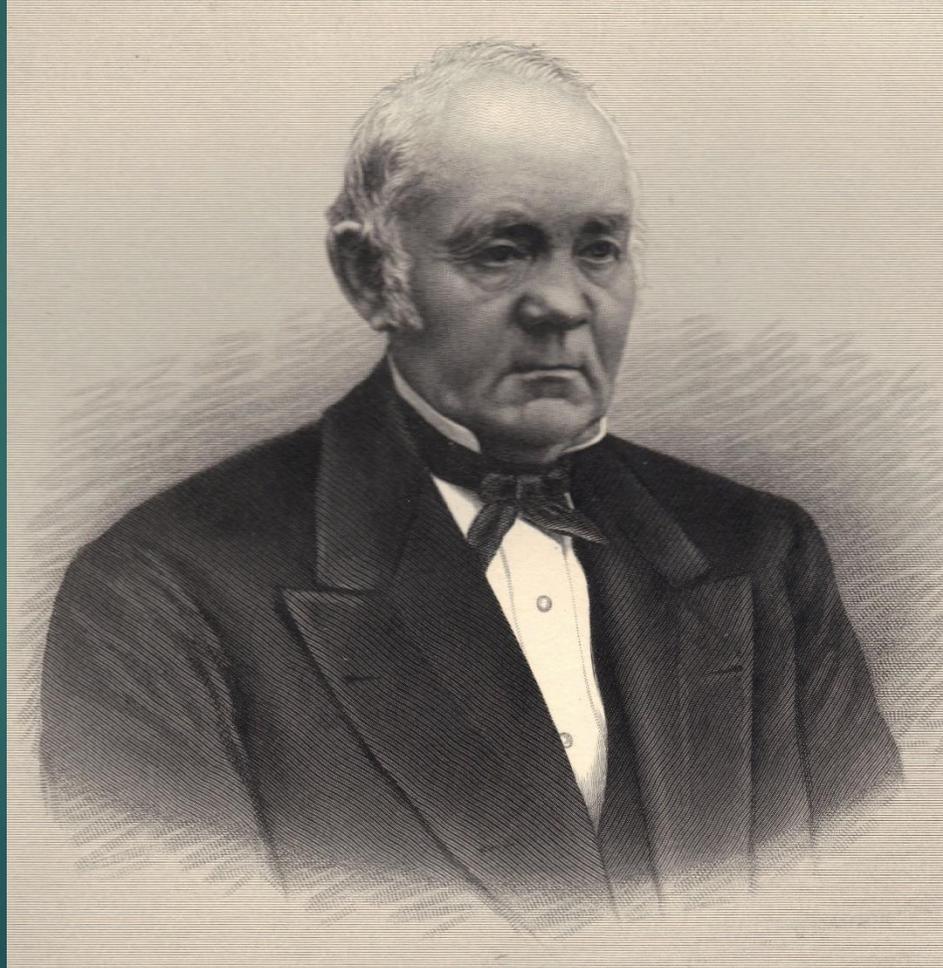


Abner Coburn

March 22, 1803 – January 4, 1885



From *Genealogical and Family History of Maine*, Volume 1

Family History

- ▶ Abner Coburn was born on March 22, 1803 in a part of Canaan, Massachusetts which is now known as Skowhegan, Maine.
- ▶ Although he was the second oldest of 14 children, he outlived all his other siblings.
- ▶ His father, Eleazer Coburn, was the great, great grandson of Edward Colburn who, at just age 17, arrived in America from England in 1635 on board the ship “Defense”.
- ▶ Abner Coburn’s mother was Mary Weston Coburn, the granddaughter of Joseph Weston, who died of exposure while guiding Benedict Arnold’s expedition through Maine to Quebec.

As a child, Abner's mother spun and wove her own blankets, sheets and towels, made her own butter, cheese, candles and soaps, and knit her family's hosiery. Abner's father was a farmer and surveyor and was very involved in civic and other business activities.



