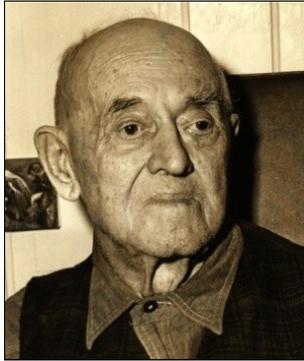


# The Bethel Journals

Bethel Maine History  
January 20, 2011

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## Fritz J. Tyler



Fritz Tyler seemed to be constantly on the move, an outspoken individual who had put his hand and energy to many enterprises of which he was best remembered for his corn canning operations in Bethel and Fryeburg while later he started a novelty business from his small home on Tyler Street. A long time member of the Bethel Budget Committee, he probably never missed a town meeting. The second and personal side of him that some of today's residents who knew him can recall was his dislike of John Harrington.

His daughter Esther's close relationship with Harrington and her position of holding title to her father's property made Fritz the target of local gossip.

Fritz Jarrold Tyler was born in Albany, Maine, Dec. 26, 1873, the son of William and Dolly Paine Tyler. His parents moved to Bethel when he was young and in this town he acquired his education and began learning smithing and carriage skills.

For three years he worked in the blacksmith shop of the late A. C. Frost (located on the corner of High and Mechanic Streets) and became a proficient smith and carriage worker. For five years he was employed in the shop of Jarvis (J. C.) Billings, a carriage business on Mechanic Street. In 1898 when Mr. Billings was appointed Bethel Post Master, he sold his business to Fritz Tyler.

He had married Miss Grace Bartlett in 1896 and they have two children: Miss Esther, a popular teacher in Portland (1931) and a son, Lauris, employed with the A. & P. Co. in Boston.

Possibly around 1900 Fritz Tyler brought suit against Clark Edwards (1824-1903) or Clark Edward's estate and his son Fred Edwards for damages of an unspecified nature. Mr. Tyler won the case. Much later, in the 1940s and '50s, Mr. Tyler was cutting hay from fields in the Vernon Street meadow he may have acquired this land as a result of his legal action against the Edwards.

The profile of Fritz Tyler printed in the Citizen's 1931 special addition indicated that he discontinued his blacksmith and iron craft working about 1913.

**F.J. Tyler Leases Corn Shop**, May 13, 1917 Citizen: The special town meeting was held last Saturday ( April 28, 1917) with but a few present. Mr. Paul C. Thurston was chosen moderator and then Mr. Tyler stated his proposition. It was voted to lease the corn factory property to F. J. Tyler for a term of three years at \$50 per year, with the right of renewal at the end of three years at a rental to be then agreed upon.

Mr. Tyler will begin repairs at once and also the installation of machinery. About sixty acres of corn have been pledged and it is expected that enough more will come in to make it seventy-five. A good early seed has been secured and all may be assured of a square deal.

