

The Dash

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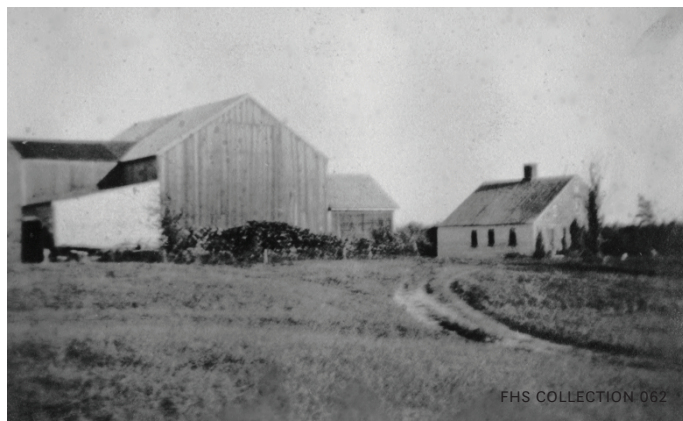
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Moments with Millie

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Pettengill Revisited



BY FHS STAFF

THIS YEAR MARKS THE 50TH ANNIVERSARY of the Freeport Historical Society's stewardship of Pettengill Farm. As an organization, it's a milestone that invites both celebration and introspection. The saltbox farmhouse overlooking the Harraseeket River has long stood as a symbol of Freeport's past. But as we approached this anniversary, we found ourselves asking: How well did we truly know the people who lived and labored here?

That question launched one of our most ambitious research projects to date. Over the last year, our team reexamined the farm's long and layered history. We dug into archives, oral histories, court cases, family letters, and archaeological records. What emerged wasn't just a list of former owners, but a human story of resilience, conflict, adaptation, and memory.

Two Exhibitions, One Vision

Out of this initiative, visitors and residents visiting the Society's Harrington House this year will encounter two complementary exhibitions that together tell a more complete story of Pettengill Farm. *Pettengill Farm: Land, Lives, & Legacy* explores the newly discovered stories of the families who lived at the saltbox over two centuries, while *Pettengill at 50* chronicles our own journey as caretakers of this irreplaceable cultural landscape.

Together, these exhibitions demonstrate both the depth of history embedded in the property and the ongoing work required to preserve, interpret, and share these stories with future generations. They also highlight a crucial tenet of our organization's mission: preservation is not a one-time achievement but an ongoing commitment that requires sustained support and community engagement.

Piecing Together the Past: Highlights from *Pettengill Farm: Land, Lives, & Legacy*

Our renewed research efforts began in early 2024. The traditional storyline was clean and linear: the Lufkins built the house, the Curtises bought it but never lived there, the Rodicks farmed it, the Randalls briefly owned it, and finally the Pettengills made it their lifelong home until selling to the Smiths in 1959. But over time, assumptions had hardened into fact, and gaps between oral tradition and documentation widened.

So we started fresh.

Our detective work led us through Massachusetts Supreme Court records, ship logs, agricultural schedules, probate

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the collection require an
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Letter from the *Executive Director*

THIS SUMMER we revived the FHS Garden Tour – a project long in the making that finally took root thanks to the persistence of past trustee and Harrington House garden dynamo, Rebecca Hotelling. With Becky's leadership and the coordination of Ineka Shair and Anne Ritchie, the event blossomed into success. Together they rallied gardeners who opened their landscapes and volunteers who welcomed visitors (page 7).

Amid planning, someone asked me: *What does a garden tour have to do with history?* At first, I shrugged. Not every fundraiser mirrors our mission directly. But as I biked between gardens on those glorious July days – speaking with gardeners and guests, pressing my nose into late-blooming peonies, overhearing neighbors swap tips – the answer became clear.

Our role at FHS is to pay attention to place, people, and the changes that shape life here. No one does that more closely than gardeners. They dig into the soil, track sun and rain, note yearly shifts, and learn what thrives in each patch. Gardening, like history, is a record of observation and adaptation.

The tour carried visitors from the rocky ledges of Highview to the

tidal shores of Staples Point, from stone gardens to plots bursting with perennials, trees, and vegetables. The variety was staggering – not only in what grew, but in the wisdom of gardeners who shaped their land through years of trial and care. Even with global access to seeds and ideas, each bit of Freeport earth has its own demands and rewards.

