



100

Years Young  
*Oakland, Maine*

CENTENNIAL ★ 1883-1983

# Oakland's first 100 yrs good ones

In celebrating its centennial this year, Oakland is marking the first 100 years of the town's separate identity as Oakland. Actually, the village known for almost 50 years as West Waterville officially separated from neighboring Waterville 110 years ago in 1873, and its history as a small New England settlement goes back to before 1600.

"Oakland, like a woman still vigorous after her fifth marriage, is now known by her sixth family name," begins the town's chapter in the long "History of Kennebec County." Native Americans called the region Tacconet, while the earliest white settlers in the area called it Kingsfield. Finally, in 1771, the area which includes present day Winslow, Waterville, and Oakland was incorporated as Winslow.

Settled as Coombs Mills about 1790, present-day Oakland seceded from Winslow with the rest of Waterville in 1802 and acquired part of Dearborn, which ceased to exist about 1840. West Waterville became autonomous in 1873, and ten years later the town meeting voted to accept Oakland as the new name.

So far the name Oakland has stuck for more than twice as long as any of its predecessors with the possible exception of the pre-colonial version of Tacconet.

In the spirit of civic pride and boosterism the Oakland Centennial Committee and the Oakland Area Historical Society therefore have taken the occasion to celebrate.

"We need to develop and encourage a sense of history among local people starting in the schools," said Mrs. Christine Hillman of the historical society. With the summer opening this summer the society is again in need of additional members to help with the preservation of important local documents and relics.

Water power was the key to Oakland's earliest settlement, and when water power was "brought into the Messajonskee Stream (then called Emerson's Stream) was unrivaled for its vertical drop and year-round water supply. The stream drains some 180 square miles, about a quarter of which is covered by the Belgrade Lakes which act as a series of reservoirs over 50 miles long.

In its initial run through town the water drops 110 feet in two miles. Because of the lakes, it could provide almost constant supplies of water warm enough so that ice didn't form to foul the water wheels, and even flooding of the stores was a minimal problem.

From the founding of Upper Mills by Coombs through the middle of the 19th century there were four dams built across the stream and various industries have flourished and died along the way. Only Cascade Woolen Mill remains, and it no longer uses mechanical water power to run its looms.

The earliest enterprises were grist mills, saw mills,

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The cascade on the Messajonskee, before the power house was built.

## On Page 1

The cover of this special section illustrates several facets of Oakland's past and future:

1. Lombard tractors like this one, built in near-by Waterville, were used by lumbermen during the winter to bring out the wood.
2. Andrew J. Libby's statue stands in the Lakeview Cemetery. He was a civic leader, a politician and a scientific farmer and stock breeder.
3. Lt. Col. William Madison Ayer, show here in an old photo, was a civil engineer and soldier who became manager of the Somerset Railroad, superintendent of the Dunn Edge Tool Co. and president of the Oakland Woolen Co.
4. Oakland's future, students of the Primary/Tapley Elementary School on Heath Street, leave school.



## Credit, where due

All of the stories in this special section, unless otherwise noted, were written by

**Stephen Collins**

who is Oakland correspondent for the Morning Sentinel. We wish to especially thank this list of contributors to the Oakland Centennial tabloid:

Mrs. Clara Watson, Mrs. Christine Hillman, Mrs. Lucretia Gleason, Mr. and Mrs. Clarence Axtell, Lawrence Jordan, Mr. and Mrs. George Putnam, Mr. and Mrs. Eldridge Wallace, Mrs. Helen Agrati, John Libby, Mrs. Evelyn Dustin, Bert Mosher, Ronald Clay of the Maine State Museum, George Pillsbury of Central Maine Power Co., the Oakland Public Library, the Oakland Area Historical Society, Mrs. Pauline Plourde, Alfred Wheeler, Charles Lewis, Michael Denis and the Cascade Woolen Mill.



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and a carding and fulling mill, all of which point to the importance of Oakland's early agriculture and forest products. According to research by Michael Denis, additional businesses along the stream have included a tannery, chair factory, carriage shop, shingle mill, foundry and machine shop, thresher, and various tool and tool handle shops.

Indeed, Oakland was long the "ax and scythe capital of the world" as home of North Wayne Tool Co., Emerson and Stevens, and Spiller Ax Co., all of which were still producing up into the 1960's. More than half a dozen other edge tool shops existed in town in addition to those mentioned.

Though the change away from water power was a gradual one, it was dramatic in the Town of Oakland since the unrivaled water power of the 19th century also is the birthplace of Central Maine Power Co. which dominates the state's electrical grid in the 20th century.

The small generator just upstream from Cascade Woolen Mill, initially the Oakland Electric Light Co., was the first acquisition of alter S. Wyman who eventually formed Central Maine Power Co.

Now CMP owns the remaining dams on the stream and uses them to regulate water levels for generation of electricity at both the original site and Rices Rips station in Oakland, as well as at several sites downstream in Waterville.

From its humble beginning here, CMP has swallowed more than 100 other small formerly independent electric companies in eight decades of growth.

Major industries that remain in town are Cascade Woolen Mill and Diamond International. Cascade weathered some harsh economic times for the woolen industry and emerged as a leader in specialty fabrics, going on to celebrate its own 100th birthday last year. Diamond makes wooden flatware including toothpicks, medical applicators, and floral sticks.

As the small stream-side manufacturers died out up into the 1960's the town population shifted from home-town millworkers to commuters. Agricultural and woods land was subdivided during the 1970's and the population spurted to more than 5,000 at the last census, with many in migrants living in Oakland but working in Waterville or Augusta.



Steve Callings photo

Alfred Wheeler, Ed Pullen and Chuck Pullen, ready for the Town Meeting reenactment.



The First Town Meeting reenactment.



School children giggle as they try out the chair.

## Tramps beware! The chair awaits

If the edge-tool hall of fame or the birthplace of Central Maine Power Co. isn't enough to assure Oakland's place in history, perhaps the notorious "Tramp chair" will.

Invented and produced in the late 1890's, tramp chairs were bizarre constructions of scrap metal fabricated to display and humiliate unwanted tramps — a problem in Oakland because of the intersection of several railroad lines.

The parading of tramps, bums, town drunks, and other se'er-dowels eventually became a New England tradition, and Oakland has been given credit for originating the

idea with the tramp chair.

Details are somewhat inconsistent. One account says that more than a dozen were made, all before 1885, and that they were distributed to various towns. Another account indicates that at least one blacksmith was still making tramp chairs here around the turn of the century.

