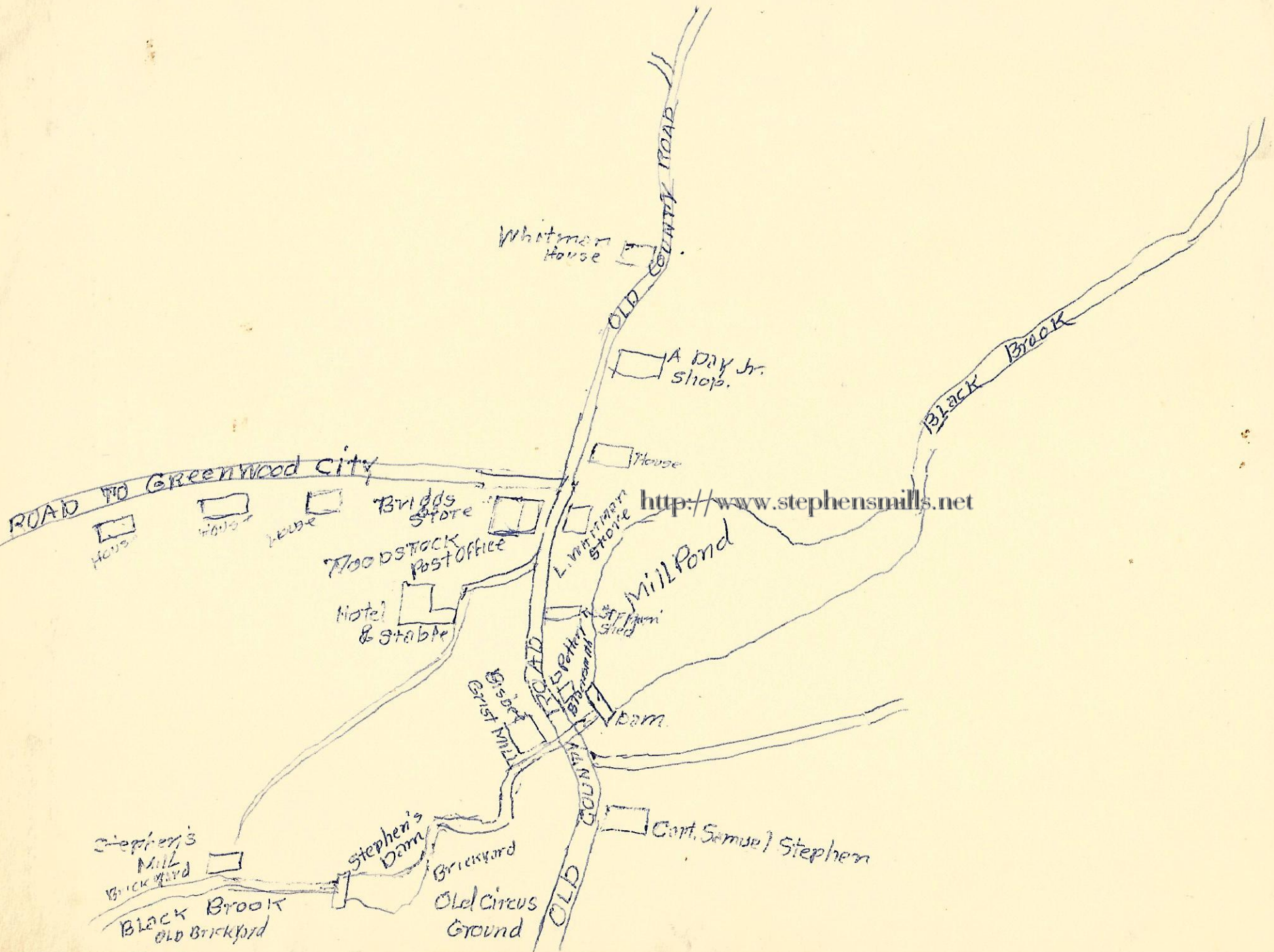


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Ralph M. Bacon  
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# WOODSTOCK CORNER



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HISTORICAL SKETCH OF WOODSTOCK, MAINE

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Our town of Woodstock had its beginning back in the days when a dense forest covered this entire area. Maine was first settled along the coast, but as the settlers began to move inland in search of good farm land they followed the river valleys, for along these waterways was to be found the best land for farming purposes.

Our neighboring towns of Rumford, Bethel, Norway, and Paris were settled years before there was a single settler in our wilderness township, called No. 3. An area of very rocky, mountainous country extended from the White Mountains of New Hampshire eastward into Maine. Albany, Greenwood, Milton Plantation, and Woodstock remained a wilderness after Bethel had been settled for twenty-three years.

Our township seemed to offer little as a farming country, but it did have a lake on its western boundary, a jewel set in the mountains with forest all around. Its spring-fed waters, cold and clear, afforded wonderful trout fishing. Early settlers

in Paris made fishing trips up the Little Androscoggin River to its source in this pond. Among these were two brothers, Christopher and Solomon Bryant. These brothers were so delighted with this beautiful lake and the fine fishing it afforded that they decided they would like to settle here.

