

QUEEN CITY REGISTER.

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The Bangor Historical Society's Quarterly Newsletter

Memories of Freese's Department Store Endure

ON GREAT FIELDS

The Life and Unlikely Heroism of Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain



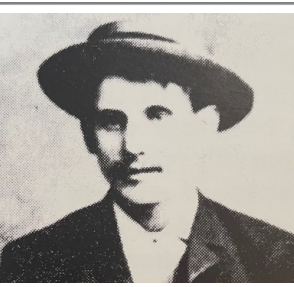
NEW BOOKS CONNECT TO BANGOR HISTORY
NEW BIOGRAPHY OF JOSHUA LAWRENCE CHAMBERLAIN
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The Christmas Lights at Freese's Department Store in the 1930s - Bangor Historical Society Collection



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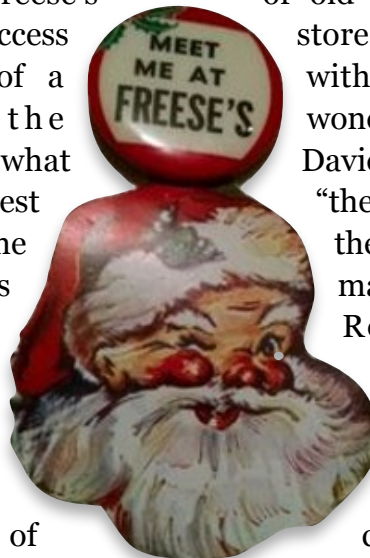


DID YOU KNOW?
MAINE'S FIRST SYNAGOGUE WAS IN BANGOR!
PAGE 4



The young entrepreneur likely never could have imagined his single storefront shop, established in 1892 as a men's clothier, would eventually become the "Macy's of Maine." A. Langdon Freese's vision and marketing success led to the expansion of a women's line and the subsequent growth of what would become the largest department store in Maine in the 1930s. His business acumen was so astute that as early as 1906, The Bangor Daily Commercial called him "a rising young merchant, the proprietor of one of the most prosperous and popular dry goods houses in the

state."¹ By 1907, he had added four floors, modern lighting, and even an electric elevator to attract a growing customer base from across eastern and central Maine. Wayne Reilly's research of old Bangor newspapers noted the store as a "commercial miracle"² with a special emphasis on the wonder of children at the holidays. David Walsh remembers Bangor as "the emerald city" with Freese's as the "wizard's castle filled with all manner of wonder."³ Beverly Roberts of Bradford recalls childhood visits to Freese's with a "candy counter stacked with candy canes, ribbon candies, fudge, and boxes of chocolates" and "the only elevator in town that transported a child to a magical fifth floor filled with



Santa Waits at Freese's
Reference 4

(See "Freese's" page 2)

Curator's Corner



As we end a busy and productive year for the Bangor Historical Society, we turn this issue's column over to the President of our Board, Risteen Bahr:

"2023 has been an exciting year for the Bangor Historical Society (BHS) with new events, more volunteers, new board members, and extended visitation hours for Hill House. We

began Phase II of our capital campaign for restoration of the house portico, the granite wall around the property, and the ornamental fence atop the wall. BHS received several grants for these two projects and private donations to get us to this point but we still have a ways to go! Thank you to those who have contributed so far. In June, BHS unveiled its copy of the Emancipation Proclamation in commemoration of its 160th anniversary at our Annual Meeting and, in August, in collaboration with Mt. Hope Cemetery, we marked the 35th anniversary of the filming of Pet Sematary in Mt. Hope with a showing of the movie. Thank you to our host Mt. Hope Cemetery, the donors of auction items, and to our sponsors Cross Insurance, Brookings-Smith, S.K. Tours, and Maine Trailer. Our awards event in October with a new venue and new format was sponsored by Means Wealth Management and the BDN which recognized Brian Swartz and Ardeana Hamlin, Abe & Heather Firth, and Andrew "Dash" Davidson for their contributions to historical storytelling and preservation in our area. The Board held a strategic planning session in November to update a strategic plan that will guide us over the next few years and we look forward to sharing it with you in 2024. Holidays at Hill House returned in 2023 with volunteers decorating the space in Victorian style and, as usual, we welcomed a number of people to Hill House, led historic tours, carried out research, took care of the collection, created this new newsletter, and otherwise Protected, Preserved and Shared Bangor's history. We're grateful for your support and look forward to sharing more of Bangor's past with you in the future."

