

The Bethel Journals
Bethel Maine History— Names in the News
George Bourne Farnsworth

March 4, 2010



Dr. George B. Farnsworth



Dr. G. B. Farnsworth and Mrs. Ruth Farnsworth with Ruth Dudley at Bethel. (Gehring Album)



George Farnsworth trying out his new boat at Christmas Cove, Maine in 1916.

George B. Farnsworth (1880-1947) was born in Boston the son of George Bourne Farnsworth and Marian True Farnsworth. He came to Bethel when only six years old after his father's death. George and his widowed mother lived with his grandparents, Dr. N.T. True and Susannah True, at the True homestead (mansion) on the south end of Broad Street. Dr. True died the following year. His father was a retired civil engineer. His mother had attended Bradford Academy in Haverhill, Mass., and had studied music in Boston; she married Mr. Farnsworth in 1870.

The True household in Bethel included a number of other True family members as residents in addition to Mrs. Farnsworth and her young son.

Young George Farnsworth attended school in Bethel which meant that he attended school at the District 15 schoolhouse located a short distance up Broad Street from the True home. From late 1891 until mid-summer 1893 he traveled with his family to Europe. By the time he returned he would have been ready to attend Gould Academy in Bethel.

In October 1888, his mother married Dr. John George Gehring of Cleveland. After a visit to Cleveland, the couple set up housekeeping in the True home. At that point Dr. Gehring became head of the house. After the Gehrings returned from the trip to Europe, other Gehring nephews and nieces joined them while attending Gould Academy, becoming part of the Gehring/Farnsworth/True family.

As part of the effort of Mrs. Gehring to insure a well defined social identity for her son, the George Farnsworth Tennis Club was given birth soon after the Gehrings returned from Europe. In 1894 news, club membership was reported as follows: president, Fred B. Merrill, vice president, Bertha Wiley; patronesses, Mrs. Gehring; Eva Twaddle, Alice Russell, Alice Andrews, Florence and Barbara Carter, Ethel Richardson, Sadie Mason, Joan Stearns, Robert Foster, Walter Lawrence, Mr. Deering and George Farnsworth. Among the invited guests to the picnic were Mrs. Rich and daughters, Mrs. Fannie Merrill of the Bethel House, Mrs. Prof. Chapman and daughter, Edwin Gehring and Alice B. Chamberlain.



The Farnsworths leaving for Cleveland from Bethel—1916 (Gehring Album)



The Farnsworths home in Cleveland—1916—Gehring Album.

George Farnsworth graduated from Bowdoin College in 1903 and from Harvard Medical School in 1907. After three years in hospitals in Boston and visits to European clinics he was accepted into an assistant professorship of obstetrics at Western Reserve University in Cleveland and as obstetrician to the Maternity Hospital. These positions he held until 1930.

He married Ruth Sutphen Wick of Cleveland and they raised two daughters, Mrs. Vollmer W. Fries of Cleveland and Mrs. Neal W. Dale of Scarsdale, N. Y.

During World War I years he commanded Battery B of the 322nd Field Artillery in 1917 and 1918.

In 1930 he was elected to the Gould Academy Board of Trustees and became President of the Board in 1937. During this time he was also President of the Bingham Associates Fund which was founded to advance rural medicine in Maine. At the same time he became a close associate of William Bingham II in the administration of his philanthropies.

Mr. Bingham gave financial assistance to an untold number of young people for the advancement of their education. In one notable case the applicant was a young man from Rumford, Maine, Edmund Muskie. The story he related in a brief profile of his career goes as follows: “Acting through Bates President

Clifton Gray, Cornell Law School offered Edmund Muskie a scholarship to attend based on the success that previous Bates graduates had there. This was despite the fact that he had not applied, nor even expressed a desire to pursue a legal profession. Muskie accepted the offer, but at the end of the first year of classes, he again found his education imperiled by financial crisis. Muskie learned of William Bingham II, a wealthy man who supported Gould Academy in Bethel, Maine and assisted students who needed financial help to continue school. Muskie wrote to Bingham, and within a few days had an interview with Dr. Farnsworth, Bingham’s agent. Muskie left the meeting with \$900 and a promise of \$900 more the next year, both interest-free loans.”

Dr. Farnsworth was noted for sending many notes to the Gould Academy principal while he was president of the Gould trustees. One of the notes basically said that the students should have pasteurized milk. Edward Bennett, my grandfather, was the academy’s milk supplier. Up until that time around 1940 he did not pasteurize his milk. He found a second hand pasteurizer in Auburn and made sure that the milk delivered to the academy and the Bethel Inn was pasteurized.

Besides Bethel, the Farnsworths and Mr. Bingham spent part of their summers at Christmas Cove, North East of Boothbay Harbor. Winters were spent in Florida. The Farnsworths had a home at Miami Beach. In 1941, the academy’s new field house was dedicated and named for Dr. Farnsworth. It was Mr. Bingham’s seventh major gift to the school.

Dr. Farnsworth died at Damariscotta May 22, 1947 at age 67.