

## *Sunday River Remembered*

Excerpts from

# Sunday River Sketches

A New England Chronicle

by

Martha Fifield Wilkins



**Martha Fifield Wilkins (1879-1963) - photographed in Carlisle, Mass., this photo appeared in Sunday River Sketches, front papers**

Sunday River Sketches written by Mrs. Wilkins as notes and memoirs were edited for publication by Randall Bennett in 1977. The book became a must have item for Sunday River residents, their families and those who shared many fond memories of the valley of which Mrs. Wilkins has so lovingly written and pictured. In this chapter, we hope you find some of the essence of the valley's ways which so entranced the author. In her foreword, written in 1947, she called her work a very imperfect history of Riley Plantation or Ketchum, it is more nearly she wrote a reminiscence of familiar scenes in my early life.

### RILEY PLANTATION, MAINE

For many years Riley Plantation has been dear to my heart, and now that it is rapidly passing out of existence, I feel that some record of it should be made while there are people left who have known about it. My ancestors were pioneers in the Sunday River Valley, where they changed the wooded land into productive farms, but because of the great distance from markets, it did not appeal to the children of the third and fourth generations whose minds turned to the rapidly expanding manufacturing opportunities of the larger and distant places.

After lumbering interests bought up the lands for the paper mills, the organized Plantation gradually disappeared, and the area is now classed as "Wild Land."

From investigation into several sources, I find there are no full State records of Riley Plantation at the Maine State House or Maine Historical Society. By chance I discovered there are two books of records (all that ever existed) in the hands of Mr. Augustus Littlehale of Bethel, Maine, whose father, Stillman N. Littlehale was the last clerk of the Plantation, having served for thirty years in that capacity. Through the courtesy of Mr. Augustus Littlehale I was allowed

in Sept. 1935 to copy some of these official records, and while there are a few non-essential routine sentences omitted here and there, all the business facts have been saved, in the original spelling. Knowing the Plantation, as I have, for more than fifty years, I realize much of interest has been left out of these records, but it is best, here, to save them as they are. Later, I hope to gather and preserve other data valuable to its his-tory.

I deplore the absence of vital records which I know should have been included. Doubtless the various clerks expected the Family Bibles to contain them in the separate families, but from experience in trying to locate them, I know they are sadly lacking. The voting lists, therefore, become more valu-able, in the Plantation records, and none of them have been omitted.

As far as I know, these books in the custody of Mr. Augustus Littlehale are the only local official records of Riley Plantation, also called Ketchum, Maine, and I strongly feel they should be in the care of the Oxford County or State authorities.

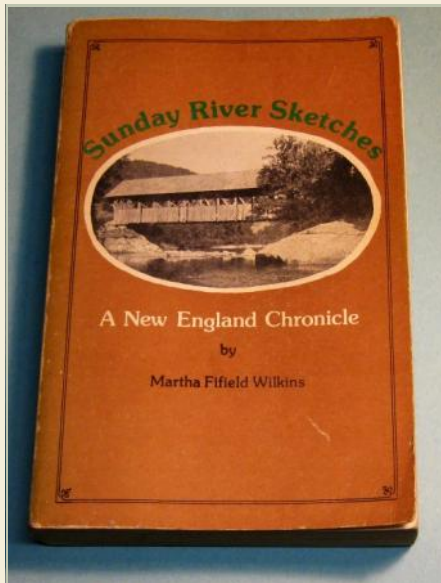
Martha Fifield Wilkins

Sept. 1935

#### RILEY PLANTATION

Riley Plantation forms a part of the western border of Oxford County, and is the next township north of Gilead, through which the Androscoggin River enters the State. Grafton lies on the north, Newry on the east, and Success Township in New Hampshire, on the west. Its chief mountains are Goose-Eye and Wheeler's, with Stone Mountain at the north-east on the border of Newry. Miles

Notch between the latter mountain, and one north-west of it, displays some remarkable features. Youngman's Mine, in this township, is spoken of as a natural curiosity.



