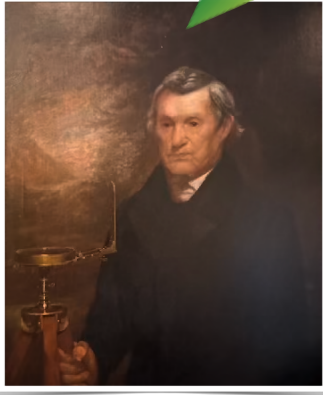


QUEEN CITY REGISTER.

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The Bangor Historical Society's Quarterly Newsletter

Black Matriarchs of Bangor: The Fight For Equity



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The Senior Mother's Club circa early 1900s included many of Bangor's notable women of color - Reference 1

At the turn of the 20th century, Bangor boasted a small but thriving Black community whose members came from the United States, Canada, and the Caribbean. Never numbering more than 300 people, this vibrant community nonetheless supported a remarkable range of social clubs, many of them established by Black women. In celebration of Women's History Month, the stories of Bangor's Black matriarchs should be told fully, not as mere footnotes, but as the essential chapters they are. These women quietly and powerfully helped shape Bangor into a more just and lively city. These matriarchs advocated not only for the vote, but for education and community care building institutions and networks that would sustain Black Bangor for generations.²

Among the most prominent figures were Mabel Derrick, Edith Johnson,

and Blanche Dymond, leaders in Bangor's Black community who championed women's suffrage and supported their neighbors through the Mothers Clubs and the Household of Ruth, the women's auxiliary to the Odd Fellows.³ These organizations served as vital lifelines, providing spaces for Black women to organize, educate, advocate, and care for one another in a community and era that offered them little formal support or recognition.

Another such pillar was Elizabeth Jackson Warner, who arrived in Bangor from Connecticut around 1912. Though census records listed her simply as a "housewife," her influence extended far beyond the walls of her home. She volunteered at the Bangor-Brewer YWCA, opened her doors to young women and university students, and in 1912 founded the Mothers Club, bringing together local Black women who wanted

(See "Matriarchs" page 3)

Summer Exhibit on Revolutionary Bangor Features Park Holland

Few figures in early American history managed to pack so much living into a single lifetime as Park Holland. Born in Shrewsbury, Massachusetts, on November 19, 1752, he fought in the Revolutionary War, helped suppress Shays' Rebellion, and spent his later decades mapping the wilderness of Maine, leaving a legacy so enduring that his survey of Bangor remains in use today. He died in Bangor on May 21, 1844, in his ninety-second year, and is buried at Mount Hope Cemetery, where the Massachusetts Society of the Cincinnati erected a memorial stone in his honor in 1888.¹¹

Revolutionary Soldier

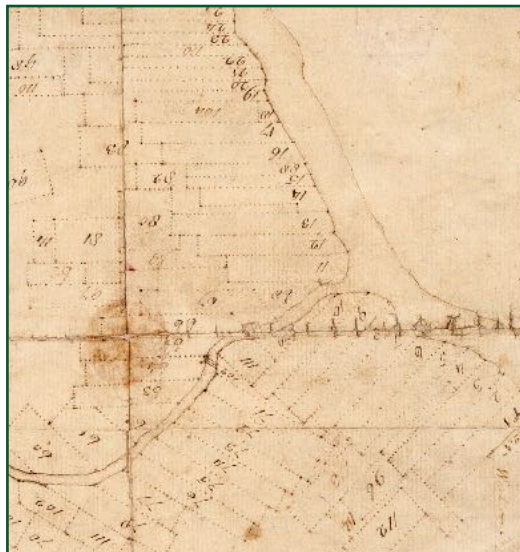
Holland and his brother Ivory enrolled as minutemen in 1776 and were sent to New York, fighting first at Harlem Heights and then at White Plains, where the army faced the full force of the British before retreating upriver. When Congress proposed a permanent army that winter, Holland re-enlisted despite being, in his own words, "heartily sick of a soldier's life", though he never hesitated, knowing what the cause demanded. Smallpox inoculations at Bunker Hill barracks claimed roughly one hundred of nine hundred men.¹²