In that way, the Garden Tour was more than a fundraiser. It embodied our mission to connect past and present. Neighbors met, memories resurfaced, and visitors shared not only admiration for plants but also a deep love of Freeport – its people and its land.

This connection echoes in the life of Mildred Pettengill, who lived on her saltwater farm for over 80 years. Millie logged each planting and harvest, recorded tides and weather, and captured the rhythms of a life rooted in one place. This fall, we'll explore her story through Elizabeth Guffey's new play *Moments with Millie* (page 9), as we continue celebrating 50 years at Pettengill Farm.

I look forward to seeing you at our programs this fall, as we continue to explore these connections – between land and people, past and present, and between one another. – Eric

Our Town at the Statehouse



Want to know more?



Scan to access
Fall 2024
edition online

Our Town: A Community Self-Portrait – including images from the FHS collection – concluded with an exhibition at the Maine State House. Maine Arts Commission Program Director Danielle Moriarty described the impact: “This exhibition brought the spirit of an entire community right into the halls of government. The depictions showed the many faces and stories that make up the town, and for lawmakers, staff, and visitors, it was a reminder of how art can bring people together, celebrate local pride, and keep community voices at the center of civic life.”

Rebecca Hotelling Receives GEORGE DENNEY AWARD



(L to R) FHS President Mary Babikian, George Denney Award recipient Rebecca Hotelling, Executive Director Eric C. Smith

THE GEORGE DENNEY AWARD recognizes members who have demonstrated long-term dedication to the people and history of Freeport and the mission and goals of Freeport Historical Society. Rebecca Hotelling has nurtured our organization for over 40 years. Like George, she is passionate about Freeport Historical Society, persistent in helping us accomplish our goals, committed to sharing our history, and generous with time served. She has shaped the organization as a Trustee, recruited many past and present Trustees, and cultivated financial support from the community. She is well known for her leadership of the Garden Group, where she led the charge to establish the Annual Plant Sale and new Garden Tours – both successful fundraisers. And she got her hands dirty creating the beautiful gardens at Harrington House and Pettengill Farm, assembling a stellar team to carry out the work alongside her. To quote Shakespeare, “Though she be but little, she is fierce,” and FHS is all the better for it. – Polly Brann

Pettengill Revisited

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

inventories, and hundreds of digitized photographs. We unearthed fragments – some tragic, some triumphant – that allowed us to reimagine familiar names as full, complex individuals. In the process, we rewrote entire chapters of the farm’s story.

Along the way, five people offered insight into the evolving meaning of Pettengill Farm.

Aaron Lufkin, Jr.

Perhaps our most poignant discovery came from the logbook of the *Massachusetts* of Salem, Massachusetts. In 1799, sailor Aaron Lufkin, Jr. boarded the *Massachusetts* for a voyage to Calcutta [Kolkata]. In its markets, he selected gifts for his sisters in Maine. But on the return trip, Aaron fell ill and died at sea. The ship’s clerk recorded how Aaron, even in his final delirious days, spoke only of his family. This discovery reframed the Lufkin family for us. They weren’t just the mysterious, first landowners, but a close-knit family bound by deep affection and loss.

Sarah Butman Lufkin

Aaron Jr.’s mother, Sarah Butman Lufkin, emerged from our research as perhaps the most remarkable figure we had never properly recognized. When her husband, Aaron Lufkin Sr., died shortly after mortgaging their property in 1811, Sarah



When was the saltbox built? Deeds, written records, physical evidence, and oral histories all disagree. While we’ve often said 1790-1810, a 1793 one-cent penny was found underneath the granite step. Placing a penny under a foundation stone or step is a long-standing tradition, often viewed as a way to bring good luck or fortune to the house. FHS INSTITUTIONAL FILES

Butman Lufkin was left a widow with five children and no legal protections. The farm was sold to their neighbor, David Curtis, but Sarah contested the transaction. She took Curtis to court – and won.

Her 1816 case became a landmark decision in Massachusetts



LMC Smith and Mildred Pettengill. The Smiths, fascinated by the Pettengills lifestyle helped secure their hold on the farm and repurchased portions of the original 160-acre property.

FHS COLLECTION 062



In summer 1978, the original chimney and fireplaces were dismantled and salvageable bricks were set aside.