This plantation is wholly mountainous, except a small strip at the south-west corner, and in the middle on the branches of Sunday River. Bull Branch is the principal stream. The arable parts have a light sandy but productive soil. The forests are principally spruce.

#### *Varney, Gazetteer of Maine (1881)*

This locality has long been known as Riley, and is now organized as Riley Plantation. The most accessible post office is in Bethel. The valuation in 1860 was \$5,014. In 1880 it was \$18,800.

In the census this plantation has been massed with Batchelder's grant, both having in 1860 a population of 32; in 1880, of 40.

### THE FIFIELDS IN RILEY PLANTATION, MAINE

One of the very earliest settlers in Riley Plantation, sometimes known as Ketchum, Maine, was O. Israel Bagley Fifield. He was the son of Edward and Mary (Bagley) Fifield, then of Greenwood, Me., but previously of Durham (or Royalsborough), Maine.

Edward Fifield was born in Kingston, N. H. and his wife, Mary Bagley, daughter of Orlando Israel Bagley, was born in Salisbury, Massachusetts. Orlando Israel Bagley was a pioneer settler in Durham, having migrated from Salisbury or Amesbury, Mass. Mary Bagley and Edward Fifield were married in Turner, Maine, March 1, 1787 and lived in Durham, Me. Their first son was named Orlando Israel Bagley Fifield for his maternal grandfather.

As there were several generations of O. I. Bagleys, it appears one generation was called Orlando and the next Israel, to distinguish father and son, but I have never seen any evidence to conclude that Orlando Israel Bagley Fifield was called anything else but "O. Israel," habitually, although I have found just "Israel" in a few records.

O. Israel B. Fifield married in 1808, in Durham, Comfort Ring, daughter of Batchelder Ring of Durham, and descendant of Robert Ring of Ring's Island, Salisbury, Mass. They lived most of their married life in Riley Plantation, both died in the house they built there, later known as the Stillman Littlehale house, and both are buried in the family graveyard on the Alonzo Fifield farm, but only Comfort has a stone.

The Bagleys and Fifields were millwrights, and O. Israel, seeking a mill site, was attracted by the water power on Sunday River and its tributaries, so, joining with "Polly Jim" Eames, came to Riley Plantation to settle. This may have been called Ketchum at that time, as both names have become interchangeable.

I have been told that a certain Phoebe Ketchum loaned money to the Government in its early existence, and received in payment, land in this region, to which her name is still unofficially attached. Lapham, in his *History of Bethel Maine*, cites deeds, etc. in the County Archives which authenticate her ownership, but I believe she never lived here, and in fact, her home and family are still unidentified. However, Riley Plantation was officially recognized, had its own officers as early as 1842 and is now dissolved.

Luke Reily, an Irish immigrant, had attempted to settle this spot with Irish people at one time,

The Bethel Journals—Sunday River Remembered—Sketches



Map shown here is a portion of the 1880 Oxford County Map. By 1880 a number of the early Riley families had left.

The Verrills, No. 4 on the map, are taken up starting on page 9.



Photos 1 and 2 were copied from Sunday River Sketches; photo 3 was taken May 25, 2009



Above: Hezekiah S. Pingree, Died Oct 1, 1849, ae. 56—War of 1812 veteran

Left: In Memory of Polly, daughter of Oisrael B. and Comfort Fifield, died March 13, 1839, ae. 30 yrs. 3 mos.



but the region was too rough and remote for most of them, and nearly all left after a very short time. Names of early settlers in the Plantation records indicate some may have remained, but this episode no doubt was the origin of the name Riley Plantation. Just prior to the time O. Israel Fifield came to this place (1826) he had been living in Greenwood where there was an Irish settlement, which may have been the source of his information about this locality.

O. Israel Fifield had his first home in a log house in the "round field" back of the house later occupied by Stillman Littlehale, although at that time no house was there. His land was situated between the Sunday River and Bull Branch and occupied part, if not all, of the point where these two streams converge, extending up the banks of both for perhaps half a mile.