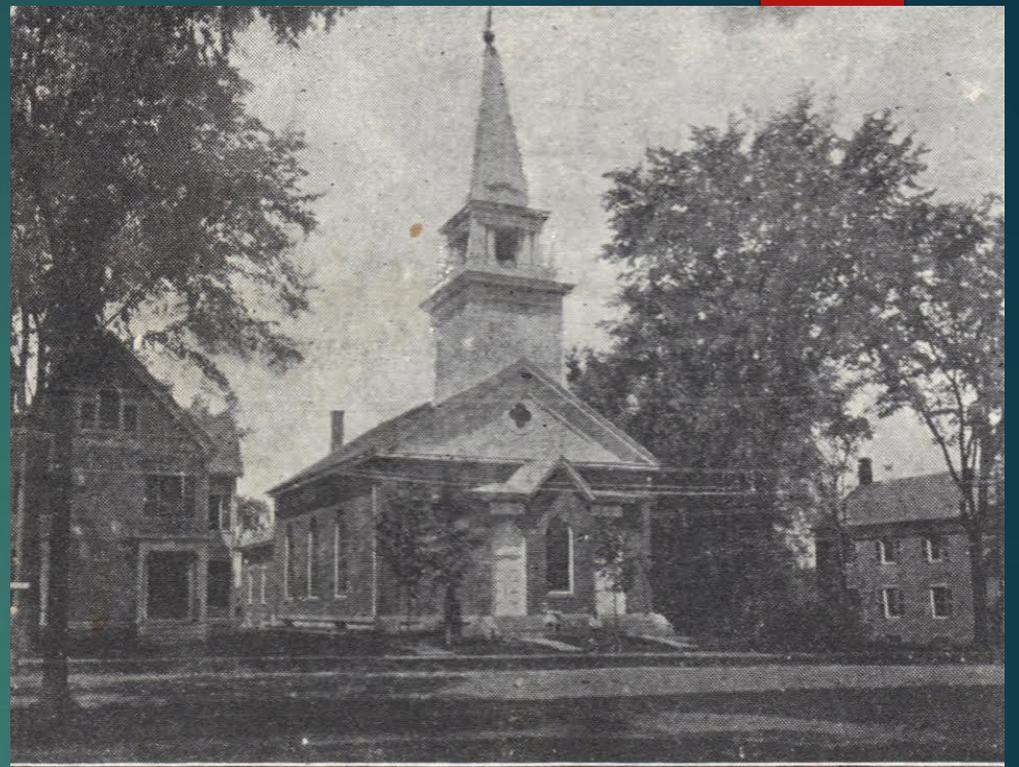
From Skowhegan on the Kennebec

Mr. Coburn grew up on the Back Road in what was then Bloomfield, now Skowhegan. He received some education at the Pitts School on the Back Road (picture on left), and attended a few terms at Bloomfield Academy on Main Street (picture on right).



Courtesy of Skowhegan on the Kennebec

Right next door to Bloomfield Academy on Main Street is the church that the Coburn family attended, the First Baptist Church. The Coburn family, including Abner himself, had strong moral convictions. Abner never smoked tobacco or used alcoholic beverages.



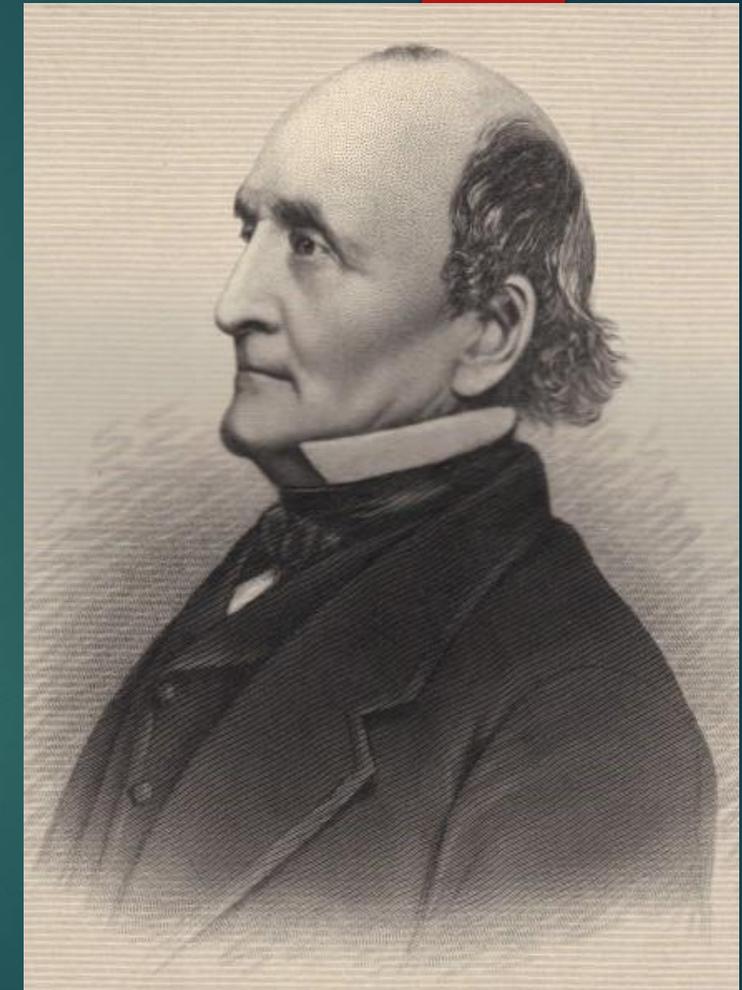
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Courtesy of Skowhegan History House

Mr. Coburn never married and he did not have children. In 1848, he built a mansion on the top of Main Street. He resided there for the rest of his life.

- ▶ Abner Coburn resided at the mansion on Main Street with his brother, Philander.
- ▶ Philander and Abner were business partners for 37 years conducting business as “A. & P. Coburn”.
- ▶ Philander was involved in many business, civic, and philanthropic ventures and causes.
- ▶ Philander was a teacher at the district schools for several terms. He became a skillful surveyor under the guidance of his father. Philander and Abner owned pretty much everything together and even had a common bank account.
- ▶ Together they accumulated tremendous wealth from vast land holdings, lumbering and many other investments.
- ▶ Philander never married, nor did he have children.
- ▶ In 1853, Philander was elected to serve in the Maine Senate.
- ▶ He died in 1876.



From Genealogical and Family History of Maine, Volume 1



- ▶ A sister named Elvira was the homemaker for Abner and Philander at the mansion until she died in 1867.
- ▶ The oldest brother and Coburn child, Nahum, died in 1822; he was only 21 years old.
- ▶ Abner's sister, Fidelia, received an education at Winthrop Academy and became a teacher. Later, she became involved in the anti-slavery movement and served as a missionary for fugitive slaves in Canada for seven years. She died in 1849, of a fever on a missionary trip to Africa.
- ▶ Abner's other sister, Eliza, married Isaiah Marston and had eight children. She died in 1874.