FHS INSTITUTIONAL FILES



In 1980, a new red cedar roof was installed, helping to protect the farmhouse from ongoing water damage and structural deterioration. It marked a critical step in stabilizing the building and extending its life. FHS INSTITUTIONAL FILES

law, reestablishing a widow's right to her husband's estate. Sarah's story also explains the mystery of Curtis "abandonment" of the property that had puzzled us for years. Curtis hadn't abandoned the property. He'd been locked in a legal standoff with a determined woman who refused to be erased from the record.

Jane Rodick Brewer

Among the seven Rodick children who inherited portions of the farm in 1848, Jane Rodick Brewer's story stands out for its unrelenting hardship. Widowed young with three boys under the age of four, she lived in a modest house near the saltbox – one her family likely helped build – but struggled with poverty, water access, and eventually homelessness.

Life was hard enough for Jane when family was nearby; it became even harder as the Rodick siblings sold off their lots and moved away. With a well that often ran dry, her new neighbor (and owner of the saltbox), Daniel Randall, built a spite fence to block Jane and her boys' access to water. When Jane's house caught fire one night, Jane came screaming across the field for help, but no help came. She "had no water, you see," Mildred Pettengill reminds us nearly one hundred years after the fact.

Jane's remaining years were marked by poverty, displacement, and ultimately residence at the Freeport Poor Farm, where she died in 1896. Her story, reconstructed through archaeological excavation and oral memory, reminds us that even pastoral places like Pettengill could be scenes of deep struggle, especially for women on the margins.

Rebecca Sylvester Randall

When Daniel Randall died in 1866, his widow Rebecca stepped into full management of the farm. Census and agricultural records show she ran it successfully for over a decade while maintaining livestock, cultivating crops, and raising six children.

Though Mildred Pettengill later remembered "Old Man Randall" as mean-spirited, our research uncovered a more compelling figure in Rebecca. She defied 19th-century norms and preserved the farm's productivity during a critical period. Her story challenges assumptions about gender roles and reveals the skill behind women's rural labor.

Mildred Gerry Pettengill

And of course, no history of Pettengill is complete without its last full-time resident: Mildred G. Pettengill (1882–1981). Mildred lived at the farm nearly her entire life, moving into the role of homemaker at age 14 after her mother and sister died. She was observant, self-reliant, and deeply attuned to the natural world. She collected rocks, raised flowers, walked everywhere, and took photographs that now offer some of the richest visual documentation we have of farm life in the early 20th-century.

Her oral histories, recorded in the 1970s, form the backbone of what we know about the saltbox today. Through this research



Current Exhibits Tell the Stories

Pettengill Farm: Land, Lives, & Legacy and *Pettengill at 50* incorporate new research and discoveries to offer a more complete story of Pettengill Farm's history. Find out about the families who lived at the saltbox over two centuries, and see our journey as caretakers of this irreplaceable cultural landscape.

At Harrington House through the end of the year.



process, we came to see Mildred not just as a witness to the past, but as a critical interpreter of it. Her memories, though personal, reflect the broader rhythms of seasonal labor, family interdependence, and the quiet persistence that defines this place.

Pettengill at 50

These discoveries about past residents take on deeper meaning when viewed alongside our own fifty-year journey as stewards of Pettengill Farm. Since 1975, when LMC and Eleanor Smith donated the property following devastating vandalism, FHS has committed to preserving both structures *and* stories.

Our stewardship has included major preservation projects – jacking up and moving the house to pour a new foundation, rebuilding the chimney with salvaged brick, restoring windows, and maintaining the roof. But it has also meant serving as a living classroom for generations of local students, hosting our beloved annual Pettengill Farm Day celebration, and providing programming that connects people to the land and its history.

The archaeological digs, the careful conservation of the sgraffiti folk art on the bedroom walls, the digitization of over 800 Mildred Pettengill photographs – all of this represents ongoing investment in understanding and preserving this place. For the Freeport Historical Society, this is what dedication to stewardship means: not just preserving structures, but investing in research, interpretation, and access for future generations.

The Work Continues

As we look toward the future, we're reminded that preservation is never finished. The physical preservation of the farmhouse requires constant attention. The 140-acre landscape needs ongoing stewardship. The educational programs that connect thousands of visitors to this place each year depend on sustained support. The research that brings these forgotten voices back to life requires dedicated resources.

