

## Ffrost-Sawyer Family History

Between 1940 and 1966, about 140 gifts to the Bowen Collection were made by three sisters from the Durham/Dover Ffrost family, one of whom had married into the prominent Sawyer family: Mary Pepperrell Ffrost Sawyer (1871-1947), Margaret Hamilton Ffrost (1873-1953), and Elizabeth Rollins Ffrost (1881-1966). A fourth sister, Sarah Low Ffrost (1875-1964) does not appear to have been part of the process.

With the original donation records for the collection no longer extant, the date of the gifts has to be deduced. The earliest dated inventory of the collection is from 1939-1940, and there are no mentions of Ffrost or Ffrost-Sawyer gifts. The impetus for the donations appears to be a 1941 loan by the sisters to the University of New Hampshire of dresses from about 1866, to be used in centennial celebrations of the founding of the university. Mary died in 1947 and Margaret in 1953, there are no gifts from Elizabeth alone, and all the items are present in the 1966 inventory: it's clear the donations were made between 1940 and 1953, with some before 1947.

The sisters' gifts to the Bowen Collection can be grouped into three categories:

Objects given together by all three Ffrost sisters are tied solely to the Ffrost family and had to have been donated before Mary's death in 1947. Only Mary, Margaret, and Elizabeth are specifically listed as donors to the Bowen Collection, and it is unclear why Sarah, who lived in the Dover family home on Locust street with her unmarried sisters until at least 1956, was not included. Those included in this digital catalog are:

- **Museum Number 476** is a pair of c.1780 green wool strapless whalebone stays. Clearly handed down or left behind in the family, the possible candidates for who wore them given their size for a mature woman and date are the donors' great-great grandmothers. On their father's side, these were Margaret Weeks Smith Ffrost (1729-1795) of Lubberland, Mehitabel Sheafe Ffrost (b. 1731) of New Castle, Hannah Hatch Hoole (1753-1830), and Ruth Prince (b. 1751). On their mother's side, they were Elisabeth Baker or Mary Wright (1728-1811).
- **Museum Number 140** is a c.1800 homespun blue and white striped dress. As a loose robe-like garment, the possible list of owners is quite large, encompassing both great-great grandmothers and great-grandmothers from the Burleigh, Weeks, Prince, Rollins, Carr, Baker, and Wright families at the least.
- **Museum Number 100** is a 1850-1860 lavender printed housedress. It could have been worn either by the donors' paternal grandmother, Mary Hoole Ffrost (1813-1882) in Durham, or by their maternal grandmother Mary Anne Hale Low (1799-1882) in Dover, though Mary Ffrost is the more likely candidate given the styling of the dress;

she would have been in her forties, and the dress could easily have been left at the Ffrost's Durham home, which was still in the family at the time of the gift.

- **Museum Number 455** is a pair of 1860s-1870s kidskin slippers with bows. These were most likely worn by the donors' mother, Martha Hale Low Ffrost (1842-1925) who would have been in her twenties. There is the possibility that they are related to her wedding in 1870.
- **Museum Number 128** is a c. 1875 brown print housedress, worn by Martha Ffrost in Dover.
- **Museum Number 46** is a 1877-1882 gold taffeta dress with a long, fashionable train. This very stylish formal gown belonged to Martha Ffrost.
- **Museum Number 166** is a 1900-1910 bathing suit and could have belonged to any of the sisters. Mary and Margaret would have been in their thirties, and Elizabeth in her twenties.

The next four items could have been worn by any of the donors, or even their mother, Martha:

- **Museum Number 11** is a c. 1902 purple dress with a black overlay.
- **Museum Number 91** is a 1910s white silk dress with embroidery and fringe.
- **Museum Number 216** is a c. 1912 linen suit.
- **Museum Number 68** is a c. 1915-1918 sheer black net dress that would have been worn over a colored undergarment.
- **Museum Number 102** is a c.1926 sheer lavender chiffon dress, probably worn by Elizabeth.
- **Museum Number 61** is a 1920s black dress with accordion pleats and scalloped edges and could have been worn by any of the sisters. Their mother died in 1924, it is possible this was worn as a mourning dress.

Objects given by Margaret and Elizabeth together are tied to the Ffrost family. Since Mary shared in earlier Ffrost gifts, it is probable that these were donated after Mary's death, and give their dates all were worn by their mother, Martha Hale Low Ffrost. Those included in this digital catalog are:

- **Museum Number 545** is a 1870s-1880s blue straw bonnet with velvet and feather puffs.
- **Museum Number 535** is a c.1880s brown velvet bonnet with jet face trim.
- **Museum Number 505** is a 1880s gray felt with wine velvet and jet net.
- **Museum Number 497** is a 1880s blue felt bonnet with feathers.
- **Museum Number 558** is a mid-1880s purple velvet bonnet.
- **Museum Number 523** is a 1880s straw bonnet with brown velvet.

