

John M. Harrington

Photo—1983
Town of Bethel
Annual Report

JOHN M. HARRINGTON (1896-1983)

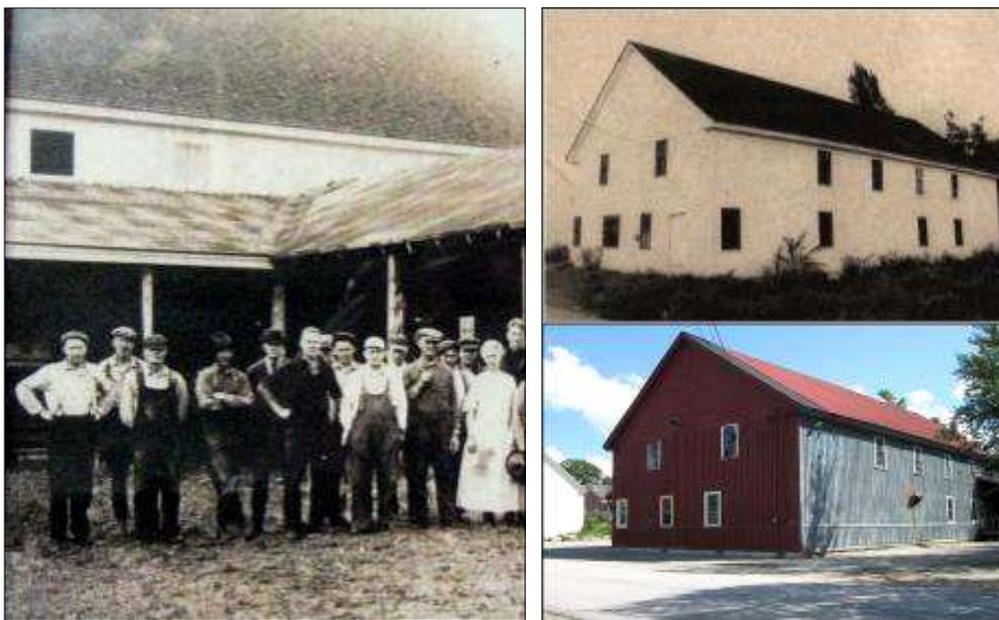
John M. Harrington was born May 27, 1896 in Greenwood, the son of Michael and Ellen Driscoll Harrington. He attended local schools and graduated from Gould Academy in 1914. After graduation he farmed for a while then entered the employ of the American Express Company in Portland. Mr. Harrington was a World War I veteran; he served in France. After returning to Bethel in 1919 he entered the employ of the J. B. Ham Company's store and mill located in the "Bisbee Block" on Main Street. (In 2010 – Ruthies and the Bethel Village Motel) About 1926, the J.B. Ham Co. moved to the building on Main Street next to the Grand Trunk Railroad and opposite the railroad station. The J.B. Ham Co. was sold to General Mills of Minneapolis, Minnesota in 1929. (At the time of the 1931 Special Edition of the Citizen, the business was owned by a General Mills subsidiary Farm Service Stores, Inc.)



The J.B. Ham Grain Co store is shown above as it looked in 1931. At the time of the photo John Harrington was reported to be the store manager. The J.B. Ham Co was then owned by General Mills or Farm Service Stores, Inc. This building burned down in 1972. In 1995 it became the location of Bethel Ambulance Service and garage.

After 1931 Mr. Harrington left the J.B. Ham Co. to start his own grain and feed business in the building which Fritz Tyler owned and had moved to Summer Street from the F.J. Tyler Canning Company site on Cross Street. One source says this happened in the 1920s and others say 1932. In July 1929 Mr. Tyler transfer the land, buildings and machinery of the canning company to himself personally. After the property was transferred from company to personal ownership, Fritz Tyler moved the building to Summer Street.

The "Harrington" building on Summer Street



Left photo was taken at the F.J. Tyler Canning Co factory on Cross Street shows some of the workers in front of the husking shed, right, and the large building to the rear is the building Tyler moved to Summer Street. Right photo is a composite of Harrington feed and grain building on Summer Street before it was used by Western Maine Supply circa 1965. Color photo is of the same building in 2010 occupied by Funky Red Barn owned by Barrie Hallett.

1932 is the most often cited date to mark Mr. Harrington's start of his own feed and grain business after leaving the J. B. Ham Co. He probably leased the building from the Tylers, either Fritz or Esther, to house his new business of selling livestock feed and farm supplies. (Our family's dairy bought its round, quart, pint and half-pint sized glass bottles from Harrington's store in the 1930s and 40s.)

He became the town's treasurer in 1929 and served in the position for 25 years until 1954. He also served as Deputy Sheriff. In 1983, the Town of Bethel's annual report was dedicated to him.

During the time Mr. Harrington was Treasurer of the Town of Bethel, his office at the grain store was also his treasurer's office. Town employees came to this office to collect their weekly pay since Bethel had no administrative town office. During weekends when Esther Tyler, who taught business math in Portland, was in Bethel she also took care of the grain store bookkeeping and, by inference anyway, the town's bookkeeping as well.

