



# Norridgewock Historical Society Newsletter

Summer 2018

## President's Letter

Becky Ketchum

Sweet September is upon us. Let us hope that it remains sweet for many weeks! NHS has had a wonderful season, with very good programs (thank you Elwin, Barbara, Cheryl and Jeff!) and a glorious garden that brings joy every time we look at it (thank you Marilyn and Valerie!). Two important events are scheduled for early fall. First up is our September 26 program with speaker Gary Scott, retired Chief Historian for the National Park Service in Washington. Then the first weekend in October (Saturday, 10/6) we will be having our second annual fall yard sale. This fund raiser is critical to the health of our finances! We hope everyone will chip in if they are able to do so by giving time (setting up/staffing the day of the sale/cleaning-up) and/ or donations (a good opportunity/incentive to "downsize"?). No electronics or clothes; most other items greatly appreciated including puzzles, toys/games, household goods/ tools, antiques, furniture, etcetera. If you can't join us for this event, but would still like to help us raise the funds we need to cover museum maintenance expenses (heat/ insurance/security/building & grounds keeping) please send a check with the notation "Fall Fund Raiser"-- (greatly appreciated and tax deductible, too!).

NHS had a float in the Labor Day parade, our first entry in a number of years. Many thanks to "Sophie May" (Janice Malek), "Penn Shirley" (Barbara Winslow), Mike Obert (float driver), and Dylan from Wentworth's Country Diner (provided the flatbed). **WE WON 1st. PLACE!!!**

## The Norridgewock Fire of 1924

Becky Ketchum

This newsletter features an informative article by Eastman Wilder on Downtown Norridgewock over the years. As Eastman illustrates in his piece, an event that had a major impact on the downtown area was the infamous fire of 1924. Some years ago Gerard Forgue (a past president of NHS) conducted a series of interviews with individual members of the community with one of the goals being to put together an oral history of the town, (*In Its Own Words: Norridgewock in the 1920's*). Below is an excerpt from Gerard's interview with Elizabeth Miller (our Town Historian for many years). They had been talking about fires and Betty turned to the fire of May 17, 1924.

*The burning started in the basement of the firehouse, right under the engine. By the time the alarm sounded and the fire fighters responded, most of the equipment had fallen through the floor. Consequently the block burned as there was very little equipment left with which to fight the fire. The day was not very windy, so flames were relatively slow moving. Although calls went out to neighboring towns, there were fires in Madison and some of the other towns. To top it off it was mud season, and what help was available was slow moving. Finally, in an attempt to put out the fire, the men blew up one of the buildings downtown to create a fire wall and were able to put out the fire before it consumed the final building in the business district.*

# Downtown Over 160 Years

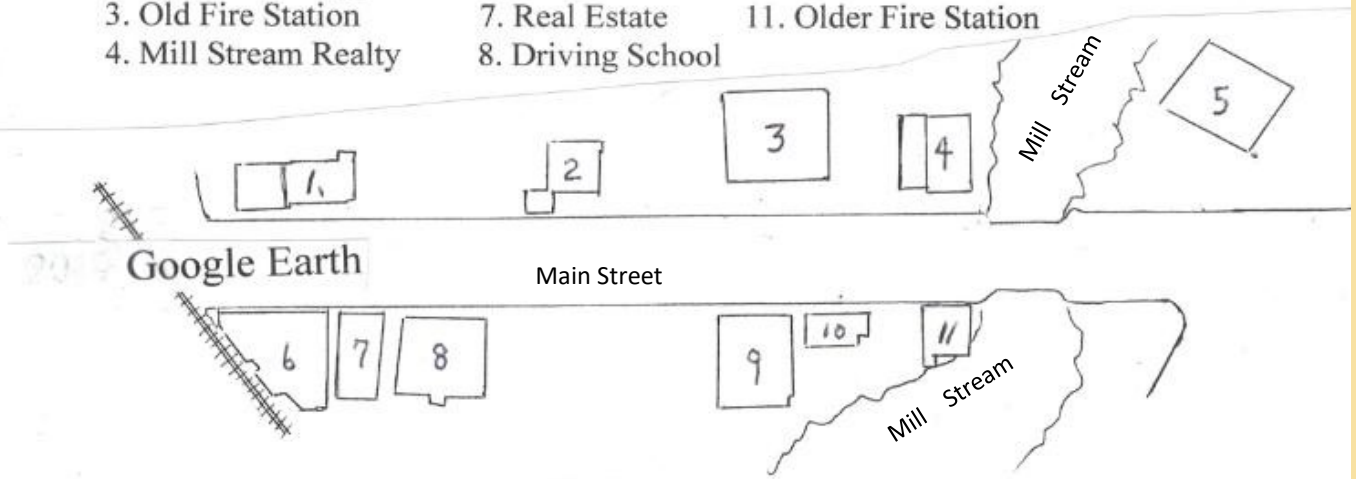
Eastman Wilder

Most of us knew Norridgewock's Downtown section very well in one period of our lives. But changes were constantly taking place; on returning after a 25 year absence one might hardly recognize the town. These pages show Downtown at six different times since 1860, but for accurate history one would need a new view almost every year.