One example is on display at the Bangor Historical Society museum, and another is said to reside in the Smithsonian Institution. A private individual has a small salarman's sample that has been offered for sale at the local historical society.





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Memorial Hall, as it appears today.

## Memorial Hall reminder of past

Oakland's most visible link with its past is the Memorial Hall, the tall, stone structure located diagonally across from the three churches on Church Street. Built from slate quarried near Cascade Women Mill along Massachusetts Stream, the hall was constructed as a monument for Civil War soldiers from town.

The soldiers' memorial was envisioned as early as 1866, the year after what was known as "the War of Rebellion" ended. Shortly thereafter the West. Waterville Soldiers Monument Association was formed and fund-raising events began.

Like so many small town projects and causes today, public sappers and entertainments were held at various halls around town; land was donated by Guy Hubbard, who lost a son in the war and had two others leading the monument association; and construction was begun in 1870.

An account in the 1933 Oakland Chronicle, a souvenir sheet published by the local Daughters of Union Veter-

ans group in honor of George Washington's Bicentennial, gives George H. Bryant's memories of the project. He recalled that the stone from what was then known as Emerson's Stream was the same type used to build the first Central Maine Power Co. power house just upstream from Cascade Women Mill. "The cost of the hall was \$12,000," he recalled.

The hall was eventually taken over by the Sergt. Wyman Post, Grand Army of the Republic, an organization of Civil War veterans. After a number of years it was deeded to the Town of Oakland with the stipulation that the remaining orders of the Grand Army of the Republic have free use of the hall. The J. Wesley Gilman Camp and Auxiliary, Sons of Union Veterans, and the Sarah Sampson Tent, Daughters of Union Veterans all meet there regularly to this day.

Memorial Hall, which was recently accepted into the National Register of Historic Buildings, was a focal point

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## • Historic

Continued from Page 6

of social activity in West Waterville and more recently Oakland.

The basement area, now known as the post rooms of the GAR organizations and the polling place for Oakland voters, has seen service as the West Waterville Savings Bank, the post office, a garage for an old hand-tub fire engine, the town office, a library, food bank, and meeting place.

The upstairs provided a site for minstrel shows by both traveling groups and local talent, plays, educational Chautauque shows, receptions, recitals, graduation exercises for the Oakland High School (now an apartment house at the corner of School and Water Streets) and many social events.

In recent years the town fathers have recognized the historical and utilitarian value of the Memorial Hall and have overseen some significant repairs while retaining the original structure and character of the building.

At the annual town meeting in 1982 an article raising \$13,000 for repairs to the hall was approved. Work has included plastering, floor refinishing, roof and ceiling work, insulation, and most recently window repairs have been ordered.

As part of this year's Centennial celebration the Oakland Area Historical Society sponsored a Centennial Ball at the hall, which proved an appropriate setting for the catered dinner and big band dance.



This photo of the hall is probably from around the turn of the century.



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# New town museum restoration is coming to end

The opening of the Oakland Area Historical Museum this month is one of the major events of the town's Centennial celebration, but the Macartney House project goes back five years more, when it was saved from destruction by the Oakland Area Historical Society.

When Waterville Savings Bank, now Heritage Bank, bought the lot at the corner of Pleasant and Main Streets to build its branch office, it also acquired the adjacent lot for parking. When it was pointed out that the neglected Federal Cape Cod style house there was one of the oldest buildings in town, bank officials offered it to anyone who would pay to move it out of the way.

Faced with a possible "free" house, the local historical society, formed the year before as part of the U.S. Bicentennial observance, hesitated to take on the major costs of first moving, and then restoring the structure.

When the bank then agreed to do-

nease a lot to put the house on behind the parking area, historical society members took a deep breath and decided to take on the task. The biggest initial job and expense was building a new foundation and moving the old house, complete with its granite chimney supports and brick-lined frame walls.

Raising two modern ells that were not preserved and various other delays held up the move for a year, but it was finally placed on the new foundation by Copp Building Movers in October of 1978. LePage Masons moved the big granite blocks to support the center-chimney.

The project was supported from month to month with private donations, craft shows, bake sales, flea markets, raffles, a debate, CD radio operators' coffee breaks, fund-raising letters, and sales of 1978 maps of West Waterville. The 1978 town meeting donated \$4,000 to the project, and a \$3,000 grant was secured.



An old photo of the McCarty house.

Frequent society and community work days at the site helped get some of the renovation work done. Meanwhile the historical society was busy lining up outside groups to help restore various rooms and provide furnishings for the historic house.

The project got a shot in the arm last year when Mrs. Clara Watson moved to town, joined the society, and took on the task of rekindling interest in the museum project. With the help of Menashaoket High School industrial arts students who volunteered to tear out all of the old plaster and lath, the opening as an early summer centennial celebration event became a reality.

Plestering was completed in mid-May, and historical society officials expected to open at least the living room and dining room completely restored and furnished with ceremonies and an old-fashioned band concert on June 21. There was also hope that some other rooms would be completed.

The building is envisioned as a museum showplace for Oakland, and as a repository for important historical items and documents that have hitherto been taken out of town if they were preserved for public display at all.

The house is believed to have been built around

1815 by Leonard Cornforth, an early Oakland entrepreneur who built carding, fulling, girt, and saw-mills at about the same time. Though it now sits right on Main Street, the house was about a mile into the woods from the settlement of West Waterville, which was located at the outlet of Menashaoket Lake at that time.

The building has been called the Macartney House since the historical society took it over because three generations of Macartneys lived there for almost 100 years up until the 1930's. But since it was built by Cornforth and had many other inhabitants over the years there's an effort also to have it called the Oakland Area Historical Museum.

While many of the original details of the house were covered over in its first 160 years, much of the original survived when partitions were removed and ells demolished.

The center-chimney cape design includes a kitchen with a large cooking fireplace, a beehive oven, and a potash oven for making soap. It has a Greek revival style dining room, a mostly Federal-trimmed parlor, and an original ell built when the main house was built, and probably used as an office or store.

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George Tyler Benson, age 97, at a G.A.R. encampment in Belfast in 1938.

