



Sign advertising the Granite State Fire Insurance Company, painted in reverse on glass, dated around 1900. Although this insurance company was Portsmouth-based, its business was statewide, as reflected in its selection of the summit of Mount Washington with the cog railway as its symbol. New Hampshire Historical Society, gift of William J. and Frances G. DesGrosseilliers. The Society's new exhibition *Signs of the Times* is on view through October 2019.

## SIGNS OF THE TIMES EXHIBITION ON VIEW

What signs have you noticed today? The sign for your morning coffee shop? A “moose crossing” sign along the side of the road? The familiar street sign that marks your route home? Signs are so commonplace that we rarely notice them beyond the information they provide when we need them. Yet signs do more than guide us through our daily lives—they also reveal something about ourselves and our priorities.

For more than a century the New Hampshire Historical Society has collected signs that have marked the state's landscape and reflected its culture. The Society's new exhibition, *Signs of the Times*, features a variety of

advertising, political, informational, and directional signs and explores how these practical creations serve as a window into the past and give us a better understanding of the times in which they were created.

Signs on display range from a toll sign for the Cornish Bridge, dated 1796, to a 1920s advertising sign for “honest underwear and hosiery” manufactured by the Contoocook Mills Corporation in Hillsborough, to a 1960s sign marking a stretch of Interstate 93 named for Alan B. Shepard Jr. of Derry, the first American to travel into space (1961) and the fifth to walk on the moon (1971).