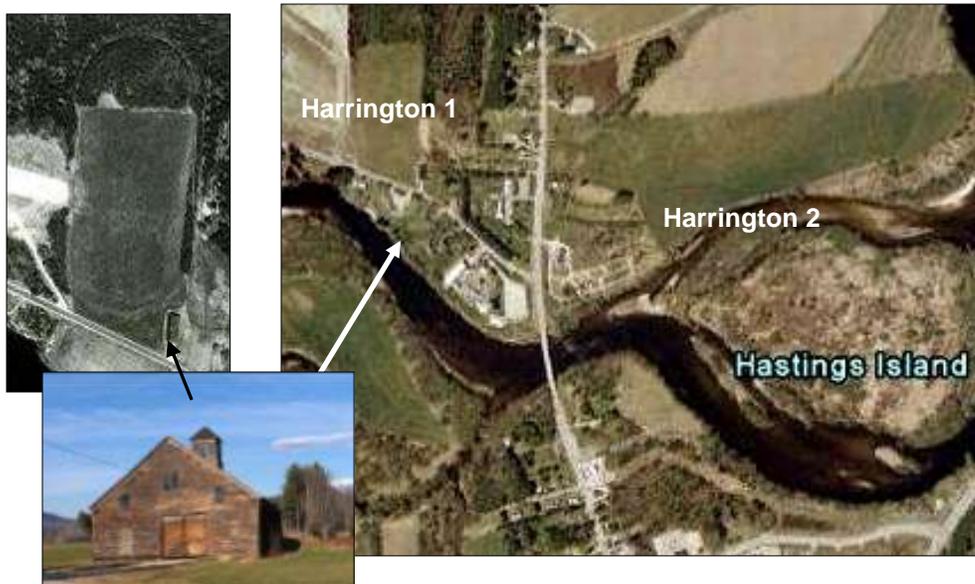
For some years prior to 1931, John Harrington raised purebred Shorthorn cattle and was a member of the Shorthorn Breeders Association. Details on where he housed his livestock are not mentioned in sources researched so far.

Circa 1940 Mr. Harrington boarded at the house owned by Esther Tyler diagonally opposite Harrington's Feed and Grain store on Summer Street. Mrs. Grace Tyler lived there, her husband, Fritz Tyler had separated from her, although her daughter Esther taught at Deering High School in Portland, she usually spent weekends in Bethel. While boarding at the Tyler house, Mr. Harrington worked on repairing and improving the barn which was connected to the Tyler house. Having this large barn available allowed him to expand the size of his herd.

The Tyler homestead which became John Harrington's home and barn on Summer Street, Bethel.



In the late 1930s or early 1940s Mr. Harrington acquired two major lots of property in Mayville. One lot was a portion of the old Bethel fairgrounds which held the Riverside Park trotting track of the Riverside Trotting Association and a barn that had been moved onto the lot from the former Mason farm (Norseman Inn in 2010). This property was purchased from Henry Boyker who had owned it in 1934 when the last Bethel Fair opened. (1934 was the last year a fair was organized on this site.) The second lot lay between Route 2 and the Androscoggin River. A fire in June of 1936 destroyed the farm buildings there, however, the cellar holes are still evident today. Sometime after the fire Mr. Harrington acquired this property.



Above—the group of photos show John Harrington's properties in Mayville—Right, the large green hayfield and pasture stretched from Route 2 to the river; and left, the field which during the early part of the 20th Century was land of the Riverside Park Association's trotting park. The large barn which stands near the North Road was Mr. Harrington's barn.

Although it is commonly referred to as the "Fairgrounds Barn" in fact it should be called the Chapman barn. It is now the Harrington barn and has been since the end of the 1930s. The black and white photo was taken in 1968; it shows the outline of the old trotting horse race track a little more clearly than more recent images.

John Harrington had the reputation of being very tight with a dollar and insistent on perfection in the things that mattered most to him. Besides his business and his farming he maintained a close personal relationship with Esther Tyler throughout their adult lives. As a result of the foregoing there were a number of John Harrington stories in circulation.

Mr. Harrington believed that he could only accept perfect hay in his barn. Two stories: On one occasion the crew that was haying for him believed that by 4 PM, nearly quitting **time, the day's hay crop was ready to load and take to the barn. John showed up about that** time. He grabbed a pitch fork to turn over part of a windrow of hay, picked up a hand full and examined it and then declared it needed another hour of drying before it could be loaded. On another day when the hay was ready to be loaded, John had given his OK for it to go to the barn but only minutes later a thunderstorm soaked it. John stomped off the field with a red face and clenched teeth.

As treasurer for the town, he paid town employees each week on Friday when their day's work was done. However, it turned out that to make sure the payroll was absolutely correct, he relied on Miss Tyler to verify it. If for some reason, Esther did not return to Bethel from her teaching job in Portland for the weekend, paying the employees was put off for a week.

Esther Tyler's father, Fritz, did not like John Harrington at all or so the story went. To make matters worse, Mr. Tyler saw fit to turn over most of his real property to his daughter to avoid losing it altogether in a bankruptcy case. This situation logically led to some loss of **personal pride on Mr. Tyler's part which did not help family relations at all nor did it make his** relationship with John Harrington any more friendly. During many if not all of the years John Harrington was town treasurer, Fritz Tyler was a member of the town budget committee— **therefore in a position to look over the treasurer's shoulder.**

Anyway the story of Esther Tyler and John Harrington pleaded for compassionate understanding for they clearly, strongly cared for each other until death parted them.

Mr. Harrington was a member of the Bethel Lodge No. 97 AF and AM, the Eastern Star, Knights of Pythias and the American Legion. He was Master of the Masonic Lodge in 1928 and 1929.

Ether Tyler died in January 1976. Mr. Harrington died at his home on June 11, 1983. He was survived by three sisters: Mrs. Mary Fuller of Sabattus, Mrs. Nellie Capellon of Attleboro, Mass., and Miss Gertrude Harrington of Berwick.

John Harrington is buried in the Irish Neighborhood Cemetery, Greenwood, as is Esther Tyler.

The Bethel Journals
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