
Cherryfield Narraguagus Historical Society

Stories of Cherryfield

May 2026

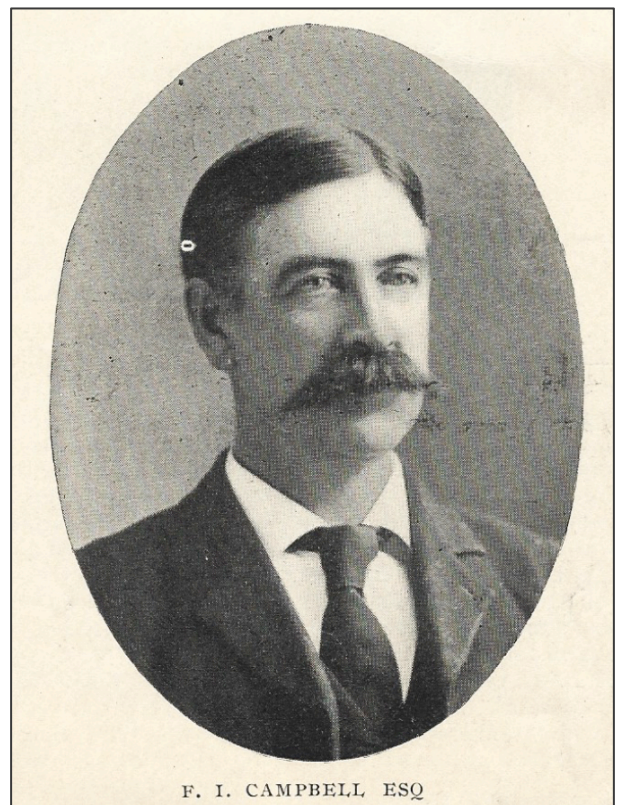
The Hedgehog Bounty Act of Maine (a.k.a. The Porcupine Law)

Story researched and written by Kelley Wescott, CNHS Board Secretary

In 1903, outrage over the damage porcupines were causing to valuable softwood timber was reaching a fever pitch. Hackmatack, known for its priceless “knees” used in shipbuilding had been desecrated over a two year span. Hemlock, whose bark was used for tanning, was facing a similar demise, driving up the tannery price for any that remained. Something had to be done to stop the devastation of these gnawing, girdling rodents, especially in the more heavily impacted counties of Washington and Hancock. In response to the landowners pleas for help, the Hon. Fred Campbell, a lawyer and state representative from Cherryfield, submitted a bill to the Maine legislature known as “The Hedgehog Bounty Act” or as some referred to it, “The Porcupine Law”.

The details of the law seemed simple enough. Within 10 days of killing a porcupine, the hunter would exhibit to the town treasurer the entire nose and feet of each creature, as well as sign a certificate stating where the animal was killed, the time and place, and that it was in the state of Maine. The treasurer would then destroy the nose and feet by burning, attesting under oath to having done so on the same certificate, addressed to the State Treasurer. When the burning was completed, the hunter would be paid .25 cents per porcupine from the town coffers. Those in townships would take their proof of kill to the nearest town. The total amount paid out would be submitted annually to the State for reimbursement. It appeared to be a very cut and dry approach to a serious problem. What could possibly go wrong ? As it turned out, almost everything!

In March, men anxious to start making money killing the prickly scourge of conifers, went out in droves, quickly making porcupine hunting one of the most active industries in Maine. In one township alone, 210 bounties had been paid in March and April when suddenly somebody noticed that the actual law did not go into effect until May 1st. Town authorities claimed that the town clerk should have known this, hence holding him responsible to retrieve the money that had been illegally paid to the hunters. The clerk, having the names of everyone he had paid, went door to door asking that the money be returned, but it was a



*The Honorable Fred Campbell
"Father of the Hedgehog Bounty Act"*

unanimous refusal. Desperate, the clerk sought the help of an attorney who discovered a forgotten act still on the books that made it unlawful to kill hedgehogs in Maine before June 1st so the clerk, still stinging from the bum's rush of the hunters, proceeded to send court summons to every man that had claimed a bounty before that date. The fine was stiff: \$5.00 for every porcupine they had killed.

Not to be outdone by the vengeful clerk, the "disconsolate slayers" as they were called, began doing their own studies of back acts of the State and came upon a law that not only said the killing of "hedgehogs" was forbidden, but also imposed a \$5 fine on any man who had any part of a dead one in his possession between October 1st and June 1st. Upon this discovery the judge summoned the clerks (having been in possession of the dead animal's parts) and they were fined accordingly, including \$62.00 for court costs. The story of this tat for tat between the hunters and the clerks reached all the way to the west coast with Californians writing an article in the San Francisco Call, patting themselves on the back for their coyote scalp bounty laws having no resemblance to the Maine porcupine debacle.