The map below shows Downtown as we kids knew it around 1940, versus as it is today after the ruinous fire of the summer of 2000. These sketches are from aerial photos taken in about 2017 and 1940 available on Google Earth, which also has a few aerials from other years since 1940. Phil Theborge, Brainard Tripp and Sidney Emmons get credit for some of the names of the buildings while I'll take credit for the mistakes.

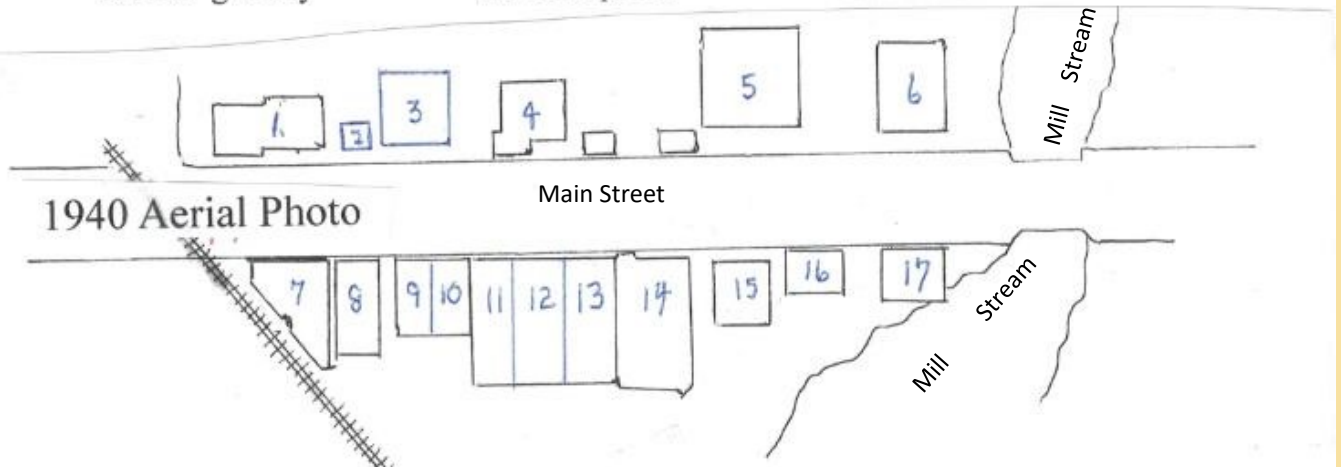
## DOWNTOWN NORRIDGEWOCK ~ 2018

- |                            |                   |                        |
|----------------------------|-------------------|------------------------|
| 1. Ketterer Law office     | 5. Everetts Tires | 9. York's grocery      |
| 2. What's For Supper rest. | 6. Residences     | 10. Residence          |
| 3. Old Fire Station        | 7. Real Estate    | 11. Older Fire Station |
| 4. Mill Stream Realty      | 8. Driving School |                        |

