the CASTINE VISITOR

CASTINE HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

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THE FIRST *HERMIONE*

David K. Adams

1666: King Louis XIV builds a shipyard: The story of the first *Hermione,* which famously carried the Marquis de Lafayette to America in 1780, really began more than a century before. Coming into his majority in 1659, the French king soon embarked upon militaristic expansion—for territory, trade and glory—all dependent on renewal of his army and navy. In Castine (Pentagoet at that time) we know of this policy, which renewed interest in trade and settlement in French North America when the 1667 Treaty of Breda returned Acadia to France from England. Pentagoet became the capital of Acadia from 1670-1674. Control of strategically located Pentagoet switched between the British and French over many decades.

Louis XIV's ambitions included a shipbuilding boom to contest British and Dutch seapower. Thus a new shipbuilding town, Rochefort, born on the Charente River on the Atlantic coast, rose from a morass through which the river lazily meandered, twenty kilometers from the sea. It was boggy, but far from British threats. A century on, Rochefort had become a pillar of French warship production, supported by a vast local industry of wood-, metal- and fiber-working ateliers who made every part of the ships and could rapidly assemble them in new dry-docks.

The *Hermione* at the naval battle of Louisbourg, July 21, 1781

["L'Hermionedétail du tableau de Rossel de Cercy," by André Béthencourt; detail from the painting "Combat de Louisbourg, 1781," by Auguste-Louis de Rossel de Cercy, Musée national de la Marine, Rochefort, France]

1778: King Louis XVI builds the first *Hermione*: The 1778 French-American Treaty of Alliance, prompted by the 1777 defeat of the British at Saratoga, again brought France to war with England. King Louis XVI ordered four identical frigates to be built at Rochefort: *La Fee*, *La Concorde*, *La Courageuse*, and *L'Hermione* — the Concorde class, each with thirty-two guns (twenty-six 12-pounders and six 6-pounders). They were "light" frigates, of exceptional speed and maneuverability.

(CONTINUED ON PAGE 4)

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A contribution was received for the Society's Hermione 2015 Project

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The Castine Historical Society welcomes these new members:

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Editor's Note: Please feel free to pass along your ideas or requests for articles, along with your comments and suggestions. Contact Wendy Knickerbocker by phone at 326-8205 or email: wknick@myfairpoint.net

For breaking news from the Castine Historical Society, visit our website at www.castinehistoricalsociety.org

The mission of the Castine Historical Society, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, is to collect, preserve, protect, and make available a variety of materials that illuminate the historical development of the Castine-Bagaduce River Area from its beginnings to the present.

The Castine Visitor is published three times a year by the Society for its members and friends.

Wendy Knickerbocker.....Editor

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Castine Historical Society

PRESIDENT'S LETTER

Not to belabor the subject but it is, as I write on February 7, winter in Castine. The temperature has been frigid for at least 3 weeks. Those of us who are lucky enough to live with knitters feel particularly blessed with our ready access to hats, scarfs and mittens. Then there is the snow. It has come about twice per week and those visits were not puny flurries. Although the snow may have come "on little cat feet," the storms left fierce snowdrifts that would scare off a man-eating Bengal tiger. Castine received about 60 inches of the white stuff in 10 days and Eastport received 76 inches!! That's 6'4", which is a good size for a teenage basketball player but is an awesome size for a snowfall. We here in Castine are expecting more snow in the next several days and thank our lucky stars for our valiant public works crews who keep the streets passable no matter how much we get. Finding room to put all the snow that will be plowed, well, that is another question….

With brave, some may say foolish, disregard for the gales and blizzards of January and February, our talented and hard-working staff completed the move into the Grindle House. The collection and our Curator, Paige Lilly, and Administrator, Sally Chadbourne, are all safe and sound in the reconstructed Grindle House. There is something to be said for occupying the new space when the snow is snowing and the wind is blowing. We were all delighted to find that the Grindle House was cozy and warm in the face of the worst that Mother Nature could throw at us. The Building and Grounds Committee and our contractor, Steve Shea, deserve much kudos for delivering a beautiful and highly functional Grindle House to CHS.