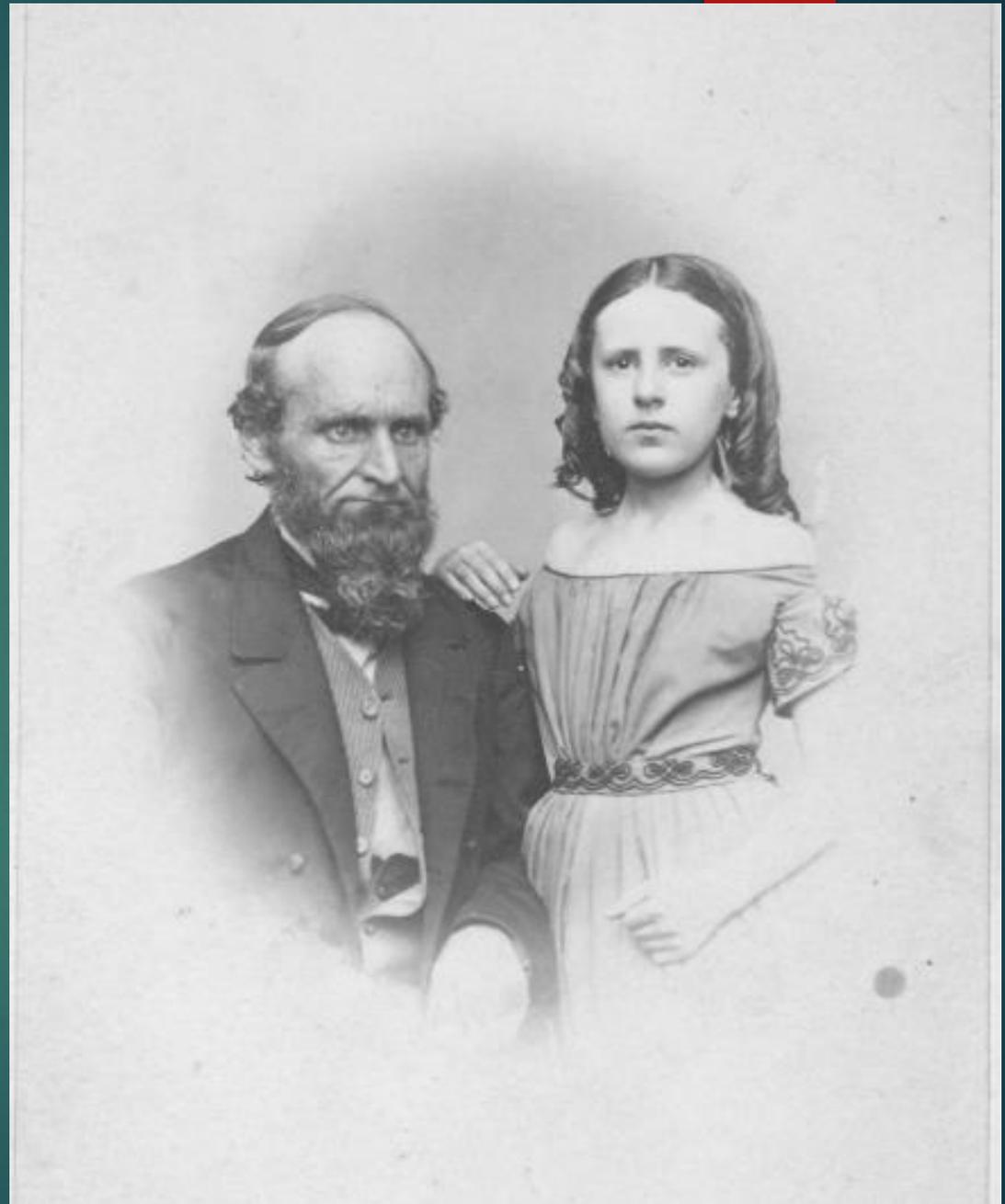
- ▶ Abner's other brother, Alonzo, was a lawyer and Harvard Law School graduate.
- ▶ Alonzo formed a law partnership with his brother, Stephen, in Skowhegan conducting business as "A. and S. Coburn", but soon left the practice to do farming. He was married, but had no children. Alonzo died in 1882.
- ▶ Another brother named Samuel was educated at Waterville College, which is now Colby College.
- ▶ Samuel taught school and farmed, specializing in raising Durham cattle.
- ▶ In 1859, he took a cargo of Durham cattle to his brother Sylvanus' ranch in California sailing by way of the Isthmus of Panama.
- ▶ Samuel stayed in California until 1862, and then returned to Maine. He was married and had 5 children. He died in 1873.



- Abner's brother, Stephen, graduated from Waterville College and taught school on a plantation in North Carolina for one year.
- When Stephen returned to Maine, he became the principal and teacher at Bloomfield Academy. He was a member of the Maine Board of Education from 1848 to 1850.
- Stephen was instrumental in bringing about the consolidation of Bloomfield Academy and Skowhegan High School.
- He attended some lectures at Harvard Law School and became a lawyer in 1845. Stephen was a law partner with his brother, Alonzo, for a short time, and when Alonzo left the practice, he became law partners with Henry Wyman, doing business as "Coburn & Wyman" until Wyman died in 1867.

(Continued below)

- Stephen then acted as attorney for Maine Central Railroad at a time when his brother, Abner, was President of the Railroad.
- In 1860, Stephen was elected to the U.S. House of Representatives to complete the term of Israel Washburn, who became Governor of Maine.
- Stephen stood near Abraham Lincoln when Lincoln was inaugurated as our 16th U.S. President.
- He also served as Postmaster for Skowhegan from 1868 to 1877.
- Stephen was married and had 5 children, including author, Louise Coburn.
- He drowned in the Kennebec River in 1882, along with his only son who was trying to save him. On the left is a photo of Stephen and his daughter, Louise.



Courtesy of Skowhegan History House

- A brother named Eleazer was a farmer and lumberman in Skowhegan.
- He was married, but had no children. He died in 1845 when he was only 30 years old.
- Another brother, Charles, graduated from Waterville College and served as principal at Bloomfield Academy, but died in 1844 at age 22, unmarried and without children.
- Abner's sister, Mary Weston, served as preceptress at Bloomfield Academy for several years. She later lived with her brothers, Abner and Philander, in the mansion, serving as their homemaker. She died in 1874.
- A brother, Sylvanus, went to California for the Gold Rush of 1849 and engaged in mining until 1854. He later bought a ranch in Santa Clara, California, and went into the thoroughbred Durham cattle business. Later, he formed a stagecoach and livery business with his nephew, E.W. Marston.
- Sylvanus had a twin sister named Sarah who only lived to be 5 months old. Sylvanus died in 1874, unmarried and without children.

