2025—2026 Newsletter

the Sullivan-Sorrento Historical Society

Archives & Museum

Open Tuesdays & Saturdays
June to September
(and by appointment anytime)

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When Wickyup Burned

About 8:30 a.m. on July 17, 1984, Sullivan Fire Chief Frank Dedmon got the call, "Wickyup is on fire!" Sullivan and Sorrento firefighters reached Wickyup on Tunk Lake shortly before 9:00 a.m. to find the building was fully engulfed and the central roof caved in. The building was 12,000 sq. feet of pine logs and there was no easy access to water; it could not be saved. Firefighters turned their attention to saving the forest around the building. Dedmon said it was "the damned hottest fire I ever saw." Four tall chimneys towered over the rubble at the end of the day.

Wickyup was the family retreat of the aviation pioneer and polar explorer, Rear Admiral Richard E. Byrd for over forty years. In April 1983, Richard E. Byrd, Jr., sold Wickyup's 836 acres and buildings on Tunk Lake to Chimney Market Corp., owned by William Berkeley of Boston. Berkeley planned to develop condominiums on the acreage. Other Byrd children contested the validity of the Chimney Market deed and filed a law suit which halted the development. As the suit worked its way through the legal process, tax liens were put on the property by the Town of Sullivan and the State of Maine. Berkeley was desperate for money to cover his investment. On July 11, 1984 Berkeley increased the insurance on the property from $420,000 to $824,000. A week later he came to Wickyup for an overnight visit and he reported that while he was making breakfast, a kerosene lantern was accidentally knocked over by a guard dog. The investigation by the State Fire Marshall proved otherwise.

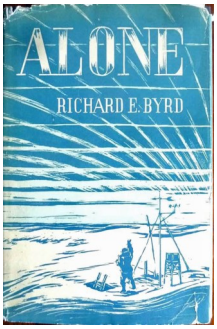
William Berkeley, aka William B. Strong, was arrested for arson, tried in Hancock County Superior Court, convicted, and sentenced to five years in prison with all but 18 months suspended. The conviction was upheld on appeal to the Maine Supreme Court in December 1989. Berkeley filed an appeal to the US Supreme Court. He evaded jail for several months, fought extradition from Massachusetts, citing poor health and his pending appeal before the US Supreme Court. In October 1990 he started serving his sentence at the Maine Correctional Center in South Windham.

(continued on page 2)

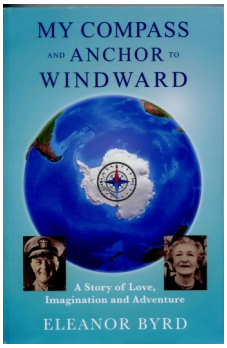
(Wickyup continued)

By 1995, Berkely had completed his sentence and all avenues to appeal were exhausted, so there was no need to preserve the evidence used in court. Town Clerk, Lynn Dunbar, had asked District Attorney Michael Povich what would happen to the large scale-model of Wickyup, the architectural drawings and floor plans. Povich remembered that conversation, and in 1995 those items were presented to the Sullivan-Sorrento Historical Society.

After 30 years in storage, Wickyup now has its own place in the museum. Our thanks to SSHS board member, George Deans, for building a mobile cart to house the Wickyup model, which allows it to be wheeled out to show off the intricate details of its construction. Come see it!



Note: Admiral Byrd wrote *Alone* at Wickyup. It's the best-selling account of his plan to be alone under the snow for six months during an Antarctic winter, and his survival from unexpected equipment failure that almost cost him his life. His granddaughter, Eleanor Byrd wrote *My Compass and Anchor to Windward* in which she reproduces over 40 years of extraordinary letters between her grandparents during the highs and lows of Admiral Byrd's career. Ms. Byrd also tells of the sanctuary her family found at Wickyup, and the elaborate pranks her grandfather always set in motion when the whole clan was there. At the end of the book there is a brief, thoughtful discussion of ADHD, which propelled Admiral Byrd's drive to achieve what people said was impossible.



The large-scale model of Wickyup used in the arson case against William Berkeley in 1984, now on display on a custom mobile cart made by George Deans at the Sullivan-Sorrento Historical Society.