## Private Benson served North, Oakland well

By JAY S. HOAR

Special to the Sentinel

One of the Pine Tree State's last six Civil War veterans living within her borders, George Tyler Benson spent nearly all his 105½ years in Oakland (West Waterville until 1879). His forebears on both sides came out of south-eastern Massachusetts. Great-grandfather Ichabod Benson first brought the family to Maine when he settled in Livermore, to farm there fifty years until his death in 1833. Ichabod's son, Stephen, born in 1777, moved to Buckfield, Maine, where he became a worker in iron, a blacksmith, a nail maker, and a plow maker — the last in smithing — completing seventy-five to a hundred plows in a good year. In 1800, Stephen married Rebecca Cummings. Their children were Seth E., Rebecca, Sewall, Benjamin C., Russell C., Mary, Albert, and George B. Uncle Benjamin was raised by relatives (his parents) and grew up on Paris Hill, where he was a school chum and warm friend of Hannibal Hamlin. Benjamin, Russell and George, "a scythe worker," all made their homes in West Waterville, where Stephen moved to in 1834. He shortly became proprietor of the old Mountgunnery House Tavern at the junction of Belgrade Road and Summer Street (Smithfield Road) on the stage line from Winthrop to Waterville. It is apparent that he trained most of his sons in iron working, for both Benjamin and Russell worked in their father's wagon shop, making wheel hubs, cast blocks, wheel rims and other metal parts. Uncle Benjamin's carriage shop was at the corner of Summer and Church Streets.

George's father, Russell, a native of Poland, Maine, moved with his family to West Waterville in the early 1840's to work at the family trade — carriage-making. Russell had married Abigail Dunbar, daughter of Amasa and

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Nabby Pond Dumber of Sharon, Massachusetts. Although most of their children — Addiside (Mrs. Ephraim) Sawyer, Sarah J., Herbert A., John B., Martin W., (Mrs. Frank) Sawtelle, Edward C., Cora L., (Mrs. Charles L.) Benjamin — were born in Kennebec County, George was born in his mother's hometown of Sharon.

In the Oakland Chronicle (Vol. 1, No. 1) published August 2, 1883, by 55th Street Press, Vol. No. 4, D. U. V. and edited by George's daughter, Louise Benson, appeared his own story, "Some Early Recollections."

Here he wrote of his grandfather Stephen's home being one of the oldest houses in town, and also of his uncle Benjamin's gun Church Street where that uncle operated a wagon shop during 1836-60. Commenting upon his own limited participation in the "Know Nothing" Party (c. 1886) opposed to slavery, he wrote:

*The Know Nothing held meetings in Wheeler's Liberty Hall. They had torchlight parades. Only voters belonged but their young sons marched in the processions. We wore black cloth capes which kept us warm and also protected clothing from the dripping of our torches, which were made of tin. Oil was burned in them. We carried them on poles about four feet long. After a parade, refreshments were served usually cakes and cheese, dry codfish, lemonade or coffee.*

George enlisted at age twenty on April 30, 1861, for three years and mustered June 4th with Co. G, Third Maine Infantry, commanded by Col. Edward Otis Howard. Organized at Augusta, the Third Maine left for Washington, D.C., the next day. They were attached to Howard's Brigade, Hentzschel's Division, McDowell's Army of Northeastern Virginia, until August. In October they became part of John Sedgwick's Brigade in the Army of the Potomac. Before he was discharged for disability (December 7, 1862, Pvt. Benson fought in major contests at Bull Run, the Siege of Yorktown, the Battle of Williamsburg, Fair Oaks (Seven Pines), Seven Days Fight, Malvern Hill, Crockett, 2nd Bull Run, and Chancellery. Though Benson himself sustained only an occasional minor scratch, 134 of his buddies were killed and another 149 died of disease.

It took him nearly four years to fully recover his health, so weakened had he become while in Virginia.

Feeling more like the blacksmith he was before enlisting, George resumed carriage ironing, the family trade, for several years. On December 18, 1869, he married a Windsor native, Miss Susan Elizabeth Pollard, daughter of William and Ora Spaulding Pollard. Their children were Leslie Shaw (Mrs. Herbert L.) Wilbur and Louise May Benson, later a stenographer in New York City. George Benson worked two years for the Maine Central Railroad in their shops at Waterville. He then returned to his favorite work, carriage-smithing, for several years in West Waterville, where like so many towns, a carriage and sleigh shop could be found on almost any street corner. He was appointed postmaster for West Waterville by President Garfield and held this office six years. Wishing to help young boys, he conducted a carpentry class at Good Will Farm, near East Fairfield. In the spring of 1886, George and Susan settled on their farm near East Pond, northwest of Oakland. Here he earned a reputation as an agriculturist. He was for many decades a Mason, belonging to Menoken Lodge No. 113 in Oakland.

He was a charter member of Sergeant Wyman Post 97, G. A. R., a local military unit and today (1983) the finest of the G. A. R. in the country. Its origin lay in the local Soldiers Monument Association, incorporated February 13, 1886. Instead of putting up a statue, Oakland chose to build instead a Memorial Hall and it did so at a cost of \$13,000. In 1887, this lovely structure of stone with brick trimmings was dedicated to Sergeant Wyman Post 97 and in return to whom by the limitations of life they (the comrades) could no longer use it."

Among his charter members was Major Abner R. Small of Oakland, noted today for his book *The Road to Richmond* (1939), chronicling the fate and fortunes of the Sixteenth Maine Infantry. Major Small was himself once a private in George Benson's Co. G, Third Maine. Contrary to Benson's Maine Department Commander, 1883-84, and had in 1929 been National Aide de Camp on the staff of Cmdr. in-chief Edwin J. Foster.

Commander Benson is yet well remembered by a handful of Kennebec County citizens, one of whom is Earl P. Sawtelle, 81, at 327 Summer Street, in Oakland. On the afternoon of April 8, 1982, while sitting down for a chat with Mr. Sawtelle, a 22nd Degree Mason of Menoken Lodge and caustic and unflinching, the writer learned:

*When I was a youngster at the turn of the century, I saw ten Memorial Days marching three abreast, more to fifty of 'em, I'd say.*

*They met at Memorial Hall and marched in a single column carrying an evergreen wreath — most of a mile down Church Street to Sumner (right by here), and over on Helgrade Avenue to Middle Cemetery — and then 1920 on, also to Lakeside Cemetery. They were side by side. The women's auxiliary made the wreaths and the old fellows placed 'em at the graves of departed comrades.*

*The S. U. V. would go up in the morning and put flags on. I went to tell you. It was a moving sight to watch those old men in blue uniforms, white belts, an' black slouch hats marching up'sy's could be. They always led up from — You bet your life! — right behind the band, usually from Waterville.*