Business Interests

- Mr. Coburn's first job was laboring on the family farm.
- In his late teens, he taught school in the winter.
- He also began assisting his father, Eleazer, a noted surveyor, who was involved in surveying large tracts of land in Maine.
- By age 22, Abner had become an expert surveyor himself.

- 
- ▶ In 1830, Abner, Philander, and their father formed a lumbering business, E. Coburn & Sons.
 - ▶ When Eleazer died in 1845, Abner and Philander continued the business under the name of “A. and P. Coburn”. They were very successful. Abner came to own over 450,000 acres of land in Maine and more than 60,000 acres in Michigan, Wisconsin, Minnesota, Washington, and Dakota Territory.
 - ▶ Besides his land holdings, Abner had investments in manufacturing, banks, railroads, stock markets, and more. At one time he was considered to be the richest person in Maine, having accumulated assets that today would be worth the equivalent of over **\$100 million dollars**.



Retrieved From Postcard

In 1825, Samuel Weston and Abner Coburn formed the Somerset Bank. Abner later served as a Director and as President of Skowhegan Bank and its successor, the First National Bank of Skowhegan.

In 1869, Abner was one of the incorporators of Skowhegan Savings Bank and also served as a Director and as President.

- ▶ In 1833, Mr. Coburn was one of the incorporators of the Somerset Central Agricultural Society.
- ▶ He became President of the Kennebec Log Driving Co in 1842. He was also an original incorporator of the Dead River Log Driving Co. and Moose River Log Driving Co.



In 1847, Abner was one of the incorporators of the Moosehead Lake Railway, a 3-mile long ox-powered rail line.

From The Ox Railroad at Moosehead Lake, Northeast Carry, Maine

- ▶ Abner, Philander, and a few others formed the corporation, “Moosehead Lake Steam Navigation Company” in 1849.
- ▶ In 1854, Abner helped finance the necessary funds for the Somerset and Kennebec Railroad Co. so that it could complete the rail line to Skowhegan.



Courtesy of Skowhegan History House

- ▶ From 1855 to 1866, Abner and Philander operated an oil cloth manufacturing business in Skowhegan (see above photo).
- ▶ Abner later served as president and served on the Board of Directors of both the Portland & Kennebec Railroad and the Maine Central Railroad. He was also involved with the Northern Pacific Railroad.

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- ▶ In 1866, Abner and Philander, as well as a few other men, formed the corporation, Skowhegan Excelsior Works, a manufacturer of carpets and mats.
 - ▶ Mr. Coburn and Philander owned a cotton plantation in Alabama.
 - ▶ Abner was President of the Coburn Aqueduct Company which provided water for some of Skowhegan's residents.

In 1870, Abner became one of the incorporators of the Canada Falls Dam Co., a corporation that formed in order to erect a dam on the Penobscot River.

In the 1870s, Abner purchased land on Mill Street in Skowhegan and formed a company that built the Coburn Woolen Co. He also served as its President.



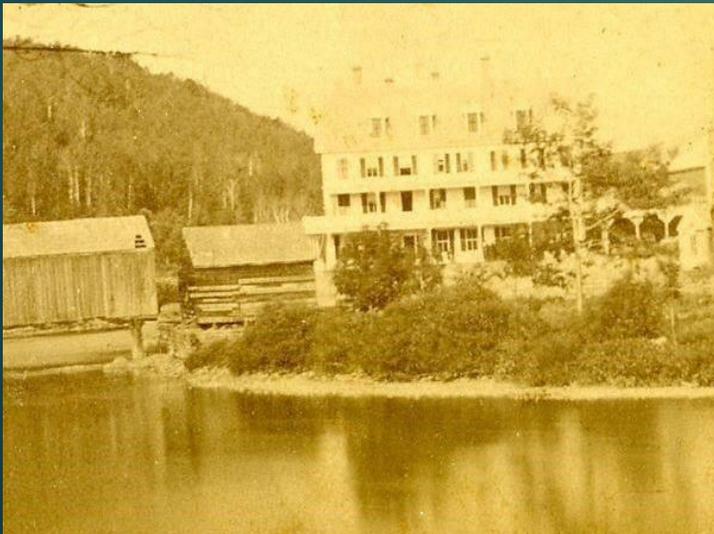
Courtesy of Skowhegan History House

Abner was the leading promoter of the Skowhegan Hall Association, which built Coburn Hall, on Water Street in Skowhegan. Several merchants rented space in Coburn Hall.

Mr. Coburn also donated 15 acres of land for the site and helped form the Skowhegan Shoe Manufacturing Co. where he also served as the President.