The one thing about winter that no one can deny is that spring and summer most assuredly will come. And what a spring and summer is in store for CHS! We now are a two-building "CHS Campus" with activities in both the Grindle House and the Abbott School. The formal opening of the Grindle House as an excellent and faithfully rendered example of a mid-19th-century New England home will be memorable. We all look forward to the full incorporation of the Grindle House into CHS and its programs. The events associated with the Grindle House this summer will indeed be exciting. And then of course there is July 14th.

You may ask, what about July 14th? Yes, it is Bastille Day and this July 14th will be a remarkable one for Castine! The replica of the 18th-century French frigate *Hermione*, a vessel that played a critical role in the success of the American Revolution, will be visiting Castine. The 6 days between July 11 and 16 will be a festive time in Castine, with many activities built around the *Hermione* and its role in American and Maine history. It is expected that this event will attract many new visitors to Castine and CHS. CHS is very proud to serve as the official host for the *Hermione*'s visit. Be sure to be in Castine this summer. You will not only enjoy the festivities of a Castine summer but also you'll see history come alive!

John S. Macdonald

The *Hermione*'s keel was laid in late 1778, and she was finished and out to sea by June of 1779. Remarkable from our view: the new *Hermione* replica has taken more than seventeen years. But Rochefort could then call on 5000 resident artisans and workers, a steady flow of materiel—from the woods of Sweden to the Pyrenees—and the King's treasury.

The *Hermione*'s captain was a local, the son of a Rochefort naval officer. Young but experienced and well regarded, Capt. La Touche put his ship to work on its sea trials, taking six prizes in nearby waters before returning to Rochefort for an unusual upgrade. The "coppering" of her hull consisted of double copper sheet, glued and nailed on, for a smoother bottom, resistant to marine growth and hull borers. The work was perhaps linked to the grooming of the ship for Lafayette's coming voyage, but with clear effect: a speed increase of twenty percent, most useful in her coming campaign, fighting the British in American waters.

1780: Lafayette sails for America: On March 10, Lafayette stepped aboard the carefully prepared and provisioned ship with his entourage of aides, domestics, surgeon and cook to be received by Capt. La Touche. Orders were to reach Boston with all speed but minimum risk—so La Touche sailed nearly straight across instead of south on the trade winds, avoiding most British ships. On April 27, Lafayette came safely ashore in Boston to great acclaim, and he was soon riding south to New Jersey to deliver his secret and critical message of King Louis XVI's substantial aid to General Washington.

In the service of Massachusetts: La Touche then offered his services to Massachusetts. He was asked to challenge the British coastal blockade, but first to sail north to Penobscot Bay, for reconnaissance of the British fortifications at "Magabagwaduce." The enemy was still there after invading the summer before and defeating Massachusetts' "Penobscot Expedition" of naval and marine forces sent to evict them. On a map in La Touche's report, the *Hermione* is shown moored in Penobscot Bay, graphic evidence that the ship was in our waters in May of 1780.

Battling the *Iris*: Turning to his blockade mission, La Touche sailed south, taking several prizes. On June 7 he found his first challenger off eastern Long Island: the *HMS Iris,* a 32-gun frigate like the *Hermione*. The battle was fierce, lasting an hour, with heavy damage and casualties on both sides. However, the *Iris* first broke off and sailed away, but the *Hermione* had sail and mast damage that prevented full pursuit. Later, the captain of the *Iris* wrote to a newspaper in Newport, R.I., claiming that the *Hermione* had failed to re-engage. This brought an indignant response in the press by La Touche, who insisted that the *Iris* had disengaged and left the battlefield. The polemic battle lasted far longer than that at sea.

