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**From the Selected Works of Kimberly J. Sawtelle**

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July 5, 1989

## Sheriff Murch and his lollipop patch

Kimberly J. Sawtelle, *University of Maine*





WONDERS OF CHILDHOOD in Dover-Foxcroft are supplemented by County Sheriff Frank Murch, who has cultivated a lollipop patch in his Pleasant Street garden for the past four years. As always, the annual harvest fell on Fourth of July morning and area children were welcomed to join the fun. Although timing does play a large part in the success of his crop, lollipops just seem to grow naturally for the man with a low, gravelly voice and a love of children and a well spun yarn. (Sawtelle)

### Sheriff Murch and his lollipop patch

by Kimberly Sawtelle

DOVER-FOXCROFT - Dubious though some may find this, Frank Murch, sheriff of Piscataquis County and native to the region, has added lollipop farming to his lengthy list of personal accomplishments. Sheriff Murch, 61, began growing lollipops in the garden at his Atkinson camp nearly a decade ago as a special treat to family and friends for Fourth of July picnics. He moved the crop to his Pleasant Street garden in Dover-Foxcroft, approximately four years ago. Initially the move was a ploy to keep neighborhood youngsters from trampling tender vegetable shoots. Although fond of children and their antics, the sheriff is also fond of healthy produce. By placing the lollipop patch near the edge of his garden, Sheriff Murch said children can play on the lawn and still search for the first young confections to sprout.

Today, he maintains the bed more to see the wonder in children's eyes July 4 morning when the crop traditionally matures for harvest. "I've already had some youngsters here this spring looking for them," the sheriff said. "I showed them where they're planted and told them how they grow. I always enjoy the children, and the adults get as much of a kick out of it as the kids."

His discovery of lollipop seed was quite unexpected, Sheriff Murch said. Scanning through the classified section of *The Old Farmer's Almanac* for a method to rid his lawn of dandelions, he found a short paragraph tucked between advertisements for Hilarious Peter seeds and a Dandelion Annihilator.

In small print, the ad read: "LOLLIPOPS! LOLLIPOPS! LOLLIPOPS! A rarity. All shapes, sizes, hues. Sweet, deep colored blooms. One bloom per stock. 4-6 in. Plant early spring for July 4 harvest."

To the sheriff's surprise the lollipops took hold; the dandelion killer did not. "I'd been hopeful they'd come, but I didn't really expect it," he said.

Good lollipop seed is indeed hard to come by, said Sheriff Murch. The species of lollipop depends a great deal on the nursery supplier. His best luck in the past has come from the same company which also markets the "Supershade Shrub" that ZOOMS! 30-feet tall in a single year; the "Hearty Hummingbird Hedge" that ZOOMS! to the height of a house in a single year; and the "Bountiful Butterfly Bush" that ZOOMS! to the size of a full grown man in a single year.

Over the years the sheriff has developed a preference for growing the round species of lollipops. He said he and his wife Violet prefer the species for the way the early morning sun catches on the translucent blossoms creating a colorful glow at the end of the vegetable patch.

Since the lollipops mature all at once, Sheriff Murch said area children are more than welcome to come pick a bloom or two before the Fourth of July morning is out.

"They come in pretty thick and heavy. There's always more than Vi and B could possibly use," he explained. "But the children should get here before the ants do. Ants like lollipops, too, and I haven't found a solution for that problem."

What the ants and children failed to carry off this year, or in years past, are used to supplement the seed supply for the next growing season. Timing seems to be the biggest factor in raising lollipops, both in the planting and harvest of seed.

"That's pretty tricky," the sheriff explained about getting some seed return from his crop. "The lollipops can't have been in the ground too short a time, and they can't have been out of the ground too long, either." Each season he tries to cultivate a few more seeds so to have a supply for area children for future years.

Soil preparation for planting is similar to that for the rest of the garden. A generous dose of cow dressing and a decent amount of tilling. The amount of rain or sun does not seem to play a major factor in success of the crop. The proper planting time, however, is essential and may be hard to pinpoint season after season as it relies heavily on the phase of the moon, the tides and temperature. The perfect time for planting may fall at any time, even midnight.