The "round field" was located in a clearing, midway between the rivers, a little above the point where the bridges crossed, and as pointed out from the present road, was "off toward Goose-eye" some quarter of a mile. No cellar or other evidence remains, as the log house was temporary and built on the ground. O. Israel built a saw and grist mill on the adjacent Bull Branch, and after preparing the lumber, built a frame house which he occupied the rest of his life, followed by his daughter and son-in-law, David and Sarah (Fifield) Bennett, after which it was acquired by Stillman Littlehale and finally by the Brown Paper Company.

In the first years of the settlement, wild animals, wood insects, bitterly cold winters and other vicissitudes of a new and wild region, beset them, but there was timber in abundance and an opportunity to start homes. How the first land was acquired, I have never found out, but there were definite bounds and separate ownership as the maps will show. The mill was set up, lumber sawed and the grist ground, however sparse the beginning. As other settlers came in, they also built homes, first of logs and later some frame houses.

Mr. Fifield's mill was not far from the falls which pour over the ledge with tremendous power at certain seasons of the year, and in which his son Israel was drowned in 1842. Here he and Mr. James Eames had their first mill, working together. The first frame house was built by Mr. Fifield, and he built at least two more some years later.

This pioneer family consisted of O. Israel B. Fifield and Comfort Ring, his wife, and their seven children: Israel, Julia, Polly, Susan, Sarah, Alonzo and Dolly. Comfort died March 3, 1855 after 47 years of married life, and O. Israel continued to live in the house with his daughter, Sarah and her husband, David Bennett, until his death in the spring of 1863. He had turned over the home place to the Bennetts with the understanding they should take care of him in his old age, and place a gravestone for him in the cemetery, but this last stipulation was never carried out.

When his son Alonzo Fifield was going to be married to Martha Abbot Russell, he helped him build his new home on the upland on the other side of Bull Branch, which will be more fully described later.

O. Israel also built the house now known as the Demeritt house, farther up Bull Branch, and probably sold to Reuben T. Sargent. The houses still farther up Bull Branch, on Miles Notch Stream and Goose-Eye Brook, were doubtless log houses and have now disappeared. Several cellar holes can be found where these stood, but the names of most of the owners have been lost. Several of these locations are miles from any recent habitation. Among them is the Reily place in a spot called "Bumfaggin," the Irish meaning of which is unknown.

After O. Israel Fifield died, the Bennetts sold the farm to Stillman Little-hale, who, with his wife Lucy, remained here for many years. In their declining years, the work became hard and the place too isolated to remain in, so they sold it to the Brown Lumber Company who installed a tenant and used it as headquarters for their lumbering operations in that region. They built a mill, had a wangin and other temporary buildings for several seasons. Then everything was abandoned and left vacant. Like many such abandoned places, some careless wanderer started a fire and the buildings burned down.

The original frame was small and of the usual farm-house type, with a central front door facing south, and one room on each side of the hall or entry. The front door was seldom used. There were four rooms on the ground floor—a large living room, two bedrooms around a central chimney, and a spacious buttery. Stairs led to an unfinished attic. An ell to the east of the main house provided for a large kitchen in which was an aqueduct of running water, and a large shed. This shed housed the fuel wood, all sorts of farm paraphernalia and chicken coops. There was a second story which I have been told was used for chamber space for farm help, loggers and itinerant persons who could not be accommodated in the house. I do not know when this large ell was built on, but I am sure it was added long years after Mr. Fifield built the main house.

Not far from the house was a small building erected first for a schoolhouse, and later converted into a blacksmith shop. The Plantation records speak of this building and of plans for teaching the children.

Across the road stood a large fine barn, back from the road, facing the house. I think Stillman Littlehale built this barn on the site of an older and smaller one. Here was stored the hay and grain for the horses and large herd of cattle.

The first Fifield house held the Plantation records all during the Plantation's existence and long afterward, as Stillman Littlehale was the last town clerk and the only notary in the valley. There are two record books, the only records extant, of the business transacted from the beginning to the time the Plantation was dissolved. What few vital records there are, are in these books, but very few were ever put down. My father Roscoe Alonzo Fifield was born there, but the only record of his birth is in the family Bible. However, his name appears as of voting age when he became twenty-one years old. A complete record of births and deaths could never

be compiled now, but some reminiscences of the people and their activities may not come amiss.