Our anniversary exhibitions celebrate that achievement while pointing toward the work still to be done. Every generation brings new questions, new methods, and new perspectives to bear on the past. The stories we've uncovered this year prove that even a place we thought we knew well can surprise us. And our work underscores that history is rarely tidy, but layered, unfinished, and sometimes contradictory.

As we look to the future, we are asking: What does it mean to care for a place with complicated histories? How can we make room for more voices in telling these stories? And what will it take to preserve Pettengill Farm not just as a historic structure or landscape, but as a place of meaning?

The next fifty years of stewardship await. With your support, we'll continue uncovering the stories, preserving the structures, and sharing the significance of this extraordinary place where history, memory, and meaning converge along the banks of the Harraseeket River. **FHS**

Fall 2025 Events



Scan the QR code to purchase tickets for these upcoming events

Pettengill Weekend

The first weekend in October is Pettengill Weekend!

We're celebrating this historic landmark with two spectacular events:



Pettengill Hay Day

Saturday, October 4th, 4–6 pm

After last year's fantastic inaugural event, we're thrilled to bring back this special celebration at the historic Pettengill Farm. Spend a memorable evening with us featuring live musical performances, delicious offerings from local food trucks, and craft beverages from area breweries. Mark your calendars for this must-attend community gathering!



Pettengill Farm Day

Sunday, October 5th, 10 am–2 pm

Come celebrate nearly five decades of community tradition at the 49th annual Pettengill Farm Day! This cherished Freeport event welcomes families to explore our historic saltbox-style farmhouse through guided tours, enjoy live musical entertainment, and savor great food. Experience hands-on period crafts and traditional games that bring history to life. Don't miss this treasured local celebration that has been bringing our community together for generations.

**New
Play!**



MILLIE

Saturday, September 20th, 7 pm

Meetinghouse Arts and FHS present a staged reading of a new play based on the life of Mildred Pettengill. How this remarkable woman lived on her subsistence saltwater farm has fascinated Freeport for decades, but her inner life is a bit of a mystery. Local playwright Elizabeth Guffey invites us to imagine who Millie was through her relationships with family and friends as she navigates life's challenges. A conversation about Millie's place in Freeport history will follow the reading.

EVENT WRAP-UPS



2025 Summer Solstice Gala

Over 100 guests gathered at the historic and beautifully decorated Mallet Barn on the longest day of the year for an evening of community, cuisine, and music.

The State Street Traditional Jazz Band brought authentic turn-of-the-century New Orleans jazz to life, transporting guests to a bygone era. Freeport locals including the Freeport Oyster Bar, Athena's Cantina, The Bakeshop, South Freeport Village Store, and Flavia Mascolo provided exceptional food that delighted everyone. The auction featuring unique items donated by Freeport businesses was a major highlight of the evening.

FHS extends sincere gratitude to all the volunteers and committee members whose behind-the-scenes work made this memorable celebration possible.



Plant Sale

Despite the weather, dedicated gardeners flocked to Harrington Gardens for the 2025 plant sale. Visitors stayed warm with coffee and fresh baked goods while browsing an abundant selection of annuals and perennials. Thanks to the hard work of FHS garden volunteers and our many business donors, this beloved annual tradition bloomed into another successful event.



Garden Tour

After years away, the Freeport in Flower Garden Tour made a triumphant comeback with ten stunning gardens welcoming visitors. Over 100 enthusiasts signed up to explore these local botanical gems. FHS thanks Allen, Sterling, and Lothrop for their sponsorship, as well as the generous garden hosts and dedicated FHS gardeners who brought this beloved event back to life.



Annual Meeting

The FHS annual meeting was once again held at the historic First Parish Church, where attendees welcomed several new board members and celebrated Becky Hotelling, who received the prestigious George Denney Award for her contributions to the organization. Executive Director Eric C. Smith and Collections Manager Audrey Wolfe delivered an engaging presentation on Pettengill Farm, exploring both its rich history and current preservation efforts as FHS proudly commemorates 50 years as owner and steward of this treasured property.

Getting (Re)Plastered at Pettengill

IF YOU'VE TOURED the Pettengill farmhouse, you've seen what we call its state of "arrested decay." This is intentional; the saltbox is a study house for historians and visitors to see the layers of history contained within the structure. But even arrested decay requires maintenance. This summer we engaged Peter Lord Plaster & Paint to stabilize the crumbling plaster.