NEW HAMPSHIRE  
**HISTORICAL**  
 SOCIETY FOUNDED 1823

30 Park Street  
 Concord, New Hampshire 03301

**603-228-6688**

**nhhistory.org**

**Newsletter**

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**President**

William H. Dunlap

**Editors**

Joan E. Desmarais  
 Donna-Belle Garvin

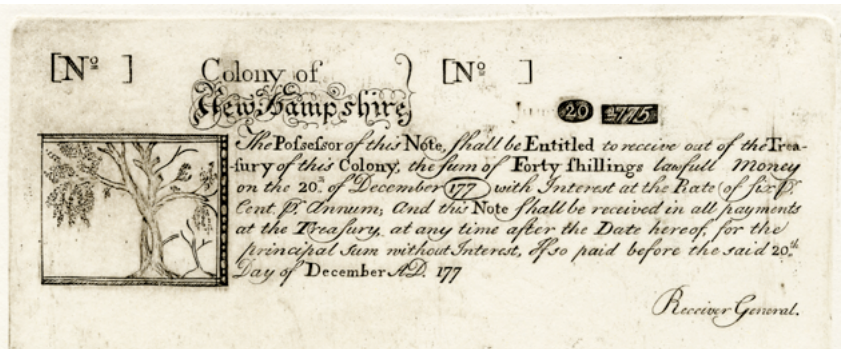
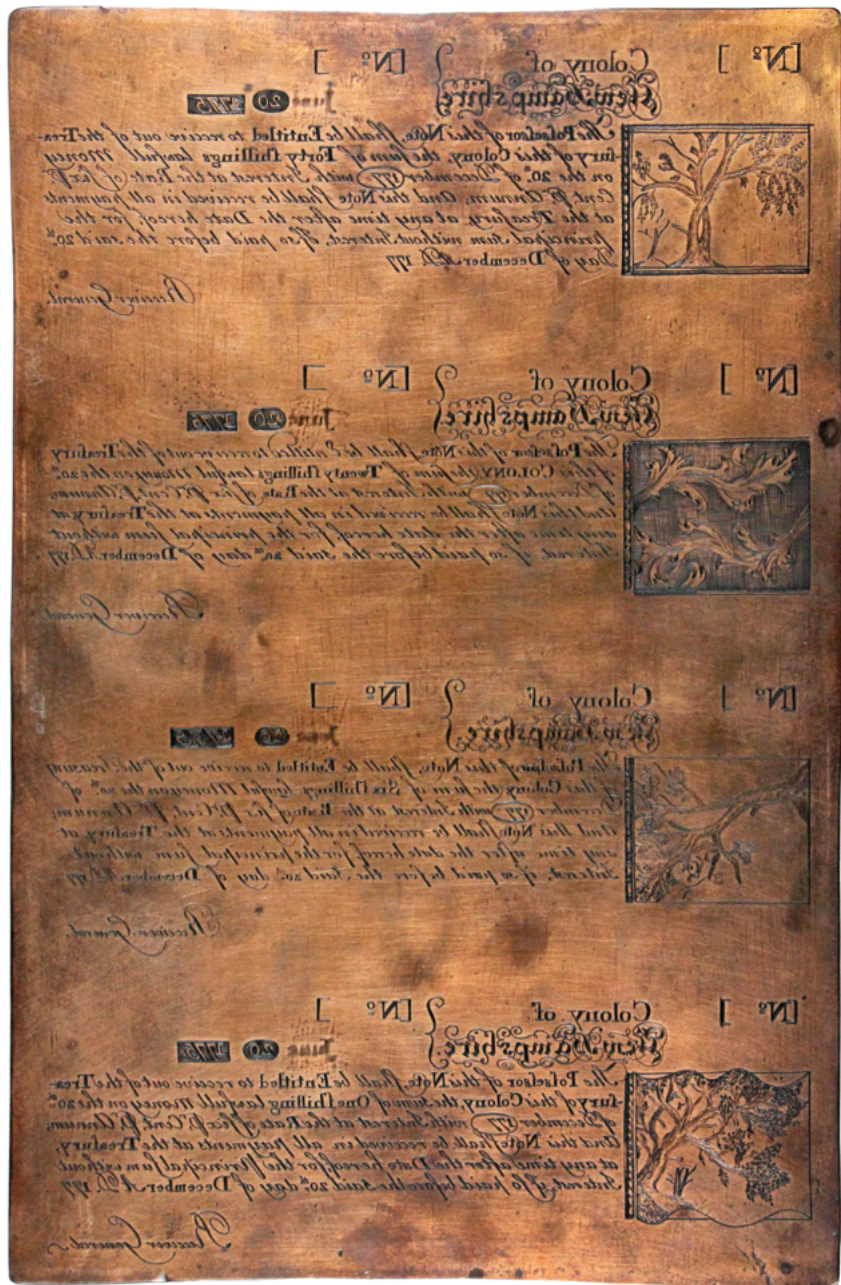
**Contributors**

Wesley G. Balla  
 Douglas R. Copeley  
 Korrena Cowing  
 Elizabeth Dubrulle  
 Sarah E. Galligan  
 Kirsten Hildonen  
 Stephanie G. McCusker  
 Christopher J. Moore  
 Jennifer Walton

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Copper printing plate engraved in reverse by skilled metalsmith John Ward Gilman (1741–1823) of Exeter in 1775 and, below it, a portion of a currency sheet printed from the plate. The New Hampshire Historical Society recently acquired the plate at auction.



## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Sometimes good things *do* come to those who wait.

Last fall the Society was able to bring back to New Hampshire a rare copper printing plate, used in 1775 to print money to help pay for the state's participation in the American Revolution. The plate was engraved by Exeter metalsmith John Ward Gilman in June 1775, just two months after the battles of Lexington and Concord. It was modeled after a similar one made for Massachusetts a few weeks earlier by Paul Revere.

The history (and mystery) of the plate's odyssey away from New Hampshire is no less interesting than that of its original production by Gilman. It is believed the plate was in private hands, outside New Hampshire, for at least the past 150 years. Exactly how it went missing from the state is a mystery. There is speculation that in the 1850s a New Hampshire government official borrowed it from a vault in the state house and lent it to a collector in Baltimore, who used it to print commemorative copies of the currency. It is possible the plate may not have been returned promptly and was then forgotten.

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*Historical artifacts such as the Gilman plate fire the imagination. They put us in touch in an elemental way with the extraordinary people and events of human history.*

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Fast forward to 2010, when staff members at the New Hampshire Historical Society and the New Hampshire Division of Archives and Records Management became aware that the plate would be offered for sale by an auction house in the Midwest. The plate had been bought at an estate sale in Minnesota by a private collector, who then consigned it to the auctioneer. Since it was unclear how the plate, a significant piece of New Hampshire history, had ended up in private hands outside of the state, the New Hampshire Attorney General's office got involved. The attorney general's office asked the private owner to remove the artifact from the auction so that its return to New Hampshire could be negotiated.