The earliest Plantation meetings are fairly well recorded, with the names of officers and voters. This constitutes our most valuable source of reference. The meetings were held almost always in this house and O. Israel B. Fifield was the first moderator. In the course of time he held about every office and apparently did his work well.

After Stillman Littlehale's death, these record books were kept by his son Augustus Littlehale, and after his decease were passed on to Emilus Little-hale, now (1945) a resident of Portland, Me., at 72 Park Ave. These are public records and especially valuable as no others exist except a partial copy which I made a few years ago, fearing something might happen which would destroy them. I think these should now be in the possession of either the County or State officials as a matter of record. I cannot discover any of these records of Riley Plantation anywhere else in the state. They could easily be lost forever.

When I was a child, it was a very pleasant event to be allowed to call on Lucy Littlehale, Stillman's wife. She had no children of her own, but there was an adopted son, 'Gustus, much older than I was. She was fond of children and made my brother and me very welcome. We usually stopped beside the door to pick a leaf of rosemary, as they called it, but which I now know to be costmary. It is a plant forever associated in my mind with this house which my great-grandfather built. This grew at the end of the stone step, just beyond the sturdy iron foot scraper, and as it was crushed, gave out a pleasing minty fragrance.

The door opened into the large kitchen where we sometimes sat, but more often we went into the large living room where Lucy had her rocking chair beside the window. There was a long leather-covered lounge over which hung deer's heads with guns resting across the antlers and mounted hoofs. Be-tween the south windows, on the table was the big Bible, well worn from use.

When Ketchum Post Office was at the end of the Star Route for mail service between this point and Swan's Corner (North Bethel), a double decker bureau held the official documents, mail, etc., as 'Gustus Littlehale was designated Post Master and this house the Post Office. Lucy would not let any of the lumbermen or farmers go into that room without first scraping and wiping their feet. There were, at times, as many as two hundred lumbermen in the various camps. When large lumbering operations ceased, so did the mail service. The post-office was officially named Ketchum in honor of Phebe Ketchum, at the suggestion of 'Gustus Littlehale. I believe there was already a post office called Riley somewhere else in the state.

Lucy often took us children on little walks around the farm. The crab-apple tree at the west end of the house was a familiar objective, and it yielded wonderful fruit which many times filled little tin pails to be taken home for sauce or jelly. Other trips were down on the ledge and up in the pasture to Camp Brockton. Just beyond the house there were bars across the road where a large pas-

ture began. The County Road did not go beyond this point, although a rough road continued into the pasture, over a bridge across the Sunday River, then dividing in three directions. Straight ahead led to William Gorman's, to the right, up river, to the Coburn place, and to the left, downstream to the Verrill and Thurlow places. There were bars here and there separating pastures and little farms, but these houses were the terminals. Beyond these points there were trails to old cellar holes or camps.

In the pasture between Stillman Littlehale's house and the Sunday River bridge, a path led to the right up a sharp grade to a sporting camp called Camp Brockton. It was a frame building put up by a company of men from Brockton, Mass., and used by them whenever they chose to come to fish or hunt or have a vacation. For years it was frequently occupied, but gradually was left to decay.

One summer small child, I was tion with my brother, at the farm. We got Thurlow child let fever, up at the woods, and suitable place for burial. A grave little graveyard farm, and Still-Littlehale made a mother took my and sent it for the out in, and the ranged for at the



**The Alonzo Fifield farm buildings and the burial plot where Fifields and other settlers of Ketchum are buried. Photo 1922, by M. F. W.**

when I was a in Riley Planta-mother and Alonzo Fifield word that a had died of scar-their house in there was no a funeral and was dug in the on the Fifield man and 'Gustus coffin. My best white dress corpse to be laid funeral was ar-Stillman Little-

hale house. Everyone went to the service which was read by Stillman from a little black book which he kept for various legal occasions. Then several men shouldered the coffin and the march began, down the road, over Bull

From 1922 to 2009 - one can easily see the changes which have taken place in Riley as families left, buildings disappeared and forest growth took over. The burial plots one sees here are in the same cemetery as pictured on page 4. Looking toward the rear fence railings of today's Ketchum Cemetery one can imagine seeing the same collection of buildings that were standing when photographed in 1922.