Look forward to seeing you for an exciting 2024 filled with events and all things Bangor history!!! - **Matt Bishop**

Freese's "Happyland"

(Continued from Page 1) teddy bears, dolls, games, sleds, train sets - and Santa himself!"⁵ Although the rise of shopping malls would mark the end of Freese's on the "5th Avenue of Maine" in 1985, memories of this retail wonderland endure as a magical time of childhood Christmases especially around the holiday season in downtown Bangor.

**THE
Merriest Christmas Store
FREESE'S**

That's what they say—little people and big people. And lots of other nice things are said about this big store full of Christmas Gift Things.

Come, little people, and see what Santa Claus has gathered here to please you! We just guess you'll be happier after a journey through this "Happyland."

Come, big people, and let us make your shopping easier and very possibly less expensive than you expected.

There are thousands of beautiful, interesting Christmas Gifts at remarkably small prices. Let us help you solve the big problem—"What To Give!"

FREESE'S
74-96 Main Street BANGOR, ME.

A Freese's Christmas Promise
Reference 6

**Special Thanks To Our
Season Sponsors!**

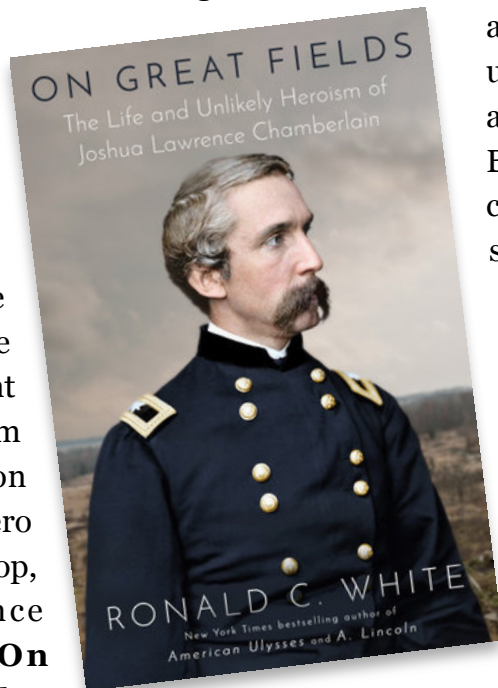


Two Books Offer Fresh Perspective Of An Earlier Bangor

Two fine new books available this holiday season capture life in the Queen City in the 1870s and 1970s with interesting

new perspectives of each era. Ronald C. White's latest historical biography (past works include comprehensive looks at U.S. Grant and Abraham Lincoln) takes on Maine's iconic hero of Little Round Top, Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain. **On Great Fields - The Life and Unlikely Heroism of**

Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain offers readers fascinating new insight into what shaped his heroism at Gettysburg with compelling research on Chamberlain's youth in Brewer and Bangor as well as his time as a student at Bowdoin and the Bangor Theological Seminary. White offers seldom seen images of both Chamberlain and his family in addition to period photographs of the places that shaped him. White builds his story on four pillars that frame Chamberlain's world view: Christian faith, a love of music, an adventuring spirit, and a commitment to education and shows readers how his close knit Brewer-based family frequently provided essential guidance to the future general and Maine Governor. Of interest to *Register* readers is a description of Chamberlain's dress sword that was damaged at Gettysburg (now residing in the collection of the Bangor Historical Society) and an entire chapter