Rochambeau arrives at Newport: On July 11, the *Hermione* sighted the fleet of Admiral Ternay off Newport, R.I., arriving from France with a fleet of ships of the line, frigates and transports carrying nearly 6000 troops under General Rochambeau: the army promised by Louis XVI. Orders now came from Ternay, and the *Hermione* began coastal patrols. She handled communications between Rochambeau and the fleet and moved provisions, arms and munitions. Overwintering at Newport with a British blockade offshore, the nimble *Hermione* still managed to get out on missions to Boston and beyond.

The first Battle of the Virginia Capes: When in February of 1781 a fierce storm scattered the blockade, a small French squadron sailed to Cape Henry at the entrance to Chesapeake Bay, to deal with British ships supplying the traitor Benedict Arnold's force rampaging through Virginia. When the squadron returned from that successful raid, General Washington asked that Rochambeau send 1200 troops to assist Lafayette's small force challenging Arnold. The larger fleet was sent in March, but this time the British, under Arbuthnot, sailed down from New York to meet the French at the Capes. A fierce battle brought near defeat to the vaunted British navy, but the French still could not safely land troops and returned to Newport. In both actions, the *Hermione* acted as the fleet scout, and was essential to its communications.

Congress is feted on the *Hermione*: The British losses were much acclaimed in Philadelphia. Invited by Chevalier de la Luzerne, the French Minister to the U.S., the *Hermione* sailed up the Delaware and on May 2nd hosted the U.S. Congress and Pennsylvania officials on board. Days later another feast, for dignitaries and wives from the town, was spread by La Touche.

The *Hermione* and the *Astree* at Louisbourg: From Newport, La Touche was soon on patrol again, led by Capt. La Perouse of the *Astree*, a larger frigate, also fast and coppered. They sailed north to Ile Royale (Cape Breton), taking prizes until July 21 when, near the former French fortress of Louisbourg, they found a large convoy of British merchant ships protected by six small frigates. It was late in the day when the French closed in, and the merchantmen were racing for a nearby port. A heavy battle ensued, but in their reports the French lamented a moonless night, with full victory wanting only light for another hour or two. They had to settle for substantial damage done to their prey—but some to themselves as well—and several prizes.

The second Battle of the Virginia Capes, and Yorktown: The famous battle that pitted the French fleet under Admiral de Grasse, up from the West Indies, against British fleets from New York under Admirals Grave, Hood and Drake had the fortuitous planning of Generals Washington and Rochambeau and Minister Luzerne, and equally fortuitous timing in naval movement. The British found de Grasse already in Chesapeake Bay at Cape Henry on September 9. But he emerged to fight and inflict so much damage that the British admirals decided they could not re-engage. Also, a French fleet from Newport carrying siege equipment and troops entered Cape Henry soon after to join de Grasse. The British turned back to New York, leaving General Cornwallis and his army without reinforcements, sealing their fate at Yorktown. Historians were left to contemplate that the last decisive battle of the Revolutionary War had been between the French and British at sea, with most Americans watching—by spyglass at best—from shore.

The *Hermione,* needing repairs in Boston, arrived at the Capes thereafter to assist through the victorious days of late October. But she had had an odd effect on the battle. As she and the *Astree* at Louisbourg had seemed to threaten the St. Lawrence estuary, the British at New York hesitated to commit all forces southward, given threats on their northern flank. Still scouting after Cornwallis's capitulation on October 19, La Touche sighted a fleet of forty-four sail approaching the Capes on the 27th. It was a revived British fleet, expected from New York. Informed that they were a little too late, the ships reset their course for the Antilles.

The *Hermione* returns to France: After a nearly two-year campaign in American waters, the *Hermione* welcomed many of Rochambeau's returning officers on board and sailed for home on February 2, 1782. She reached the mouth of the Charente in only twenty-three days. La Touche soon left the *Hermione* for another frigate, the *Aigle* (Eagle). He survived the French Revolution with his reputation intact and later did much to rebuild the French navy under Napoleon. The *Hermione* went on to serve far afield, even to India, but succumbed in 1793 to serious errors by a pilot near Brest, France. There she went solidly aground and found her grave.

Save the Date!