Discussions broke down and dueling lawsuits ensued, requiring members of the attorney general's legal team to fly to Minnesota for courtroom appearances. The plate was pulled from the auction sale, but eventually the lawsuits were dropped. The plate's chain of title remained clouded, and it was apparently returned to a Minnesota bank vault. The desire here in New Hampshire to have the plate repatriated remained strong, but it seemed best to let emotions cool down.

(continued on page 4)

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## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE (continued from page 3)

Interest in the printing plate was high among many in New Hampshire because of its role in the state's history. It was commissioned by the New Hampshire Provincial Congress at the outset of the Revolution, when New Hampshire was still a colony, not yet a state. The Congress authorized the printing of 10,500 pounds in currency notes to help fund the war effort.

John Ward Gilman was paid 13 pounds to create the plate and print the money, a painstaking process that took him and an assistant more than 12 days, after first obtaining the printing press from Newburyport and various needed materials. Gilman was a patriot who played a prominent role in New Hampshire's early history. He signed a protest in 1765 against the Stamp Act passed by Parliament and in 1776 designed the state's first seal. Several artifacts made by Gilman are in the New Hampshire Historical Society's collections.

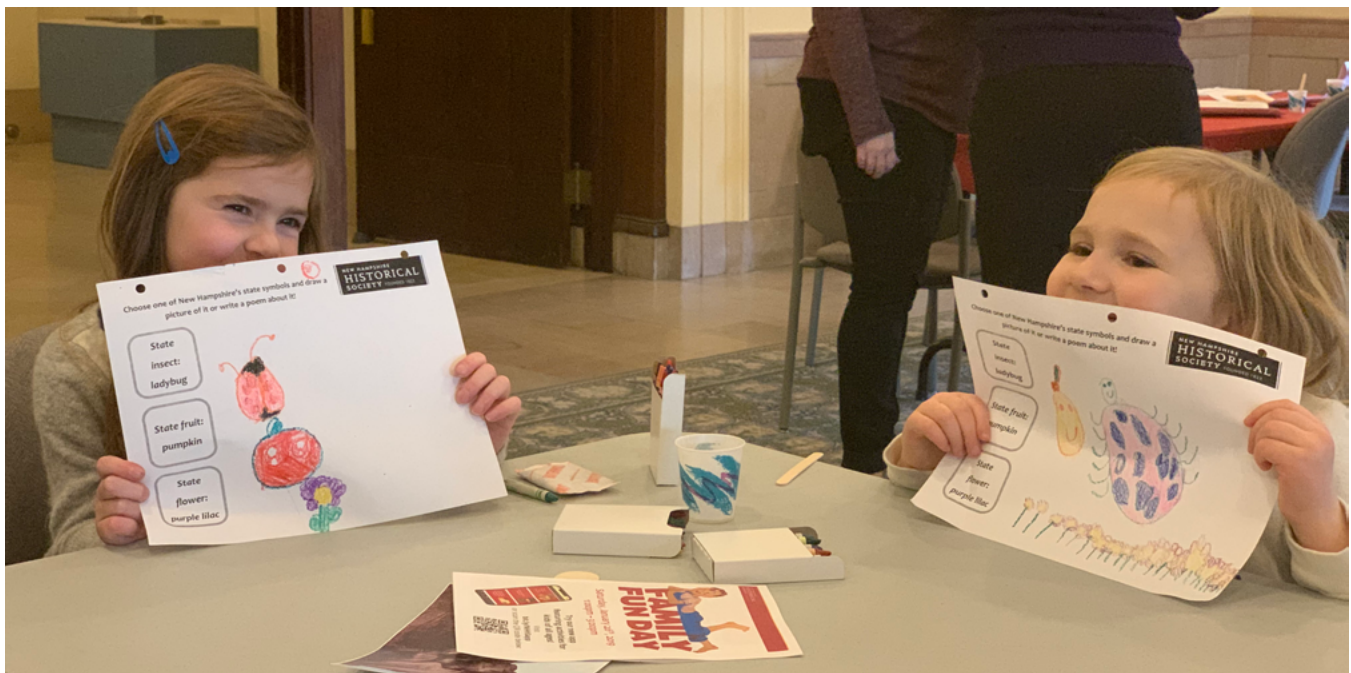
This past August the Gilman currency plate resurfaced. It was being offered for sale by the same auction house. The New Hampshire Division of Archives and Records Management and the New Hampshire Historical Society consulted and decided that the Society should take the initiative in attempting to acquire the plate at the auction.