In 1777, marching toward Fort Edward, Holland was nearly drowned when an overloaded boat struck a sunken rock, and his companions laid him on the shore for dead. He survived, later remarking with characteristic dry wit that it was "far easier being drowned than restored to



Park Holland Portrait by Jeremiah Hardy in the Bangor Historical Society Collection

life again." He fought at both Battles of Saratoga and witnessed Burgoyne's surrender on October 17, "a glorious day", before his unit moved to West Point in 1778, where they stretched a 43-ton iron chain across the Hudson to block British ships. Holland served until Cornwallis's surrender at



Holland survey map of Bangor is the earliest known map of the Queen City and clearly shows the Penobscot River and Kenduskeag Stream - Reference #10

Yorktown brought the war to a close in October 1781.¹³

Citizen and Rebel-Fighter

Back in Massachusetts, Holland married Lucy Spooner of Petersham in January 1785 and threw himself into civic life, serving as Captain of the Militia, Town Clerk, Selectman, Assessor, and representative in the General Court. During Shays' Rebellion in 1786–87, he commanded a company on the side of law and order, though his account of the uprising showed sympathy for men who had fought the war only to come home to crushing debt.

The Holland Map and After

Holland's surveying career began in 1784, when General Rufus Putnam recommended him to chart the eastern Passamaquoddy and Schoodic country for Massachusetts. His most punishing assignment came in 1794, when he and Jonathan Maynard surveyed William Bingham's two-million-acre purchase across northern Maine, territory unknown even to most Native Americans. They crossed mountains, rafted lakes, ran out of food, waded the St. John River in near-freezing water, and endured October snowstorms in linen jackets. Holland lost 83 pounds before the party staggered home. Yet his measurements were extraordinary in their accuracy, differing from modern topographic maps by less than one percent.¹⁴

Settled in Maine, Holland surveyed nine townships along the Penobscot in 1797, then in

(See "Holland" page 4)

Matriarchs Make Community

(continued from Page 1) their children and families to experience the arts and build a positive sense of community. Her daughter Beryl carried that legacy forward with remarkable force. In 1935, Beryl became the first Black graduate to earn a degree in mathematics at the University of

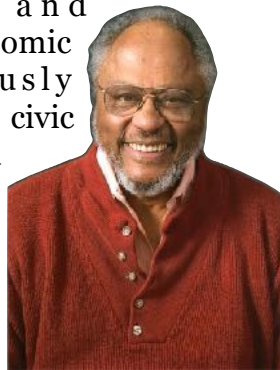


UMaine Grad Beryl Williams Reference 7

Maine, followed by a master's degree in 1940. After earning her master's degree, she was not permitted to teach in Maine due to racial discrimination, but she went on to become the first female academic dean at Morgan State University and played a leading role in the desegregation of the Baltimore public school system. In 2021, the University of Maine renamed a campus building Beryl Warner

Williams Hall in her honor. 4

Economically, these women were pillars in their own right. Concentrated in an area known as the Parker Street neighborhood, Black women in Bangor worked as domestics, cooks, caterers, beauticians, clerks, and stenographers, building economic lives while simultaneously sustaining a rich cultural and civic fabric. 5 Their labor, both paid and voluntary, was the connective tissue of Black Bangor. As historian Bob Greene has noted, "Black Americans did not simply arrive in Maine recently; they have been present for generations, helping the state grow" in ways that history has too often overlooked. 6



Bob Greene helps tell the stories of Bangor's Black Matriarchs Reference 8

During a period when circumstances were especially difficult, these women still came together as a community to uplift and teach, working not just for themselves but for the collective good. Their legacy endures today in historical markers, walking tours, and the ongoing work of organizations like the Bangor chapter of the NAACP. The Black Matriarchs of Maine were not simply part of Bangor's history. They helped build it.

