



# The Plant Home Pennant ...

News and Views of *The Plant Home* .... Volume Seven: March 2009

*"This home is founded on the sincere belief that those who have lived honest and industrious lives and are without means or friends to care for them, have earned the right to be cared for. Only through the labor and expenditures of others is it possible ..."* **Thomas G. Plant, 1917**

Snow! Snow! Melt Away! And don't come again 'till next Christmas Day! Eccchhh! What a long, cold, windy and tedious winter this has been. Thank the powers-that-be for generators -- especially the kind that know when to turn themselves on and off. Keeping in mind "... *in like a lion and out like a lamb*", we will undoubtedly see Mr. Winter trying to sneak in a few extra blows before the windflowers and crociii raise their tentative blossoms, but Spring *is* coming ... a little patience, please.

***Fabulous opportunity! ... for all of you who know and love The Plant Home!***

In early March, Bangor Savings Bank will give a total of \$100,000 to 68 local non-profit organizations. The Bank is looking to the communities of Maine to help them decide how to best distribute the funds, and they want to hear from as many Maine residents as possible. Please take a minute today to cast your vote. After voting, please help the Bank to spread the word by forwarding this message in E-mail format to as many of your friends, family and contacts (*only in Maine*) that you can find. You can cut and paste this message into a new E-mail and edit it as you see fit. ***The Plant Home*** is in the Greater Portland Lewiston-Auburn area, which will show on the voting list, and there is a blank box at the bottom to write in ***The Thomas G. Plant Home, Bath.***

Please visit:

[www.bangor.com/YouMatterMore/Voting.aspx](http://www.bangor.com/YouMatterMore/Voting.aspx)

Even a small grant would help us to help the residents of ***PMH!***

So, what is happening in this third month of the year? On Saturday, March 7th, the residents are holding an indoor Yard Sale in our recreation hall. They will be selling all manner of items, including furniture, clothing, and books, as well as baked goods. All are welcome to browse and buy, and if any of you would like to contribute to the sale, all *thingies* will also be welcomed ..... on Monday, March 9th, the residents will be entertained with the singular guitar and songs of ***Dave Fisher*** -- a little country, a little folk, a few oldies. Then it's an early St. Patrick's Day celebration on Saturday, March 14th, with green cake, of course, and song stylings by ***Present Company***, a popular group of singers ..... and finally, on Thursday, March 26<sup>th</sup>, resident shoppers will enjoy dropping their dollars at Big Al's Discount in Wiscasset, with lunch to follow at the Sea Basket, renown for offering crunchy seafood and dee-vine crispy onion rings.

The saga of young Mr. ***Thomas Plant*** continues ... ***Thomas*** married Caroline Griggs in 1895, honeymooned in Europe for five months, and returned home to the ire of well-organized unions bound and determined to win their bid to organize ***Tom's*** company. ***Tom*** was equally determined to frustrate that bid, and after a protracted battle of wits, ***Tom*** closed his Ipswich factory and relocated

## Volume Seven, Page 2

his Lynn facility to the Boston area. In June 1896, during his negotiations with the unions, **Tom** had purchased almost an acre of land, with buildings, in Jamaica Plain, and one of the buildings contained a boiler, a hot air system and an elevator. The district was in the southern section of Boston in an area of former farms and reservoirs, and at one time was considered to be a residential suburb of the city. At the time of **Tom's** purchase, Roxbury/Jamaica Plain was a mix of ethnicity and social class, and was undergoing considerable speculative development, with its own industrial strip and a mix of manufacturers. **The Plant Company** was a good fit, and local wits began to refer to the region as "Shoemaker Plain".

By January 1897, the new factory was well under way; and by March there were 1,000 "shoe operatives" on the payroll, who were manufacturing more than 6,000 pairs of shoes per day. Local gossip held that **The Plant Company** was becoming an "elegant workshop", as well as one of the most complete factories ever seen. According to biographer **Barry Rodrigue**, "*By April it was reported to be the busiest factory in the country for ladies' shoes in the (are you ready for this?) \$2 to \$2.25 range, and by July was drawing workers away from competing factories in Lynn.*" **Tom** added new departments and machinery, and brought his brother, William, on as superintendent of the new factory, which allowed William and his family to move into a comfortable residence near the factory.