In the year 1795 the citizens of Paris and Rumford (then called New Pennacook) petitioned for a county road to connect the two settlements. In 1796 the road was cleared and opened to travel, although still very rough. This road entered Woodstock from Greenwood just south of what is now the Norton Emmons place, and extended up over the hill past the Dana Dudley farm, and on through what is now North Woodstock into Rumford. This was the first road through our wilderness township.

With the new road connecting Township No. 3 with the outside world, the Bryant brothers in Paris decided the time had come to start a settlement to be located not far from the lake and on the county road. They had a younger brother, Samuel, and several brothers-in-law. They hired a surveyor from Buckfield



to run out ten 100-acre lots, five on each side of the county road. This was in the spring of 1797. The following summer the Bryants cut trees on the lots they had selected. In 1798 they came again and built log cabins, and in October moved in with their wives. In November Christopher's wife gave birth to their first child, Christopher Bryant, Jr., the first child to be born in what is now Woodstock. The next year other families followed and in the winter of 1799-1800 five families were living here. They were the families of Christopher, Solomon, and Samuel Bryant, Luther Briggs, and Jacob Whitman. These were the pioneer folks who paved the way for other families which followed at the beginning of the new century. These were Luther Whitman, Levi Berry, Asa Thurlow, and others. Probably nine families spent the winter of 1800-1801 in No. 3.

In a historical sketch, which must of necessity be brief, to give the names of all who played an important part in the settlement of our wilderness, would not be possible. However, I think we can all agree that the Bryants, who had the courage

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to first settle in the township and encouraged others to come here, who gave their name to our lake, our village, and our Post Office, are the ones to whom we do honor today. Woodstock is not only proud of the Bryant family, but of all the other early settlers, and of those in more recent years, who have given their best to make our town a better place in which to live. The names of Andrews, Bisbee, Chase, Cushman, Cole, Curtis, Dudley, Davis, Russ, Day, Felt, Perham, and Dunham are only a few of the many.

For ten years after the first settlers came there was no village. The settlers had to make the long journey to the nearest stores on Paris Hill. In 1808 Rowse Bisbee built ~~the first~~ the first mill, a grist mill. It was located on Black Brook just below where the brook was crossed by the county road. This was the beginning of our first village, which was to play an important part in the early history of our town. Four years after the building of the mill the population had increased to the extent that it became necessary to organize the township into a plantation and to assess the first taxes. This was in 1812.



Three years later, with a further increase in population, the citizens decided it was time to get incorporated as a town. At that time Maine was a part of Massachusetts. As in other sections of Maine, the citizens of Plantation No. 3 wanted an outstanding name for the new town. Rome and Athens had already been incorporated, so the citizens petitioned the General Court of Massachusetts to have Plantation No. 3; incorporated as a town. by the name of Sparta. Evidently the authorities in Boston did not like this name, for when the papers came back our plantation had been incorporated as the Town of Woodstock. This name was satisfactory to the citizens at that time, and today, 150 years later, it is still satisfactory. Some years ago your historian was privileged to travel from London through Oxfordshire to Stratford-on-Avon. The route went through old Woodstock. I am so glad the authorities in Boston named our own Woodstock for this beautiful old English town.

There may have been occasional meetings of the settlers in the early days of No. 3, but when it was organized as a plantation

it became necessary for the citizens to meet to elect officers and to transact business. Some of the earliest meetings were held at the homes of the settlers. We understand that the first and several other town meetings were held at the farm now owned by Dana Dudley and his son. Later town meetings were held at the Chase School House. In 1848 a town house was built between the north and south villages. This was used for over twenty years. In 1872 the present building on Main Street was erected. This was used until women became voters and larger quarters were necessary. After this, Dudley Opera House was used until it burned. Since the High School gymnasium was built it has been used for the annual town meetings, while the smaller meetings continue to be held at the town hall on Main Street.

Woodstock being located near the height of land in this area has no large rivers or streams and hence but very little water power. Black Brook, perhaps the largest stream, flows from its source on Spruce Mountain down through the valley, crossing under State Aid Road No. 1 and on into the Little Androscoggin River



in Greenwood. Near the Harris Hathaway place the state aid road follows the general course of the old county road into Greenwood. In the early days the brook was larger than it is today and this no doubt led Rowse Bisbee to build the first mill just below the point where the county road crossed the stream. It was the good fortune of your historian to be born in the Capt. Samuel Stephens house, the only house in the old village now in existence. My grandfather, Abel Bacon, had bought the place years before, and he could remember the old village, well, because he had lived as a boy just over the line in Greenwood and made frequent trips up to the village stores. There were two stores here, a hotel and livery stable, a blacksmith shop, a pottery, and a brickyard. Later a second mill was built some distance downstream from the Rowse Bisbee mill. Folks used to come to the old village on Saturday to trade at the stores and have a social time with their neighbors. They often had foot races, horse races, and games. My grandfather could remember a circus which was once held on the knoll just south of the Stephens place.

