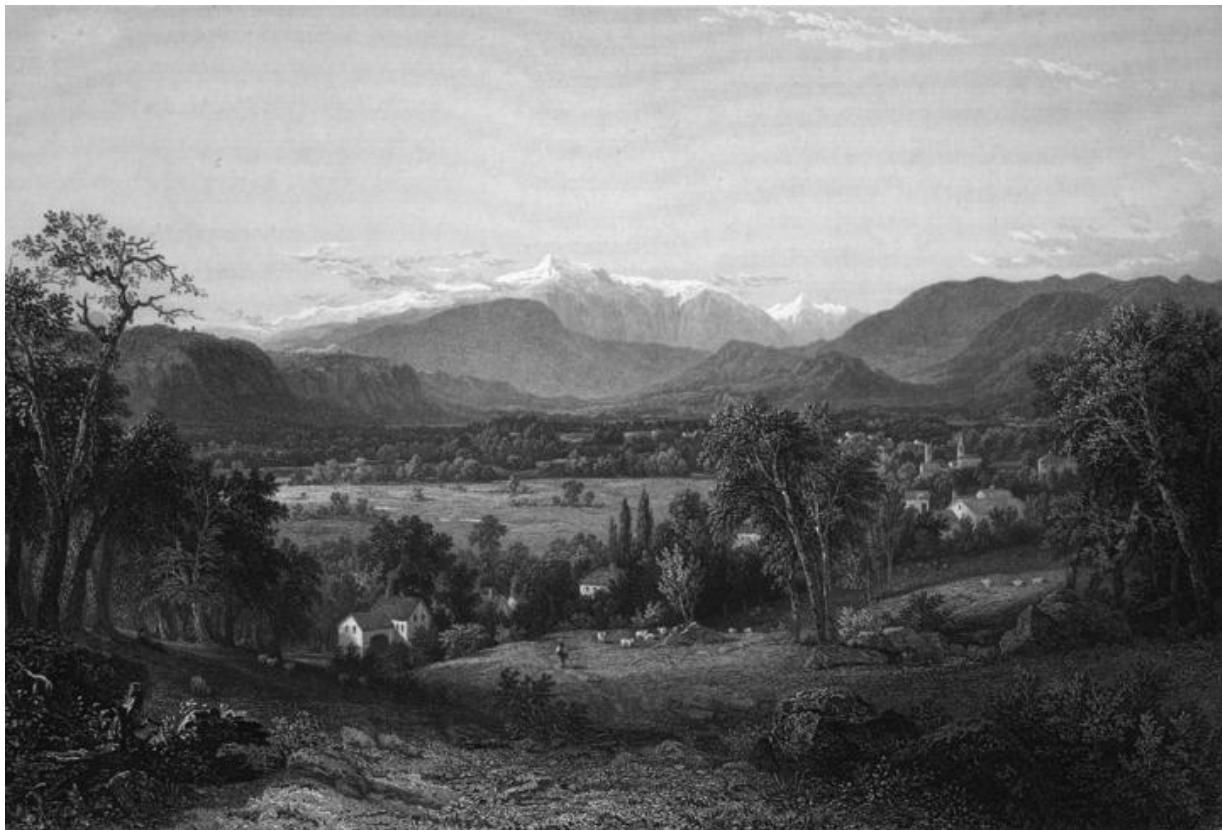
## **J.F. Kensett Photomural**

January

3,

2008

Library patrons can now enjoy a giant reproduction of a familiar local scene as they visit the library's recent addition. A photomural was installed in the stairway landing by Bruce Kennett in January, 2008. It depicts a view painted in 1851 by J. F. Kensett, one of the prominent members of the "White Mountain School" of artists.



It shows a gentle hillside in the foreground, with North Conway village and the intervale beyond, and Mount Washington at the head of the valley, with Cathedral Ledge at the left. The original oil painting is a bit more than 5 feet wide and 3 feet tall; it is now owned by Wellesley College in Massachusetts.

The Mount Washington Valley first became known across the U.S. when a steel-engraved copy of the painting was issued through the American Art-Union in 1851 and distributed to its 13,000 subscribing members. The engraving is in black-and-white, and measures 10 x 7 inches. Other copies of this view were later issued by Currier and Ives and other publishers, further spreading awareness of the Valley.

Former library trustee Bruce Kennett first came up with the idea to reproduce this image at the library. He describes the library as the cultural center of the town, and felt it would be the perfect place to display this picture. The proposed mural was produced through the generosity of several local people and the support of the trustees. First Kennett approached local art collectors Ludwig

and Dorothy Schiessl and asked if they would loan him their copy of the engraving for one day. He then hand-carried the print to Lunenburg, Vermont, where it was photographed on a special Leica art-reproduction machine and turned into a digital file. Next, Kennett designed the photomural to fill the wall space of the stairway, and had the mural produced on a gigantic inkjet printer. John Gotjen and Kennett carried out the installation. Kennett and Gotjen donated their services as a gift to the library and the town.

Although he is known primarily as a book designer, Kennett is also a photographer and exhibit designer. He creates large murals as a specialty, sometimes up to 50 feet long, for clients such as L.L. Bean, Boston College Law School, and the National Governors Association. A few years ago he created a panoramic view from the summit of Mount Washington, for installation in the Observatory's Museum on the summit. It is a backlit color transparency, 48 feet long and 4 feet high, covering 180 degrees of view from due west to due east, showing all of the northern Presidentials. Kennett also designed the Weather Discovery Room on the summit, with interactive exhibits to help visitors learn about moisture, temperature, wind speed, and other aspects of weather atop Mount Washington.