August 4, 7:00 p.m.

Michael Greenburg's book, *The Court-Martial of Paul Revere,* will be the topic of the seventh annual Deborah Pulliam Lecture, to be delivered on Tuesday, August 4, at 7:00 p.m. at the Delano Auditorium on the campus of Maine Maritime Academy. Mr. Greenburg's book has been praised by many, including Bernard Cornwell (author of *The Fort*), who described it as "Beautifully written, exhaustively researched, and judiciously fair." [See the review on page 9 of this issue.]

Lafayette's Brotherhood

Wendy Knickerbocker

When the *Hermione* sailed into Penobscot Bay in May of 1780, the Marquis de Lafayette was not aboard. However, the Revolutionary War hero did sail into Muscongus Bay, a little south of here, four years later. He travelled in the company of two former generals who were not only his brothers-in-arms but also his Masonic brothers. (As was Capt. La Touche of the *Hermione*.)

Freemasonry, as Masonry was more formally known then, was widespread and influential in colonial America. Most of the group of men we call the Founding Fathers were Masons, including George Washington. He became a Mason in 1752, and he held leadership positions in several Masonic organizations.

Freemasonry originated in the British Isles and was well established in France by 1770. Charles-Francois de Broglie, the governor of Metz, in northeast France, was a high-ranking Mason, and he may have introduced Lafayette to Freemasonry. The governor met Lafayette when the young army captain's company was in Metz for regimental exercises in the summer of 1775. Broglie took Lafayette into his social circle and introduced him to several influential people, including the Duke of Gloucester. The British nobleman, another high-ranking Mason, was travelling through France that summer on his way to Italy. Gloucester was a strong and vocal supporter of the American cause, and at a dinner in Broglie's home he talked at length about it with Lafayette.

In December of 1775, the Lodge Saint-Jean de la Candeur, a Masonic lodge in Paris, listed Lafayette among its members. The next year, through Broglie, Lafayette met the German-born Johann de Kalb, a former French army officer who was interested in fighting for America. De Kalb introduced Lafayette to Silas Deane, an American commissioner in Paris, who gave him a letter of introduction to the Continental Congress. De Kalb and Deane were both Masons.

De Kalb travelled to America with Lafayette in 1777, and they were commissioned as officers in the Continental Army. They spent the winter of 1777-1778 in Valley Forge with George Washington. In camp they met and befriended Philip Ulmer, a young officer from Waldoboro, District of Maine, who served as a German interpreter. Ulmer was also a Mason, having joined a travelling military lodge the previous winter. There were ten such lodges in the Continental Army; they were formed within regiments and met in army camps.

George Washington supported the travelling Masonic lodges, and he often officiated at lodge meetings, especially at initiation ceremonies. A significant number of Washington's officers were Masons, and those officers were reportedly more favored and trusted by their commander-in-chief. At Valley Forge, Lafayette learned about the Masonic lodge there, perhaps from Ulmer. The Frenchman asked to join the lodge and was accepted as a member. Many years later, Lafayette told the Wilmington, Delaware, Masonic lodge that his special friendship with Washington began with his initiation into that travelling military lodge.

After the war was over, in 1784, Washington invited Lafayette to return to America. Lafayette accepted, and in August he visited Washington at Mount Vernon, where he presented his former commander with an embroidered Masonic apron. In the fall he travelled to New England, and he spent some time in Boston with Henry Knox and Benjamin Lincoln. Knox and Lincoln had served with Lafayette, and both of the former generals were Masons. From Boston the three men went north to Portsmouth, New Hampshire.

Knox had significant land holdings in the District of Maine, and he arranged for the travelling party to sail from Portsmouth to mid-coast Maine. Lafayette got a tour of the area's natural resources, maritime industries, and potential for settlement and development. Knox's lands abutted the town of Waldoboro, and Knox, Lincoln, and Lafayette stopped there to pay a visit to Philip Ulmer.