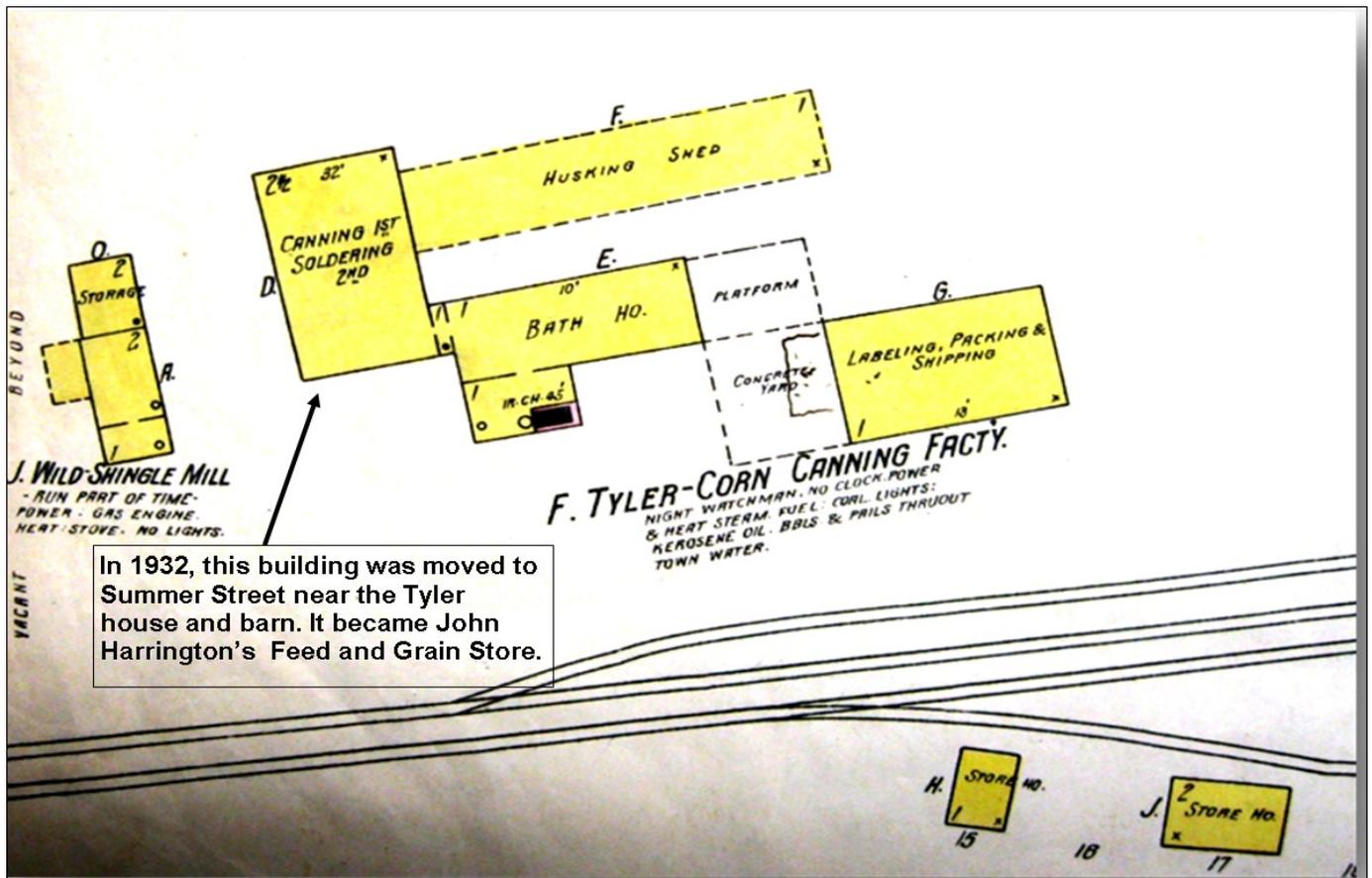
The farmers should give Mr. Tyler hearty support and plant some sweet corn, if only half an acre, for it may mean the running of the corn factory more that in the corn season. Why would not the canning of peas, string beans, beets, apples, etc., be possible here?

**White Mountain brand canned corn:** Mr. Tyler has been interested in the corn canning industry of this section of the country and for several seasons has managed the shops at Bethel and Fryeburg and one for a season at Casco, Maine. For his Bethel canning business, Mr. Tyler sold his products under his own White Mountain brand name.



This label is printed here courtesy of Doris Fraser, Bethel, Maine

A 1924 Sanborn insurance map showed a detailed layout of the canning factory and it was labeled in Mr. Tyler's name. Next to his plant the map shows the buildings of James Wiles, the Sanborn document incorrectly identified the owner's name as Wild and listed the building's purpose as a shingle factory. The building had housed a cider mill and according to those, whom I asked about Mr. Wiles, all remember the building as a cider mill and that Mr. Wiles sometimes produced cider. It was this building where Fritz Tyler stored hay harvested from his field in the Vernon Street meadow.



In 1932, this building was moved to Summer Street near the Tyler house and barn. It became John Harrington's Feed and Grain Store.

In 1944, the corn canning factory property was leased to Leslie Davis by Mr. Tyler for Davis to set up a new planer mill after Davis's mill on the East Bethel/ Middle Interval road burned. Quite likely and according to others who were familiar with Mr. Tyler's later business of making wooden boxes and novelties in the late 1920s and early '30s was started, the manufacturing activities took place within the corn factory premises.

