

Elizabeth B. Davidson, National Bank President

By Karl Sanford Kabelac

YORK VILLAGE, MAINE IS LOCATED IN THE SOUTHERNMOST PART OF the state, just a few miles from the New Hampshire border. It is one of the oldest communities in the United States, and by the end of the 19th century was a popular summer resort area. In 1900 the town's population was 2668, with a summer population some five times that.

To serve the residents and the summer visitors, The York County National Bank of York Village (charter #4844) was founded in 1893. John T. Davidson, a lawyer, was the founding president. That same year a building was begun for the bank on York Street in the village. The attractive colonial revival Dutch gambrel roof building, looking more like a home than a bank, was completed the next year.

Elizabeth Burleigh, who was born in nearby South Berwick on September 5, 1862, had married Davidson on July 3, 1883. She was the daughter of John H. and Matilda Burleigh. Her father was a prominent businessman and former member of Congress at the time of his early death in 1877.

James T. Davidson, was himself a relatively young man at the time of his death in 1901. The vice president of the bank was then elected president, and Mrs. Davidson became the vice president. When the new president died two years later, she was chosen president.

Perhaps this was not unusual, for a 1906 article noted that she and her mother owned two thirds of the stock of the bank. There were 44 other stockholders and 1,100 accounts at that time.

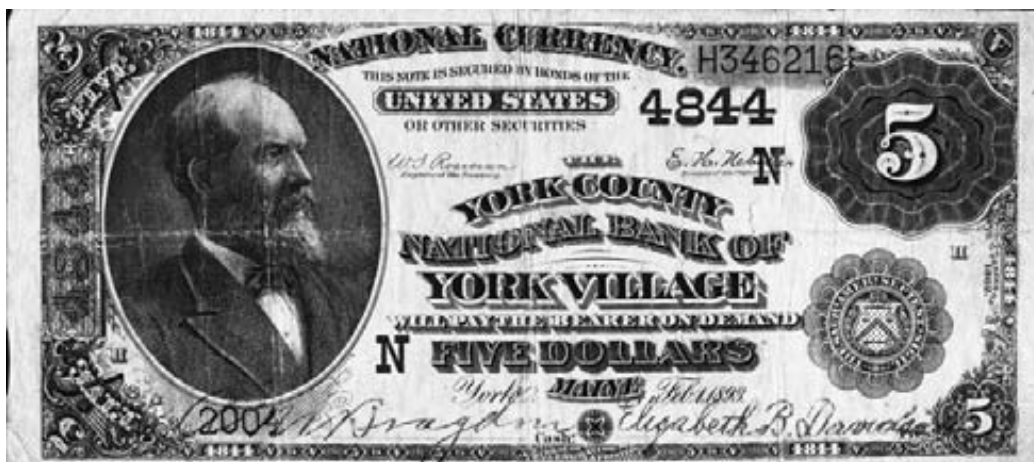
Even as a fairly young widow with six children, she devoted much of her time to her banking responsibilities. But she did sell her large home in York Village in 1905 (to become the community's hospital) and moved with her children to South Berwick to live with her mother, who could help with running such a large household. The modern convenience of an interurban railroad made it possible for her to commute from South Berwick via Portsmouth NH to the bank in York Village.



Elizabeth B. Davidson as she appeared in a feature article in a Boston newspaper in 1906.



A view of the bank, located in an attractive Colonial revival with a Dutch gambrel roof building, built in 1893/94. The building, with later additions, is now home of the administrative offices and library of the Old York Historical Society, an organization which maintains several museums in the area.



A Series 1882 date back note with the signature of Elizabeth B. Davidson as bank president. (Courtesy Heritage Currency Auctions)

The detailed article about her in a 1906 Boston newspaper quoted her as saying, “A well trained, alert mind is needed to cope with financial interests, and it matters not whether that well trained mind is possessed by a woman or by a man.” She also found great pleasure in keeping closely in touch with the business world. “Nearly every day I go to the bank and personally supervise the investments and make myself thoroughly familiar with the books and accounts and the daily routine,” she said.

Elizabeth B. Davidson continued to run the bank until 1919, when it was liquidated as a national bank and became the York County Trust Company. In her later life, a grandson remembered that she visited her six children during the winter months, not wanting to be alone in the large house in South Berwick. The grandchildren loved these visits of their grandmother, whom they called Madame.

She died in October 1937 at the age of 75 and was buried next to her husband in the First Church Cemetery in York.

Sources and Acknowledgements

The Sunday Herald, Boston, February 11, 1906, carried a long article about Mrs. Davidson with several illustrations. Peter A. Moore of York Village wrote an article about her (December 1, 1993) and one about the bank (February 14, 1996) in *The York Weekly*. Michael A. Fargo, *The York Hospital, the Story of a Small Community Hospital*, 1996, has biographical sketches of both Elizabeth Burleigh Davidson and James Thomas Davidson on pages 27-29. A search of various newspaper databases turns up a number of short article about her, 1906 through 1913. Many state she was the only woman bank president in New England. There was, however one other at this time, Frances (Mason) Moulton of Limerick, Maine. (An article on her appeared in *Paper Money*, May/June 2007.) The assistance of Peter Moore of York Village and Virginia S. Spiller, the librarian of the Old York Historical Society, is gratefully acknowledged. The illustration showing the bank and the church is courtesy of the Old York Historical Society. ❖

A second view of the bank on a quiet street in York Village, Maine.