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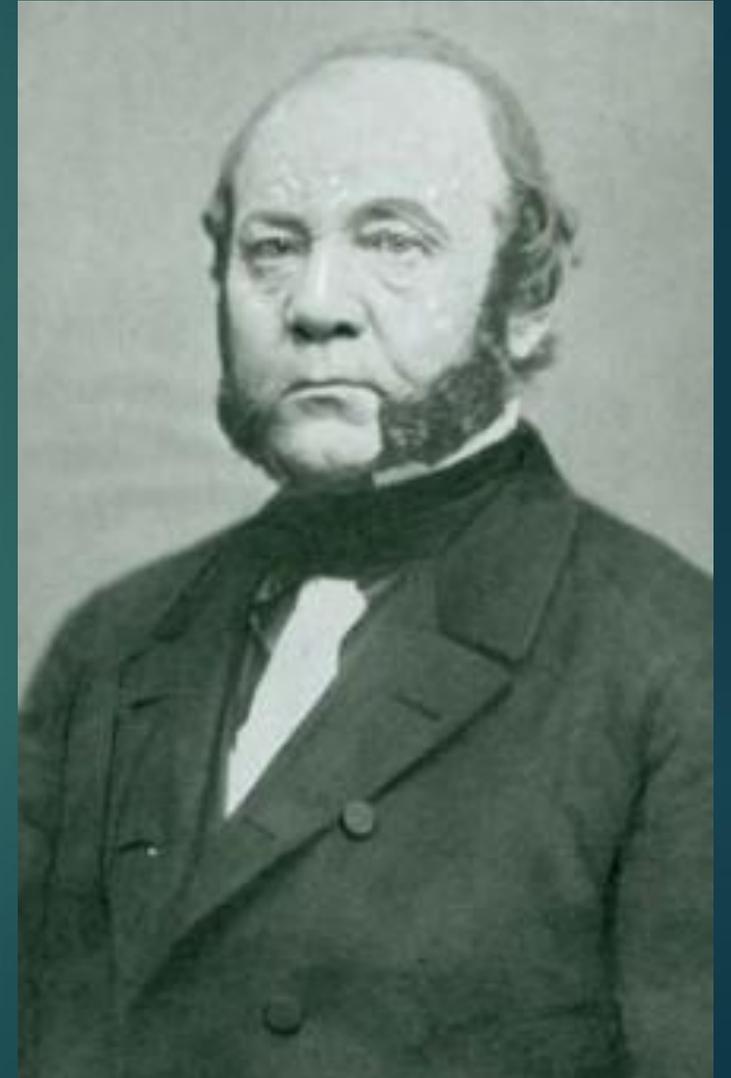


Abner and Joseph Clark Jr. built a 100-room hotel in The Forks, known as The Forks Hotel, which burned down in the early 1900s.

Courtesy of Old Canada Road Historical Society

Public and Political Life

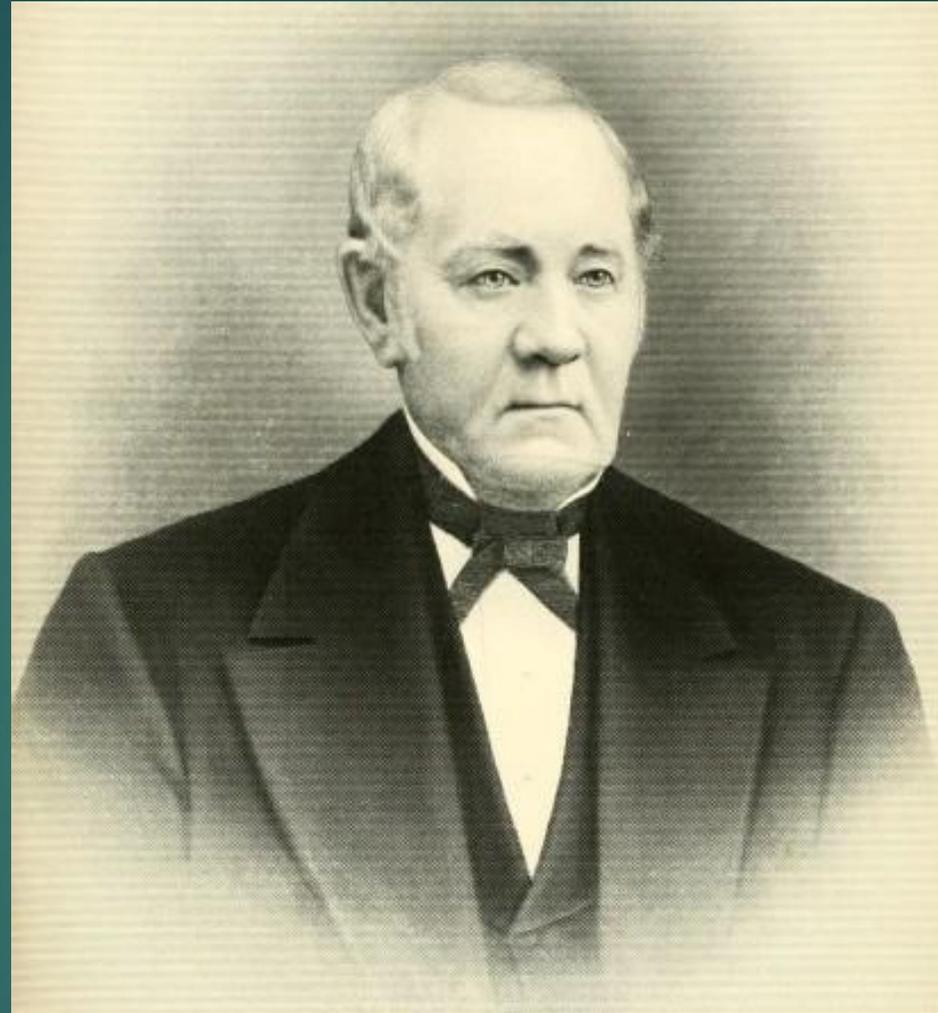
- ▶ Like his father, Abner was initially a Federalist Party member. At age 21, he voted for the first time for John Quincy Adams, our 6th U.S. President.
- ▶ Later, Abner Coburn became a Whig and served as a Whig Party Presidential Elector in 1852.
- ▶ He also served three terms in the Maine legislature as a Whig.
- ▶ While in Legislature, Abner served on the Finance, Northeastern Boundary, Banking, State Lands and State Valuation Committee.



- 
- ▶ Also like his Father, Abner was a strong supporter of temperance and was a member of the Bloomfield Temperance Society.
 - ▶ In 1834, Abner was elected to be a delegate to the Maine State Temperance Society. However, because the Maine State Temperance Society did not promote total abstinence from the use of intoxicating liquor, Abner, among others, formed the Maine Temperance Union in 1837 which advocated for total abstinence.
 - ▶ Mr. Coburn was also a member of the Washingtonian Society, a group in which all members pledged total abstinence from the use of “spirituous, vinous and fermented liquors as a beverage”.