In 1927, the Citizen reported that Lauris Tyler, after graduating from Gould Academy in 1923, had completed his courses in Boston and was employed at the Herrick Bros. garage. In the same column, June 9, 1927, news reported that Fritz Tyler had completed his work at Herrick Bros. and was hauling squares for the N. S. Stowell Co. (Later this mill was the Hanover Dowel Co.)

The July 5, 1929 Oxford County Advertiser in its monthly report on real estate transfers included this information about Mr. Tyler's business.

"The F. J. Tyler Canning Co. transferred to F.J. Tyler, Bethel, a parcel with buildings on the northerly side of the Grand Trunk Railway in Bethel Village. It was bounded on the west by land of James Wiles; on the north by the town way leading past the Thurston mill and on the east by a parcel of Howard F. Thurston. Conveyance is the former corn shop property as

conveyed to Tyler by the Inhabitants of Bethel in 1921. All machinery and equipment is included together with the right to use “The White Mountain Label”, so called.”

The 1931 special Citizen edition wrote about three years ago (1928) he opened a box and novelty shop in Bethel and at present is engaged in developing this industry.



***The Tyler home on Summer Street; the Tylers were living here at least as early as the 1900 census.***

The 1931 Citizen special edition’s profile read - Mr. Tyler has served the town as deputy sheriff and tax collector. From earlier newspaper information we also find that Mr. Tyler had been appointed to the Budget Committee in 1921 and 1922; he was appointed to the same committee in 1944 and, therefore, may have served during the years in between.

In 1931 the Citizen printed - with his wife he lives in a pleasant home on Summer Street. The Tylers were living in the same home at the time of the 1900 census. In 1900 Mrs. Tyler’s sister, Maud Bartlett and a boarder, George Averill, lived with the Tylers. At the time of the 1920 census Fritz Tyler’s mother Dolly, age 87, was living with them along with their children Esther and Lauris. In 1930 the residents were Fritz and his wife, Grace, daughter Esther and a boarder, David Fieldman.

The Tyler’s daughter, Esther Joy Tyler (1902-1976), graduated from Gould Academy in 1919 and from Boston University in 1923. She taught high school for one year at Morse High School in Bath and then for 42 years (until 1967) she taught business math at Deering High School in Portland. She was assistant treasurer of school activities while at Deering High School. Generally, she returned to Bethel Friday afternoons for the weekend. On the weekends,

Esther worked for John Harrington doing his business bookkeeping and helping him with his town treasurer duties. During the years when Mr. Harrington was town treasurer (1929-1954), there was no Town of Bethel administrative office (The selectmen's office was on the second floor of the Cole Block.) and town employees were paid weekly at the Harrington Feed and Grain store on Summer Street.

It has been assumed by those who have provided me with much of this information that Esther Tyler took care of town employee pay since on the weekends that she did not come home, paying employees was put off until the following week. Esther Tyler we could assume also did much of the bookkeeping for her father. (A number of contributors to this paper noted that Esther could not have kept her teaching job if she married.)

At some time after 1930, Mr. Tyler apparently was facing bankruptcy, possibility due to his box and wood novelty business, which threatened loss of his house. To avoid losing their family home, Mr. Tyler apparently decided to transfer ownership of their Summer Street house to his daughter Esther. Others of my sources for this article said that for as long as they knew the Tylers, Esther Tyler took care of all bills and commitments concerning the Summer Street house.

In this same period Tyler family relations must have soured and Fritz left his wife to live in a house he built on Tyler Street. Moreover, Fritz Tyler did not care for John Harrington who was very close to Esther Tyler and apparently Mr. Tyler wanted plenty of space between Mr. Harrington and himself. After Mr. Tyler went to live on Tyler Street, John Harrington boarded with Mrs. Tyler. During this time he did a considerable amount of work to improve the barn. Eventually, the barn housed his short horn cattle when they were not pastured in Mr. Harrington's field in Mayville.

After Mr. Tyler built a very small house on Tyler Street he also built a small shop behind the house where he continued his novelty business. Arlan Jodrey, who visited Mr. Tyler at his shop, remembered that one of his products was a small log cabin made as an incense burner. Oscar Annis described the way these were made – Tyler would get flat wood stock from a dowel mill that had been run through a dowel cutter on one side making it look like a small scale log wall.