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The first Woodstock Post Office was located in this village. The mail was brought on horseback from Paris Hill once a week, and the carrier blew a horn as he approached, warning the Postmaster to be in readiness to change the mail. As the building of the first county road through our wilderness township brought great changes, so did the building through town of what was called the new county road. It came up through Paris and South Woodstock, and joined the old county road north of the Dudley farm. It was a more level route into Woodstock and thus drew travel away from the old village. Ziba Andrews had already built a mill at South Woodstock, and a little village had started there which grew with the opening of the new county road. The old village, Woodstock Corner, commenced to decline. The old grist mill was taken down or fell down, the Woodstock Post Office and some buildings were moved over near the Andrews mill, and somewhere between 1840 and 1850 our first little village passed into history. All that remain today are the traces of the old dams on Black Brook and the old Capt. Samuel Stephens house, the home of one



of the last citizens in business at Woodstock Corner. This house is now owned by Scott Emmons.

Some time after the Post Office had been moved from Woodstock Corner to the south village, a mill was built at North Woodstock and another little village, including a store and a hotel, grew up there. A Post Office was located here and for several years the business of the town was divided between the north and south villages.

The year 1851 brought the greatest change of all to Woodstock for a railroad to connect Portland and Montreal was being built through our town. A station was located near the lake and named Bryant's Pond. This was the beginning of the present business center of our town.

A Post Office was established here in 1852. Ezra Jewell was the first Postmaster. The village steadily increased, and at one time was the trade center for a considerable area. A monthly newspaper or magazine, called the Standard Storyteller, was published by A. M. Chase & Co. Two wood-working factories,

lost by fire, have been replaced by larger, more modern mills.

Mention should be made of the large granite quarry just south of the village, which at one time employed about fifty men.

In the fifty years since our Centennial many changes have come. The rough roads have given place to fine state and state-aid highways through our town. We have an excellent central school building in the village and an improved school building at South Woodstock. We have a manual arts building and a gymnasium as a part of Woodstock High School. Our town library, the Whitman Memorial, has nearly 10,000 volumes and is a valuable help to our High School students, who use it extensively. We have a fire station that would do credit to many a larger town. Our lovely lake, which attracted the first settlers here, has proved a great asset to the town, along with the four other beautiful lakes within the borders of Woodstock. These lakes have resulted in the building of about 150 summer cottages, greatly increasing the taxable property of the town. Woodstock has improved its roads leading to North Pond, Little Concord and Concord Ponds, and



Shagg Pond, and these continue to attract the summer visitor to Woodstock.

Our population, which reached 1,025 in 1860, now stands at 930 by the last census. While our village has slowly increased, many of the old farms are now returning to forests, and some citizens still living on farms find employment at the paper mill in Rumford and in wood-working mills, including the two we have in town.

The mill which Ziba Andrews built at South Woodstock, back in the early days of the town, has continued in business up to the present time, and is the oldest industry in Woodstock, having been carried on in the same family for five generations. Today it is a modern plant, manufacturing burial caskets. The business also provides undertaking services and funeral parlors.

In recent years North Woodstock has shown new growth with the building of several new homes.

A few years ago Woodstock became the site of a State Conservation School, the Freeman-Waterhouse Conservation Camp,

on the shore of Lake Christopher. This has done much to publicize our town, as teachers and students attend this school from other parts of Maine.

We cannot conclude this sketch without mention of our churches. We are proud of the fact that we have three active churches and five church edifices. The Baptist, Universalist, and Seventh Day Adventist are all active with church edifices at each end of the village and at East Woodstock. The little church at North Woodstock is used for a Sunday School, and the former Methodist church at South Woodstock is kept in repair and used as a community house. The Universalist church was the first one to be built here soon after Bryant Pond became our town center.

To all who have resided in this town, to all who love to come here as summer residents, Woodstock with its charming village, Bryant Pond, its five lakes like jewels surrounded by the forests and mountains, forms one of the beauty spots of Maine. Many of us come from great cities for a few weeks of life in this country town, which is a second home to us. We love the big boom of the



Baptist church bell which, by the way, has a history too long to include in this sketch. We love the mellow tones of the new chimes of the Universalist church. We love the loud, clear whistle of the spool factory, and the chime whistle of the clothespin factory. These sounds show life and activity here.

A few years after our Centennial in 1915 the citizens organized the Woodstock Chamber of Commerce. The town was well advertised through the quarterly publication of The Woodstock Chamber of Commerce Journal. The Chamber did much in its few years of existence to interest the citizens in securing electricity for lighting our village and farm homes.

A Chamber of Commerce is a forum for the discussion of the needs of a town and of the best ways to take action to meet those needs. This little town in the Oxford Hills deserves the best its citizens can give it. Let us, in the near future, organize a new Woodstock Chamber of Commerce, with the women of the town included

in the membership. Let us make a study of the needs of Woodstock and do what we can to keep it moving forward, to make it one of the cleanest and best little towns in Maine. We must look forward if we are to progress. May the elegance of yesteryear, which we have tried to show in this sketch, lead into the bright promise of tomorrow.