*Then about World War I they were maybe 20 or 30 of 'em marching in two's. Just seeing them parading, it hit the spot for me every year. Then, last I saw of 'em, there was perhaps eight of 'em still foxing it over in the late 20's. Last of it, they rode. The sight of 'em — It was mighty movin', I tell you.*

*Fifty years ago I lived across the street on Maple from the Bensons and went to talk with 'em. Talked on current events. Not much about the Civil War, he didn't. They'd sold their East Pond farm — go to be less much by here, no doubt — and moved to their Maple Street home. He was a great hand to read. Had a good head of hair at the last. Had the Boston Post come quite awhile. Louisa, the daughter (also never married) took care of 'em. My wife bought a costume from Louisa Benson they had and it's been my kitchen. The Bensons were buried in Lakeside.*

Commander Benson attended most of the late Maine G. A. R. encampments. The standing of his wife Susan at 86 in 1911, after seven or eight years of marriage, was his greatest personal loss. The oldest Civil War veteran in New England at the time of his demise, Benson was second only to Lyman E. Butterfield, of Manchester, N. H., (Feb. 20, 1863-Nov. 10, 1941), and then only by just four days, in being the last survivor of the Third Maine Infantry Volunteers.

Professor Jay Hoar teaches at the University of Maine at Farmington, and is writing a book about Civil War veterans called *Sunset and Dawn of the Blue and the Gray*, from which this piece is excerpted.

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## Tool shops put Oakland on the map

AUGUSTA — Ronald Clay, Registrar-Curator of the Midway State Museum, has made two major acquisitions missions to Oakland in the last 15 years. One was to salvage records and paraphernalia from the defunct North Wayne Tool Co.; the other a similar trip to Emerson-Stevens Axe Shop during its waning days in the early 1970's.

His sentiments about both projects are identical: "As we learned about the history of the company we wished we had gotten more, but it was one of those last minute salvage operations. I wish we had known then what we know now."

On a positive note though, he's delighted to have saved as much as he did by just getting in on the close of an era in toolmaking. "Usually people get nostalgic about three days after the bulldozing is done," he said ruefully.

Oakland was the scythe capital of the world in its day, and that's what Clay's excitement is all about.

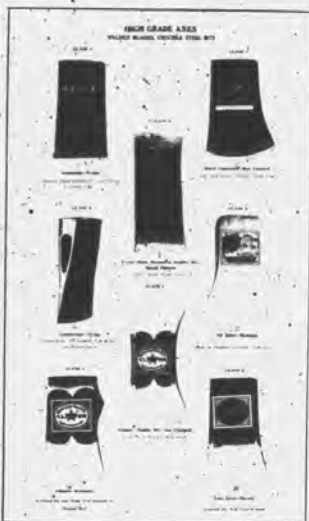
At North Wayne Tool Co., formerly Dunn Edge Tool Co., located just downstream from the Kennedy Memorial Drive bridge, Clay found literally tons of company records, labels, and advertising material, all piled up in the bottom of an elevator shaft. He salvaged a couple of bushels.

At Emerson-Stevens, on the west side of the School Street bridge, Clay got to see the foundry still in operation. Hesitant to save much of the very large, very heavy equipment, he settled for a single trip-hammer about eight feet long which four men have trouble moving. He also took at least a ton of company records checks, bills, and orders which are now in the University of Maine at Orono library special collections department.

"It seems like a small amount, but it's a hell of a lot more than we get in most cases," Clay said.

Why the interest in a couple of moribund and relatively small manufacturing businesses? Because Oakland was a

Continued on Page 13



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Photo courtesy of Lawrence Jordan.

This view of the Emerson Stevens ax shop shows Joseph Jordan at right.

## •Tools

Continued from Page 12

meets among edge-tool manufacturing sites, and because right up until 1972 they were making axes the same way and with the same equipment they had been using for more than a century.

Instead of the modern, mass-production equipment that Clay likens to "cookie-cutters", the Oakland shops used the immense trip-hammers and the seasoned eye of a craftsman as the tools and gauges of the process. That type of "craft-oriented edge tool manufacture" was unique in the country at the time, and now it's gone altogether.

Gone, but not forgotten. The Maine State Museum displays several of the Oakland-made tools, and a larger exhibit with the antique maple and iron trip-hammer from Emerson-Stevens will eventually be set up. Collections of labels and label printing does testify to the scope of the Mesasakonook area operations.

Among the scythes made by North Wayne Tool Co. (whose former office is now the Oakland Town Office) there were 30 different brand names of scythes produced. Each brand could be ordered with seven different degrees of curvature, and each curvature could be bought in lengths ranging from 14 to 46 inches. The firm used to produce as many as 180,000 scythes annually, not to mention bread knives, corn hooks and knives, eight kinds of grass hooks, grain sickles, resping hooks, rice knives, etc.

But the demand is gone for much of these specialized tools. "Scythes are kind of antiquated, if we sell more than two or three a year now, we're lucky," said Steve Blake of Oakland's only hardware store last month.

But if there are no consumers, there is still a small but

Continued on Page 14

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## • Tools

Continued from Page 12

appreciative audience left. Oakland's reputation as an edge-tool capital lives on. Clay explained that people who have recognized that antiquated tools are often better and less expensive than modern ones tend to progress from curious craftsmen to collectors.

"Edge-tool freaks," as he classifies them, are not all that uncommon. There is even an Early American Industries Association whose magazine has published various articles on the famous Oakland toolmakers of yore.

In fact, 20 to 25 years ago an "edge tool freak" stationed at Dow Air Force Base discovered the few remaining manufacturers and made an excellent documentary film, "The Pioneer Axe" at Emerson-Stevens. Though made in the last quarter century, the film showed exactly how axes were made a century ago, Clay said.

"It really is a dream; you can count on the fingers of one hand the times an old industry has been so well documented," he said. The filmmaker, Peter York, went to work for the Smithsonian Institution's industrial technology department, but could be tracked down if there were sufficient interest in his still and motion pictures of the process. "It's too bad nobody did that for the Lombard Tractor Co.," Clay said.

The ax and saw shops along the Menominee are important to Oaklanders because so many have old or deceased relatives that worked as skilled craftsmen in the shops before changes in both agricultural techniques and manufacturing strategies slowly sapped the local industries' vitality.

