

## HISTORY OF LEE'S MILL AREA

Written by Mildred C. Larson in April 1959

Before the Moultonboro Historical Society actually came into existence, Mr. Solon Colby and Mr. Carl Colby came over to Moultonboro from Meredith to tell us something of the methods the Meredith Historical Society used to get organized and action started. At the close of the meeting I asked Mr. Solon Colby where one could get historical knowledge that had not been gathered before and written up and feel sure that it was authentic. His answer was that stories and incidents handed down in families was the only source for such information and must necessarily be accepted as fact. These stories, backed up many times by ruins of buildings, cellar holes, articles of furniture, names and epitaphs on old gravestones found in family cemeteries, was mute proof enough to prove that there was much fact in the old handed-down stories.

With Mr. Colby's statements in mind I venture to write down the information which follows regarding the early days of the area around Lee's Mills. The source of much of my information came to me from my great-grandmother, Lucy Brown, whose mother was the daughter of David Lee, who I believe to be the first owner of the mill named after him. Great-Grandmother lived to be ninety-two years old and lived on the farm where I now live. At the time she passed away I was fifteen years old, so you see I had a number of years with her to listen to the stories she loved to tell of the early days of Moultonboro. Her grandparents came up here among the earliest settlers and her parents met and married up here. Their name was Blake, her mother's name was Elizabeth. Their farm was located on the now called Blake Road, just about opposite where Marion Perkins now lives. When I was a child, these buildings had been gone for many years but there were still signs of former hayfields there. At that time the farm bore the name of the horse burying yard, for most horses who died in this end of town were buried there because of the easy digging. There was one other house on the road on the corner of the main village road which is now Route 25. Again, in my childhood the only proof there had once been a house there was the presence of a good well and curb on the property.

After their marriage David Lee and Elizabeth Lee made their home on the Lee's Mill Road in the house which, when I was a child, was occupied by Mr. and Mrs. McKeen and their family. Today, Mr. and Mrs. Bainton of Melrose, Massachusetts own this property. For the present they use it only as a summer home but Mr. Bainton will soon retire and they will live there the year round. It was in this house that the ten children of the David Lees were born, the youngest was my great-grandmother, Lucy, who later married Lyman Brown. There were three more houses on the road going toward the Mill — one where Catnip Lodge is now located and another directly opposite which I can just remember as a weather-beaten, peculiar looking old house, which in spite of its age had a look of having never been completely finished. The third one was the beginning of the home where Harold Martin now lives. The road to the Landing, which we now call Lee's Mill Wharf, led off to the left some distance from where the present one is now located. A short distance down that old road was a very black and weather worn old barn, which had a few horse stalls in it and always seemed to have hay there. Here, everyone who had occasion to go out on the Lake unharnessed his horse and put it in one of the stalls to give it protection in case of rain or shade if the day was hot. My recollection is that in those days the care of his

horse was paramount with just about every man. If they sweaty, they were blanketed to ward against a chill which might cause an attack of colic.

My first recollection of the Landing was an old wooden wharf where one could look down and see the water between huge cracks. This was always in need of repair and oft-times looked as if it had the measles. Many times different people have claimed ownership of the wharf. There was often controversy over it but nothing was ever brought out to prove these claims until someone who bought the property thereabouts found the wharf included in his deed and I believe he eventually turned it over to the town. That happened not too many years ago.

The old mill was built on a waterway which connects what was then called the Upper Pond and the big Lake. A very large dam was built there to make the power which turned the big wheel. There was also a large sluiceway which emptied into the Lake. Of course my childhood life here in Moultonboro was entirely a summer one as I had to return to Massachusetts for school opening soon after Labor Day. Usually the mill ran for a short time after I arrived to spend my summer at the Farm, but it generally closed down in July for there was no one free to work there during haying season as everyone was busy at that most important job.

Half way down the river from the mill on the left side was a building which was called the cooper shop and "barrel hoops were made there. My grandfather used to threaten to take my brother down there and put hoops on him because of his tremendous appetite.

In the Spring the river and the entire Bay would be a regular field of logs, from shore to shore, held in place by big booms. As soon as the ice broke up in the Spring, little steamers towed these huge rafts to Wolfeboro, Lakeport or perhaps Alton Bay where they probably would go onto flat cars. The Meredith Shook and Lumber Company was often a destination for some of these rafts. Most of these steamers had large barges fastened to their side which on occasion were used to transport sawed lumber to a stated destination. A lot of so-called spool stock was transported to Meredith in this manner. About once or twice during a summer the owner of one of these barges could be prevailed upon to transport passengers down to Lakeport for a day's shopping in Laconia. The boat generally left the mill before six o'clock in the morning with anywhere from ten to twenty passengers. About four hours later it tied up in Lakeport where the Irwin Company now have their docks. There the passengers boarded a trolley for Laconia, after learning they must be back at the dock at four P.M. as the return trip to Moultonboro was always scheduled for that hour. Any time after three o'clock horse drawn vehicles, generally small express wagons, would start arriving at the wharf where the boat was tied up with all sorts of merchandise which the passengers had purchased in Laconia. Generally one or more barrels of sugar or flour were unloaded, along with various wooden boxes, loaded with staples, odd pieces of furniture, cooking utensils, pieces of farming equipment, etc. Some of the ladies would appear wearing new hats, coats and perhaps shoes, as wearing these articles of wearing apparel was the safest and easiest way to get them home. It was always a beautiful trip across the lake in late afternoon and sunsets were truly Gorgeous, even to my young eyes, and a seat on the old barge was one of rare advantage to see all this beauty. When the boat reached a spot about opposite Black's Wharf, one long and two short, whistles were blown to tell those who were waiting at home that it was time to harness