- 
- ▶ Abner Coburn served the Town of Bloomfield as Town Clerk from 1828 to 1833. He also served 8 years as moderator at the annual Bloomfield Town Meetings.
 - ▶ In 1854, he was instrumental in the formation of the Republican Party in Maine. In 1855, he presided over the Somerset County Republican Convention where strong anti-slavery sentiment was voiced. Abner Coburn was a strong abolitionist, like his father, his sister, Fidelia, and his brother, Samuel.
 - ▶ Abner also served as a member of three different Governor's Executive Councils (Gov. Anson Merrill, Gov. Hannibal Hamlin, and Gov. Joseph Williams).
 - ▶ As a Republican Party Presidential Elector in 1860, Abner voted to elect Abraham Lincoln as President.

- 
- ▶ Mr. Coburn was elected to one term as Maine's 30th Governor during the Civil War and was instrumental in fulfilling Maine's required quota of recruitment of soldiers for the Union Army. He traveled to Gettysburg and was present for Lincoln's Gettysburg Address.
 - ▶ As Governor, Abner was a strong supporter of publicly funded education stating, "While we may not be in a condition to make any extraordinary expenditure for educational purposes, it will be one of our highest duties to see that our schools are maintained in full vigor and usefulness, and that while other interests may suffer from the inevitable effects of war, the culture of the young, shall in no wise be neglected or abated".
 - ▶ He also supported the Morrill Act which led to the future evolution of the University of Maine.



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Governor Coburn also was chosen to serve as a Presidential Elector in 1884, however, he became ill and was unable to do so. He died a few weeks later on January 4, 1885.

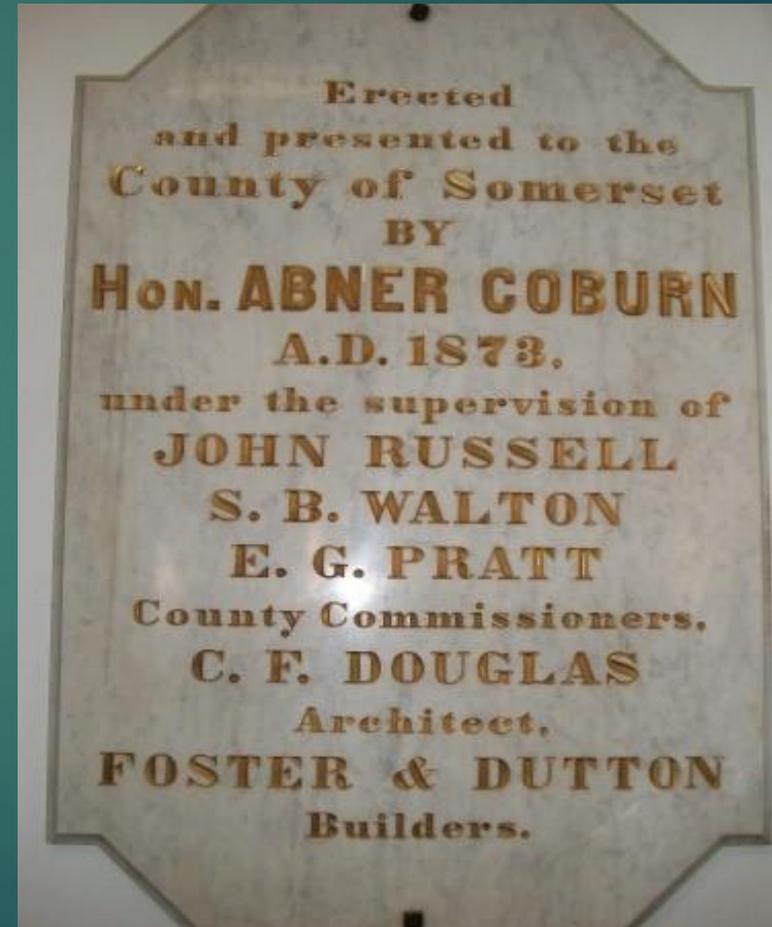
Philanthropy and Legacy

- ▶ During his lifetime, Governor Coburn helped many people and many worthy causes, especially the poor.
- ▶ Abner generously gave funds to help educational institutions, such as the Waterville Classical Institute, Colby University (now Colby College), and the Maine State College of Agriculture & Mechanic Arts (now the University of Maine at Orono).
- ▶ He served on Colby's Board of Trustees for 40 years and at one point, he served as President.
- ▶ Mr. Coburn also served as President of the Board of Trustees at Maine State College of Agriculture & Mechanic Arts.

In 1873, Governor Coburn erected and presented the Court House to Somerset County. This allowed Skowhegan to replace Norridgewock as the “shiretown” of Somerset County.



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Courtesy of Kristen Washburn

- 
- ▶ Abner and Philander donated a portion of the land for use as the South Cemetery in Skowhegan.
 - ▶ He gave Harry Haines his one-half ownership interest in the lot on which the Hotel Coburn was built, and Haines, thereafter, named the hotel in his honor.
 - ▶ Abner was secretary for an organized effort for foreign missions through the Bloomfield Baptist Church.
 - ▶ He donated the uniforms for the local militia group and they, in turn, honored him by calling themselves the Coburn Guards. The group was expertly drilled, wore handsome uniforms, and could be seen at Skowhegan parades and events.
 - ▶ Through the Skowhegan Hall Association, later renamed the Coburn Hall Association, Abner built a large building on Water Street in downtown Skowhegan, with a large auditorium that could accommodate 1200 people. He gave the Town of Skowhegan a perpetual lease on part of the building for Town purposes, including a Town Office and Selectmens' Offices. Town meetings and elections were also held there.