"I really enjoy it, Fourth of July morning, to see the kid's eyes get big and look and look. I've had several adults driving by, slow right down or stop and get out and take a look to see what's up. Usually they go off shaking their heads. For the kids it's sort of like hanging out their stocking at Christmas time. It gives them something to look forward to," Sheriff Murch said. "Some people have peas for the Fourth of July, I have lollipops."



THE COMMUNITY CONCERT BAND provided music at the Dover-Foxcroft 4th of July parade on Saturday, July 1.



DEDICATING the Kiwanis Park behind the YMCA is Kevin Stitham on the right. Stitham recognized Ed Gilmore (left) and Louise Gerrish (in memory of Henry Gerrish) for outstanding contribution to the park and the town of Dover-Foxcroft.

### A bit of history about the Sangerville Post Office

(Editor's Note: Information for this article was provided by Jeanne Adams, of the Guilford Post Office.)

The Sangerville Post Office was established on the same day as the town's incorporation, (June 13, 1814), and both the town and its post office recently celebrated their 175th anniversaries. The post office held an open house, featuring a special hand-cancellation stamp commissioned by the town's Centeseptuquinary Committee and designed by Richard Schmand, of Dover Foxcroft. The open house was organized by current Postmaster Marilyn Burgoyne. The major portion of the town's celebration was held on June 23 and 24.

In her article for *Pride*, a Postal News publication, Jeanne Adams wrote, "Samuel McLanathan, agent to Colonel Sanger and his nephew by marriage, was already an important town official when he was appointed Sangerville's first Postmaster. At the time, the town had grown very little since 1810, when its population numbered 126. Very few people today realize what an overwhelming task it was to assure safe mail delivery to such an area, especially under Maine's severe weather conditions."

Adams noted that although Benjamin Franklin and the other early founders of the United States Postal Service were greatly hampered in their efforts by the British and by economic and self-governmental problems, regular mail routes were in operation between major cities by 1814. "The route from Boston, Mass. to Portsmouth, N.H., and to Portland, Maine, had been extended to include not only Augusta, but even remote Bangor, which is today the MSC for the Sangerville area and many miles around," Adams wrote.

The cost of mailing a letter in the early 1800's was weighable in pennyweights and grains of silver, preferably in advance, but often collected upon receipt by the customer. A single letter consisted of one piece of paper, weighing less than one ounce and the price was doubled or tripled for additional pages. These were the times of the post riders, stage coaches and steamships that crossed the Atlantic Ocean. The difficulties in handling the mail and collecting the fees for its

delivery gave rise to many an argument.

According to Adams, a book entitled, "Maine Postal History and Postmarks," records, "the expenditures for conveying mail across post routes was in almost every instance greater than its income." Sangerville was situated on one of these cross post routes and was required to solve its own problem with regard to transportation to the major mail route in Bangor.

By 1820, Maine had separated from the Commonwealth of Massachusetts and had become a state in its own right. Sangerville's population had increased to 310 people and its post office was

moved in 1822 to a store operated by Edward Mitchell, who then became postmaster. The post office was being served each week and had become a profitable venture by 1824.

Over the course of the next 20 years, the railroad became an increasingly popular method of delivering mail, racing along at two miles-per-hour. Although the pace may have seemed slow, the difference in miles travelled was considerable. According to statistics provided by Adams, in order to cover the 3,941 miles of postal routes in Maine, horseback carriers had to travel 290,211, coaches travelled 702,900 miles and trains had to cover only 36,400 miles.

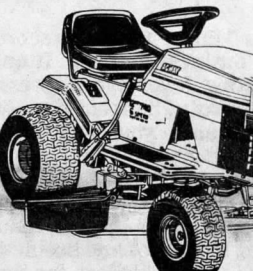
Visitors to the June 13 open house either brought in envelopes for receipt of the special cancellation stamp, or purchased stamped envelopes on which to have their cancellations embossed. While enjoying refreshments provided for the day, guests also were able to view old post office forms, records and pictures. Adams said amusing entries included salary payments made in the early 1900's to "Cerk-hires" and "Mail-messengers."

### Photos by Shirley Wright



MANY CHILDREN enjoyed the new playground equipment at the YMCA on July 1.

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