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From your (new) president

There is an old saying about today being the first day of the rest of your life. If I can borrow that line for a moment, I'm going to say this issue of *The Maine Philatelist* is the first of its future. This issue is being sent to almost 800 philatelists living in the great State of Maine, or those living out of state who have an interest in Maine philately. It is indeed the first step in a bold new beginning for the Maine Philatelic Society.

Naturally, it's easy to make such statements, and the road ahead is anything but smooth. Whether the organization can succeed in taking a strong step into the 21st century remains to be seen. In fact, the future is in your hands. If you are now a member of the Maine Philatelic Society, I need your help and direct involvement now. If you are not a member, I need you to send either Bruce Hazelton (see address on page two) or me a check for \$5 made out to the Maine Philatelic Society. I'm not going to beat around the bush -- I want your money, I want you and I want your help.

Why? The Maine Philatelic Society is not a new organization. It has been around for a long time. In the "old days," or what some of us more seasoned philatelists would call the "heyday" of philately, membership grew at a strong rate. The organization had a strong board of directors, sponsored a lot of events, and was a positive voice for organized philately in Maine. Practically all of the stamp clubs in the state held membership. Board meetings were well attended and a lot was accomplished.

But something happened in the not too distant past. People grew tired of serving on various boards. It became difficult to get men and women to stand for election. The MPS has gone through difficult times. Interest in stamp shows dwindled as it became more difficult to get help. Now understand -- this is no indictment of anyone. It's just a natural progression of events over time. It's nothing different than in the many organizations, fraternal, church or social, that you and I belong to: it's becoming very difficult to get people to help with the myriad of tasks that must be done to keep an

organization going. In a way, the handwriting was on the wall, and it wasn't a pleasant message. Unless a new direction was taken, the Maine Philatelic Society would go the way of the dinosaur. I don't think any of us wants to see that happen. That's why YOU must do something, TODAY, to make sure it doesn't occur.

First, let me tell you why I agreed to serve as president and why I'm committed to getting this organization back to representing a broad spectrum of Maine philatelists. I'm a native Mainer, and I've been a stamp collector for over 40 years, and I've been a dealer for the past 25 (celebrating my Silver Anniversary as a dealer this year, in fact!). Many of you will not know me or recognize my name because for many years I was not involved in the organization. Living out of state for a portion of that time, I didn't even know there was a state organization. I met Bruce Hazelton a few years ago at a MUDPEX show and became "reacquainted." I say reacquainted because we had met years ago when he ran a heavy equipment business and lived near my brother in my hometown of North Yarmouth. He encouraged me to become more involved when I chided him about why the Maine Philatelic Society wasn't doing more to promote philately in the Pine Tree State.

There is some underlying doubt that we can increase membership and again become a strong organization. I think we can. I have taken over editing *The Maine Philatelist*. I believe a philatelic journal is the glue that holds an organization together. You send me \$5 (that's all it costs for a year's membership) and I'll guarantee you four quarterly issues of a newsletter that you will *want* to receive. Each of the former editors has contributed much to build the journal and I only want to improve on that with the latest in computer technology. I will give you a professional journal and my pledge that the Maine Philatelic Society will again be a strong, viable and important organization. Will you join me? It's only \$5 with your name and address. Thanks for listening.

Ernest L. Parker

The Chesuncook Lake Tourists' Despatch Stamp: A Maine Local (?)

By Bruce W. Hazelton
MPS Secretary

Chesuncook Lake is located in unorganized Township 5, Range 13 in Piscataquis County, Maine. The usual route taken to Chesuncook Lake, prior to 1900 started from Bangor, via the Bangor & Piscataquis Railroad (later the Bangor & Aroostook Railroad). By this means one could arrive at Greenville, which is at the foot of Moosehead Lake. From there, travel proceeded via a steamboat line which originated during 1837, and continued, passing Mount Kineo at the narrowest part of the lake,