To a museum curator like Ron Clay it's a fascinating topic because edge tools were so closely tied to both lumbering and agriculture which are so important to the state. It was also an attraction for people interested in edge-tools to see the time-honored, 19th century techniques being used in real ax shops until only 10 years ago.



Shovel handle shop employees line up on Heath Street. They are (left to right): Joe Manter, Fred Perkins, Morris Crowell, Frank Gariand, ? Bridges, Oral Wheeler, Charles Bates, Joe Gorden, ? More and ? Welsh.

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In this old photo, ax shops cluster around the School Street bridge.



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## Scythe shop specialists created tools which epitomized craftsmanship

"The biggest change in Oakland was losing all the ax and scythe shops and the mills. They're just vacant lots there now." That assessment of the town's history came from Mrs. Lucretia Gleason, born 90 years ago at her grandfather's farm on Summer Street.

Advancing technology in agriculture — tractors and mowing machines instead of farmhands with scythes — spelled the end for the edge-tool industries in Oakland. As they retired out during the middle third of this century they left a big void in a small community.

Not only did employment opportunities dwindle, but so did the town's spirit. Skilled craftsmen who used an eye as sharp as the finished cutting edges they produced were left with nowhere to practice their craft. The older ones retired, some of the younger ones moved to Bangor or Connecticut to work in more modern ax manufacturers and forges.

But Oakland was left with its identity and pride damaged and only memories of when it "produced the best possible goods... (in) the front rank in edge tool producers of the world," in the words of the Dunn Edge Tool Co. catalog.

Eldridge "Ellie" Wallace, who lives on Alpine street and turns a well-preserved 90 this year, came to town in 1924 when the plant in North Wayne burned. He began as a machinist and eventually took over as plant manager for 15 years near the end of production at Dunn.

He arrived after the forges had been converted from coke and charcoal to oil, and as former manager can describe all the steps that went into the old process of making top quality edged tools. "We'll

just talk about the welded scythe, of course that was the best," he began.

The process began by welding several pieces of steel together. A hard, high-carbon edge was sandwiched between a folded piece of loopy steel, and the "slugs" was heated up and hammered together for a complete weld.

Hinge trip hammers were used to provide the welding blows. If a spot didn't bind together it would blister and if a spot got hit twice it would be thin and weak... either condition would spoil the slug.

Forging out the blade was the second operation. It was called planing. Platers would move the blade back and forth under another trip hammer to spread the hard metal out into the proper shape and taper. "You could always tell when they started up, even up here on Alpine Street, by the noise from those hammers."

The next step was rolling the blade to distribute the metal to where it was needed. It began to take shape with a heavy heat and a tapered blade. Rolling also determined the weight and stiffness of the blade. It was perhaps the most skilled of the operations, Wallace said.

Forgers took the rolled blade and brought out the blade, leaving the back its original thickness and giving the blade the proper curve. "He really gave the scythe its form."

The next step, finishing, was really a misnomer—Wallace said. The metal was heated again so that the back could be turned up. A heat turner then took the straight long and bent it up so the blade would fit a scythe snath (handle.)



Eldridge Wallace adjusts a scythe blade to the snath.

Continued on Page 17

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The correct position for scything.

Continued from Page 18

Heat treating hardened and tempered the blade so it would hold an edge. The steel was heated red-hot and quenched in a bath of either water or oil to make it hard; then it was reheated in a lower temperature and quenched again so it would hold an edge without being brittle.

Blades were then straightened ("It was all up to the craftsman's eye") and ground on huge grindstones imported from Nova Scotia or Ohio. The stones used were six feet in diameter and 12-14 inches thick. They'd come with eight or 10 on a railroad flat car and the men would move them by wagon to the mill and then roll them down into the shop.

"When we were going full blast here it took probably 15-20 stones a year," for the grinding shop, Wallace said. The 10-inch diameter grindstones now used in landscaping around lawns are just the unsuitable stubs left over from the six foot original stone.

After grinding the blades were then tested for temper, re-straightened, and sent for polishing, painting, and packing. Axes were made in much the same way.

"Of course the business died slowly," recalls Wallace.

Local companies stuck to the old-fashioned methods and refused to modernize. In contrast to the slow, labor-intensive process described here, at a modern, mechanized plant "it

takes three blows to make an ax," Wallace said.

Wallace saw the end coming in Oakland. "If a young man out of high school would come apply for a job Elsie would tell him, 'You don't want to work here, you want something to look forward to,'" his wife Nettie said.

"What killed the scythe business was that people didn't learn how to use them," Wallace said. An inexperienced man would say a scythe was no good, only to have an experienced reaper pick it up and mow a whole field without leaving a spear of grass or hitting an anthill in the process, he added.

Mrs. Wallace said, "When we came to town we had a little old Ford, but not everybody owned a car." People depended on jobs in their own community, and the businesses depended on skilled workers to keep the forges going.

Farmers and woodmen made their livings with scythes and axes, and Oaklanders were proud of their niche in that system. But the business refused to change with the times. One plant was offered the contract to build cranes for a leading chain saw manufacturer and turned it down. None invested in expensive modern machinery.

Oaklanders became consumers, and for those nostalgic about the proud old days as an important cog in the old agrarian hierarchy, the words "nestron community" are mumbled quickly, as if they cause some embarrassment.

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## Getting around

These three photos, taken around 1910, show the diversity of transportation available at that time. The train station, horse-drawn buggies (right, rear) in the bottom photo, the Model T flivver in the top photo, and the horse-drawn sleigh at left, all were used by Oaklanders to travel. Not shown are the trolleys (covered elsewhere in this edition), which were a major means of inter-town travel.



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### Along the stream

The top view of the Messalonskee taken around 1910 shows the cluster of commercial buildings near the cascade, including the old Portland Canning Co. corn shop in the center, just to the left of the rear of Messalonskee Hall. At right, a canoe awaits paddlers downstream.





## Memorial Day

These two views of a Memorial Day parade in Oakland were taken around 1910, with a camera using glass plate negatives.





The waterfront at Alden Camps in 1912.

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OAKLAND

## Lakes tourism another arrow in town's industrial bow

With parts of four major lakes within the town borders it's no wonder that waterfront property has come to play an important role in the economic history of Oakland.

But the industrious townspeople who were quick to exploit the tumbling water of Mousaloussie Stream to power a cluster of manufacturing shops took more than a century to capitalize on the more placid waters of Mousaloussie Lake, East Pond, Salmon Lake, and McGrath Pond.