With contributions from Society members and trustees David Bowers, David Sundman, and Jim and Donna-Belle Garvin, combined with museum acquisition funds, the Society was the high bidder, paying \$18,000. After more than 150 years, the Gilman plate was on its way back home to New Hampshire, where it will be preserved by the Society in perpetuity.

Looking at the Gilman plate for the first time caused me to ruminate on the significance of such historical artifacts. At a superficial level the plate is just an inanimate piece of metal, but on a deeper level it carries great symbolic power. The Gilman plate is a tangible representation of the almost unimaginable audacity and personal courage of the patriots who commissioned it during the American Revolution and employed it to defy the greatest power on earth. If they failed, it would have certainly cost them their lives. Historical artifacts such as the Gilman plate fire the imagination. They put us in touch in an elemental way with the extraordinary people and events of human history.



Bill Dunlap, President



Young visitors have fun learning about New Hampshire's state symbols at the Society's "Family Fun Day" held on January 26, 2019. More than 100 children, parents, and grandparents participated in the event, which offered games, crafts, and storytelling.

## SOCIETY CONSERVES IMPORTANT SCOTS-IRISH DOCUMENT

The New Hampshire Historical Society has preserved the Shute Petition, considered the most important document in existence related to the history of the Scots-Irish in New Hampshire. The rare document recently received conservation treatment at the Northeast Document Conservation Center, one of the nation's leading centers for the conservation of documents, books, maps, and photographs. Funding for the conservation was provided by the New Hampshire Society of Colonial Wars and a matching grant from the General Society of Colonial Wars.



The Society's Director of Collections and Exhibitions Wes Balla (left) and Ken Beckwith, governor of the New Hampshire Society of Colonial Wars, with the recently conserved Shute Petition, at a Scots-Irish genealogy workshop offered by the New Hampshire Historical Society in March. Balla showed the document to workshop attendees and spoke about the conservation treatment undertaken to preserve the important 18th-century document related to the history of Scots-Irish immigration to New Hampshire.

In April 1719 a group of about 16 families of Scottish descent who had immigrated the previous summer to New England from Ulster in Northern Ireland, settled in Nutfield, New Hampshire (now the towns of Londonderry, Derry, Windham, and the Derryfield neighborhood of Manchester). These early settlers were part of a larger group that, on March 26, 1718, had petitioned Samuel Shute, then governor of Massachusetts and New Hampshire, for permission to settle in New England. The document, known as the Shute Petition, contains 319 signatures. This year marks the 300th anniversary of the Scots-Irish settlement in Nutfield, a key event in Granite State history. Several anniversary celebration events are planned (see [www.nutfieldhistory.org/nutfield300th](http://www.nutfieldhistory.org/nutfield300th)).

In 2018 the Society's collections staff identified the Shute Petition as a prime candidate for conservation treatment. Over the three hundred years of its life, the document suffered from light exposure, extremes in temperature and humidity, and wear and tear. The goal of the project was to clean, stabilize, and repair this important document to ensure its preservation for generations to come.

As part of the extensive conservation treatment, the petition is now protected in a new custom-made archival box. In addition, high-quality digital images made of the document will enable the Society to provide researchers and the general public with access to all of the historical and genealogical information it contains without the risk of damage that could occur to the original item through handling. The Shute Petition is available for viewing in the Society's online collections catalog at [nhhistory.org](http://nhhistory.org).