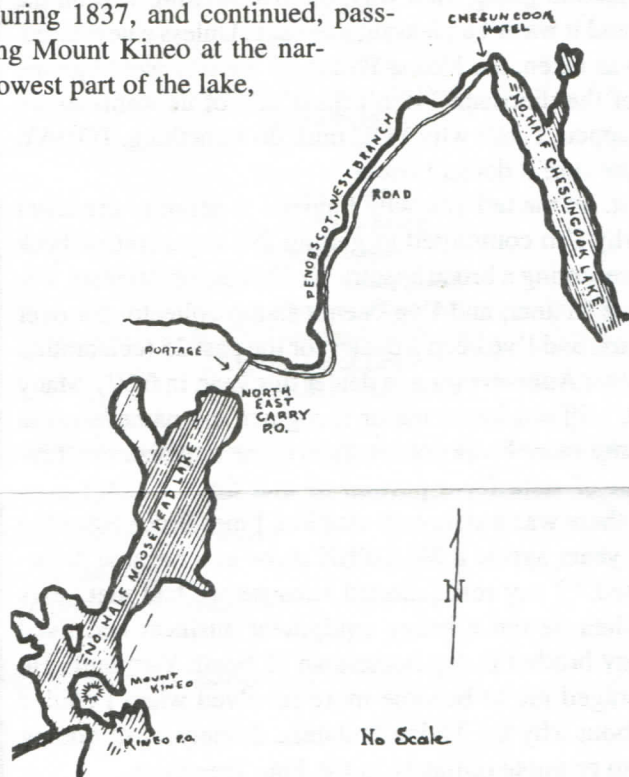


Figure 1: Map of Chesuncook region

lished a scheme to unite the tidewaters of Maine with the southwestern branch of the upper St. John River. This was to be accomplished by a series of canals which would pass through Chesuncook. In 1836 a dam was built at the outlet of Chesuncook Lake to raise the water level in order to drive logs down the West Branch of the Penobscot River.

In 1838 land was cleared and in 1849 a log shanty was built. The principle business of Chesuncook became farming and lumbering. In 1859, John H. Eveleth of Greenville acquired Chesuncook and in 1863 he built the Chesuncook House. The area soon became alive with sporting camps and was a tourist haven during the hunting and fishing seasons. The Chesuncook House was managed by Leonard Hilton of Kingsbury from 1870 to the late 1890s.

In 1880 the population of Chesuncook was 82; in 1890 it was 66. At present, only three people live at Chesuncook year-round. However, the population was as high as 270 during 1920. On September 29, 1900, a post office was established with Lonnie M. Barnes as postmaster. It was discontinued in 1909.

What are Chesuncook Lake Tourists' Stamps?

In figure 2, notice that the Chesuncook Lake stamps somewhat resemble the two-cent brown stamp of 1883 in design (Scott 210), or the two-cent green stamp of 1887 (Scott 213). They are, however, slightly larger. There were three denominations: a one-cent green, a three-cent brown and a five-cent blue. In a straight label at the top of the stamp is the inscription "CHESUNCOOK LAKE" and in a curve above the central circle is the wording "TOURISTS' DESPATCH." In the central circle is the head of a moose and the value appears across the bottom of the stamp, expressed with a large numeral centered between two words denoting the amount. Each stamp is approximately 1 1/8 inches high and 7/8 of an inch

and arrived at Northeast Carry, which is about 40 miles from Greenville (see map).

Northeast Carry well named, for from this point a portage (or "carry") was made from the Kennebec River watershed to the Penobscot River watershed, a distance of about two miles. During 1837 an oxcart "railroad" was built along this carry but it was burned out in the 1860s. There was next the choice of going by water or following the land trail along the river bank. The land trail was best for travel in the winter-time.

Why go to Chesuncook Lake?

In the early to middle 1800s, the above mentioned route was the popular route to Madawaska, and it passed through Chesuncook. (Madawaska is at the northern tip of Maine on the Canadian border, across the St. John River from Edmunston, New Brunswick.) As far back as 1816, Moses Greenleaf, the mapmaker and surveyor of the period, pub-



Figure 2: The three values of Chesuncook stamps with regular U.S. stamps above.

wide, measuring just the printed area and making no allowance for margins or perforations. All values are known both perforated and imperforate, and each value is known with the head of the moose printed at a 90 degree turn to the left, on one stamp.

Figure 3 shows a complete imperforate sheet of 64 stamps (8x8 and reduced in size) and the "turned variety" -- always the same position on every sheet for each value -- is seen as