Branch bridge, up the long hill to the little graveyard. All the family and neighbors walked in the somber procession, slowly and silently. Stillman read the committal service and the pine box was lowered into the grave and closed over. The grave is unmarked and I do not even remember the Thurlow girl's name, but I was impressed with the entire proceedings as I had never before seen a funeral without a hearse, hacks and flowers. Stillman assumed new dignity as he read the services for this little child of the woods. He had seen death many times, for he was a veteran of the Civil War.

## THE VERRILL'S

After crossing Sunday River at the bridge in Stillman Littlehale's pasture, one road went to the left, downstream. Through pasture bars and a short stretch of thin woods, the log house came into view which was the home of the Verrill family. Previous to their coming, it had been first owned by a Kelliher, then Ramsey, parents of Annie Ramsey who m. James Spinney. These men, and Mr. Verrill who followed them, were lumbermen. I do not know much about any of them, but I find in the meager Riley Plantation records the names of three Verrills and a few facts about them

Frank E. Verrill, given also as Francis E. Verrill, is mentioned first in 1879 and again in September, 1882, as a voter. Edward A. Verrill also is mentioned in 1879 and was made constable in 1881 and 1882, also in 1884, with the added office of assessor in 1884, 1885, 1886. In 1888 he is in the list of voters dated Aug. 25. This appears to be the last time he is mentioned, but the records did not appear every year. Edward F. Verrill was in Riley Plantation in 1882, and was listed as a voter in 1886 and 1888. He was 26 years old in 1887 when a list was compiled for military purposes.

Edna B. Verrill of Riley Plantation and Thomas A. Conroy of Cabourg, Canada, declared intentions of marriage June 26, 1887 and a certificate was issued July 1, 1887. There is no way of determining the relationship of these persons from the Plantation records. I do know there were two sons named Virge and Edward Verrill who married into local families. Virge m. Nora Gorman and had one child which died, and Edward married Madge Foster, daughter of Stephen Foster of Newry.

Floyd Verrill, a well known farmer in Concord, Mass., is a descendant of the Verrills of Riley Plantation; also Miss Prue Verrill of Portland, Maine, who could no doubt give an account of the family.

Celdon Foster said Leonard Leavitt build what was later called the Verrill house, but 'Gustus Littlehale, on his map, locates the Leavitt house beyond the Verrill place. It is true there are cellar holes farther on which seem to bear out the latter idea.

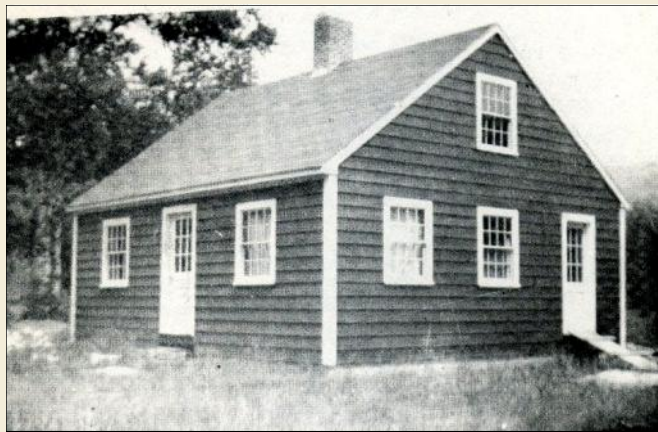
EDWARD ALONZO VERRILL, m. Isabel Cotton. *Children:*

(The Verrills comes from pages 282 and 282 Sunday River Sketches. More about the Verrills on next page..)