You may have seen their trailer and signage on a walk to the farm. An award-winning artisan, Peter specializes in preservation and restoration of historic surfaces. He and his team began by evaluating the existing plaster and, in consultation with Collections Manager Audrey Wolfe, determined how best to

address each area of concern. Using a combination of materials and techniques Lord developed, his team painstakingly stabilized, repaired, or replaced each element. His method provides the strength of new plaster with the look of the original plaster. The result improves the visitor experience while maintaining the value of the study house, even adding a new chapter to the book of Pettengill Farm's history.

Thanks to a grant from the Cynthia Woods Mitchell Fund and matching funds from a bequest by Linda L. Bean, we were able to undertake this important work and have it completed in time for Pettengill Farm Day. We encourage you to tour the house during PFD and see the results. **FHS**



New Faces at PETTENGILL FARM

THIS SUMMER, visitors to Pettengill Farm encountered a few new faces, as FHS welcomed livestock to the property for the first time in over 40 years. FHS partnered with Cooper Giblin (Giblin Cattle Company) in this first-of-its-kind initiative to apply proven regenerative agriculture practices on an historic property. It has been a "win-win-win" for the land, Giblin, and the cows and sheep who spent their summer with us.

The benefits of this collaboration have been manifold. For FHS, having livestock in the pastures reconnected visitors with the farm's working heritage, opening the window to the past a little bit wider. The Pettengill family kept dairy cows, pigs,



(L) In 2025, cows returned to Pettengill for the first time in over forty years. (R) c.1980, Pettengill House Committee member, Liz Johnson, works alongside her "friends". At that time, Eleanor Houston Smith leased the Pettengill fields for the Wolfe's Neck Farm herds to graze.



geese, and chickens, which were fed on what they found or cultivated on the property. Their diet consisted of green grass – and in the early days salt (marsh) hay – in the summer and mown hay and corn ensilage in the winter, harvested with hand tools and horse-drawn equipment. To this day you can see Frank's mowing machine in the woods by the back field, right where he left it.

For Giblin, who is Senior Apprentice at Wolfe's Neck Center for Agriculture and the Environment, the project offered a chance to apply his custom grazing plan

in producing sustainable, high-quality grass-fed beef. The Lowline Angus cows and Barbados Blackbelly sheep he chose are known to promote healthier, more resilient pastures by restoring soil health and supporting wildlife and pollinators.

For the livestock, there was a summer of grazing on abundant – and delicious – green grass and wildflowers.

This partnership has highlighted collaboration, sustainability, and community engagement. We hope you've enjoyed seeing this aspect of the farm's history brought to life. **FHS**

Getting to know *Millie*: a conversation with Elizabeth Guffey

As part of the Freeport Historical Society's year-long celebration marking the 50th anniversary of our acquisition of Pettengill Farm, we are thrilled to present a new staged reading of a play by FHS Trustee and playwright Elizabeth Guffey: *Moments with Millie*, centered on the life of Mildred Pettengill, the last resident of the saltwater farm.

The play, set to be read on September 20, 2025, is a thoughtful and emotionally rich portrayal of Mildred's life, exploring her independence, relationships, and enduring connection to the land.

Recently, Executive Director Eric C. Smith sat down with Elizabeth to discuss the creative evolution of the play, her research process, and why Mildred's story remains relevant and resonant today.

ECS: Elizabeth, this new version of the play has deep roots. When did you first start working on it?

EG: The original version was written back in 2015 and performed as a monologue for Pettengill Farm Day. It was based on earlier "Ghosts of Freeport's Past" tours, where we featured Mildred as a character. But what I'm working on now is a completely new piece – richer in detail, with dialogue and multiple characters.

ECS: What inspired you to revisit and expand Mildred's story now?

EG: It started with a nudge from Suzanne Watson at Meetinghouse Arts who remembered the original piece. That conversation opened the door for a new vision, a fuller theatrical work about Mildred – not just as a historical figure, but as a person with agency, inner life, and complex relationships.

ECS: How did your understanding of Mildred change during this second round of research?

EG: In 2015, I portrayed her as a two-dimensional subsistence farmer. Now,

I see her as far more nuanced. She was intelligent, curious, and connected to her community. She was resilient, practical, and deeply attached to the farm – not out of tragedy, but by choice. This time, I don't see her life as shrinking or sad. I think she found meaning in her routines, her reading, her flowers, and the people around her.