SSHS Board of Directors

President—Gary Edwards
Vice President—Tobey Crawford
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Board Members

DJ Deans
George Deans
Jeanne Edwards
Judy Ashby
Leslie Potashner
Sam Younger
Lynn Dunbar-Murphy

Won't you join us? We're always looking for new board members and committee members!
Email info@sullivansorrentohistory.org

President's Report 2026

The Archive/Museum was open for regular hours for most of the summer. Individual visits may be scheduled any time of the year by calling us at 422-0995 or email at gandjedwards@gwi.net or info@sullivansorrentohistory.org

2025 has been a productive year:

- The annual newsletter was published.
- The annual Hotson scholarship to a Sumner Senior was awarded to Jasper Connor, who is pursuing an engineering degree at UMaine.
- The board of directors met sporadically. We hope to be more regular in 2026.
- Committees continued their work on Programs, our Collections, Exhibits and the Urann House project. All of the committees need additional members.

  Program Committee: Chair Tobey Crawford, Members: Jeanne Edwards, George Deans, Judy Ashby
  Museum/Exhibit: Chair vacant, Members: Tobey Crawford, Cynthia Stanley, Leslie Potashner. Judy has stepped down as chair.
  Collections Committee: Chair DJ Deans, Members: Tobey Crawford, Sam Younger. This committee has been working hard to better organize the collection with emphasis on removing items nonrelevant to the mission. We have an arrangement with a buyer who purchases historical items and that has become a source of new revenue.
  Urann Committee: Gary Edwards, George Deans, Matt Masse, David Eddleman and Tobey Crawford. The committee met in July to map out a plan to get the project back on track. Matt Masse and volunteers did a massive clean-up of the house and garage, organizing things that are useful for the project and removing other materials. The next step is to develop a plan for restoration to best portray what life was like in different periods of local history. I am working on an application to get the property eligible for listing on the National Register and will be pursuing grant funding to support various projects.
- **Finances:** We had a normal year financially with one exception. We received a bequest from Margaret Thurston's estate in the amount of $14,673.74. The board voted to start the Margaret Thurston Fund in our Maine Community Foundation Endowment investment program in the amount of $10,000. The remainder was put in the Urann House fund, a project that Margaret was very much involved in. A bequest of this nature is always welcome.

Winter History Hour programs included:

- January- The Story of Sullivan Falls
- February- The Story of Dora Jones
- March- The Empty Sleeve A Civil War story

Summer in-person programs included:

- June- Dr. Dwayne Tomah Passamaquoddy historian
- July- Stephen Sanfillippo
- August- Denis and Ruth Vibert
- September- Blacksmith Demonstration at the Urann House
- October- Cider Pressing at the Farmstead

Commentary:
The Sullivan-Sorrento Historical Society was formed in 1972 by a group of folks from the two communities, that were once one. The mission was "To collect and preserve" our history. Since that time, dedicated volunteer members have built an amazing collection to make our history available for present and future generations.
S-SHS is in the people business. We offer the community a chance to look into its past and an opportunity to participate in preserving and displaying that past. For the most part the work is done by volunteers. While the membership remains stable, the number of people with time and energy to help with the society's mission seems to be less every year. If you like history and are interested in local history there is always work to be done. There are projects that meet any area of interest, from cooking, to mining and quarrying, to just getting by.

On a personal note, this is my last year as President. It is time for new leadership for the organization. I plan to remain involved and hope to concentrate on the Urann project and other projects.

Gary Edwards, President

Hotson Scholarship Awarded to Jasper Connor

Leslie and Mary Hotson were long-time summer residents of Sorrento who bought land from the town and built a summer cottage there in the 1930s. The Hotson Scholarship, established through a sizeable donation from the Hotsons, and investment and direction by the Board of Directors since, is awarded to a graduating senior at Sumner Memorial High School who is from Sullivan or Sorrento, and who intends to attend an accredited college or university. The scholarship is granted upon completion of the first term or semester of college attended.

Jasper is a 2025 graduate of Sumner and his parents are Tobey Crawford and Michael Connor of Sullivan.