Ulmer had been discharged from the Continental Army in early 1778. He returned to Maine and joined the Massachusetts militia, earning the rank of captain. In 1779 his company joined Col.

Samuel McCobb's Lincoln County Regiment and served in the Penobscot Expedition. Ulmer was wounded in the battle, but he managed to keep his company together in the retreat and led them, along with some other soldiers, through the woods to Camden and safety.

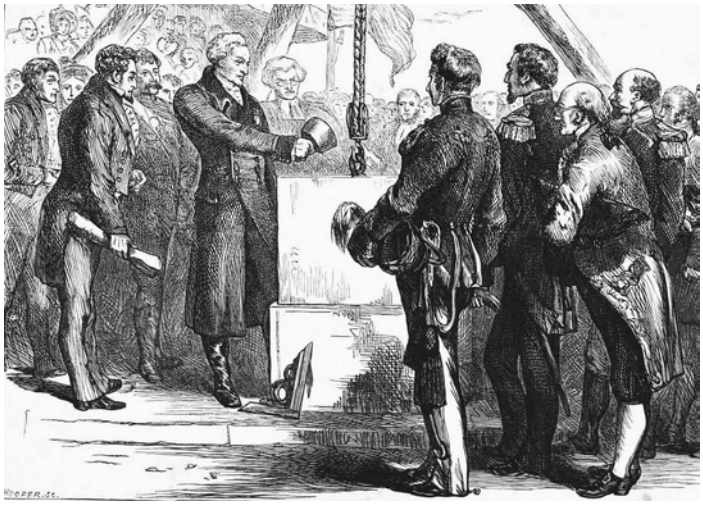
When Ulmer's active duty was over, he got more involved in Masonic activities, serving as Grand Representative of the Grand Lodge of Massachusetts to the District of Maine. In that capacity, he helped organize the fourth lodge in Maine, Hancock Lodge in Penobscot (soon to be Castine). Ulmer was one of the Hancock Lodge's charter members, and he served as Grand Treasurer *pro tem* at its constitution on June 9, 1794. Five years later he was a charter member and the first Master of Amity Lodge in Camden.

Lafayette would return to Maine some forty years later. In 1824, Congress directed the President to invite Lafayette to the U.S. as the nation's distinguished guest. Lafayette toured the country from August of 1824 until September of 1825, enjoying huge parades and celebrations everywhere he went. He also spoke to local Masonic lodges whenever his schedule permitted.

The nation's distinguished guest presided over the dedication of the Bunker Hill Monument in Charlestown, Massachusetts, on June 17, 1825. While the dedication was an important civic event, it was also an important Masonic event. Joseph Warren, the Boston patriot in whose honor the monument was erected, had been a high-ranking Mason. Most of the members of the Bunker Hill Association, the organization that planned the dedication, were Masons, and the featured speaker was its president, Masonic brother Daniel Webster.

Lafayette rode from the State House in Boston to the monument in the company of a large military escort and Masonic delegations from every New England state. The Grand Lodge of Maine sent representatives in full costume, carrying elegant banners. Members of the Maine Grand Encampment of Knights Templar were also there, resplendent in their dress uniforms. Albion K. Parris, governor of Maine (and a Mason), joined the other New England governors and President John Quincy Adams in receiving the procession at the monument site. Lafayette donned a Masonic apron and, with assistance from Masonic officials and according to Masonic rites, he put the foundation stone in place with a trowel and mortar. It was a grand day for him, for Boston, and for the United States.

When he left Boston, Lafayette went north. On June 24 he arrived at the Maine state line, where he was met by two of the governor's aides, both militia colonels and one a prominent Mason. They took him to Kennebunkport for dinner and then to Saco to spend the night. The next morning, the two



Lafayette at Bunker Hill, June 17, 1825
[From *Cassell's History of the United States*, by Edmund Ollier (London: Cassell Petter & Galpin, 1874?), vol. 2, p. 619]

aides escorted Lafayette to downtown Portland, where Governor Parris greeted him and the lawyer and Congressman Stephen Longfellow delivered the city's official address. Longfellow's father-in-law, Peleg Wadsworth, had served with Lafayette and was also a Mason.