Initially it was those local people, from Oakland and surrounding towns and cities, that bought pieces of shoreline and put up summer cottages. Old-timers can remember those buildings being there before the turn of the century.

Then the Belgrade Lakes began to flourish, with as many as four big hotels luring apartmenters from cities up and down the eastern seaboard. People came to visit, fell in love with the lake area, and returned in ensuing years, slowly spreading out through the Belgrade region including Oakland.

Entrepreneurial Yankees saw the expanding market and commercial rental camps began springing up. They took the forms of American plan sporting camps that offered cabins with all meals served at a central lodge, or housekeeping camps where guests had facilities to fix their own meals.

At the same time, out-of-state visitors lured by the serenity of the lakes and the legendary fishing in the area began buying land and cottages of their own.

Alton Farm and Camps on East Pond was among the first. If not the first, to bring the sporting camp idea to Oakland. Founded by A. Fred Alton in 1899 it offered a working farm that provided produce, milk and eggs to land guests who stayed in camps that were rented mostly by visitors from Boston, New York, Philadelphia and other eastern cities.

In the early days the staff would cut ice on East Pond in the winter and store it under sawdust in the ice-house to keep perishables cold all summer long.

Continued on Page 28



A pre-WWII shot of the waterfront.

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Alden Camps, today

## •Lakes tourism

Continued from Page 25

Current owners George and Vesta Alden Putnam recall that, "When we took over (in 1956) most of the boats were wooden and people rowed them."

That quickly gave way to three horsepower motors and then to a steady escalation in horsepower as guests wanted to get to their favorite fishing spots faster.

That faster pace that began to materialize mid-century was one factor that spelled the beginning of hard times for the commercial camps. Guests, who no longer took two days to travel from Boston, were mobile enough that they didn't stay for a month or two anymore.

Vacation schedules got tighter, minimum wages were brought to bear, regulations and book-keeping escalated, people started buying their own tents and campers, it was difficult to get the hard work of maintenance and repairs done, and perhaps most damaging of all, property values and property taxes skyrocketed.

With shoreline property officially valued at about \$100 per foot, and market values as high as twice that much, the return on a commercial campowner's equity is not fantastic. Therefore families that have owned the property for years can keep the businesses going and show a profit where someone who bought at today's market value would be hard pressed to recover their investment, much less make a living.

Campowners agree that bookings look good this year, but they also concur with Alfred Wheeler of Wheeler's Housekeeping Camps on Salmon Lake who said, "If we were in it for the money, we'd quit." Wheeler's camps were built by his father, one at a time as needed, beginning in 1921.

John Libby, who built Cedar Camps beginning in 1980 said, "We're just hanging on from one year to the next," in the same breath that he confirmed that "business is great," and he's booking a year in advance.

Continued on Page 27



On the float at the camps, from an old postcard.



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An interior view of one of the cabins, date unknown.

## •Lakes

Continued from Page 28

The current trend shows that when a commercial cottage owner gives up the battle, unless it's passed down to a dedicated family member the housekeeping or sporting camps get split up and sold separately.

That's been the fate of many Oakland camps already. The latest urban twist in the scenario has the camps turned into condominiums. Buyers of the individual buildings also own back land and/or shoreline in common, and a jointly financed association administers group business.

The boys and girls camps, which came along later into the 20th century than sporting and housekeeping cottages, have struggled with many of the same problems and their numbers have decreased. Casualties include the former Camp Low on East Pond and Cedar Crest on Messalonskee Lake.

Among the private cottages on the lakes in the area the trend in recent years has been toward conversions from summer camps to year-around homes. As personal mobility increased and Oakland started to become a town of commuters, some people realized they could enjoy the virtues of lakeside

living year-round while working in nearby cities.

Others have decided to cut the expenses of maintaining an in-town home as well as a summer camp by selling the house, winterizing the camp and moving to the lake for keeps.

That trend caused some concern among town officials and environmental protectors who saw the added activity and pressures on the lakes as a threat to water quality. As a result regulations concerning septic systems and expansion of buildings have been enforced more strictly as local officials have become more vigilant.

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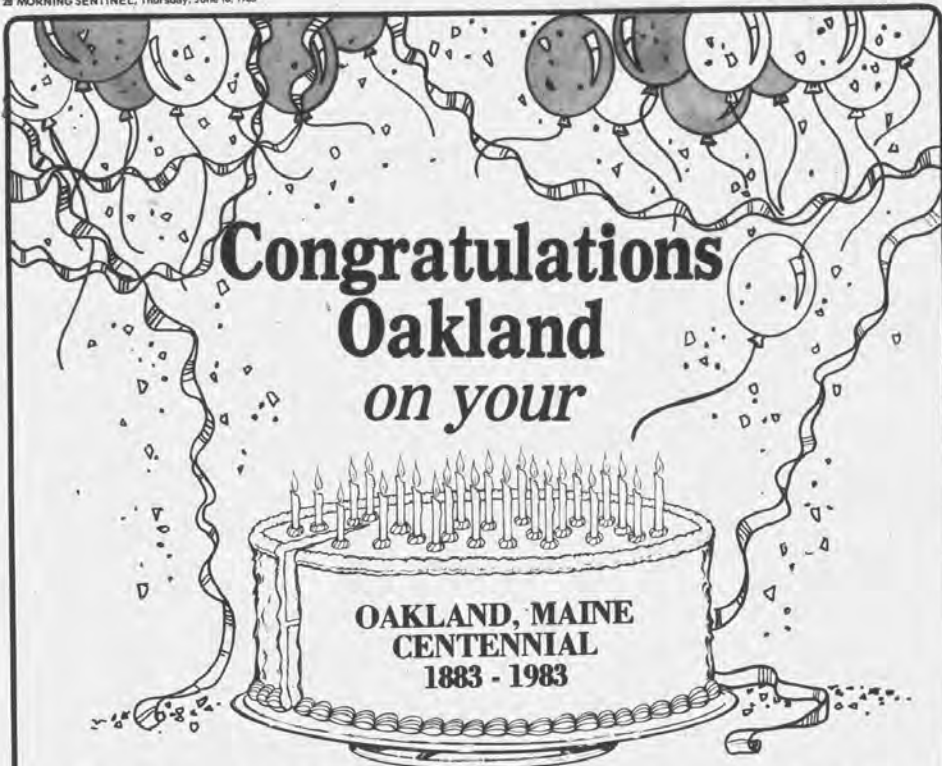
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## When it was trolley time

The electricity we take for granted was often first offered to residential customers as a sideline to more profitable electrical ventures. The Oakland Electric Light Co. was established in 1887 to provide street lighting from dusk to 10 p.m. when the moon wasn't shining, and it also served some residential customers.