It was also reported that **Tom's** mother, Sophie, died in May of 1899, four years

after moving into her daughter's house in Bath. **Tom's** feelings about her death were private, and were not reported. But it is reasonable to assume that the circumstances of his parent's life in their declining years had an influence on his decision to eventually build **The Thomas G. Plant Home**, in Bath.

Between his personal money, his wife's inheritance, the lease of certain properties to his company, and other assets and investments, **Tom** had an annual income of about \$14,000 -- considered to be a very comfortable living at the turn of the century -- and from 1897 to 1903, he and Caroline lived in the new Hotel Belvoir in Boston's Kenmore Square. The Belvoir was considered to be a "continental system of family hotels", a precursor of today's apartment houses. Also known as "French Flats", they were elegant buildings with rents from \$400 to \$3,000 per year, and usually boasted steam heat, elevators, and janitorial service. In the same year, 1897, **Tom** was invited to join The Algonquin Club, an exclusive Boston circle of wealthy bankers, merchants and businessmen, and he did so for social as well as commercial advantages. To quote **Barry Rodrigue**, "*The Algonquin was known for its elegant interior, outstanding food, works of art, and its namesake -- an authentic, six-foot-seven-inch, gaudily decorated cigar store Indian.*" **Tom** was a member of the club until 1898, when he left for unknown reasons. He would not rejoin for six years.

**Tom's** society connections were probably one of the reasons he supported more modern subcontracting and sales techniques in his factory. He wanted time to pursue those connections, and

### Volume Seven, Page 3

less time at the factory meant more time to maneuver his business contacts. The accepted manufacturing custom in the 19<sup>th</sup> century was to make and sell shoes according to styles -- Oxfords, button boots, work boots -- they had no company or brand names. In November of 1898, **Thomas Plant** transformed tradition with his acquisition of the "Queen" line of shoes, including its trademark, from Boston's Clark-Hutchinson Company. He immediately added the word "Quality" to "Queen", and began production of his most famous brand of shoes. Queen Quality shoes were billed as being "*superior in quality for a reasonable price*", and they took the country by storm. His print and newspaper advertising used what "appeared" to be a picture of Empress Marie Louise, Napoleon's wife, and **Tom's** brand name of Queen Quality Shoes became recognized across the USA. They were available in over 30 styles, and the cost was \$3.00 for any style. The growing "**Tom Plant Mythology**" whispered that **Tom's** experience as a former shoe peddler had brought him into contact with many women, so of course he knew what they wanted in a shoe; but **Tom** was more entrepreneur than designer -- he simply understood how to bring his product to a wider market.

Tom's innovation of popularizing a brand name furthered his move into retail markets. After the Civil War, increased capital became available, suburban areas sprang up, and the "department store" concept began making inroads into the profits of many small shops in the cities. By 1900, **Tom Plant's** shoes and boots were sold in

every state and almost every city in the country, including Canada and overseas. Tom eliminated jobbers and wholesalers from his marketing chain, and set up a sizeable structure of agents who plied the retail trade only. **Barry Rodrigue** wrote "*Between 1899 and 1901, the number of dealers for Queen Quality shoes increased by about 400 per year. The shoe became so popular that Plant had to defend his trademark in court, and in 1901 the shoe won a gold medal at the Pan-American Exposition in Buffalo, New York.*"

So ... **Tom Plant** had become a shoe mogul of the world ... and you'll hear more about what happens to his mogulship in Volume Eight.