A large procession and military escort, with Samuel Fessenden, militia general and Masonic officer, as chief marshal, led Lafayette through the streets of Portland. At the State House, the governor, several members of the legislature, and the president of Bowdoin College received him with welcoming speeches. Afterwards, the honored hero spent an hour or so mingling with Portland citizens before he was escorted to his lodgings. He was met there by a delegation of Masons from the Grand Lodge of Maine. After exchanging greetings and cordial conversations with them, Lafayette visited Mrs. Lucy Thatcher, Henry Knox's daughter. At 4:00 there was a well-attended public banquet at Union Hall, and the evening ended with a party at the governor's mansion. Lafayette left Portland for points south the next day.

Lafayette's relationship with America and Americans was deep and long lasting, and many of his comrades-in-arms and friends were also his Masonic brothers. He visited Maine twice, in 1784 and 1825, and both times he enjoyed the company of Maine Masons. Although Lafayette got no nearer to Castine than Waldoboro, his Masonic connection reached Castine in the person of a fellow soldier who helped to charter Hancock Lodge, No. 4, F. & A.M. (Free and Accepted Masons).

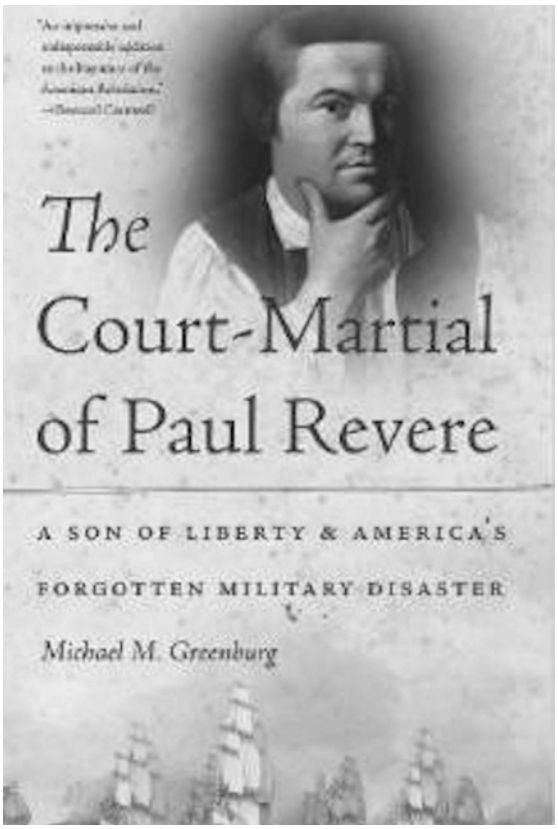
Are You on Board?

Are you on the CHS email list? The Castine Historical Society recently sent out our first email "blast," a letter to the membership from CHS President Jack Macdonald on plans for the *Hermione*'s visit to Castine in July. If you did not get the email, but want to be included in future membership notifications, please send us your email address. Simply send an email to info@castinehistoricalsociety.org. Your information will only be used by the Society for mailings of interest to our membership.

The Court-Martial of Paul Revere

Review by Lynn H. Parsons

It is both interesting and informative to read the online comments about Michael M. Greenburg's book *The Court-Martial of Paul Revere.* Although CHS members are well aware of the Penobscot Expedition and Paul Revere's controversial role in it, most outlanders are not. This book will help them.



Mr. Greenburg is a practicing attorney in Massachusetts who is not new to the historian's craft. His previous books include *Peaches and Daddy: A Story of the 1920s*, and *The Mad Bomber of New York*: *The Extraordinary True Story of the Manhunt that Paralyzed a City*, but neither has attracted the attention and acclaim of *The Court-Martial of Paul Revere.* The Paul Revere who emerges from these pages is a flawed hero: pugnacious, short-tempered, vain, and not always scrupulous about the facts. But he remains a hero nonetheless, perfectly willing to risk his life on many occasions in the patriot cause.