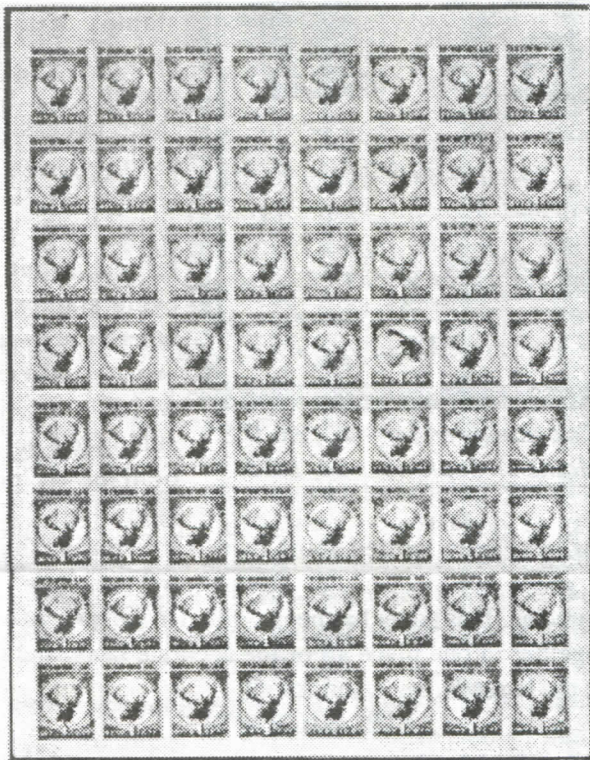


Figure 3: Complete imperforate sheet of 64 Chesuncook stamps showing the "error" stamp.

the sixth stamp in the fourth row (30th stamp). Actual size of the complete sheet including margins is 8 1/2 x 11 inches. The sheet shown is watermarked "RAVEL STONE" in Roman style double-line capital letters 15mm. high, with the "R" and "S" slightly higher, or about 18mm. Portions of the watermark fall on only seven of the stamps. This watermark has been identified as being used by the Keith Paper Company of Turner Falls, Massachusetts, and after considerable study it has been established that the date of initial use was November 9, 1881. The perforate stamps were gummed, but the imperforate stamps were not. This possibly could explain the slight difference in shade between perforated and imperforated stamps.

How were these stamps used?

At this point it should be mentioned that no covers have been found with this stamp dating later than the middle 1890s. Therefore, they could not have been used at the Chesuncook Post Office since it was not established until 1900. Kineo, with an 1880 population of 23 and 66 in 1890 and presently "zero" established a post office in 1884. Thus, Kineo was the

nearest post office to Chesuncook between 1884 and 1889, when a post office was established at Northeast Carry. The two covers the author has seen were postmarked in September from the Kineo Post Office.

The *Weekly Philatelic Era* in an editorial note on October 13, 1894 states: "Mr. W.M. Taylor sends us a set of three stamps, or labels, which are claimed to have been in use between the hotel at Chesuncook Lake and the nearest post office, which is North East Carry." The writer has not seen or heard of covers with the Tourists' Despatch stamps bearing a Northeast Carry postmark.

Based on articles printed in the *Weekly Philatelic Era* (October 1894), *Mekeel's Weekly* during 1915 and the *Northern* magazine (April 1928), an article by L.S. Cook, and letters from Sterling Dow, W.B. O'Connor and William Hilton, the following is a reconstruction of the origin and use of the Chesuncook Lake Tourists' Despatch stamps:

The consensus is that these stamps were used by Leonard Hilton at the Chesuncook House either for compensation, or merely to formalize a "carrier service" provided for outgoing letters from the Chesuncook area to the nearest post office, which was probably Kineo or possibly Northeast Carry. The actual date of these stamps could not be ascertained, but has been guessed at from 1885 to 1893. Mrs. Elizabeth Smith, of Brewer, Maine, told W.B. O'Connor of Bangor that she worked for Leonard Hilton at the Chesuncook House during the time the stamps were supposed to have been issued. She said: "There was no post office at Chesuncook Lake, and the Hiltons put the outgoing mail in a box on the wall near the desk. When someone was going out, the accumulated mail was given to him to carry to the nearest post office, and for a short time the stamps may have been used to compensate the native 'going out' for his trouble." She also stated that "eventually" (date unknown) ... "the postmaster at either Kineo or Northeast Carry was told by a postal inspector that the stamps must not be used on letters." She added, "After the post office instructed Hilton not to use the stamps, he had many left and these he gave to interested parties." She did not think that Hilton paid for the stamps, but that "they were sent to him and it was suggested that he use them. But the man who sent them never visited Chesuncook again."

Of the covers the writer has seen, one is shown in figure 4. It is addressed to Mrs. F.O. Conant, Yarmouthville, Maine, and has a three-cent and a one-cent Chesuncook stamp, together with a four-cent 1890 regular postage stamp (Scott 222). Note that the one-cent Chesuncook stamp is the so-called "error" with the moose's head appearing at right angles to its normal position in the center circle. The envelope bears the corner card: "Return to O.A. DENNEN./KINEO, MAINE,/ If not Delievered in Days."

Mrs. Conant was the wife of Frederick Odell Conant of Portland, Maine, and a graduate of Bowdoin College, Class of 1880. He, and a classmate, Edwin Upton Curtis of Boston,

Massachusetts were accustomed to spending a month during the fall at Chesuncook Lake during the late 1880s and early 1890s. Mr. Conant was an enthusiastic stamp collector at that time, and it was in his collection that Sterling Dow first saw these stamps during 1894. Mr. Dow wrote a letter to Heylinger De Windt in 1939 in which he stated "... It is also know that he was well stocked with these Chesuncook stamps, and it was at his home (where I spent about four evenings each week) that I first saw them."

