

Artifacts will be donated to museum—

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Brewer House rich in local history

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ROBBINSTON — It's a bed and breakfast now, where weary travelers are welcome to rest, but at one time the Brewer House in Robbinston was the home of John Nehemiah Marks Brewer, a restless ship's captain who sailed all over the world. Some of his family's belongings will one day be displayed in the Charlotte County Museum, thanks to a generous descendant and the hospitality of the Holloways, the couple who renovated the gracious home.

"Last fall, when I was first told the home had been in my family I felt a strong ancestral pull. On the whole trip from Ontario to Robbinston I felt as if I were going home," said James Milner.

Milner has traveled to Maine and New Brunswick on many occasions to research his family's heritage, but his last visit to the area was special. He not only discovered that the Brewer house had been his great-great-grandmother's home, he was also delighted to discover that other residents in the area were interested in his family's heritage. Frank Fenderson and Brand Livingstone told him about

the St. Croix Valley's history and put him in touch with Francis Raye who traced his family back to 1596.

Estelle and David Holloway, owners of the Brewer House, invited Milner to stay at their bed and breakfast while he was in the area. Estelle said the minute Milner walked in the door, she knew he had a tie to the house.

Milner strolled the grounds, sipped coffee beneath tall-columned porches, found the tombstone of a relative resting against a cemetery tree, and enjoyed telling the Holloways stories about his family's shipbuilding history.

"We were always interested in the history of the house, and had found out quite a bit on our own, but Mr. Milner knew details about the family that we didn't and filled in pieces of the puzzle," said Estelle.

A friendship was sprouted, discussing the Brewer family tree. The Holloways and Milner became fast friends. They learned that the Brewer family had strong ties in both Canada and the United States. Captain Nehemiah Marks, the grandfather of the man who built their home, was a loyalist founder of St. Stephen.

Marks first emigrated to the United States from London, England in 1726 and operated a trading post in Derby, Conn. When the Revolutionary War

started Captain Nehemiah Marks remained loyal to the British side. He became a lieutenant of armed boatmen, was stationed in Lloyd's Neck, Long Island and led raids on New England.

In 1784 Marks was dispatched to find land in Nova Scotia. He traveled with 114 men, 48 women, and 39 children to Nova Scotia, but decided that land in St. Andrews and at the falls of the St. Croix River were more suitable for a settlement. He obtained land grants in St. Andrews and with other men in the Quartermaster's department, applied for and received large land grants in St. Stephen. Brewer established a store near the St. Stephen wharf and contributed to the mercantile development in the area.

At 52, the loyalist founder of St. Stephen died in the town he helped build, but he left a legacy of entrepreneurs to carry on. Several of his seven children lived and worked in the area and added to the town's architectural and mercantile heritage. A daughter married General John Brewer, a successful shipbuilder. The Brewer family built over 100 ships in a Robbinston boatyard and the Brewer House was one of three homes built and occupied by the family.

The Mansion House was built by

General John Brewer in the late 1700's; the Brewer House was built around 1830 by his son John and the Redclyffe Motel was built by Henrietta Brewer after her husband's death.

James Milner has a large collection of items from the Mansion home. When he was visiting in Robbinston he decided the paintings and furnishings in the collection should one day be returned to the area for all to enjoy. Milner bequeathed the collection to the Charlotte County Museum in St. Stephen and the items will be loaned to the Holmes Cottage in Calais and a museum in Searsport on occasion.

A spyglass, engraved decanter, table and a painting of a boat are among the 16 items that will one day find their home in the museum.

"It seemed right to leave the artifacts in the towns where the family had strong ties," said Milner. He said he was thankful to all the people who helped him trace his roots and he enjoyed coming home.

Ships built by General John Brewer were often named for family and friends. A painting of a ship bearing the name Marshall O. Roberts will be among the items to be displayed in the area. Milner says he is happy to leave the painting in the area where he made so many friends.

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