

Holmestead's Entryway Back to Original 1850 Condition

By Jayna Smith

Many today have probably never heard of Asher Bassford, a noted 1800s Calais-area architect. Bassford designed and built many homes and other structures in the area, among them the old Calais Academy and some now long gone Main Street homes. One of these structures still stands, however, and that is the Holmestead at 527 Main Street, built in 1850.

The preservation of structures like the Holmestead allows for a better understanding of our community's past while respecting those who lived in prior times. That, coupled with recording the history of Calais, is what the St. Croix Historical Society aims to do.

Thanks to the group's efforts, a grant was received by the Belvedere Historic Preservation

Fund of the Maine Community Foundation. This allowed for the entryway of the Holmestead to be completely renovated back to its original state, a job completed by Joyce Jackson and Patrick Mealey, owners of Fine Artist Made, which specializes in restoring and renovating older homes.

Mealey was able to use enlarged photographs of the Holmestead to follow Bashford's original design to complete the necessary work. Through his and Jackson's expertise, delicacy, and patience, the balusters, hanging corbels, railing, and portico of the front entryway have all been restored to their original condition, looking as they did in 1850.

Last week, the project on the Holmestead's entryway was completed. Ironically, Asher Bassford's great-great-granddaughter Portia Thomp-

son from Rhode Island was in the area with her son John of Massachusetts. It was decided that it would only be appropriate for Ms. Thompson and her son to be the first to walk up the newly renovated steps to the entryway.

Ms. Thompson explained that her mother's family was all from Calais and she would visit as a child. She had an interest in learning more about her ancestors as a youngster and recalls trying to find out more information about the family. "I remember my grandmother's sister talking about her father and saying that his signature was doing beautiful doorways and that always stuck with me, so I am amazed to be here and actually see that."

"It's wonderful, it's fantastic," Ms. Thompson's son said of the renovation project. This was his first visit to Calais, and



John Thompson and his mother Portia, great-great granddaughter to Asher Bassford, the architect who designed and built the Holmestead in 1850, were the first to walk up the steps of the Holmestead's newly renovated entryway. They are pictured with Jerry Lapointe of the St. Croix Historical Society. (Photo by Jayna Smith)

he expressed his admiration of build things like that today," the Holmestead. "They don't he stated.