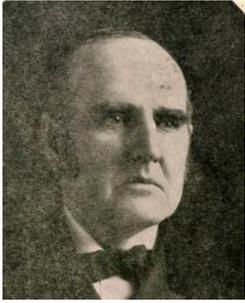


John M. Philbrook—Business and Community Leader



John Philbrook (1840-1923) was probably one of the most vigorously active businessmen in the Bethel area for over 30 years. His vigor in the field of livestock buying and selling applied to a trade that is virtually unknown here in the 21st Century.

During his active years Mr. Philbrook covered a territory that at times took in eastern Vermont, Canada and a wide swarth north and west of Bethel village. His livestock shipments by rail were so numerous that Grand Trunk Railroad constructed stockyard corrals at their stations in West Bethel and Bethel.

In the 1880's he worked with his brother, Samuel D. Philbrook; however, during the 1890's and into the 1900's his single dealings were reported in local news almost weekly.

John Philbrook was also an investor in real estate for trading and as rental properties. Besides his farm in North Bethel, Bethel's 1880 map shows his name on the property known as the Good Food Store in 2012 and on the property known as the Willows of the Bethel Inn for nearly 90 years.

John M. Philbrook was born April 9, 1840, in Shelburne, New Hampshire. His – parents, Harvey and Susannah- founded the still active (2012) Philbrook Farm Inn. In 1862 he married Paulina Eames daughter of Ebenezer and Hepsibah Eames of North Bethel. The Philbrooks lived on the Eames homestead where John Philbrook farmed and dealt in cattle trading. They raised two children, Edith born in 1863 and Fred born in 1871.

As examples of his livestock trading, in 1888



he brought 300 head of cattle from Vermont to Bethel for sale here. In 1889 he had shipped a large number of horses from Montreal to Bethel for sale here also. With his brother Samuel the two men conducted a number of weekend auctions of horses, cattle and oxen.

John Philbrook's most talked about activity was shipping livestock to the Brighton Market in Boston.* He shipped from twelve to fifteen hundred veal calves and four to five hundred cattle to Brighton annually plus hundreds of hogs and sheep (1896).

Mr. Philbrook had a long resume of public service: he was a representative to the state legislature in 1893 and in the Maine Senate in 1903. He served as a County Commissioner for six years. He was a director of the Bethel Water Company, a Trustee of Bethel Savings Bank and member of the Loaning Committee; a Trustee of Gould Academy, from which he had graduated.

About 1890 he purchased the Gilman Chapman estate with its buildings on Main Street. After the buildings were removed he replaced them in 1895 with an elegant house and stable. The house with its round turret front corner may have inspired Dr. and Mrs. Gehring to follow a somewhat similar design in 1896.



Above: The Philbrook's 1895 home. Below left: the Philbrook farm as it looked in 2010.

* Brighton Market was the center of New England livestock trading. It had grown from the 1775 "commissary" hastily brought into being to feed Continental army troops in Boston.