### Guided Gallery Tours — Spring 2019

**Saturdays, May 11 and June 8, at 10 a.m. and 11 a.m.**

**Fridays, May 17 and June 21, at noon**

Enjoy a guided tour of the Society's Park Street building and exhibitions in a 45-minute tour led by a member of the Society's education or volunteer docent staff. Included in the price of admission, the tour is appropriate for visitors of all ages. Availability is on a first-come, first-served basis, and tours are capped at 12 people.

***Admission to the New Hampshire Historical Society is \$7 for adults. Children ages 18 and under and members of the New Hampshire Historical Society are admitted free of charge. Full-time students and active military personnel and their families also are admitted free of charge with a valid ID.***



## CELEBRATING THE GRANITE STATE HOUSE

New Hampshire Historical Society President Bill Dunlap presented Governor Chris Sununu with a copy of the Society's special issue of *Historical New Hampshire*, commemorating the 200th anniversary of the State House. The issue was written by former state architectural historian Jim Garvin and Donna-Belle Garvin, editor emerita of *Historical New Hampshire*.



New Hampshire State House Bicentennial Week will be held from June 2 through June 8, 2019, and numerous events are planned, including tours of the state house, music, and fireworks. The Society will participate in the anniversary festivities

by offering free admission (Tuesday through Saturday, 9:30 a.m. to 5 p.m.). The original wooden eagle, which stood on top of the state house from 1818 until 1957, is preserved at the Society and on permanent display.



The only known photograph of the New Hampshire State House, which opened in 1819, in its original form, taken between 1859 and 1864. George W. Perry Scrapbooks, New Hampshire Historical Society, gift of May Nutter.



## NEW ACQUISITIONS ADD TO SCOTS-IRISH HISTORY

Portraits of Josiah and Mary Stark Gillis of Merrimack, New Hampshire, and Wilmington, Massachusetts, were recently added to the Society's collection of portraits dating from the 1700s to the present. The Starks and Gillises were fourth-generation New Hampshire Scots-Irish farmers and business owners, and descendants of General John Stark and Jotham Gillis, who fought in the American Revolution. The paintings were donated by Joe and Betty Ellovich of Burlington, Vermont.

Josiah Gillis was the son of Jotham and Abigail (Codman) Gillis of Merrimack and Manchester. Mary Stark was the daughter of John and Mary (Huse) Stark of Dunbarton and Goffstown, and the granddaughter of General John and Elizabeth (Paige) Stark of Derryfield. They were married on September 14, 1813, in Goffstown. The Gillises lived on a family farm in Merrimack through 1818. Josiah was a land speculator and lumber dealer who owned 20,000 acres in the towns of Sandwich, Burton, and Thornton. In 1818 the Gillises moved to Wilmington, Massachusetts, where they operated a hotel and shipping business on the Middlesex Canal.



## LIBRARY RESOURCES REMINDER

The Society offers on-site researchers access to digital databases via the library's public access computers. Through EBSCO's database "America: History and Life™ with Full Text," researchers can search thousands of articles and entire journals related to the history of the United States and Canada. For patrons focused on genealogy, two other databases will likely become a staple of their research: Ancestry.com can be used to access millions of genealogical resources, and American Ancestors, produced by the New England Historic Genealogical Society, contains a wealth of records with a focus on New England. The Society's library is open Tuesday through Saturday, 9:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. Admission is free for New Hampshire Historical Society members; \$7 for nonmembers.

Portraits of Josiah Gillis (1789–1825) and Mary Stark Gillis (1795–1878), attributed to artist Frederick R. Spencer (1806–75), and dating from around 1825, were donated to the New Hampshire Historical Society by Joe and Betty Ellovich. The paintings were purchased by the donors in 1994 from the estate of Nina Moore Frey, a Stark and Gillis descendant.