For the next year and a half "The Hedgehog Bounty Act" of Maine continued to have its problems, including the fact that the legislators, in their less than infinite wisdom, had only appropriated \$500 for 1903 and 1904 combined to cover the reimbursement for the bounties in all the towns. By August of 1904 the State was carrying more than \$20,000 in unpaid bounty debt, while the towns were suffering financially from the lack of payment. Those that had approved the initial \$500 had no idea the population of voracious porcupine was that plentiful. Then there was the other cost, the one no-one could have predicted: a loss of \$800,000 worth of timber as the result of the hunters trying to smoke the hedgehogs out of hollow trees and ledges, sparking fires that destroyed more woodland than the porcupine ever could have.



Finally in January of 1905 a committee hearing was held to discuss the repeal of the "Porcupine Law", a meeting that by spells was more carnival than content. Mr. Campell arranged for "two brigadiers of the State house army to bring in a stuffed, life like porcupine so that he could demonstrate the damage the rodents incisors could cause. Representative Reed from Portland asked if anyone could tell whether a beech tree was girdled by a porcupine or a field mouse, causing an uproar, while a Senator Staples wanted to know if the quills were dangerous, to which Mr. Campbell replied. "Yesiree, you just spank your hand down on them and you will be busy for quite some time!"

After hours of debate, both serious and comedic, the law was finally repealed, but the title of "Father of the Hedgehog Bounty Act" would remain Hon. Fred Campbell's to this day... and another one of Cherryfield's "claims to fame" for being its birthplace.

The Cherryfield-Narraguagus Historical Society holds a central role in our community. The Society is the keeper of our history, the collector of our stories, and a direct connection to our heritage.

We welcome anyone interested in the history of Cherryfield to become a member or volunteer, attend future events, share your curiosity and questions about Cherryfield, and share your own memories of Cherryfield.

Become a member on our website - cherryfieldhistorical.com. Contact us by email at cherryfieldhistorical@gmail.com.

2026 Happenings at the Historical Society

Scaryfield Shiverwalk and Haunted Museum.

[Scaryfield Events](https://scaryfieldevents.com) is looking for volunteers to help build the Shiverwalk and Haunted Museum! We are looking for crafty individuals who know their way around a workshop, an art studio, a computer, or who just love Halloween - if that's you, we need you! We're expanding operations from the 2025 event, and plan to be open for two nights this year (the 30th and 31st,) so we're adding monster builds, small-scale carnival-style games, and so much more! To sign up, go to scaryfieldevents.com and click the link at the bottom of the page to fill out the volunteer application form.



something Wicked is coming back...

Roadside Cleanup Day. The Historical Society and Cherryfield Riverwalk have partnered to coordinate the annual spring roadside cleanup day, after many years of leadership by Lori Barbee. Cleanup day is **Saturday May 16th**, from 9AM through 2:00 PM, and includes lunch. Come when you can – we'll be at the Cherryfield Academy with trash bags, safety gear, and yummy treats! (**Rain Date May 17th**).

Paid Interns. During the spring and summer, the Historical Society will share 2 paid interns with the Cherryfield Riverwalk. These interns are young adults from Cherryfield, sponsored through Healthy Acadia and Maine Career Exploration, gaining skills in community service. Deven and Quinn will help the Historical Society with a variety of tasks to improve the building. They will also help the Riverwalk Committee with improvements to Veteran's Memorial Park and Falls Park.

Exhibit Planning and Curation. In 2025, an anonymous donor helped us advance renovations to the 2nd floor to create exhibit space in honor of the late Kathy Upton. **Sheet rocking and wiring have been completed!** As soon as it's warm enough, we will paint the walls. We hope to have a new floor installed this summer so we can begin to set up permanent exhibits – bringing us one step closer to welcoming people into the museum again!

Structural Renovations. In 2026 we conducted a thorough structural assessment of the museum building to help us most effectively tackle some pretty major repairs. The report, provided by the Design Group Collaborative of Ellsworth and funded by Maine Preservation, is available on our website CherryfieldHistorical.org. We will address the highest priorities during 2026. We have already checked window frame and sill repairs to four basement windows off our to-do list!!!

2026 is a big year for raising funds to make these critical repairs to the foundation and structural elements of the building so we can open the museum to the public again. Your support in this work makes a huge difference!!

PO Box 42; Cherryfield, ME 04622

**Cherryfield Narraguagus
Historical Society**



Do you live near Cherryfield and want to have a direct role in preserving and sharing local history? We are accepting nominations for our board of directors.

***Historical Society Board meetings** occur on the **3rd Thursday** of each month at 6:00 pm in the Cherryfield Congregational Church downstairs meeting room.*

Follow us on Facebook or contact us by email (CherryfieldHistorical@gmail.com) for more information about the Society and opportunities to participate in Society activities.