Upon his death in 1885, Governor Coburn bequeathed his fortune to not only his family, but also to many worthy causes as follows: (Note: \$100,000 then is worth about \$2.5 million today):

- Maine Insane Hospital (Augusta) \$50,000
- Maine General Hospital (Portland) \$100,000
- Maine State College of Agriculture & Mechanic Arts \$100,000
- Colby University (Colby College) \$200,000
- American Home Mission Society \$200,000
(with the condition that ½ of this amount be used to help fund Freedmen's schools)
- Wayland Seminary, Washington D.C. \$50,000
- American Baptist Missionary Union \$100,000
- Maine Baptist Convention \$100,000
- Waterville Classical Institute \$100,000
- Houlton Academy \$5,000
- Maine Industrial School for Girls \$5,000
- Baptist Church & Society in Skowhegan \$18,000
- Bloomfield Academy \$7,000
(To open the school free of tuition)
- Town of Skowhegan worthy poor \$20,000
(1/2 to be expended by the Ladies Aid Society)
- Skowhegan Hall Association \$15,000
- Town of Skowhegan
(lot for park on south side of Water Street, now known as Coburn Park)
- Trustees of Bloomfield Academy \$30,000
(to fund the library)



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Mr. Coburn lived an incredible life and was very generous to Skowhegan, Somerset County, and the State of Maine. His life has been the subject of a book as well as some articles and his greatness is evident by having many places and things named in his honor.

Here's a few:

Coburn Park, Skowhegan, originally considered to be too far from the village to be of much use.



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Coburn Park, Waterville
(now renamed
Veterans Memorial
Park)



Courtesy of Skowhegan History House

Coburn Hall , Water
Street, Skowhegan
(housed some
merchants, as well as
Town offices and an
auditorium; burned down
in 1904)

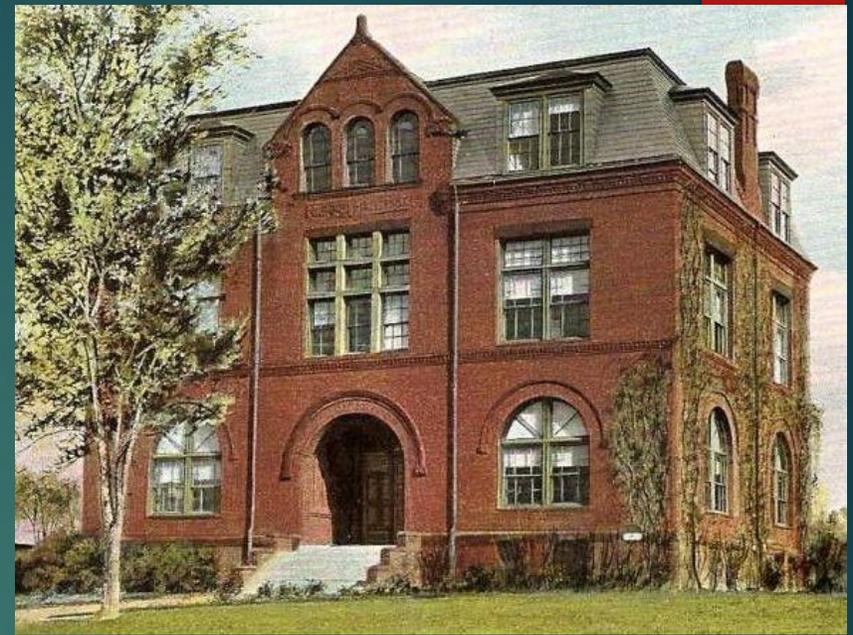




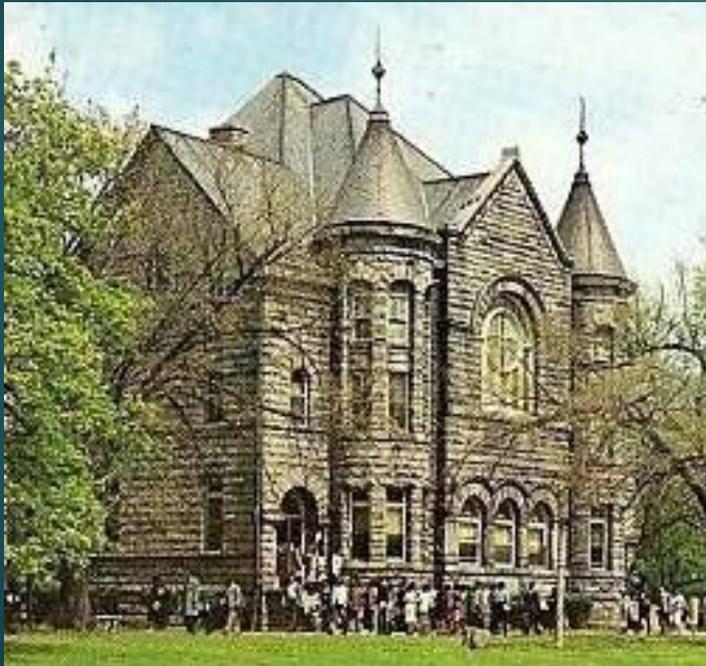
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Coburn Classical Institute was originally in Waterville, but later moved to Vassalboro (it was formerly known as Waterville Classical Institute and was renamed in Governor Coburn's honor; later it became Oak-Grove Coburn and it now houses the Maine State Police Academy)

Coburn Hall, University of Maine at Orono
(initially housed the library, later housed the
Departments of Agriculture and Natural
History)