ECS: Who are some of the other characters in the play?

EG: The three main characters, aside from Mildred, are her brother Frank, her mother Adelaide, and her close friend Vera Ballard Coffin. Each reveals something different about Mildred. Frank's character, for example, has evolved a lot, especially as I've learned more about his later life and decline. Vera brings warmth and perspective. I added L.M.C. Smith, too. I think he represented something important to her – an echo of what her grandfather tried to do – preserving and reclaiming land.

ECS: As a playwright working with historical material, how do you balance fact with creative interpretation?

EG: It's a delicate balance. I never put words in her mouth that I can't justify somehow – whether through her logbooks, library records, or letters from others. But it's not a biography. I've used composite characters to protect real people's legacies while still exploring the emotional realities of Mildred's world. I believe that plays are about emotional truth, not just factual

accuracy. The biography can come later.

ECS: What modern themes have you uncovered through Mildred's story?

EG: So many! Aging in place, caregiving, dementia, and rural isolation – they're all deeply relevant. Her brother Frank ultimately died in the Augusta Mental Health Institute, and I imagine Mildred struggled for years before that to care for him. Those questions – how we support our loved ones, how we navigate independence and decline – are as pressing today as they were then.

ECS: Has this process changed how you see Pettengill Farm itself?

EG: Absolutely. I see Mildred's presence in every detail now: the orange daylilies, the muddy tracks, the ridge she used to climb. I'm struck by how much the landscape has changed, and how deeply she shaped and preserved it. The farm is remembered as Pettengill Farm largely because of her stewardship, her resilience, and her choice to stay. She's everywhere out there.

ECS: What can we expect on September 20?

EG: You'll see a dramatic reading – not a history lecture – with actors bringing to life a deeply personal story rooted in fact but elevated by emotion and imagination. It's about a woman living her life with strength and intention. I hope people will come away feeling they've truly met Mildred. **FHS**



MEET OUR NEW TRUSTEES

*FHS thanks outgoing board members **SCOTT BURRILL** and **NADIA SALIBA** for their time and contributions to the organization.*



LYNN SULLIVAN

Lynn is a native of Freeport and currently serves at North Yarmouth Academy as both a US history teacher and Upper School Dean of Students, as well as the Academy's historian. Lynn earned a B.A. in History from Colby College and a Master's degree in American and New England Studies from USM, writing her thesis on the economic transformation and historical invention of Freeport. Lynn recently delved into the history of her childhood home at Cheehawk Farm in South Freeport and presented that research at a 2023 FHS program and an article in *The Dash*. Lynn enjoys cold weather, being on the water, and raising poorly behaved dogs.



JESSICA CHASE

Jessica grew up in Pemaquid and has lived in Freeport for 14 years. She earned a B.S. in Accounting from the University of Maine. Jessica joined Ultimus Fund Solutions in 2023 as a Senior Vice President in Relationship Management, where she also serves as Principal Executive Officer and as Treasurer for a number of mutual funds. She also works on certain strategic initiatives for the firm. Jessica is raising two sons, Rocco and Max, one currently at Freeport Middle School and one at Freeport High School, and their Cavalier King Charles spaniel, Princess Grace.



AUDREY LYNCH

Audrey Lynch has been proud to call Freeport home for nearly a decade. She brings with her a strong commitment to community service and civic engagement. With a professional background in nonprofit leadership and development, Audrey has spent her career building partnerships, launching community initiatives, and helping good ideas get off the ground.

She and her husband, Dan, have raised their now-adult children with a deep appreciation for history, travel, and the importance of giving back. In their free time, they enjoy traveling abroad, as well as exploring Maine's coast, back roads, and small-town treasures.



DAVID SHEHADI

David is a strategic account manager at Memnon Archiving Services, where he helps organizations preserve and digitize valuable media collections. Originally from Dorset, Vermont, David now lives in Freeport with his wife Alex and their son Howie. He brings a lifelong passion for history and is excited to support the Freeport Historical Society's mission to preserve and provide access to its collections.

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What do you want to read in the pages of *The Dash*? Do you have a story idea? Do you want to contribute an article on an aspect of Freeport history that interests you? Or interview one of Freeport’s many “Living Treasures” and write about them? We want to hear from you! Send your story ideas or interest in writing to dash@freeporthistoricalsociety.org.

For more information:
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