the old horses to the express wagons and drive to Lee's Mill Wharf where they could pick up the tired members of their families and their purchases and take them home.

Often there were two other trips made on these barges during the summer, generally on Sunday, one to the Advent Campmeeting at Alton Bay and the other to attend Governor's Day at the Soldier's Reunion at the Weirs, the latter being an especially gala event.

To return to the subject of the very active lumber business which had its start at this end of the Lake, there were several points in this area for picking up rafts or logs or for the purpose of picking up barge loads of sawed lumber, besides at Lee's Mills. One was at Oak Landing at the farther end of Green's Basin, others were at Clarke's Landing or at Black's Wharf and Union Wharf in Tuftonboro still farther down the Lake. The fact was that rafts of logs could be picked up almost anywhere they had been boomed provided the water was deep enough for the steamer to maneuver. It was quite a trick for men to run the logs, held in place only by the surrounding boom. These logs would spin and often a man would get a ducking in the icy waters of early Spring as he ran from place to place on the raft in order to keep the logs in position to pull the raft out into deep water without the boom bursting open. It was a sad story whenever a raft did burst open for all the hard wood would sink to the bottom immediately and it was a real job to salvage it oftentimes proving impossible to do so and it had to be left where it sank. However, the men working at rafting wore very heavy all woolen underwear, sometimes two suits of it, because when this got wet there was much less danger of the victim becoming chilled.

Whenever the wind sprung up on the raft while a raft was in tow it was quite necessary to get into the nearest cove for shelter, and it was not unusual for the boat crew to have to wait there for days before the wind subsided sufficiently to make it safe to venture out into open water again. It was a very slow trip for a raft of logs to cross the lake for the boats had to run at very low speed in this business. It was a common sight to see more than one man out in the middle of a raft out in deep water hunting for weak spots which could develop trouble quite suddenly under certain conditions. At best, spring rafting was a cold, hard job for the men.

Back in the 1890's a new business was developed at Lee's Mills when the old house located on the road opposite Catnip Lodge, (which had been unoccupied for several years) suddenly had tenants in it, several persons altogether. At first much mystery surrounded these people — why were they there and what were they doing? In due course of time it came to light that they had come up from Manchester for the purpose of doing fishing on a whole-sale scale, sending the results of their efforts to the fish markets in Manchester. Some of these fishermen stayed around this area for several years, two of whom some of you may remember, namely, Cal Merrill and his brother. Cal built a little camp on the upper pond the entrance to which was through a path which went in just to the right of Harold Martin's house. After living here for several years he sold the place and built another camp for himself farther up on the right side of upper pond, access to which was made from the Blake Road.

The first camp or cottage which was built on Moultonboro Bay, belonged to Arthur Brown, a cousin of my mother, in the year 1893 and is now owned by Eustis Clemons, of Montpelier, Vt., a grandson of Arthur Brown. The next one to be built was the little green camp, put up by Arthur Weeks, husband of my mother's youngest sister, Perne Brown Weeks, who was mother of Raymond Weeks and Maxine Weeks Lively. That place is now owned by the Fourniers, of Darien, Connecticut. Next came the Starkweather cottage, Built by the husband of another sister of my mother, Oscar Starkweather. Directly across from this is Camp Inwood, built by my father and mother about the same time as the Starkweather place in the year 1912, and this is still in the brown family for it is owned now by two grandsons of Perne Brown Weeks, Arthur and David Lively, of Holbrook, Massachusetts.

About this same time one of the younger members of Dr. Green's family (of Castle fame) built the little green cottage that still stands on the cliff, off against Tea Rock, in Green's Basin. Others who built cottages in the very early days of the development of summer homes on the shores of the Lake were Lena Davis, mother of Lyle Davis; Fred Foss, father of Roy and Clyde Foss and a few years later, Orville Bartlett built what was then considered one of the finest cottages in this area. From this point the development of the lake shore property moved rather slowly for perhaps ten years when things began to speed up until the shores of Moultonboro Bay now are well lined with attractive cottages.