The "O.A. Dennen" of the corner card was the manager of the Kineo House, and also postmaster at Kineo at the time the letter was posted.

Now, recalling the remarks made by Mrs. Elizabeth Smith, could the man who sent the stamps to Leonard Hilton have been F.O. Conant or E.U. Curtis? As Sterling Dow's letter states: "... if there was any man who could give information about these stamps, it was (the late) Mr. C., as he was on the grounds when they were supposed to have been used." He further states: "I know that Mr. Conant was just the man to dress up a cover in this way!"

The only other cover the writer has actually seen has a pair of imperforate five-cent Chesuncook stamps on a two-cent 1887 stamped envelope, apparently addressed to Boston, Massachusetts, although we do not recall to whom.

Unanswered questions

The covers may be philatelic, but we cannot be sure, and will probably never know the whole story. There are many questions that need to be answered, but the events surrounding the use of the Chesuncook stamps are too far in the past, and no one seems to be around who can supply the answers.

Why, for example, if Leonard Hilton wanted to make a

charge for carriage are there three different denominations? Also, when the plates were made (the stamps were not engraved), why were pains taken to tilt the moose's head sideways on one subject on each plate? Since O.A. Dennen was also postmaster at Kineo, could he have done a few favors for an ardent collector like F.O. Conant?

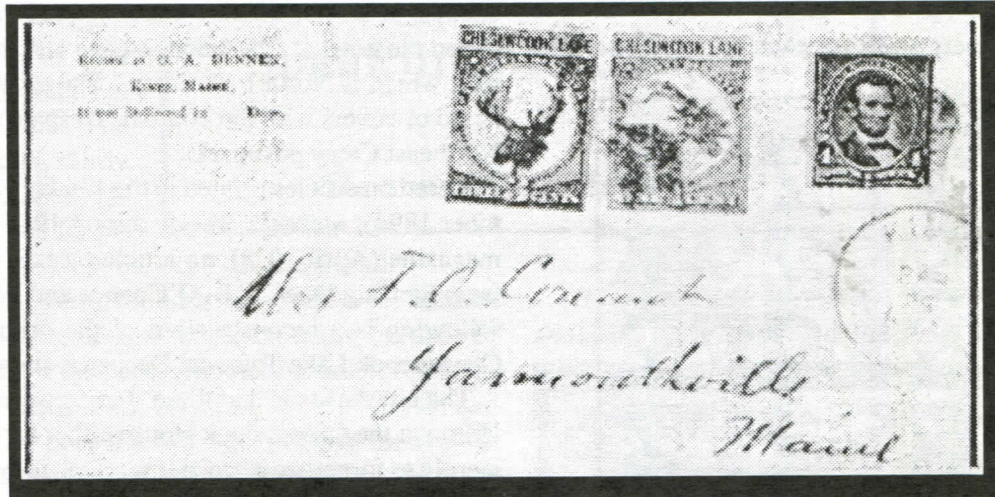


Figure 4: Postally used cover bearing Chesuncook stamps and a four-cent U.S. stamp. Mailed from Kineo to Yarmouthville, Maine on September 28, 1893.

The *Weekly Philatelic Era* of October 1894 closes the article on these stamps with this paragraph: "We doubt very much their necessity or usefulness, and they should be classed with the much talked about 'bicycle stamps' and other local issues by private individuals which are neither authorized nor recognized by postal authorities." These

stamps have been written about many times during the past many years, but most of the articles have been filled with inaccuracies. This paper has been written in the hope of bringing together in one place all of the accurate facts, and separating the legends, once and for all.

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The author would like to acknowledge the help and encouragement given by C.D. McFadden, Bertram Ames and Herman Herst, Jr.

The author is a founding member of the Maine Philatelic Society, a longtime philatelist and a resident of North Yarmouth, Maine.

New Maine philatelic book is big success

Last February, the Maine Philatelic Society published a definitive book on post offices in the state. The first copy was sold April 1, 1995. As of this writing, *The Post Offices of Maine: A Rarity Guide* is completely sold out.

If you are interested in securing a copy, write to Phil Bansner, P.O. Box 2529, West Lawn, PA 19609. He is a

philatelic literature dealer and has a small supply. Already updated information is coming in, and we will include in each issue of *The Maine Philatelist* an insert of additional information in the form of addenda and errata. Another benefit of membership!

-- Bruce Hazelton