Curator's Corner

Happy almost spring, everyone! The sounds of birds singing and granite being moved fill the Hill House. The portico construction is well underway. Removal of the debris under the portico is almost complete and a large portion of the new concrete base has been poured. The larger pieces of granite have already started to go back into their previous locations. We thank E.L. Shea and G. Drake Masonry for their hard work through the past winter!



Winter Portico Work Is Well Underway!

We are grateful and honored to be recognized by the Bangor Region Chamber of Commerce as the 2026 recipient of the "Spirit of the Region" Cultural Award, and thank all our patrons and visitors for their support of Bangor's rich history. Our goal is to open the Thomas A. Hill House for the 2026 season in mid-May and start celebrating the 250th birthday of our country. Walking tours will start in mid-May and be available to purchase starting in April. We can't wait for our building project to be completed so we can once again share the rich history of this region with you.

- Matt Bishop

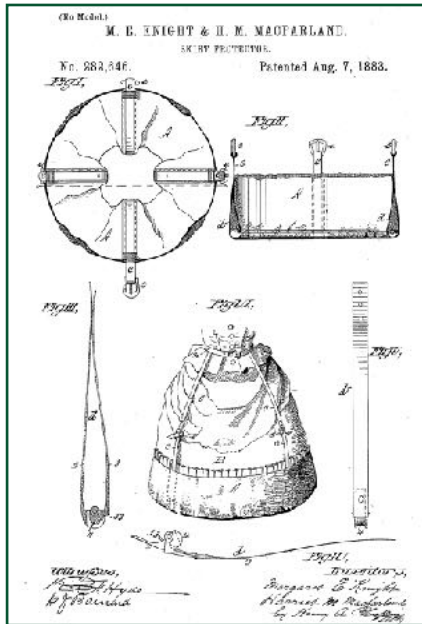
Special Thanks To Our Sponsors!



Did You Know? - Bangor's Julia Penley Set Fashion Standards With Her Patents

In the latter half of the 19th century, Bangor, Maine was home to a quietly remarkable inventor: Julia Penley, a dressmaker whose ingenuity would change the way women's clothing was made across North America.

Penley held two U.S. patents: No. 337,016, granted March 2, 1886, and No. 410,695, granted September 10, 1889, both for a dress chart that allowed a seamstress to size a pattern piece to fit virtually anyone, taking much of the guesswork out of fitting clothing.¹⁸ Her 1889 patent described the invention as "an improved chart for cutting out dress-patterns... adapted to enable any one of ordinary intelligence to prepare from simple measurements a pattern for a woman or child."¹⁹



Dress Patents of the 1890s-
Reference 17

Her ambitions extended well beyond Maine. In 1884, Penley managed an establishment at 48 Winter Street in Boston, where she earned a diploma at the Exhibition of the Massachusetts Charitable Mechanic Association. Judges there praised her "Penley Patent French Tailor System" as superior to all others: accurate, swift, and simple enough that a dress waist could be drafted in just three minutes.²⁰

She later moved to Portland to open her own dressmaking school and obtained patent protection in Canada, receiving royalties from schools teaching her innovative methods to dressmakers and seamstresses across the continent. Her story is a testament to the fact that innovation doesn't always come from grand machinery. Sometimes it comes from a well-measured pattern and a practical, determined mind.²¹

Holland's Maps Still Mark Bangor Today

(continued from Page 2) 1801 produced a plan of 113 Bangor lots that remains a foundation of the city's real estate records to this day. He also served as Agent for the Penobscot tribe and is credited as the originator of the Maine or Holland Log Rule for estimating timber yield.¹⁵

His later years brought a catalog of misfortunes: a dislocated shoulder, a crushed elbow, loss of hearing, and finally loss of sight. He bore it all without complaint. Joseph W. Porter's tribute in the *Bangor Historical Magazine* in 1887 captured him perfectly: Park Holland was "an honest, industrious, and benevolent man, and a man who had the confidence of all."¹⁶



AND THE THOMAS A. HILL HOUSE MUSEUM

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