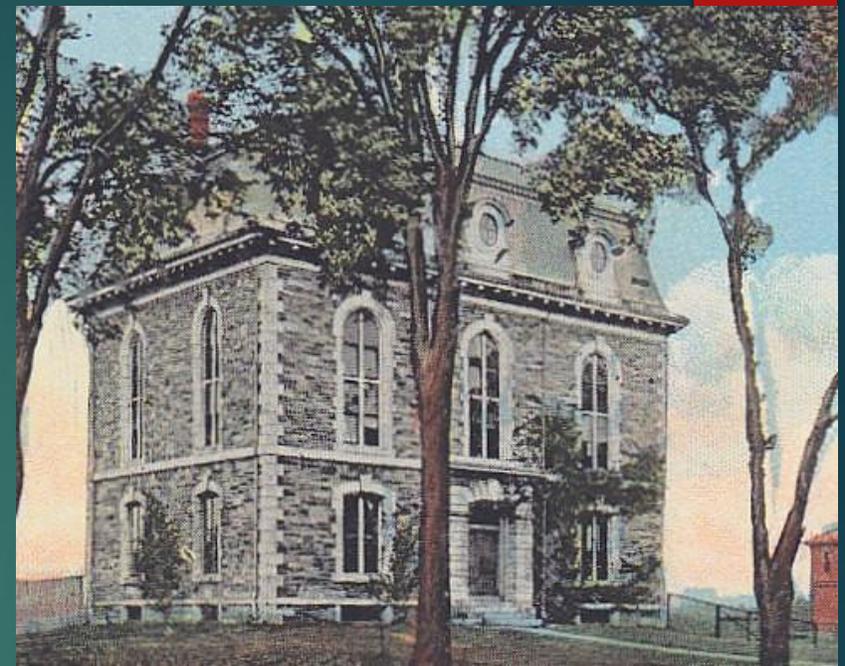
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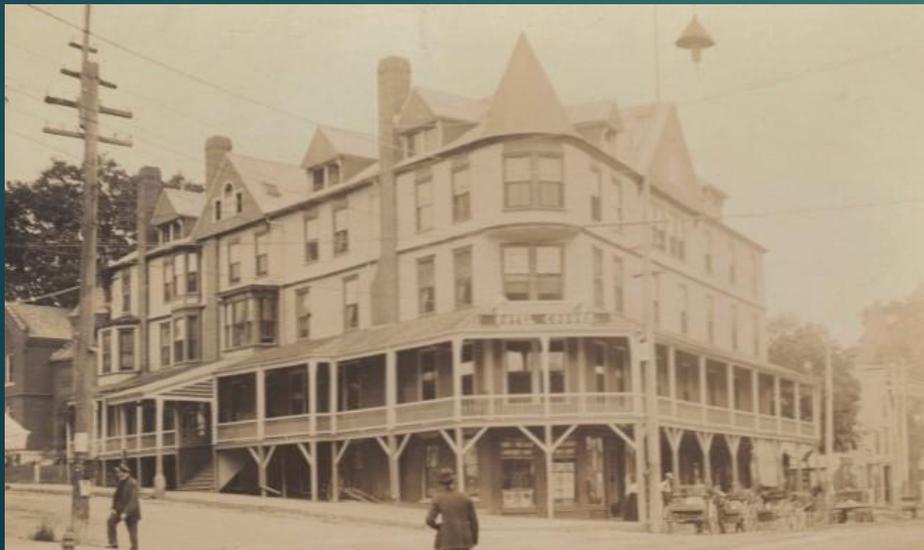
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Abner Coburn Hall, Virginia Union University,
Richmond, Virginia (Booker T. Washington and
Martin Luther King have both spoken in the
building)

Coburn Hall (now demolished, it once stood on the old Colby campus on College Avenue in Waterville)



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Hotel Coburn (on corner of Elm St. and Madison Ave in Skowhegan; burned in 1918)



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Coburn Mountain

(near Jackman, Maine; it was named after Abner and Philander Coburn; it formerly was the site of Enchanted Mountain Ski Resort and today the summit is the highest groomed snowmobile trail in the state)



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Courtesy of Coburn Summit Riders



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The Governor Coburn (Steamboat
used on Moosehead Lake from 1871 to 1890s)

U.S.S. Abner Coburn (an international sailing ship that operated from 1882 to 1925
and then was burned and the metal salvaged; the ship is also the subject of
paintings by famous artists)



From *Progress is fine, but it's gone on for too long* website



Retrieved From The State Library of Victoria Collection



Courtesy of Kristen Washburn

In 1875, a bust of Governor Abner Coburn was permanently encased at the Somerset County Courthouse in Skowhegan.

- 
- ▶ Governor Coburn, a Maine Central Railroad steam locomotive (placed in service in 1870)
 - ▶ Coburn Gore, Maine
 - ▶ Camp Coburn, Augusta (a Civil War Training Camp)
 - ▶ Coburn Township, North Dakota and Coburn County, North Dakota (now renamed Ransom County)



- ▶ Abner Coburn's solid family values, high integrity and keen business skills allowed him to enjoy a lifetime of accomplishments, great wealth, and philanthropy.
- ▶ After Mr. Coburn died in 1885, Governor Robie delivered a message commemorating Coburn to the Maine Legislature, "His life is a monument of great usefulness, of high public spirit and patriotism...Called to the office of Governor during the most trying period of the late war, he displayed firmness, sagacity and patriotism of the highest order. His life, character and achievements are an honor to Maine, and proud is the State that can claim the birth and citizenship of such a man."



Former U.S. Secretary of State and U.S. Congressman, James G. Blaine wrote of Coburn: “Governor Coburn was altogether a remarkable man. With only rudimentary training in early life, he has proved our most liberal and discriminating patron of classical education. With no gift for public speaking, he has constantly exerted a wise and beneficent influence on public opinion. He was, if humanity can ever attain perfection, an absolutely just man in all his dealings. And beyond the severe demands of justice, he was always kind and even generous to his fellow man. Singularly quiet and unobtrusive, the world had little knowledge of the constant flow of his charity, of the numberless good deeds which adorned his daily life.”



In honor of all that Governor Coburn has done for the Town of Skowhegan and the State of Maine and the exemplary life he lived, the Selectmen for the Town of Skowhegan and Somerset County Commissioners have Proclaimed **March 22nd**, forevermore, to be **ABNER COBURN DAY!**

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