



The *Weathervane*

An Early Fall Edition with the Summer & Fall News! 2024

Voting Information

Voting Nov. 5, 2024, from 8:00 to 8:00 at the Fire Station. Absentee ballots are available at the Town Office during office hours and can be returned either to the office during office hours or the grey mailbox by the steps of the office building. The voting this year consists of three (3) ballots. One for Federal, one for State and one for our Referendums. To view the ballots, you can visit the Town's website at Westgardinermaine.org.

One of the ballots is two (2) sided. Please bring your glasses and your patience and things should go smoothly. Thank you.

THE GREAT RACE



The Great Race is an annual event that captivates enthusiasts of classic cars and vintage automobiles. This year the 9-day, 2,300-mile race commenced in Kentucky in mid-June with vintage automobiles dating back as far as 1916. Teams and cars from Canada, Japan, England, Australia, and every corner of the United States converged in Owensboro, Kentucky. As participants embark on their journey, drivers will navigate through 19 cities, diverse terrains and charming towns, each leg of the race offering its own set of challenges and scenic vistas. Finally, after a thrilling cross-country adventure, the finish line awaited in Gardiner, Maine, on June 30, where crowds eagerly anticipated the arrival of these automotive marvels.

The event not only celebrates the enduring allure of vintage automobiles but also fosters a sense of comraderie among participants and spectators alike, making it a cherished traditions for car enthusiasts everywhere.

West Gardiner Historical Society (WGHS) Update

West Gardiner residents approved \$80,000 towards electrical, insulation, and siding for the new WGHS building at the annual town meeting on April 6, 2024. They are currently out to bed for contractors to complete the work. The next meeting of the WGHS will be held on November 20th, 2024, at 5:00 pm at the Auxiliary Hall.

Veteran Spotlight– Neil Farrar**by Debra Couture**

Neil's 9/11 came in November of 1979 when Iran took more than 50 American hostages over a period of 444 days. This led him to enlist in the U.S. Navy. Due to a backlog in his school, he was forced to wait until March of 1980 to go to Orlando, FL for bootcamp.

After graduating bootcamp, Neil went to N.A.S. Millington, TN for "A" school. It was after graduating "A" school that Neil received his rate as an Antisubmarine Warfare Operator (AW), with orders to fly as an acoustic analyst aboard the P3 Orion. The AW rate was exceptionally unique, in that it was the only job in all the different branches of the military where an enlisted man was guaranteed to fly. The United States was also the only nation in the free world that did not use officers for this position. His next set of orders were to N.A.S. Pensacola, FL for Aircrew Candidate School. It was there that he excelled in the one-mile swim qualification in his flight suit and boots with not only his class, but a class of Aviation Officer Candidate Students (AOCS). Neil was the second person out of the pool; only to learn the top two swimmers would have their orders changed to search-and-rescue (SAR) swimmers, who flew out of helicopters. He eventually was able to maintain his original orders and went to N.A.S. Jacksonville, FL for specific training on his flight station/duties aboard the P3.

A year after going to bootcamp, Neil arrived in March of 1981 at N.A.S. Brunswick, ME to VP-26 (Tridents). There he made three deployments: Rota, Spain/Lajes, Azores (81); Keflavik, Iceland (82); and Bermuda (83/84). His detachments included: London, England; Puerto Rico; Sigonella, Sicily; Naples, Italy; Barbados; and Bodo, Norway. It was during this first tour where Neil tracked Soviet nuclear submarines during the Cold War in the Atlantic, North Atlantic and above the Arctic Circle.

His first enlistment ended in May of 1984. He then went to college and earned an Associates degree. During this period, he was a reservist with VP-67 in Millington, TN. Neil re-enlisted in May of 1987 as a TAR (Training and Administering Reservist). He was stationed again at N.A.S. Brunswick, ME with the Master Augment Unit (VP-MAU). As an active-duty reservist, one of his primary responsibilities was to train the reservists during their weekend drills. Neil also ran the Weapon System Trainer (WST) for the AW reservists on the weekend. This second enlistment covered the Post-Cold War and the First Gulf War. Where antisubmarine warfare was his primary mission during the Cold War, drug interdiction became one of the leading objectives during his second tour. Due to the blitzkrieg speed in which the First Gulf War was won, Neil never deployed there. His second enlistment ended in July of 1991. He then drilled as a reservist at N.A.S. South Weymouth, MA with VP-92 until February of 1992.