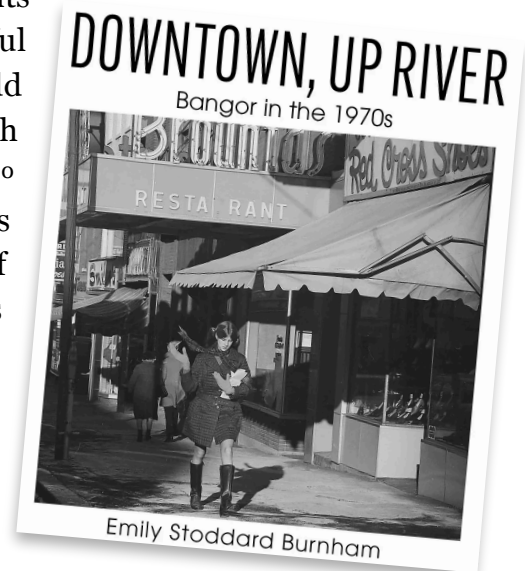
Courtesy Penguin Random House Publishers - Reference 7

on Chamberlain's time at Bangor Theological Seminary. White points out that, while at the Seminary, Chamberlain "taught German language and literature to a group of women in Bangor, an unusual initiative at the time; accepted an appointment as superintendent of schools in Brewer; played the organ in his hometown Brewer church; and joined two friends in teaching Sunday school on the Ellsworth Road" (now Route 1A).⁹

Equally illuminating for local history lovers is Emily Burnham's new collection of 1970's photographs from the Bangor Daily News archives. Burnham, a BDN reporter has curated stark images of a city in transition in **Downtown, Up River: Bangor in the 1970s**. The book is organized around people, places, work, and fun and not only captures the spirit of the working class citizens of Bangor but also offers glimpses of a changing infrastructure and landscape. As Burnham notes in the prologue to the collection, "so much of what made Bangor unique never

went away - its grit, its colorful history, its odd mixture of high and low..."¹⁰ Burnham's organization of the pictures allows us a stirring look at the people who made up the Queen City at this pivotal

time in its history and we encourage you to pick up this valuable book of memories that tell the story of Bangor in a unique time and place. Use the publisher links above to order these books or, even better, shop local for the Holidays!



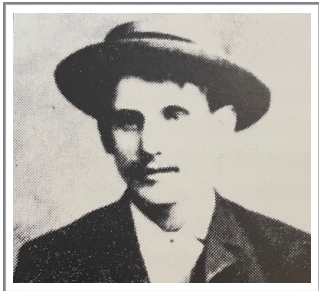
Courtesy Islandport Press - Reference 8

Did You Know? - Maine's Oldest Synagogue Founded in 1897 on Center Street

The history of the Jewish community in Bangor dates back to the mid-19th century with several subsequent waves of immigration, including German, Lithuanian, Russian, and Polish Jews. Each wave contributed to the growth and diversity of the community, with different groups assimilating and establishing their presence in the city. The first organized synagogue in Maine, Ahawas Achim (Brotherly Love), was established in Bangor around 1850 by a group of German Jews who met in the homes of the congregants. However, due to economic challenges, the congregation dissolved by 1856. In 1888, Congregation Beth Israel, with its roots in the early Lithuanian Jewish immigrants to Bangor, was formally organized in Bangor, and its current building is still the oldest continuously functioning synagogue in Maine. The original meeting house, located on Center Street, was lost in the Great Fire of 1911 and replaced by the current structure on York Street.¹²



**Center Street Beth Israel Synagogue
As It Appeared in the 1890's
Reference 11**



**Ezriel Lemke Allen - One of
Bangor's Early Jewish
Leaders - Reference 11**



The Hill House Holidays!

Victorian Charm at Hill House for the Holidays

Our annual holiday display is open to the public with several rooms decorated in the Victorian Christmas style. Be sure to stop in to see the period furnishings with holiday decor as it might have looked in 1865! Hill House is open from noon to 4:00 p.m. Monday through Saturday with the last viewing of the holiday display offered on December 22.



CLICK BELOW TO SUPPORT BHS
WE NEED YOUR HELP!

HILL HOUSE RESTORATION PROJECT

Thomas A. Hill House was built in 1835. It is the home of the Bangor Historical Society.



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