"I'm studying for a Bachelor's in Chemical Engineering, and I've just finished my first semester on campus at the University of Maine at Orono. When I first moved into my dorm and started the semester, the scariest thing was the classes. As an engineering major, physics classes, advanced math classes, and of course, chemistry, are central to your academic career. I've heard from many that engineering majors have some of the hardest classes.
At first, I struggled due to the workload and constant flow of new information and topics being much greater than anything I had in high school. However, as I waded through the new classes and environment, I found my footing. I made friends with other students with the same major, and I learned more about not just the college experience, but also the path ahead.
Chemical engineers usually have careers in manufacturing and work with or in factories and plants. Their job is to work in labs with other chemists and engineers to find the most efficient and cost-effective ways to use compounds and processes to make their product. Since manufacturing is kind of all-encompassing, chemical engineers can work in all sorts of fields, like cosmetics, food and drink manufacturing, pharmaceuticals, and even for the federal government. In Maine, a popular career path for chemical engineers is in pulp and paper production, which is one of the largest industries in the state. I plan to get an internship within one of the local paper companies, and once I get my Bachelor's, be fully employed."

Dedication to Barbara Potter

Barbara Potter

The newsletter is dedicated to Barbara Allstrom Potter, a Sullivan resident since 1986 when she and her husband Bob moved here from Massachusetts. After getting settled, Barbara began volunteering at the Downeast Community Hospital. She stayed there for over 20 years. Barbara and Bob were researchers in this community. They were fascinated with historic places and old families. She spent time at SSHS with Ruth Watson and Betty Hills learning acquisition, filing, and other tasks. Eventually both Betty and Ruth moved on, and Barbara found herself "Keeper of the Material" while Bob became President of the historical society.
Growing up in a family with parents who had emigrated from Sweden, she enjoyed her time with Edna Robertson who shared many of such stories.

During this past year, Barbara has given up a final job with the historical society. The clipping of obituaries and local news in the Ellsworth American for the files has been passed on to others. That doesn't mean she's not interested any more. It's a joy to have a cup of tea with her while going over the old stories.

Communications & Outreach Update for 2025

With another eventful year in the books and another planned, SSHS is on a roll! The winter History Hour series continued in 2025 with a boost from an article in the Ellsworth American. Those programs are available for viewing on our YouTube channel.

This past year, working on the Vibert exhibit and program was an enriching collaborative effort with their friends and family. I developed skills in restoring and editing old videos for the interactive exhibit – skills that will continue to be useful. The program was our largest draw yet, with over 130 attendees and commemorated with a feature in the Ellsworth American.

I truly find such joy in combing through our archives for stories and photos to share with the public on our Facebook page, which now has over 1400 followers. The memories and stories shared by folks there are added to our collective memory and preserved for posterity. I'm also continuing to learn about restoring images and colorizing them to show the past in the way that people experienced it – they didn't see the world in black and white. Now on to 2026, which is the 100th anniversary of the opening of the Singing Bridge. I'll be presenting a History Hour on that in April, and we're planning an extensive exhibit for the summer.

—Tobey Crawford, Communications Coordinator Email: tobey@sullivansorrentohistory.org

Upcoming Events

History Hour Winter 2026 Schedule

Held via Zoom online at 7pm—free to all! To register, visit our website or Facebook page.

January 13: The Maine That Never Was: British Plans for Downeast Maine 1775-1815 with Dr. Patrick Callaway

February 10: The Story of Frank Jones, His Mistress Delana Harrington Curtis, & Rock End Cottage with Sam Younger

March 10: Daniel Sullivan in the American Revolution: Prisoners of War & International Law with Dr. Leslie Potashner

April 14: The History of the Singing Bridge with Tobey Crawford

Singing Bridge Centennial Celebration 1926-2026

Help us commemorate the iconic landmark this year! We are planning an extensive exhibit for the museum as well as a summer program. Do you have memories or stories to share about the Singing Bridge? Family members who helped build it, tend it, or dismantle it? Items or videos to loan?
Please reach out to tobey@sullivansorrentohistory.org or info@sullivansorrentohistory.org

Or call Gary at 422-0995 or Tobey at 266-4448

Dues for the Sullivan-Sorrento Historical Society are being collected for the period of January 2026 through December 2026

Enclosed are my dues as checked:

_____ Individual $15.00

_____ Family $25.00

_____ Life Member $100.00

_____ Donation

Scan the QR code to renew online!

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