For many years Mr. Tyler owned a large field – a section of the Vernon Street meadow. A number of Bethel residents who knew Mr. Tyler from working as young men or teenagers for Bill Chapman, another Bethel livestock

farmer who hired them to work during haying season, tell about Mr. Tyler being helped to get his hay cut and moved to a barn by Bill Chapman and crew. Mr. Tyler did not have any livestock at the time but hay was in good demand for horses used in logging and for winter feed for beef and dairy cattle.



*Fritz Tyler's home on Tyler Street as it appeared in 2010. The original house was probably the section standing in the rear. Some of the building materials came from unused stock stored at his box shop between the railroad and Cross Street (the former corn canning factory site.)*

At the 1944 town meeting, there was an article in the warrant to extend Tyler Street so that it would connect with Vernon Street. Mr. Tyler had applied to the town for this extension. Ralph Berry supported the motion. Charles Bryant who owned the land through which the street would pass opposed it. Bryant received \$150 in damages and the street extension was approved. Tyler Street was named for Fritz Tyler but this was before the extension issue came up.

At the town meeting Fred Merrill, a banker and lawyer, was moderator. In appointing members to the Budget Committee, which included Mr. Tyler, Merrill reminded the committee to consider what was best for the town and not just best for their personal interests.

Two weeks later in March 1944 when the Bethel Village Corporation held its annual meeting the Citizen reported "the only excitement developed in the discussion of building repairs. (A meeting article called for the appointment of a committee to look into repairing the corporation's "lower building" located between Main and High Streets; part of the building housed the fire department's lower hose company equipment – two old carts and hoses.) With opposition from Fritz Tyler and (a neighbor) Fred Clark, who felt that the building

should be disposed of, a clash developed in which Fire Chief Luxton submitted figures and Everett Merrill spoke.” Nevertheless a decisive majority voted to repair the building.

On May 20, 1944, fire destroyed the planer mill and home of Leslie Davis which stood about one mile from Bethel Village along the Middle Interval Road and east of the Androscoggin River. The following month Mr. Davis leased some of the buildings of Mr. Tyler which were originally part of the corn shop property. News of the deal noted that the new location for the Davis planer mill had two major advantages—there could be direct delivery from the planer machines to rail cars and the buildings already had the required electrical connections for large motors.

Grace B. Tyler died in 1959. Mr. Tyler lived to be 90; he died at the Lewiston hospital on March 22, 1964. At the time of his death, their daughter Esther was living in Bethel and their son Lauris was in Albany, N. Y. However Lauris died in December of the same year.

Mr. Tyler was living at his Tyler Street home when he left, probably at the insistence of his daughter, Esther, to enter the Herrick Nursing Home at West Paris in November 1963. From the late 1920's on his name has been pinned to the property dealing and building along the Tyler Street corridor. Of the nine properties there in 2010 he is linked to three of them. Tyler Street was named for him. From all accounts he was an independent minded, outspoken citizen.

From a December 27, 1963 news clipping saved from the Portland Press Herald more about Mr. Tyler is learned: At age 13 he completed his schooling from his local district school. His first job as a lumber cutter when he was 16 (1889) paid 75 cents an day. He organized the Fryeburg Canning Company and supervised construction of its factory at Fryeburg center. The canning business played a large part in his life. Earlier in his employment life he spent several years in the blacksmith business. One story he told claimed that he and a partner shod 3,200 horses in one year (which would be about 10 a day)

Esther Tyler retired June 6, 1967 and returned to her home in Bethel. She died January 18, 1976. She is buried in the Irish Neighborhood Cemetery.

Sources:

Stephen Seames collection—photo of Mr. Tyler and 1963 news clipping

Arlan Jodrey, Bethel – personal remembrances.

Richard and Grace Douglass, Bethel – personal remembrances and family association

Oscar Annis, Bethel - recollections.

Tyler Street— Bethel Historical Society Courier of Spring 1988

Oxford County Bethel Citizen

Bethel Water District records

The Bethel Citizen—1931 Special Edition

Donald Brooks and Rodney Harrington also contributed information about Fritz and Esther Tyler.

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