

Legacy of the Burrill Woods

Compiled by Brenda Seekins – Hartland Historical Society – 2018

For years local hunters knew, or heard of, a “sawdust pile” deep in the Burrill Woods in North Hartland, near the Cornville town line. It was a popular site for scouting deer and many older hunters may remember “sitting on the sawdust pile” waiting for that elusive buck or doe. Or maybe they heard the stories of hunters who used that pile as a waypoint during successful hunts.

In 2016, one of those hunters, Carl McKenney of Skowhegan, reached out to the Hartland Historical Society with a collection of photos of the sawmill that created that pile. Some may know Carl from his days as Skowhegan Fire Chief or Somerset County Emergency Management Director and even his stint helping with membership for the Maine Old Cemetery Association. Carl appreciates local history and he knew he had something significant from Hartland history.

Carl offered to send the original photos as well as some copies he generously made for us. He said, “The original photos were some belonging to my grandparents, Walter & Edith McKenney. They were living in the East Ridge Road area of Cornville and I'm told by my Aunt, the only living child of Walter & Edith, that her father worked at the Burrill Mill during this time (1919). The photos should be preserved and I would like them to become the property of the Hartland Historical Society. They show a part of Hartland's history approximately 100 years ago. Consider them a donation from the family of Walter & Edith McKenney.”

According to Carl's research, the Burrill Sawmill was located in the same vicinity as the Burrill Farm. The road is shown on page 21 in the Maine Atlas and Gazetteer starting just north of Withee Stream on Route 43. But an 1883 map of Hartland shows it starting in the vicinity of the Barden Camp Road and also on the corner before that road. The old road is discontinued now, but it's still marked on the maps, and heads towards Burrill Hill, all within the borders of Hartland, and used to come out in Cornville where it meets the Ames Road.

In more recent years, the Weyerhaeuser Company of Fairfield maintains a woods road that offers access to the large tract of land (3,000+ acres) commonly known as the Burrill Woods. It was previously known as Plum Creek land. The road provides access to the land and continues through to Athens, Canaan and Cornville.

Additional research on the family who owned and operated the Burrill Sawmill around the turn of the 20th century, reveals that Fred S. Burrill (1865-1928) and his wife, “Gussie” (1867-1923), lived on the Burrill Farm and operated the Burrill Sawmill in the late 1800s thru to about 1928.

It appears Fred may be a second generation lumberman, the son of Scammon and Helen L. (Whitten) Burrill. An 1883 map of Somerset County shows a large tract of land, that came to be known as the Burrill Woods, was owned by S. Burrill.

Fred Scammon Burrill and Olive Augusta Bigelow were married December 31, 1892 in Skowhegan (Maine Vital Records, copy of marriage certificate). Fred was 24, a lumberman from Hartland, Olive (Gussie) was 22, a dressmaker from Cornville, although later census records indicate she was born in Ireland.

In the 1900 Census, the couple had been married 8 years and had two children, one in school, and two boarders: Fred Burrill, 34; Gusta Burrill, 33; Ethel Burrill, 6, Lucy Burrill, 3 and boarders Lewis Greene and Arthur Greene. However, nothing was found in the 1910 census.

In the East Somerset County Register of 1911-12, Fred S. Burrill is listed as a Hartland Selectman from 1900 to 1905. But the Census from the same book, lists two F.S. Burrills, both are listed as lumbermen, but oddly enough their business is listed in Cornville, not Hartland. A fact disputed by local hunters who sat on the sawdust pile well within Hartland borders.

The census data included in the book, appears to show them as father and son, both Fred S., one is married to Gussie (Bigelow) and had three or four children. Helen L. Whitten Burrill is listed at the same residence, apparently the mother of the older Fred S. Burrill.

In the 1920 Census: Fred Burrill, 51, living in Hartland with wife Olive A. Burrill, 49 (reported born in Ireland) with sons Elmer F. Burrill, 22 (Purchaser at the woolen mill) and Harold L. Burrill, unemployed, age 20 North Hartland or Elm St. written on the side of census form.

Fred S. Burrill became President of the Hartland Water Power Company which incorporated in 1911 who later built a 6 mile main water line from Starbird Pond to Hartland Village in 1913.

Many of the Burrill Family are interred at Southside Cemetery in Skowhegan.