After his children were raised, Neil decided to go back in the military as a chaplain. His passion was to serve with a combat unit. This required him completing both his junior and senior of college in less than nine months because of age restrictions, and then go on to seminary to complete his Master of Divinity. Two months before attending Chaplain Candidacy School in December of 2011, it was stated in October of 2011 we had won the war on terror. Neil was at the apex of the age limit – only to be disqualified – when the age criteria was lowered. He later worked at Togus VA as a Clinical Mental Health Chaplain.

As a Patriot, Neil considered it an honor to serve his country in the military and would do it all over again! According to Neil, serving in the military today is very different than when he first went in. There are far more political policies and agendas that appear contrary to the military's mission. If a young person loves our country and wants to maintain our freedoms and way of life, then he considers the military as an amazing opportunity to serve.

Neil, thank you for your service.

Merrill's Corner Trotting Park

by Judy Jamison

The years following the Civil War brought a tremendous amount of change to the country, with technological advancements in transportation, industry, and agriculture spurring economic growth and greater prosperity for the middle class. The changes also gave people more leisure time.

In rural areas like Maine, farming remained a backbone of the economy, and national organizations like the Grange and various local and state agricultural societies provided both the support farmers needed to manage the changes, and some of the social and recreational outlets that people were eager for. This included associations promoting harness racing, which became extremely popular. According to the Lost Trotting Parks Heritage Center website, between 1890 and 1930 there were over 90 towns and cities in the state of Maine with "trotting parks". West Gardiner was one of them.

Located at Merrills Corner just off the Pond Road, races were being held there possibly as early as 1867, as an ad in the Gardiner Home Journal in August of 1867 mentions Merrill's Trotting Park. The first actual report of a race was in the *Kennebec Reporter* on October 3rd, 1868, when the Farmer's Horse Fair was held at the Park. One race offered a \$50 purse, and "...pool selling was quite brisk during this race, and even a member of the editorial fraternity became so carried away by the excitement of the moment as to bet his pile on the result." Apparently local reporters were not immune to the charms of the park!

No mention is made of the park in the local papers for several years after that, and an item in the *Kennebec Reporter* on September 27, 1890, explains why. According to the article, "... the old trotting park didn't pay the stockholders large sized money in dividends, and dissatisfaction arose, and the Trotting Park Association became a thing of the past, and for many years until 1889 horse trotting as an entertainment for the public was unknown in Gardiner." In that year, the Kennebec Farmers and Stock Breeders Assoc. revived racing and sponsored a day's trotting at the park, including a "...scrub race open to all trotting and pacing horses, from the New Mill's Bridge to Spear's Corner, round the square to Horse-shoe Pond Bridge, through Litchfield to Burnham Bridge, and back to Merrill's Corner." Just picture that - a horse race up 126, around through Litchfield, and back down the Pond Road!

In 1919, the Gardiner Driving Club was formed and subsequently incorporated as the Gardiner Driving Club and Agricultural Association. In September of 1922, they described a fair held at Merrill's Park on Sept. 12 - 15. The association had been able, according to the paper, "...to acquire Merrill's half -mile track with 10 acres of grounds and improvements were made including widening the track, adding drainage, and installing railings. A judges stand, grandstand for 500, bleachers for many, and stabling for fifty horses were erected, wells driven. It is now the fastest track in Maine; the field of horses may be seen at any point all the time, and the landscape surrounding are the handsomest in all the racetrack country."

The Association wanted to hold agricultural fairs as well as races, and the President, R.R. Littlefield, believed they could be "... made as much a success as were the indoor carnivals at the Coliseum... drawing the crowd from wider regions, the fair would give much valuable publicity to our city and show that our community was full of public pep. No backset by any circumstance hurt it... Hence, the Kennebec Fair hoped to be a permanently annual event."

The first day of the fair was a washout, but the next day was clear and the crowds came, enjoying the Ferris wheel, carousel, agricultural exhibitions, and airplane rides - \$10. for 10 minutes - as well as the races.