Frequently electric generation was first instituted to run street cars. The Waterville and Fairfield Railway and Electric Company was begun in 1892 with a four mile track which replaced horse-drawn trolley service that had begun in 1888.

That company eventually expanded to become the Waterville, Fairfield, and Oakland Street Railway Company, and in 1903 Messalonske Hall was built as a car barn at the end of Church Street on Messalonske Lake. In addition to being the end of the trolley line, the hall was a center of social activity until it was demolished about the same time that rail street-car service was terminated in 1907.

Though Maine had a healthy rail system and Oakland was served by several rail lines, the street car system grew up after the turn of the century as an alternate mode of transportation over a wide area. In 1888 Lewiston, Augusta, and Waterville street railways were consolidated, and Lawrence "Joe" Jordan of Belgrade Avenue can remember riding street cars all the way from Oakland to Old Orchard Beach as a very young boy.

At that time, Jordan said, one could make con-

nections all the way from here to New York City, and that system was preferred by traveling salesmen who saw each little village and hamlet along the way as another selling opportunity.

Jordan's father, Joseph, worked on the Waterville, Fairfield, Oakland system, and in 1877 father and son rode on the last trolley that ran from Oakland into Waterville and made the return trip on the first bus to pick up the transporting chores.

Many old pictures of the Oakland streets show tracks on which the street cars ran, and overhead wires that carried the direct current to power the wheels.

Jordan recalls that kids used to strew wet leaves on the tracks where the trolleys had to ascend the hill on Church Street to see if they could make it slippery enough to stop the cars.

The Messalonske Hall, which dominated the architecture on Sumner Street, had openings at ground level to permit trolley cars in and out of the building, and had a large deck around the second story which was a big dance hall. A steamboat used to operate out of the hall plying the waters of Messalonske Lake carrying picnickers, sightseers, and people going to the campmeetings in North Belgrade.

Two other attractions on the street car line were Cascade Amusement Park just east of Messalonske Stream which offered rides and a picnic area, and the old Waterville Fairgrounds which were located where Seton Hospital stands today.



Messalonske Hall, showing one of the trolleys kept in the lower floor.



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This old photo shows the cascade, surrounded by mills drawing power from its currents.

## Wyman pioneered power industry

The Mousalookne Stream, which provided water power for the industries that made Oakland a leading manufacturing center during the 1800's, also played a major role in the leading power source of the 20th century.

A native of West Waterville, Walter S. Wyman, got together with a little 22.5 kilowatt generator about the size of a bushel basket in 1889 and what eventually became Maine's biggest electric utility was born.

Wyman purchased the 30-horsepower dynamo with his friend and attorney Harvey D. Eaton for \$4,500 from the Oakland Electric Light Co. That company had the contract with town of Oakland to provide street lighting from sundown to 10 p.m. — except on moonlit nights — for \$500 per year. It also covered poles and wire to serve about 100 customers.

The newly formed Oakland Electric Company with its 25-year-old owner was chartered to do business in Oakland and Belgrade. But Wyman's vision was not quite so limited.

With the meager earnings of the Oakland system and his salary as general manager of the Waterville and

Fairfield Railway and Light Co. Wyman was buying land for future power development. When his employers learned of the plan he had to choose whether to keep his job or throw himself into the new and risky venture, and he chose the latter.

At the time electricity was available only to communities that had a convenient waterfall, and only when there was enough water to keep the generator turning. With little reliability or consistency, the electricity industry was merely a new-fangled idea that had not yet proved itself.

Wyman, however, envisioned an integrated system of wires to distribute the power more widely and reliably. He soon abandoned the 22.5 kw generator, strung lines to the Waterville border, and started buying juice from Union Gas and Electric.

At the same time, Wyman and Eaton recognized the potential of the storage capacity of the Belgrade chain of lakes. After a contract was secured to provide the City of Waterville's street lighting, a hydro-station was built at the head of Mousalookne Lake in 1891, and the Mousalookne Electric.

Continued on Page 13

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Many items from the original estate of Col. William Ayer  
offered for public sale for the first time.

Congratulations To  
Oakland  
On Your Centennial Year



Walter S. Wyman

## Continued from Page 22

Company was formed (since the Oakland company was not chartered to do business in Waterville).

A separate firm, the Fort Halifax Power Co., was formed when a dam was built on the Sebasticook River in Winslow to provide power for an inter-urban electric railway in Maine.

A large dam site was being investigated in Bingham (now Wyman Dam) and in 1906 Wyman and Eaton amended the Augusta-Gardiner-Fallowell area. In 1910, 10 years and a month after the Oakland Electric Co. was chartered, the same Central Maine Power Co. was adopted because it better de-

scribed the area served by the rapidly expanding company.

One source also suggests that it was preferable to Messalonskee Electric Company because urban investors wouldn't buy bonds from a company whose name they couldn't pronounce.

In subsequent years (CMP) has grown to be the state's largest electric utility through expansion as well as takeovers of the small, local utilities that were begun during the industry's early years.

In Oakland generating stations were begun at Rices Rips in 1918 and at the cascade just above Cascade Woolen Mill in 1925.

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0911, Main St., Seawport, 246-6341, Mt. Liberty Pl.,  
Bar Harbor, 295-5050.



This old postcard shows the mill with the original fancy bell tower roof.



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# Cascade Woolen: a survivor

Cascade Woolen Mill celebrated its 100th anniversary a year ago because it was incorporated in 1883. But construction of the five story mill wasn't completed, and the wheels of industry didn't spin up inside, until 1885 — the same year that West Waterville residents voted at town meet to become Oakland.

Perhaps the oldest woolen mill in Maine, Cascade's history is a success story peculiar to the area; of about a dozen textile mills that have operated in Waterville and surrounding towns, Cascade is the only one still spinning and weaving. One of more than 100 woolen mills in Maine before the turn of the century, it is now one of about a dozen survivors.

Founded by some local men in partnership with Seth Milliken of Portland, Cascade began operations in 1883 with about 100 employees as part of what became the Milliken textile dynasty. Milliken and Co., with most of its operations in the south, eventually became the largest privately owned industry of any kind in the country.

