

Mills Interview, Part II

We are reprinting an interview of Wilbur and Nellie Mills, held in April, 1979.

“As we grew older there were big parties at home in those days. We always had a good crowd, mostly family. We had watermelon sometimes and my mother and father would sit outside and enjoy it so much. Fourth of July the whole family got together. All the families came from their homes – Winsted and around, to the home place. We had picnics and good times. We were a family who used to love to sit around and talk. The boys were more musical than the girls. Sometimes my brother Alfred played the violin. Even after we were older and married, when we got together he would play for us. We had good times. Sometimes my sister Fannie would read the papers to the family. She had polio when she was young, nine years old. She did lots of sewing, too. [Fannie Chapin had a telephone switchboard in her house in Winsted, and had most of the doctors and I don’t know how many other professionals as clients. She liked to share her collection of photographs with visitors, and her favorite one was of the school children standing by the front door of the Beech Hill Schoolhouse. She would point herself out and say ‘See how straight I’m standing?’ The picture had been taken a short time prior to her coming down with polio. Everybody who knew her loved her, young and old alike.]

“Sundays we were always all together. We went to church at the little Baptist church in North Colebrook. I remember they used to do the baptizing in Sandy Brook. I remember seeing Grace Bunnell baptized there. There were picnics and hymn sings there. I know I was always there for those gatherings in North Colebrook.”

Mr. Mills says: “My father was George Mills and my mother was Henrietta Sage. We lived over where Lillian Jasmin lives now. [Today this is 67 Bunnell St.] Our house since burned and the Jasmin house was built on the same spot. I went to the schoolhouse on the west side of town, then later down to Colebrook Center. The West School still stands on the corner of Stonybrook Road. [Stonybrook Rd. is now named Phelps Road, and the dwelling that once was the West School is numbered 124 Stillman Hill Road.] I walked to school from my house. I remember one time when I used to build the fire in the school the snow was so deep no one could get there, but I got up there and got the fire going, but nobody came. We had to go to a neighbor’s for water there, too.”

“It was a one room school with long benches. The stove was at the end of the room. We played games at noon, probably snowball in winter. In the spring we played baseball.”

Mrs. Mills: “I met Wilbur at Grace Bunnell’s place. [The location was behind 126 Bunnell Street.] We played cards and I thought he was pretty nice. He didn’t take me home, as I was pretty young at the time. We were married in 1908 by Rev. Jarvis in his house, which was almost directly opposite North Cemetery. We had a good home life. We lived in the further house on Chapin Road [Number 44] when we were first married for about a year, but Wilbur didn’t like it, so we moved to North Colebrook where the Furnesses used to live. Then after a year or so we bought the place we have lived in ever since from a Mr. Jules Barnard. [Today this is 603 Colebrook Road.]

Occupations through the years were farming, logging and ice harvesting. “We cut lots of ice for ice houses from Lake Marguerite and from the Lily Pond; by covering the ice with sawdust in the ice houses, it would keep nearly all year round.” Mr. Mills did his own butchering and horseshoeing, drove his own teams of horses, too. He worked for Brockett at Brockett’s camp on the road that Bill Gray lives on. [Phelps Flat Road today]

Mr. Mills: “Brockett was a sawmill man. I drew lumber there. He had six or seven pairs of horses. He was cutting the timber from the Phelps’ land. We were there for two years. Brockett bought the standing timber from Phelps.

There was a water-powered shop downstairs in the old factory up by Phelps; the planers and saw upstairs. Later there were dances up there. The water used to run right under the building. I think it was originally the cheese factory.

I was a State Fire Warden and received a merit award for 20 years of active service, which I have framed.”

“I painted the center church a long time ago. Rudy Stenman helped me. We went sawing wood with our saw rig to lots of houses. Fred Chapin’s saw rig tipped over into the Sandy Brook one day. I could show you the place today. I guess they got too near the edge. Fred went out sawing wood for people, another occupation of the day. I worked up at McClaves years ago doing farming and so forth. I had my meals in the house, but slept in the barn. That was before we were married. Mrs. Mills: “Sunday afternoons we went riding a lot after we’d saddled that horse. Everybody loved him. A Miss Una Clingham, a photographer at the end of Sandy Brook Road, took pictures. We went out riding that day and just decided to have our picture taken, that’s all. It was before we were married. I think the horse’s name was Ted.” [The photo accompanied the original article.]

Mr. Mills: “I remember a story with that horse. There was a deep snow coming up Rock School Hill [now part of Sandy Brook Road] and I felt sorry for the little bugger. I had Fannie [remember that she couldn’t walk because of polio] and Nell in the sleigh and myself. The snow was deep and I felt sorry for him, so I got out and walked. He turned his head around and saw me, gave a jump, and turned the sleigh over, dumping Fannie and Nell out in the snow and he went up the hill. He yanked the lines right out of my hands and away he went. I had my fur coat on. The snow was deep. I put Fannie in the fur coat and we all went along up to the top of the hill there to the horse. Somebody had stopped him up there at the top of the hill.”

Mrs. Mills: “I used to ride him horseback and bareback, too. I didn’t go to the 1929 Colebrook celebration, I don’t know why. Ida, Eddie and Burt went and they took part in it.”

This ends the interview.

[Addendum: Wilbur might have been too modest to mention it, but for many years he had the reputation of building the neatest and best load of hay of any farmer in town. This was a significant honor bestowed on him by his fellow townsmen.]

Historic Bytes

Bob Grigg