Objects given by Mary alone either belonged to her or to her in-laws, Charles and Susan Sawyer, and therefore arrived in the collection prior to 1947.

- **Museum Number 324** is a 1840-1860 brown velvet vest, worn by Charles Henry Sawyer (1840-1908) in Dover as a young man.
- **Museum Number 74 a,b,c** is a 1860s blue plaid skirt with a day bodice and a matching evening bodice. Susan Cowell Sawyer (1839-1899) would have been in her twenties when she wore this in Dover.
- **Museum Number 393** is a pair of 1865-1880 white cotton stockings, with Susan Sawyer's laundry tag sewn to them.
- **Museum Number 443** is a pair of 1880s-1900s purple faille boots, likely worn by Mary, who would have been in her twenties.
- **Museum Number 389** is a pair of 1880s white cotton stockings, likely belonging to Susan.
- **Museum Number 481** is a c.1885 bustle, more likely to have belonged to Susan than to a young teenage Mary.
- **Museum Number 126** is a 1880s silk duster designed to fit over a bustle, worn by Susan.
- **Museum Number 101** is a c. 1892 dark wine one-piece dress, suitable for entertaining at home. It was worn by Susan at the family mansion on Central Avenue in Dover.
- **Museum Number 49** is a c.1898 bodice with black lace, rhinestones, beads, chenille, worn by Mary, possibly around the time of her 1897 marriage to James Sawyer.
- **Museum Number 316** is a c.1900 pale gold corduroy vest worn by Charles at about the time his Dover woolen mill went bankrupt.
- **Museum Number 452** is a pair of 1910s "colonial" blue kid pumps, worn by Mary.

While most of the objects date from the middle of the nineteenth century to the early twentieth century, the Frost and Sawyer family histories twine through New Hampshire's past, through wars, the governor's mansion and state house, and the industries that enriched the state, reaching all the way back to the earliest European settlements.

## **Ffrost Family History**

In 1620, James I of England granted the Plymouth Council for New England a royal charter to found colonies along the northeastern coast of America, and on August 10, 1622, the Council in turn granted John Mason and Fernando Gorges all the land between the estuaries of the Merrimack River (present day Newburyport, Massachusetts) and the Kennebeck River (present day Bath, Maine). Morgan Howell (1595-1679) and Mary Edwards (c.1596-1666) were among the first English arrivals to this new colony, marrying in 1622 or 1623 at Cape Porpoise near what is now Kennebunkport, Maine. Their daughter, Mary Howell, was born there in 1623, and a few years later, in 1629, the colony was divided in half along the Piscataqua River (its mouth at present day Portsmouth, New Hampshire), with Mason claiming the southern portion as the Province of New Hampshire and Gorges the northern portion as New Somersetshire. The Howells remained with Gorges' colony, and Mary Howell was about eighteen when she married recent arrival Joseph Bolles (1608-1678) at York Village. Their daughter, Mary Bolles (1641-1704), was born in 1641, and she married Charles Ffrost (1632-1697) in 1660. They had nine children together.

Charles Ffrost had come to the colony as a young child, about three or four years old, when his father Nicholas (1595-1663) emigrated with his wife and children, settling near the Piscataqua River at Sturgeon Creek in present-day Eliot, Maine. Upon Nicholas' death Charles inherited the homestead and five hundred acres of land. By this point what had once been a fairly peaceful cohabitation with the Native American tribes began to shatter into violence under the pressure of an ever-increasing settler population. The French took advantage of the situation, attempting to destabilize the English colonies by making alliance with the Wabanaki Confederacy. King Philip's War, or Metacom's War, had begun in 1675 further south in Rhode Island, but raids had become frequent up into the northern colonies. Major Roger Waldron and Captain Charles Ffrost led the settler defense in the region, and their actions at Waldron's Dover garrison in 1676 led ultimately to their deaths. Together they tricked about 400 Wabanaki Confederacy warriors, who had made peace with Waldron and had trusted him, into discharging their weapons in the first round of what was supposed to be a mock fight, rendering them defenseless against their subsequent capture by soldiers who had held their own fire. This was regarded as a dishonorable breach of hospitality and in 1689, after colonists' memories had faded, Dover was attacked. Waldron was singled out for execution, and a quarter of the town's population was killed. Meanwhile the raids and attacks continued and Ffrost, now a Major, remained active in his military service until 1693, adding to the enmity the tribes felt for him with every encounter. In 1697, he and a small party were traveling from Newichewannik (Berwick) when they were ambushed. Charles was killed along with several others, but his sons Charles and John survived the attack.