Cascade's path diverged when a 61-year-old native of Great Britain took the opportunity to buy up stock and take over the mill during the depression. That Englishman was Frederick W. Tipper, then president of Cascade and national woolen sales manager for Deering-Milliken. He had begun work in woolen mills at the age of 14 in his native country, and rose through the ranks after being recruited to work in America's textile industry.



F.W. TIPPER

Tipper, a remarkable man who died at age 90 in 1975, endowed Cascade with lofty standards for both ethics and quality. His son Kenneth Tipper got into the production end of the business in 1926 while the elder Tipper operated in the New York market-place. More recently F.W.'s grandson Gerald has taken over the leadership at the mill.

But three generations of service to Cascade is not restricted to the manager's office. Employees' longevity with the company and the fact that children and grandchildren come to work beside Moosehead Stream is a major point of pride at Cascade.

It's taken more than just dedicated workers to run a woolen mill through the vicissitudes of the last century, however. Employees have gone from 14-hour weeks to two or three 40-hour work shifts; lighting has gone from kerosene lamps to electric lights of increasing quality; equipment has gone from archaic to high-technology; and power has gone from water-wheels to electric motors.

Cascade made it through the depression to be brought back to full throttle by a war-time surge that needed material for soldiers' overcoats. But the post-war technology that brought synthetics and later double-knits took Cascade to the brink.

While other woolen mills were crippled and their pockets re-tooled in their beds and dug into profits could least afford the expensive machinery. The strategy was to specialize, creating a product that couldn't be supplied by the "big boys" of the industry.

After some lean years that tested the owners' resolve, the plan paid off. Cascade was turning out smaller batches of a wide range of styles and weaves, offering top quality wool fabrics to a specialty market. Most importantly, they were keeping the wheels turning — prospering by making themselves invaluable to their clients because of flexibility and quality.

## OAKLAND, MAINE CENTENNIAL ☆ 1883 - 1983

May you continue to prosper in  
the next 100 years!

### New From Dead River Company: The Convenient Fuel Gauge



Imagine knowing the amount of heating oil in your tank without ever going down to the basement...

Have you ever thought how convenient it would be to know how much oil is in your tank without going down to the basement to check? Now there's a way.

#### Provides maximum convenience

The Dead River Convenient Fuel Gauge was designed with your needs in mind...convenience and savings. It's a new remote fuel monitoring system that automatically keeps track of your fuel oil supply. Equipped with easy-to-read indicator bulbs, each lights up according to the volume of oil in your tank. The green indicator means the tank is more than one-half full; yellow indicates one-half to one-third full; and red indicates less than one-third. When the red indicator lights up, it's time to schedule a delivery!

#### Accurate scheduling & improved budgeting

By keeping careful track of your fuel supply you can schedule and plan for your oil deliveries conveniently and to fit with your household budget. If you prefer a smaller delivery, 125 gallons for example instead of a full-up, you can call Dead River Company when the yellow light indicates your tank is one-third to one-half full. This way, you can arrange for a delivery at your convenience and make it a little easier on your pocketbook.

#### Eliminates costly service calls

The Convenient Fuel Gauge can also save you costly service dollars. We all forget sometimes. And if you forget to periodically check your tank you could

inadvertently run out of oil. An empty fuel oil tank means a cold and uncomfortable home. And an expensive service call to get your heating system running again. With the help of our gauge — you should never run out of oil and won't have to worry about preventable service charges.

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The small, 2" x 4" unit can be installed in any first floor location that's convenient for you, including the kitchen, laundry or utility room, and is designed to blend with your decor. Installation is performed by one of our trained technicians. The unit runs on a small transformer and uses very little electricity — approximately less than 3¢ per year. Moderately priced at \$29.50, or \$49.50\* fully installed, the Convenient Fuel Gauge can make heating your home even easier. This price assumes normal installation. For a closer look or more information call us today.

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### Bible class

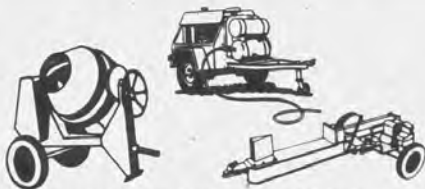
This circa 1910 photo of the Men's Club of the Free Will Baptist church was taken on a glass negative. The Rev. Mr. Garrish occupies the center of the front row. St. Theresa's is now located in the building which housed the church.



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**Catastrophe** We don't know the date or the details, but this train wreck photo is supposed to have been taken around Oakland somewhere.

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### Sluggers

This Oakland baseball team, from around the turn of the century, we'd guess, demonstrates the changes in sports equipment since then.

## OAKLAND, MAINE CENTENNIAL ☆ 1883 - 1983

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# Special Centennial Events

March 10 — First Town Meeting reenactment, with concerts by Williams Junior and Messalonskee Senior High School Bands, 7:30 p.m., Messalonskee High School gymnasium. Sponsored by Oakland Area Historical Society.

April 23 — A Tribute to Oakland with slide show "Oakland Yesterdays," 7:30 p.m., Cascade Grange Hall. Sponsored by Cascade Grange.

May 7 — Centennial banquet and ball, 7 p.m. costume preview, 8 p.m. dinner, Memorial Hall. Sponsored by Oakland Area Historical Society.

June 21 — Dedication of Oakland Area Historical Museum, 6 p.m.; Old-Fashioned band concert with R.B. Hall Band 7 p.m., museum house, Main Street. Sponsored by Oakland Area Historical Society.

June 26 — Choral concert "America Depends on You," 4 p.m., United Baptist Church. Sponsored by United Baptist Church Choir.

July 16 — Street dance, 8 p.m. - 12 midnight, Blake Hardware parking lot, Main Street. Sponsored by Oakland Firemen's Association.

July 30 — Monte Carlo Night, 8 p.m., Memorial Hall. Sponsored by Oakland Sno-goers.

July 31 — Float parade, 2 p.m., Messalonskee Lake.

August 6 — Centennial Parade, 10 a.m., Downtown Oakland. Sponsored by Oakland Centennial Committee with Decker-Simmons American Legion and Ernest A. Rutter VFW posts.

August 6 — Country and western jamboree with live bands and chicken barbeque, 12 noon - 6 p.m., Oakland Fire Station, Fairfield Street.

September 24 — Home and business tour and quilt show. Sponsored by Oakland Area Historical Society.

December 3 — Holiday dance at Memorial Hall. Sponsored by Oakland Area Historical Society.

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