

Goodwin R. Wiley

Goodwin R. Wiley was a key person in Bethel's development during the last quarter of the 19th Century. His skills in public administration as well as his social faculties including his generous, honest concern for the welfare of those with whom he associated made him along with his wife and family a memorable community presence.

He was born in Bethel January 13th, 1846. He died in Shawnee, Oklahoma on Monday, April 3, 1911. He was the son and fourth child of Dr. Robert Goodwin and Abigail Twitchell Wiley.



Mr. Wiley was educated in the public schools, Gould Academy, Edward Little Institute and Eastman Commercial College of Poughkeepsie, N.Y. He began business as a druggist in Bethel village in 1869 after attending a course of pharmacy at the Maine Medical College.

Goodwin Wiley married Matilda Olive Swift, daughter of Newton Swift on October 5, 1869. For more than 35 years he conducted a large and successful business until he sold it to William E. Bosserman.

The building which housed the Wiley drug store and pharmacy which became known as the Wiley Block had been built by Mr. Wiley's father-in-law, Newton Swift. In 2011 the same building, after a number of renovations, stands with much the same appearance as it had in 1895.

G. R. Wiley's store offered a wide variety of goods besides drugs and medicines. He stocked paints, oils, turpentine, brushes, paper hangings, curtains and fixtures, was an agent for mixed paints, fishing tackle, confectionaries, tobacco, cigars and office supplies. The town's annual report of the treasurer usually listed paper and other office supplies purchased from G.R. Wiley.

He built an elegant home on the lot adjoining that of Gould Academy. After the Wiley family left Bethel, their home and barn were purchased by Liberty Holden and given to the Academy to be re-modeled and used as student dormitories.

When he was 60 years of age in 1906, he left Bethel for Shawnee, O.K., where “he held important positions in the city’s government”. Shawnee is east of Oklahoma City and today it is connected to Amarillo, Texas to the west and Memphis, Tennessee to the east by Interstate 40. Its population in 2000 was slightly about 28,200. A district west of Shawnee is called Bethel Acres.

In 1884 he joined the Board of Trustees of Gould Academy and held the position of secretary for 22 years until he left the town. He was also super-



The Wiley home facing Church Street. After the Wileys left Bethel it was purchased by E. C. Bowler, owner and publisher of the Bethel News. In 1908 Liberty Holden acquired the building, had it remodeled into two dormitories—boys and girls. Holden gave the building to Gould Academy. In 1944, it was sold to Leslie Davis who dismantled the building for its framing and windows.

intendent of the Academy building and grounds; he was a strong supporter of the school and was a noticeably hard worker with regards to the schools welfare. His position as secretary of the trustees saw him involved in virtually all of the school’s administration.

He was town clerk in 1874. When the Bethel Village Corporation was formed in 1889 he became clerk of the corporation and held the position until he left Bethel. For many years he was chief engineer of the Bethel Fire Department.

Appropriating sufficient money for school expenses was always a tough issue. Only men who had paid their poll

tax could vote. In 1872 there were 570 eligible voters. Apparently not much thought was given to the idea that district school teachers attended high school normal courses to be better qualified teachers. At the 1890 town meeting voters turned down a proposal for the town to buy Gould Academy and make it a free high school.

At the 1892 town meeting, everything passed off quietly until the article for appropriating money for the academy was called. This article was a motion from the floor made by Goodwin Wiley, Secretary of the Academy Trustees. Then there was considerable wrangling, some speechmaking, etc., but after two or three votes it was approved by a small majority “that the town authorize and instruct its supervisor (of schools) to contract with and pay the trustees of Gould Academy for tuition of its scholars in accordance with chapter 167, Public Laws of 1889.” \$800 was appropriated for this purpose. (That amount would pay tuition for about 38 students.)

However, this would not be a victory for higher education in Bethel. A March 31, special town meeting was called by petition. Its Warrant was: 1. To choose a moderator; 2. to see if the town will vote to rescind a vote made at the annual meeting to raise and appropriate \$800 to be expended in a contract with Gould’s Academy trustees for the tuition of scholars in the town of Bethel. The result was that the town voted 147 to 107 to rescind the vote whereby at the annual meeting \$800 was appropriated to pay tuition of town scholars at Gould Academy.

In 1893 he was appointed post master of Bethel. That year he built and equipped a new post office adjoining his store block. During his administration as post master the Bethel post office was upgraded from fourth to presidential class due to the expansion of business through the Bethel P.O. He was Bethel postmaster until 1898.

Mr. Wiley’s greatest challenge: A 10PM fire which was discovered in the eaves of the Gould Academy building came close to destroying the whole building in February 1898. One account recalls that for a fifteen minute period it was touch and go in a battle between Bethel’s fireman and the fire. Besides the academy building, Mr. Wiley’s home was very nearby. Damage to the building for which he was responsible was such that classes had to meet in the Bethel brick schoolhouse until repairs were completed more than three months later.