1. Edward Francis, (b. 1861?) m. Nov. 30, 1888, Madge Foster, dau. of Stephen B. [8] and Lydia Ellen (Marshall) Foster of Newry; b. Newry, Nov. 4, 1870. *Children:*
  1. Ray Marshall.
  2. Floyd Foster; res. Concord, Mass.
  3. Prue Miriam; res. Portland, Me.
2. Verne.
3. Verge, m. Nora Gorman, dau. of William and Martha (Littlehale) Gorman of Riley Plantation. They had one son, b. Mar. 3, 1900 who d. in infancy. Nora d. a few yrs. after her marriage.

**Riley Plantation:** The apiary of Mr. Mason is doing finely. Mrs. Isabel Verrill, wife of Edward Verrill, takes charge of the bees. She has raised and shipped 22 queens and has orders for 8 more to be shipped to Cuba. They have at the present time some 18 swarms. Ed Verrill is making a trout pond; he intends raising trout for market.

A.T. Kelliher's men have been cutting bushes by the side of Sunday River and are going to blasting stone and putting in roll dams just below the large dam for log driving next spring. He intends putting in three million feet next winter for the Androscoggin Water Power Company of Lisbon Falls. (July 23 1886 Oxford County Advertiser)



**The Floyd Verrill cottage, built between the Stephen Foster house and the Fleet place, where Horace Foster lived. From negative supplied by Avis Foster Smith. (Page 283, Sunday River Sketches)**

Floyd Verrill built the present cottage, which he still owns, about 1945 near the site of the Stephen Foster place. Asa Foster (1858 Map) is thought to have built the ell portion of the house circa 1810-1815. The two story front was built by Galen Holt who married Asa's daughter Sarah, circa 1850. Sarah's brother Stephen was the grandfather of Floyd Verrill. Stephen Foster lived here after he was married in 1863, and it is thought he lived here until his death in 1908. The house had a number of tenants, among them was the

R. M. Bean family and R. L. Foster, mentioned earlier. At the time the house was destroyed by fire in June of 1944, it was owned by Floyd Verrill.

(Source—Newry Profiles, Paula Wight, 1980)

## **Floyd Verrill, Sunday River Native, To be Honored at Newry Celebration**

Bethel Citizen August 7, 1980

Floyd Verrill, 88, is a Sunday River, Newry native who will be honored at the town's celebration of its 175<sup>th</sup> anniversary on August 9. Although he moved from Newry at the age of four years, and has spent most of his life in Concord, Mass. Mr. Verrill and his family own a second home on the old farm place where they return frequently. The original house, which burned in 1943, was the birthplace of his mother, the former Madge Foster and was built by her grandfather, Asa Foster. A grove of birches marks the spot today. Mr. Verrill's father was Edward Verrill, born in Minot, Maine. Mr. Verrill recalls a big oak tree across the road from the house. It had a big hollow in it where he often hid, especially when the sheep were being driven out to the fields. The tree still stands.

He graduated from Brunswick High School and took a two year agricultural course at the University of Maine. He married Amy Cole of Stoneham, Mass., and they have three sons, all of whom live in Concord, Mass. He ran a dairy farm and retail milk business and until recently took care of over 50 calves and heifers. His youngest son now runs the business.

Mr. Verrill was a charter member of the Concord Rotary Club, Director of the Eastern States Farmers' Exchange, member of the Massachusetts Milk Control Board and chairman of a number of farm programs. On his frequent trips to Sunday River, Mr. Verrill still enjoys working in his woodlot where he cuts about three cords of wood each year. For many years he came to Sunday River in the spring and made maple syrup. Enjoying very good health, he says, "Work has been my hobby!"

( A final note: In their drive from Massachusetts to their Sunday River cottage, the Verrills always stopped for milk at our dairy, Riverside Farms, on Route 2. One thing about the family I will always remember is that they drove a nicely polished black Cadillac. DGB)

**REILY—RILEY** LUKE REILY FAMILY (NEXT)

**The Bethel Journals** Donald G. Bennett, Editor PO Box 763 Bethel Maine