John Ffrost (1681-1732) was sixteen when his father died. He went on to command a British warship before bringing the family branch to the New Hampshire side of the Piscataqua, becoming a merchant in New Castle. He traded throughout the West Indies and also ran a ferry between Portsmouth and New Castle; in his civic life, he was commissioned Justice of the Superior Court in 1724 and was a member of the Provincial Council of the Governor. In 1702 he married Mary Bray Pepperrell, the first generation of her family to be born in the colonies, and they had seventeen children.

Their son George (1720- 1796) was born in New Castle and was a merchant captain for twenty years prior to the Revolution, during which he served as an elected delegate to the Continental Congress from 1777 to 1779. In 1764 George married Margaret Weeks Smith, and joined her at the Smith garrison house on Great Bay, near today's Moody Point. All six of Margaret's great-grandparents had arrived in New England by the 1640s, with one great-grandmother, Hannah Parker Hubbard, among the first children born in the colonies, in 1620. George and Margaret had four children, among them twins George and Mary (Mary's daughter Sarah married William Plumer of Epping, who became a US Senator and a governor of New Hampshire.)

George Ffrost II (1765-1841) married Margaret Burleigh (1770-1846) in 1797. Margaret had at least nine ancestors who emigrated between 1623 and 1649, including her third-great grandfather, Roger Conant (1592-1679), who arrived in 1623 aboard the "Anne", landing at Plymouth and founding Salem, Massachusetts, of which he was its first governor. George and Margaret made themselves comfortable in Durham, where George had purchased a house built in 1649 by Valentine Hill on the banks of the Oyster River. Today it is the oldest house in Durham and one of the oldest in the state. It was originally part of a sawmill operation and was one of the few houses to survive the devastating 1694 attack on the settlement by French, Maliseet, Penobscot, and Norridgewock forces. Its history was of less interest to George than its proximity to the river; he was a successful merchant and the river as a commercial artery was key to his acquisition of the house and land. With the arrival of rail connections in Durham in the 1840s, however, the importance of the Oyster River waned, and George oversaw the transformation of the house from a working structure into a mansion — and purchased railway stock. He served in the New Hampshire State Legislature as Durham representative in 1807, and was Durham's Postmaster from 1808-1841, town moderator from 1812-1814 and again in 1828, and fought in the War of 1812 as a member of Captain Alfred Smith's company.

George and Margaret's son, William Pepperrell Ffrost (1802-1892) married Mary Horle Smith (1813-1882) in 1842. While this generation of Ffrosts eventually moved to Dover, William and Mary's daughters Margaret Burleigh Ffrost (1846-1916) and Anna Pepperrell Ffrost (1849-1909) remained in Durham and lived on at the house, overseeing extensive work on the gardens.

Margaret and Anna's brother, George Seward Ffrost (1844-1931), followed their parents to Dover, where he married Martha Hale Low (1842-1925) in 1870. Martha's fourth great-grandfather, Robert Hale (1609-1659) emigrated from England in 1630 and his wife Johanna Cutter had sailed at about the same time. Martha's father, Dr. Nathaniel Low (1792-1883) had served in the Civil War, as had her aunt, Sarah Low (1830-1913), who insisted on following her brother into the war effort. Her family balked until her determination won them over; she left Dover in 1862 to serve as a nurse until 1865, even working at the front. Martha named one of her four daughters after her intrepid aunt: Sarah Low Ffrost (1875-1964). George and Martha's other daughters were Mary Pepperrell Ffrost Sawyer (1871-1947), Margaret Hamilton Ffrost (1873-1953), and Elizabeth Rollins Ffrost (1881-1966). Mary married James Cowan Sawyer (1872-1944) in 1897 in Dover. The couple moved to Andover, Massachusetts for a time where James was treasurer for the Philips Andover Academy, but they also took over the Ffrost Durham house, turning it into a Colonial Revival summer estate with extensive formal gardens, arbors, an elaborate stone wall, tennis courts, and a swimming pool.

## Sawyer Family History

James Cowan Sawyer could trace his antecedents to English-born seventeenth century emigres on both sides, though his ties to New Hampshire were more recent. His fourth-great grandparents were all emigres from England who settled in Massachusetts, and it wasn't until his uncle Alfred Ira Sawyer (b.1799) who came to Dover in 1824 that the family made its mark on the state. Alfred established the Sawyer Woolen Mills Company on the banks of the Bellamy River, at the time just the third woolen mill in New Hampshire. At his death in 1849, his brother Zenas Sawyer (1808-1856) ran the business for a year alone before being joined in its management by brother Jonathan Sawyer (1817-1991). Zenas retired in 1852, at which point their brother Francis Asbury Sawyer (1812-1881) joined Jonathan, sharing responsibility for the mill until 1873, although Francis remained in Boston.