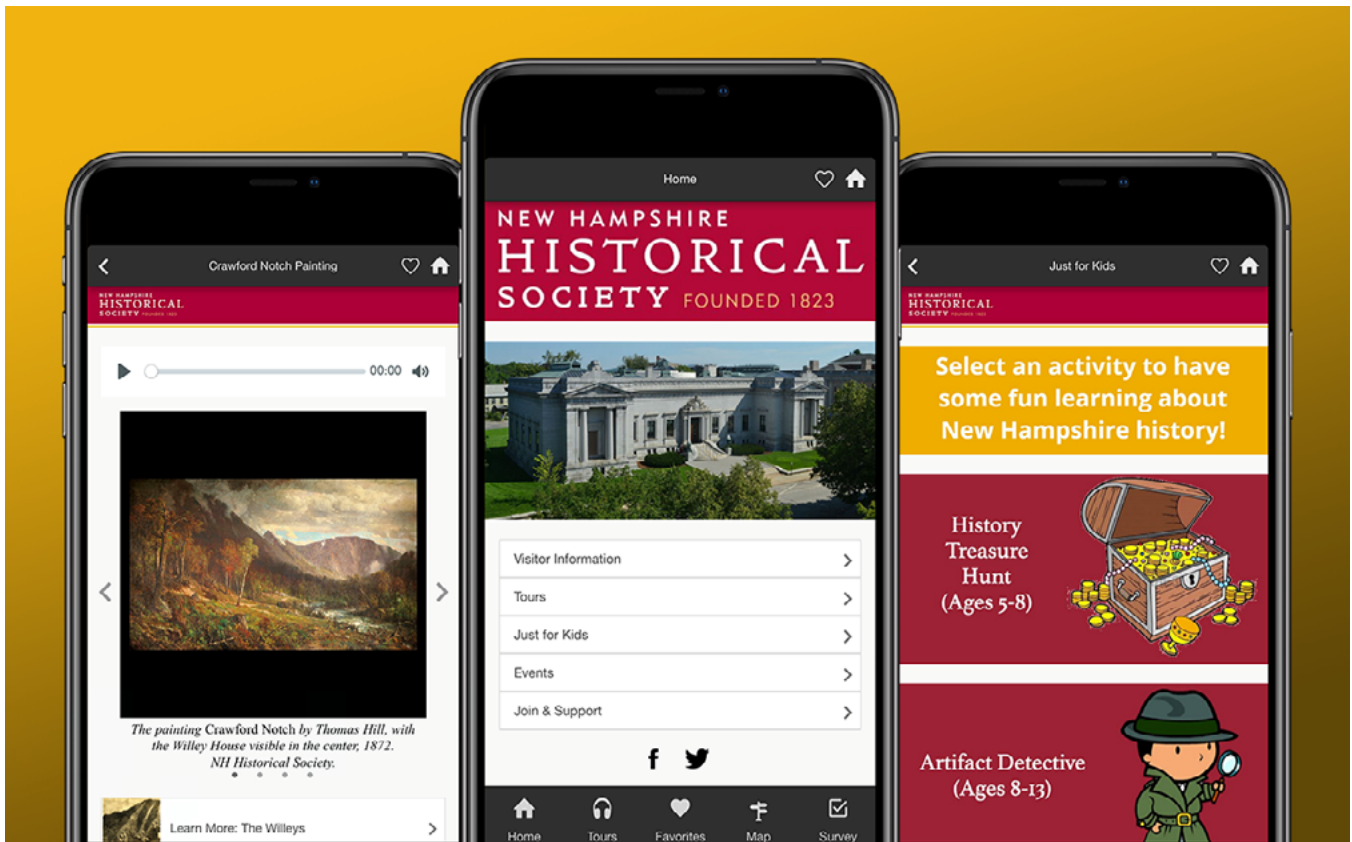


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## NEW MOBILE APP

The Society has launched a new mobile app offering an audio tour of the Park Street building, introductions to exhibitions, and interactive activities for kids. Developed by Society education staff Kirsten Hildonen, Jennifer Walton, and Elizabeth Dubrulle, the app is richly illustrated with images of objects, documents, and photographs. Although designed for use while touring the Society, this new resource can be accessed from anywhere and viewed on a smartphone, tablet, or even a desktop computer. The Society's app is available via our website at [nhhistory.org](http://nhhistory.org), the App Store®, and Google Play.