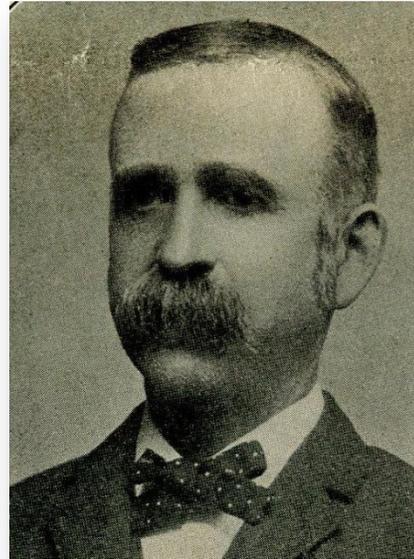


Calvin Bisbee



Calvin Bisbee (1847-1904) was born in Sumner, March 17, 1847. His parents were Jonas and Mary J. (Walker) Bisbee. He worked on the Bisbee farm in Sumner through his school years and early youth.

Bisbee began as a storekeeper, trader in Paris before going to Newry. He married Fanny U. Churchill of Paris. They had two children: Robert C. and a daughter, Helen.

When Jacob Thurston moved from Errol to Newry in 1881, he took over Bisbee's store at Newry Corner.

In 1886 Calvin Bisbee was in business in Bethel. A July 1886 news item noted that he was busy selling two carloads of corn from his store. Later the same year he was a traverse jury member from Bethel. He also was one of the petitioners calling for a special town meeting to raise funds for completion of the new chair factory.

In 1888 he was elected a Director of The Bethel Chair Factory Company. News for 1889 listed Mr. Bisbee has one of the town's higher ranking taxpayers with a tax of \$141.

In June 1890 Mr. Bisbee was building a stable in connection with his house near the depot. By November the Odd Fellows Hall was nearly completed and Calvin Bisbee would put in lines of fancy and dry goods while he would also continue to operate his general store (with Clarence Fox?). Mr. Bisbee had leased the store at the Odd Fellows hall for two years. By late December 1890, the news reported that Bisbee's new store was one of the best stocked, commodious, and largest stores in the village.

In March 1892, Mr. J. F. Young who had been manager of Calvin Bisbee's lower store was to leave soon as he was going on the road as salesman for a Boston shoe store. Mr. Bisbee's taxes in 1892 amounted to \$128. October 1892, Mr. Bisbee had contributed \$100 toward restoration of the Methodist Church. Next news, July 1893, is that Mr. Bisbee will re-open his old store in the Odd Fellows block on August 1st but it will be a general store with groceries. September 1893 news read Mr. Bisbee has two stores running full blast and is preparing to build a house on Clark Street.

A news item in October 1893 noted that Mr. Bisbee has just spent several hundred dollars on a lot east of his house lot and will turn it into a small farm.

In February 1894 Frank Bisbee of Newry had gone to Bethel to care for his sick brother, Calvin Bisbee. April 1894, Calvin Bisbee had closed his lower store (Odd Fellows block) but is running the other store with Clarence Fox and Fred Roberts in charge. In December 1894, Calvin Bisbee has bought the Clark Street house of Mrs. Harding and is remodeling it. And David Lovejoy will clerk for Mr. Bisbee as Fred Roberts is leaving for China, Maine.

In 1892 he and Clarence Fox were partners in the building located at the corner of Main and Spring Streets (later known as Brown's Variety). In 1893 he was elected a director of the Bethel Chair Company. Then in 1895 he was president of a society called the Home and Foreign Missionaries Society.

Mr. Bisbee was a Bethel Savings Bank trustee and a Gould Academy trustee.

In December 1897 when a group of Bethel businessmen organized a movement to form an electric generating capability in the town Calvin Bisbee was one of the incorporators.

Calvin Bisbee left his partnership with Fox when Fox bought full ownership of their store. In 1898 the Rialto Skating Rink building which was leased by the Bethel Chair Company burned down. After fire debris had been cleared, Bisbee bought the lot and in 1900 built a two story grist mill on it. Sanding Brook ran through the property. The Bethel News wrote that it was a modern type with three sets of rollers and improved bolting machinery. The News said it was operated by a 25 h. p. gasoline engine and had a capacity of milling 250 bushels of mill feed a day. The same engine also powered an electricity generator operated by the Bethel Light Company. During the winter months (when it was darker) several hours a day of power plant operation were given to the Light Co. at the expense of grain mill operation. The new building could store up to 5,000 bushels of loose grain, about 40 tons of "bag stuff", and two to three hundred barrels of flour.

Unexpectedly, Calvin Bisbee died on January 14, 1904 at the Portland hospital where he had gone the week before for an operation. Although not considered serious, Mr. Bisbee did not recover from the surgery. Funeral services were held at his Vernon Street home in Bethel and burial was at West Paris. He was survived by his wife, Fanny. Their son Robert was a student at Massachusetts Institute of Technology and their daughter, Helen, was a student at Gould Academy.

After Mr. Bisbee's death his grain store continued to be called "Bisbee's Mill". In the 1920's the J. B. Ham Co, a grain mill company, occupied the building and John Harrington was the store manager. From 1938 until 1968, Bethel's A&P Store operated from the ground floor of the "Bisbee Mill". In 1968 Norman Grieg purchased the building and then sold it to John E. Grover in 1970. Ruth Grover owns the building in 2012 which has been remodeled to include an addition for living quarters in the rear and houses Ruthie's clothing retail store on the ground floor with the Bethel Village Motel occupying the second floor.

Sources: 1904 Special Edition of The Bethel News and Mr. Bisbee's obituary in the Advertiser, also Bethel Historical Society Courier articles on Main Street History compiled by Rosalind Chapman.