Obviously, given the amount of investment in the Park, the Association was banking on its being a moneymaker. But again, time marched on, and the 20th century brought rapid change - new and diverse forms of entertainment, an increasingly mobile society, fewer and fewer farms. I'm not sure when the races stopped at Merrill's Corner, but the last mentioned was in 1923 - and the newspaper item indicated turnout was poor. The track was abandoned and forgotten.

Stephen Thompson, the Creative Director of The Lost Trotting Park Heritage Center, walked the property with Mert almost 15 years ago. At that time, they couldn't find any evidence of the track. Eventually, on a subsequent visit, Thompson was able to find the cement posts that were the base of the grandstand. The structure measured 30 x 50 feet. Today, the area is wooded, and you would never guess it was once clear and open to the stream, with a racetrack and a grandstand and a parking lot full of buggies - or Model Ts- and crowds of people out to enjoy a day at the races.



The Gardiner Driving Club fair in September, 1922 featured a Ferris Wheel and plane rides as well as harness races.

Few forces compare to the light show the other night when the Northern Lights blazed across the sky. We'd not seen them in recent memory, maybe never. Big wow! Violet and red started at 60 miles up and red danced between 60 and 150 miles, an elaborate solar wind of intangible charged particles mingling with Earth's magnetic field. Enough science though.

Ancient cultures felt the lights were a spiritual presence from a power in the heavens. I get that feeling now. Nature was more relevant to daily life in the past. Granted, our ancestors found meaning and felt guided by natural signs. Farmers planted by the phase of the moon, the harvest was celebrated by baking bread and blessing it at church, stars guided navigation. No GPS.

Sitting on the porch, awed by the color and movement 100 miles up, we didn't need the science or feel any omens. We just didn't. Being in the moment of Nature's beauty and power was enough.

Wreaths Across America

December 14, 2024 9:00 AM

West Gardiner Fire Station

Donations are being accepted for wreaths to decorate our veterans' graves on Wreaths Across America Day. The wreaths are \$17.00 each and donations can be accepted until November 22, 2024. We are still short over 75 wreaths to decorate our 200+ veterans graves for this year. Checks can be made out to Wreaths Across America and left at the Town Office. You can also donate by clicking on this QR code. Thank you very much.



Scan the QR code to make a donation online or visit
www.wreathscrossamerica.org/ME0073

The Weathervane is a non-profit informational newsletter intended to be unbiased, non-denominational, non-partisan, accurate, and enjoyable.

The Weathervane welcomes story ideas from our readers.

***Send articles to:
townclerk@westgardinermaine.org***

Christmas Tree Safety



As you deck the halls this holiday season, be fire smart. A small fire that spreads to a Christmas tree can grow large very quickly.



PICKING THE TREE

- Choose a tree with fresh, green needles that do not fall off when touched.



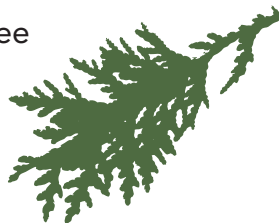
PLACING THE TREE

- Before placing the tree in the stand, cut 2" from the base of the trunk.
- Make sure the tree is at least three feet away from any heat source, like fireplaces, radiators, candles, heat vents or lights.
- Make sure the tree is not blocking an exit.
- Add water to the tree stand. Be sure to add water daily.



LIGHTING THE TREE

- Use lights that are listed by a qualified testing laboratory. Some lights are only for indoor or outdoor use.
- Replace any string of lights with worn or broken cords or loose bulb connections. Read manufacturer's instructions for number of light strands to connect.
- Never use lit candles to decorate the tree.
- Always turn off Christmas tree lights before leaving home or going to bed.



After Christmas

Get rid of the tree after Christmas or when it is dry. Dried-out trees are a fire danger and should not be left in the home or garage, or placed outside against the home.

Check with your local community to find a recycling program.

Bring outdoor electrical lights inside after the holidays to prevent hazards and make them last longer.

FACTS

- ! **Almost one third** of home Christmas tree fires are caused by electrical problems.
- ! Although Christmas tree fires are not common, when they do occur, they are more likely to be serious.
- ! A heat source too close to the tree causes more than **one in every five** of the fires.



Your Source for SAFETY Information

NFPA Public Education Division • 1 Batterymarch Park, Quincy, MA 02169