After the fire, Mr. Wiley, Samuel Twitchell and John Philbrook were appointed as the trustee’s committee to oversee repairing the fire damage and getting classes going again in the academy building. In 1891, the same committee had been formed to supervise renovations for the academic

building. Frank Hanscom was serving as a newly appointed principal then but was mostly concerned with getting classes resumed. (My grandfather, Edward Bennett was a Gould student at the time. When the academy was closed due to the fire, he went home to Errol, New Hampshire, but did not return when classes resumed.)

Possibly, quite likely, the strain of all the above proved too much for Mr. Wiley who was taken seriously ill at the beginning of March; he was requiring the attention of three doctors. Convalescing for at least three weeks, he still did not look fit when he returned to duty at the post office.

The February fire occurred of course by accident coincidentally at the same time Article 20 in the town meeting warrant for 1898 read “To see what sum of money the town will vote and raise toward a Free High School, and to determine the method it shall be expended.”

Extensive repair work put the 1881 academy building back in business and Mr. Wiley’s academy duties returned to more routine ones.



The “Wiley Block” after Mr. Wiley’s post office addition had opened. Wagon, team and passengers pictured may have been the Mail Stage which traveled from Bethel to Upton and on to Errol, NH then returned another day to Bethel. (“Blocks” in 1895 are called “Professional or Commercial Buildings” in 2010)

For several years he was a member of the Maine Democratic State Committee.

Goodwin Wiley was a prominent Mason, being a member of the Bethel Lodge, and had held the second highest office in the Grand Lodge of Maine. He was also a member of and had twice been High Priest of Ox-

ford Chapter R.A.M. and a Sir Knight of Lewiston Commandery. He was for many years an active member of the board of trustees of the Universalist Parish of Bethel.



The Wiley Block in 2010. Former post office still stands but has undergone many changes of use including a barber shop and agency liquor store. In 2010 it housed Stone Mountain Mortgage.

In 1877, Mr. Wiley had made application to join the Mount Abram Lodge of the Independent Order of Odd Fellows in Bethel. His application document has survived and is included in this paper. Besides the documented facts of the certificate, it is an excellent example of Mr. Wiley's penmanship – a skill noted by those who valued his clerical abilities.

In 1895 Mr. Wiley and Judge Enoch Foster were the two Bethel Masons represented in the official party of Masonic Grand officers in the laying of the corner stone ceremony for the new Oxford County Courthouse in South Paris. Mr. Wiley was Senior Grand Warden and Judge Foster was Senior Grand Deacon.



In 1897 when his post office was inspected by a postal examiner he was complimented on the excellent condition of his office.

At the time of his death in Shawnee, Oklahoma, Goodwin Wiley was survived by his widow, Matilda, four of their children and a sister, Mary Elizabeth Wiley. Their daughter Bertha and son Howard lived in Shawnee also. The Wiley's other son, Goodwin Arthur was a doctor living in Bar Mills, Maine and their second daughter, Mrs. Harvey McClure lived in Bangor.

Soon after Mr. Wiley's death in Shawnee, arrangements were made to return his remains by train to Bethel for burial at Woodland Cemetery.

Bethel's Masonic Lodge minutes record that on April 13, 1911, the Lodge met in special session for the purpose of receiving the Body of our Late Brother Wiley at the train station. Then the Lodge formed and marched to Bethel Station "where the body was received and transported in Masonic Fashion to the home of Brother Fred Edwards (Vernon Street). At that time the Masonic Lodge was located in the recently rebuilt building of Gilman P. Bean at the intersection of Church and Main Streets.


The next day, April 14, the Lodge met to conduct the final rites for the late Brother Wiley. Lodge members then moved to the Edwards home. From there they again moved as a body to the Universalist Church on Church Street to conduct the Masonic service. After the funeral service Mr. Wiley's body was taken to Woodland Cemetery for burial. There were about 50 Masons taking part in the funeral services.

To the N. G., V. G., Officers and Members of

MOUNT ABRAM LODGE,

No. 31, I. O. O. F.,
 Bethel, Maine.

Approving the principles of your Order and the provisions of your Constitution, and its-Laws, and willing to yield obedience thereto, I have requested
Mr. Fred Clark
 to propose me as a candidate for admission into your Lodge.
 I reside at *Bethel, Maine*
 My age is *31*
 My occupation *Apothecary*
 Place of business *Bethel,*
 My health is good.

I have *never* before applied for initiation in any Lodge of this Order.
 For information in relation to my character, habits, &c., I refer to
S. W. Haskell
A. W. True
Heran Young

FEE, \$ *5.* enclosed.
 Signature: *Goodwin R. Wiley*

Being personally acquainted with the above applicant, I hereby propose him for admission into this Lodge.

Fred Clark

Print. Geo. H. Watkiss, Print. Oxford Democrat Office.

Photograph of Goodwin Wiley and Mr. Wiley's certificate of application courtesy of Stephen T. Seames and the Bethel Masonic Lodge.

Summary of Bethel Masonic Lodge records provided courtesy of Stephen T. Seams.

Source materials and photograph of the Wiley Block property of the Bethel Historical Society.

Information sources—The Bethel News—Bethel Oxford County Citizen and the Oxford County Advertiser.

Goodwin Wiley's application for admission to the Bethel Odd Fellows Lodge.

The Bethel Journals
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