Castiners may be familiar with Revere's troubles during the Penobscot Expedition itself, but they may be less knowledgeable about his actual court-martial and its results, or about his not-entirely-successful attempts to redeem his reputation in its wake. Greenburg provides useful information about the climate of opinion in Boston in the aftermath of the Expedition and the legal hurdles that confronted Revere in his quest for vindication.

The most frequent criticism made of the book, which this author shares, is that it takes a long time to get to the point. The court-martial itself occupies less than one-fourth of the narrative. And Greenburg is not entirely free of some of the dubious legends that grew up concerning Revere and his role in the Revolution. (Did Mrs. Revere *really* tell their children "this is the last cup of tea you will get for a long while" on the eve of the Boston Tea Party?)

But no matter. Michael Greenburg has given us a balanced and well-researched account of a key figure in America's revolutionary past.

Michael M. Greenburg, *The Court-Martial of Paul Revere.* University Press of New England, 2014. 282pp. $29.95 hard cover edition. $24.99 e-book edition.

Curator's Corner

History Now!

Paige Lilly

One of the great aspects of a local historical society is that the members and volunteers can support the mission by pursuing their own historical interests!

For example, through the nearly 40-year history of the current version of the Castine Historical Society, a series of energetic volunteers have sat down with a tape recorder or video camera to interview Castine residents. Gardiner Gregory interviewed people around 1980 and Lois Cyr typed the abstracts. Phil Perkins and others did audio interviews in the 1990s. Another ambitious effort conducted by Carole Barnard, Paul Gray and others took place from 2002-2007. The result is a rich archive of informal oral history ranging from Eva Thombs in 1979 to Phil Perkins in 1988 and Ann Miller in 2011. Look for the most recent video work by volunteer Dr. Kenneth Scheer on the CHS website. The earlier audio interviews will be added to the website after a digitizing project in the coming year.

Ken Scheer, a summer resident of Castine with his wife Ruth, is now retired from a practice of obstetrics and gynecology at the Brigham and Women's Hospital in Boston and from the faculty of Harvard Medical School. He devotes time and energy year-round to video recording and editing "living history" for the CHS archives. His interviewees range from graduates of Castine schools to founders of the Yacht Club to trained historians. The Society provides the equipment and Ken does the rest, entirely as a volunteer project. When asked to contribute a comment for this column, he provided this eloquent report:

> *Advances in technology make it easier than ever before to obtain live information about the history of our little gem of a town. The people I photographed and interviewed have lived through the major changes of the twentieth century. They are distinguished, educated, and highly intelligent reporters and observers of life both within and outside of Castine. It has been a unique opportunity, educational and entertaining, for me to conduct these informal conversations in recent years, and it is a privilege to be able to contribute to the enrichment of the historical collection of the Society.*

Ken has captured and edited 14 interviews and a few historical talks which are available on the CHS website. To watch and hear this 20th-century history, visit www.castinehistoricalsociety.org/collections/digital-media and enjoy!

Dick Hale, in a screen shot from Ken Scheer's recorded interview with him.

CHS Appreciates Your Support

We would like to thank all of our members for your generous support of the Castine Historical Society. Including life members, our membership numbers around 650. Each new, renewed, or gift membership conveys all the privileges of being a CHS member, including a subscription to *The Castine Visitor*, published three times a year.

If you have a change of address, either winter or summer, please let us know. It is important that we keep our records accurate, to insure that all members will receive all CHS mailings. Your support is what makes the CHS and its members, near and far, an active part of the Castine community.

Castine Historical Society

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Thank you for joining the Castine Historical Society, a 501(c)3 non-profit organization.

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"L'Hermione, La Frégate de la Liberté" ("Hermione, the Frigate of Liberty")

[Original painting by Gordon Frickers. Reproduced here with the kind permission of the artist. For more information on this painting and Gordon Frickers' marine art, see: www.frickers.co.uk]