To make this historical resume complete the district should include the northern end of Lee's Mill Road and the road which it joins running from Shaw's corner to Route 109 in East Moultonboro. We'll start at the corner of the Blake Road and the Lee's Mill Road: On the left, just before reaching the bridge over Halfway Brook is the Charles George home. Since the George family has lived on this spot, which is for many years, this original home was burned to the ground. When I was a very little girl this was called the "old Kennedy place" and was empty and had been ever since the last member of the Kennedy family had died. During my memory it was all grown up to bushes, but my grandmother had said it used to be a nice little farm with cleared farm land and a fair sized barn. Next place up the road is Homestead Farm, built out of the wilderness by one of the first settlers Batcheller Brown, who with his wife, Abigail Garland, came up from Hampton, Hew Hampshire, to settle and make a farm for himself and his family to be (the Browns were a young couple with their lives ahead of them and much courage and determination inside them). The first home they built was on the other side of the lane from the present house and here they lived for perhaps thirty years. There was a large family of children, many of whom died in their youth, and my mother's grandfather was the one who realized the time had come when larger quarters were absolutely necessary. He was a brick mason and made his own "brick right here on the farm where there was plenty of clay available; so he set about the job of building a brick home which is the house I now live in. When his first son, who was my grandfather, was two years old the place was sufficiently finished for them to move over here, and the following three children were born here, this being the third generation, my mother was the fourth, I am the fifth, my son was the sixth and now my granddaughter is the seventh generation to live here. If there is another family in town who lives in the original old family home, I do not know who it is — there are some whose family has always lived in the town, but they have changed homes down through the years.

Starting at the corner of the cross road near Howard Shaw's on the left corner coming down the cross road there used to be a house, which as a little girl my mother remembered because the big rock, which is still there, was right up against the house. The camp which is on that lot now is of comparatively new erection. Next house down on the same side is the home of Arthur Whitehouse which building was moved there several years ago from the Hannah Moulton place on the Three Bridges Road. The next place on the left side is the home built by Bert Whitehouse, from land which was part of his father's farm next door. The Charles Whitehouse place was built by Nathan Lee, a son of David Lee, the Mill owner, around the year 1840. Nathan kept it for only a few years when he sold to the Stevens family of East Sandwich, who after a few years sold it to Augustus Jacklard who occupied the place with his family until he built a home at Moultonboro Corner. At that time Charles Whitehouse purchased the fine farm and operated it for many years, and after his passing it still remained in the family for some time, when Fred Larson, who was then living in Minnesota bought it, intending to remodel the house and live there himself. However, his plans changed and he never did live there although he continued to own it. Meanwhile the place was deteriorating and the barn fell down and the wooden ell fell in. Finally, the place came "back into the Whitehouse family, when Cora Whitehouse Roth and her husband purchased it and after rebuilding parts of it new and repairing the brick part they moved into it as their permanent home. Next, of course, on this road comes Homestead Earn, and on past that is the home of Mr. and Mrs. Richard Tower, which is of somewhat recent construction, having been built by Charles Hoyt and lived in by him and his wife for many years before it was sold to a Peter somebody whose last name was of Italian extraction and has slipped my mind. It was used for a few years when Tom Simms bought it and he likewise owned it for only a few years. Mr. and Mrs. Don Wright were the next owners and when they decided to build a new home in Melvin Village, the Towers purchased it.

The little, old house on the left, where Amy Atkinson now lives, has stood there for ages, but the first owner I know the name of was Mrs. Sarah Choate, a widow, who lived there from early in the 1880's until she passed away at the turn of the century. The next owner was Leon Dodge, who, with his family lived there until his death. The family moved away, but the place remained in the family for several years, with members of the family returning occasionally for visits. About six or seven years ago Ross and Amy Atkinson took it over for their home and Amy still lives there with her two children.

The last two houses on the road are located exactly opposite to one another. On the left is the old family home of George Lee, but he was not the original settler and builder of the farm. A Brown family, which we believe was a connection or our Browns and came here about the time our forebears did, lived there before George Lee took it over. George died young, but his wife Lucy continued to live there through her long life, bringing up her three sons, Herbert, Harry and Robert from small childhood. The place is now owned by David Brickley of Boston, a relative of Robert's wife.

The little white house across the road, which is now the home of Robert Lamprey and his family, was owned for many, many years by a widow, Ellen Huntress. I know she was not the original occupant and owner to live there but like Mrs. Choate came there in the early 1880's. Having much in common these two old ladies became great pals and I have a vivid recollection of seeing the two ladies, then over 80 years of age, walking together, to be sure, slowly, on an occasional trek up to the village for a few

supplies, My grandfather would see them as they plodded along and remark "there go the girls". Mrs. Huntress has been gone for many years now and in the years since her passing the place has had three owners: first, the Henry Whitehouse family ( son of Charles Whitehouse) for a short time, followed by Mr. and Mrs. Loren Fuller, who used it only as a part time summer home and now its the home of Mr. and Mrs. Robert J. Lamprey and their three children.