Jonathan Sawyer and Martha Perkins (1816-1896) moved to Dover when their son Charles Henry Sawyer (1840-1908) was ten. Jonathan built a grand Italianate mansion on extensive lands along Central Street in Dover; this was later torn down during the construction of the Spaulding Turnpike. It once stood where the ramp to NH 108/Central Avenue now lies, a very short stroll to the mill.

Charles married Susan Ellen Cowan (1839-1899) in Dover in 1865, and they had five children, including James Cowan Sawyer. Susan had been born in Dover to James Wellington Cowan (1814-1848), who had emigrated from England and earned his degree in medicine from Dartmouth in 1835. He married Elizabeth Hodgdon (1818-1888) in Dover, in 1837, and Elizabeth could trace her family back to the founding of Nantucket Island — her fourth-great-grandfathers, Tristram Coffin (1609-1681) and Edward Starbuck (1604-1690) were among the eight original founders of the colony, and Coffin was Governor of Nantucket in 1671 and from 1674-1689. Their children, Elizabeth's third-great-grandparents, Peter Coffin (1631-1715) and Abigail Starbuck (b. 1641) left Nantucket for Exeter; Peter had made the crossing from England with his father in 1636. Both Charles Sawyer and Susan Cowan could point to Revolutionary War heroes in their ancestry. Charles' great-grandfather Israel Whitney (1751-1827) and Susan's great-grandfather Caleb Hodgdon (1732-1814) had answered the call when General Gage marched on Concord, Massachusetts in 1775 and the iconic rides of Paul Revere and William Dawes raised the alarm. Gage's troops had left eight militia men dead in Lexington but while they continued on to Concord, Isaac marched from Harvard, Massachusetts and Caleb marched from Dover, joining the militia units that harried Gage's troops all the way back to Boston.

Charles was twenty-five when he and Susan married, and by then had been immersed in the mill's workings for eight years, learning from the ground-up. At twenty-six he was appointed superintendent and became president of the company in 1881. By 1883 the Sawyer mill was

the largest manufacturer of woolens in the state. In addition to his manufacturing concern, Charles served in the New Hampshire House of Representatives from 1869-1871 and from 1876-1878 and was the state's 41st governor from 1887-1889. During his term he represented New Hampshire at several centennial celebrations including the Philadelphia centennial of the Constitution and the New York centennial of Washington's inauguration, as well as the 1889 Universal Exposition in Paris.

Two of Charles and Susan's four sons has joined their father in running the family business, and by 1898, William Davis Sawyer (1866-1922) was its treasurer and Charles Francis Sawyer (1869-1938) was the superintendent. However, by this time the mill's prominent market position had been overtaken by the Amoskeag Manufacturing Company, and it went into bankruptcy in 1899. It must have been a devastating year for the Sawyers; not only did they lose the mill that had been in the family since 1824, but Susan passed away, only sixty years old. Susan had inherited her family's farm on Stark Avenue in Dover, originally built by Caleb Hodgdon in the late eighteenth century. When the Sawyer Mill was sold off, Charles and several of their children moved to the land, which they named Middlebrook Farm. There, they ran a dairy, and during the early 20th century the farm prospered supplying much of the area's milk.

The mill was sold to the American Woolen Company and for a brief time Charles Francis Sawyer stayed on as an agent there. He soon left the region, striking out on his own to Dalton, Massachusetts, where he ran his own woolen mill until his death in 1938. (Production at the former Sawyer Woolen Mill ceased in 1955, and the mill was converted into housing in the mid-1980s. The Sawyer Woolen Mill Company's papers, records, sample books, and more are held at the Baker Library Special Collections at Harvard University.)

Daughter Elizabeth Coffin Sawyer (1880-1980) took over management of the dairy after Charles' death in 1908 and ran it well for several decades. None of her four brothers were interested in the endeavor; Charles had gone to Dalton, William Davis Sawyer (1866-1922) was a lawyer in New York City, and Edward Sawyer (1874-1924) was president of a wire manufacturing company in Connecticut. James moved to Andover with Mary, where he was treasurer of the Philips Andover Academy until 1931, at which point they returned to Durham and the Frost family home. Elizabeth had been the only Sawyer sibling to remain in Dover. By the time a bovine epidemic hit Middlebrook Farm in the mid-1940s, forcing the culling of the entire herd and the closure of the dairy, she was the only member of her Sawyer generation remaining. She lived to be 100, passing away in Brookline, Massachusetts in 1980.