Now, I'd like introduce the youngest of the **PMH** family residents, **Russell Herrick**. He is another true "mainah", born in 1946 and brought up in Portland. His mom was a nurse at Portland City Hospital (which is now the Barron Center), and his father was a life-long commercial painter, who turned his skills to furniture refinishing at Portland's Eastland Hotel. **Russell** was also the baby of his own family, with three older siblings. He told me that high school was pretty normal, spotted with "*the usual dumb stuff*", and after graduation he worked for two years at Nissen's Bakery in Portland. **Russell** met his wife, Linda, after high school, and following a trip to Sunny-Let's-Lie-Around-On-The-Beach-Florida, they realized that selling encyclopedias door-to-door would not pay rent, and returned to Maine, marriage, and a house in Wyndham. **Russell** left Nissen for Maine Central Railroad, working through the ranks for the next 10 years to become a brakeman and conductor. He

## Volume Seven, Page 4

was a valuable “rotating” RR worker, and even though his job kept him working for long hours, he and Linda found time to raise Ethan, Sarah, Kyle and Neil. A job change to a moving company brought **Russell** home more often, and he worked as an advance glass packer for the next 25 years, bringing his crew in ahead of the movers to carefully contain all of the homeowner’s fragile glass items. He and Linda also built a new home in Wyndham, where **Russell’s** father finished all of the woodwork. The family hiked the local woods and trails, and skied together at Bridgton, now Shawnee Park. While driving to work one morning, at the tender age of 55, the sight in **Russell’s** left eye “*disappeared like someone pulled down a shade.*” Their family practitioner, Dr. Carl Schuler, was suspicious of a nerve disorder, and referred Russell to Dr. Kathryn Seasholtz, a neurology specialist. Her confirming diagnosis of a rare, one-time attack of Multiple Sclerosis, the partial loss of his sight, and the resulting fatigue of MS meant no more work. **Russell** retired, and with three of the children out of the nest, he and Ethan moved to a house on three acres in Harrison with their beloved family dogs, Wiley and Annie. Linda returned to Portland with Neil, where she began nursing school and he finished high school. The next ten years seemed to fly. Linda finished school and began working at the Barron Center. Sarah married and presented the family with two beautiful grandsons, Neil attended college in Vermont, and married a classmate after graduation; and Kyle was able to purchase the Portland house built by his great-grandfather who emigrated to Maine from Norway. Kyle and his

wife recently added their daughter to the family. Fortunately for **Russell**, Ethan remained with him in Harrison, and was home the day **Russell** had a second, and more devastating attack of MS. After two weeks of hospitalization and nine months in rehab, where he learned to walk and talk again, **Russell** returned to Harrison, only to mourn the passing of Wiley “*to the big dog bone in the sky*”. So **Russell** went to the Greyhound Placement Center in Bridgton, and returned with his elegant and loving two year-old “Mo”, which was the dog’s racing name. A friend remarked, “*That dog is so beautiful, he deserves a beautiful name*”, and Mo became “Moses”. Unfortunately, **Russell’s** physical health made it impossible for him to stay in Harrison, even with Ethan there, so Sarah and Linda found **PMH**. **Russell** and Moses came to live by the river in August 2008, and he told me with a flashing smile, “*I cannot believe that I am actually living in a mansion, on a river, with so many wonderful neighbors! And the food ... Bruce, Lisa and Tracy REALLY know how to cook!*” **Russell** and Moses take daily walks to Sarah’s home on Middle Street in Bath. Sarah is now a nurse at Midcoast Senior Center’s Bodwell Rehab, and Linda lives in Topsham, commuting to work at the Barron Center, and deeply caring of her husband. **Russell** says, with a disarming and grateful smile, “*I love this country, I love where I live, and my family means more to me than life. God has been good to me.*” Thank you, **Russell Herrick**, for bringing your love to **The Plant Home**. You enrich us all, and your beloved Moses contributes his grace and dignity.

*Volume 7, Page 5*

So ... as you make your way through this month of March, and imagine no snow, less mud, and emerging buds, always remember that breathless question:

***If toast always lands butter-side down, and cats always land on their feet, what would happen if you tied a piece of buttered toast, butter side up, to the back of a cat, and dropped the cat?***

*The Thomas G. Plant Home  
One Washington Street, Bath, ME 04530  
Telephone: (207) 443-2244  
E-mail: [dcapoldo@planthome.org](mailto:dcapoldo@planthome.org)*



*Income limits may apply*