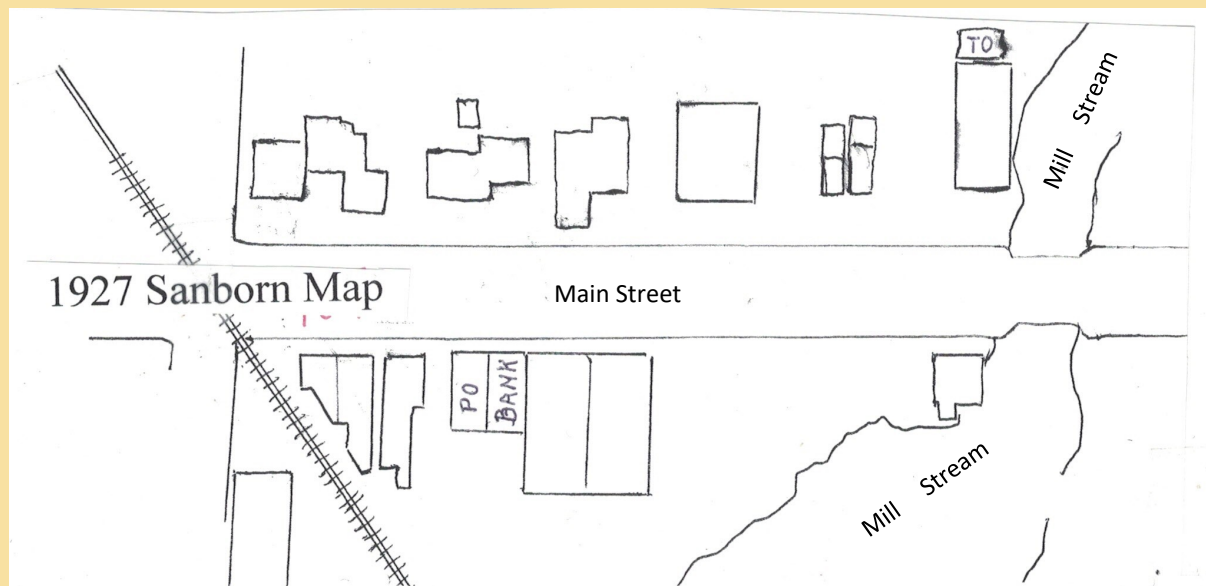


## DOWNTOWN NORRIDGEWOCK ~ 1940

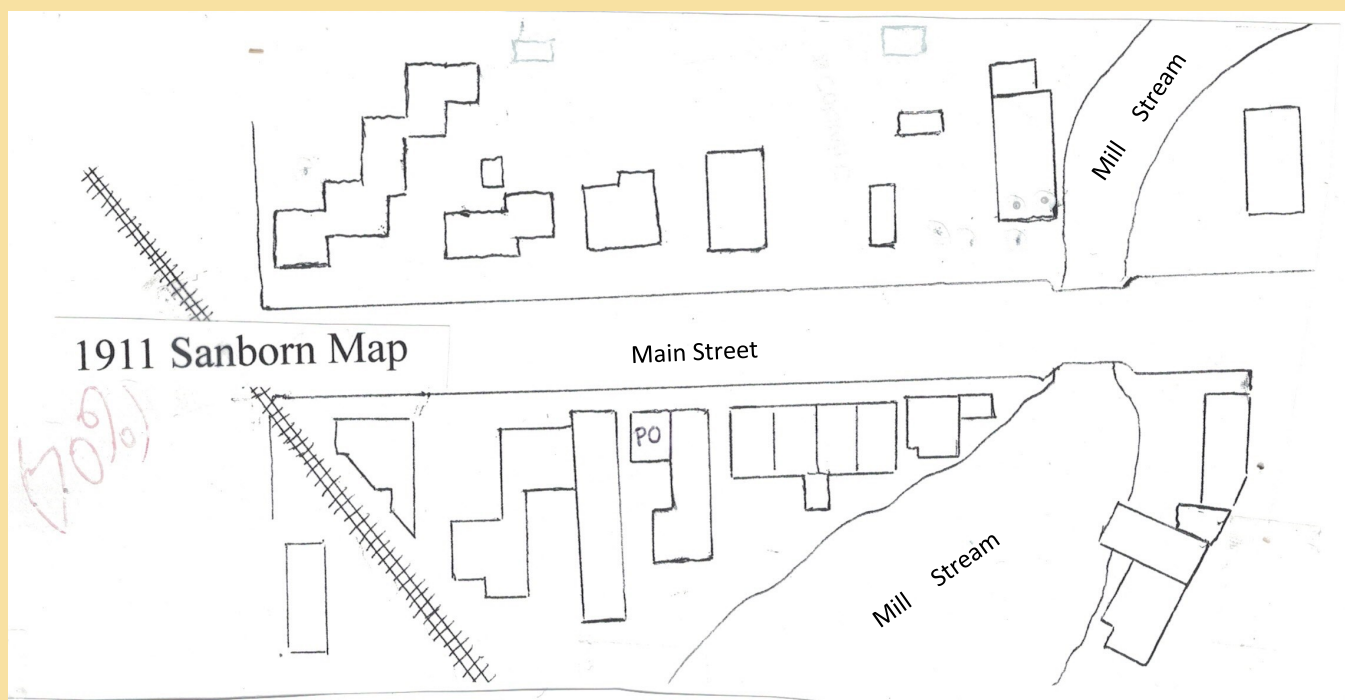
- |  |                          |                      |
|--|--------------------------|----------------------|
| 1. Mrs. Thomas's house                   | 6. Mont Stanley garage   | 12. Ketchums Grocery |
| 2. Meat market                           | 7. Chittuck's restaurant | 13. M&J Hardware     |
| 3. Ketchum's house                       | 8. Frank Trench candy    | 14. Antiques - junk  |
| 4. Ames & Ames, Barber, Telephone office | 9. Post Office           | 15. H. Hilton 5&10   |
| 5. A&P grocery                           | 10. Drug store           | 16. Cote grocery     |
|  | 11. Beer parlor          | 17. Fire Station     |



Below is a view from 1927 taken from a Sanborn insurance map at the museum. Most of the buildings on the map are not named. But there was a bank next to the post office. The Town Office was in a small building behind the Stanley garage next to the Mill Stream.

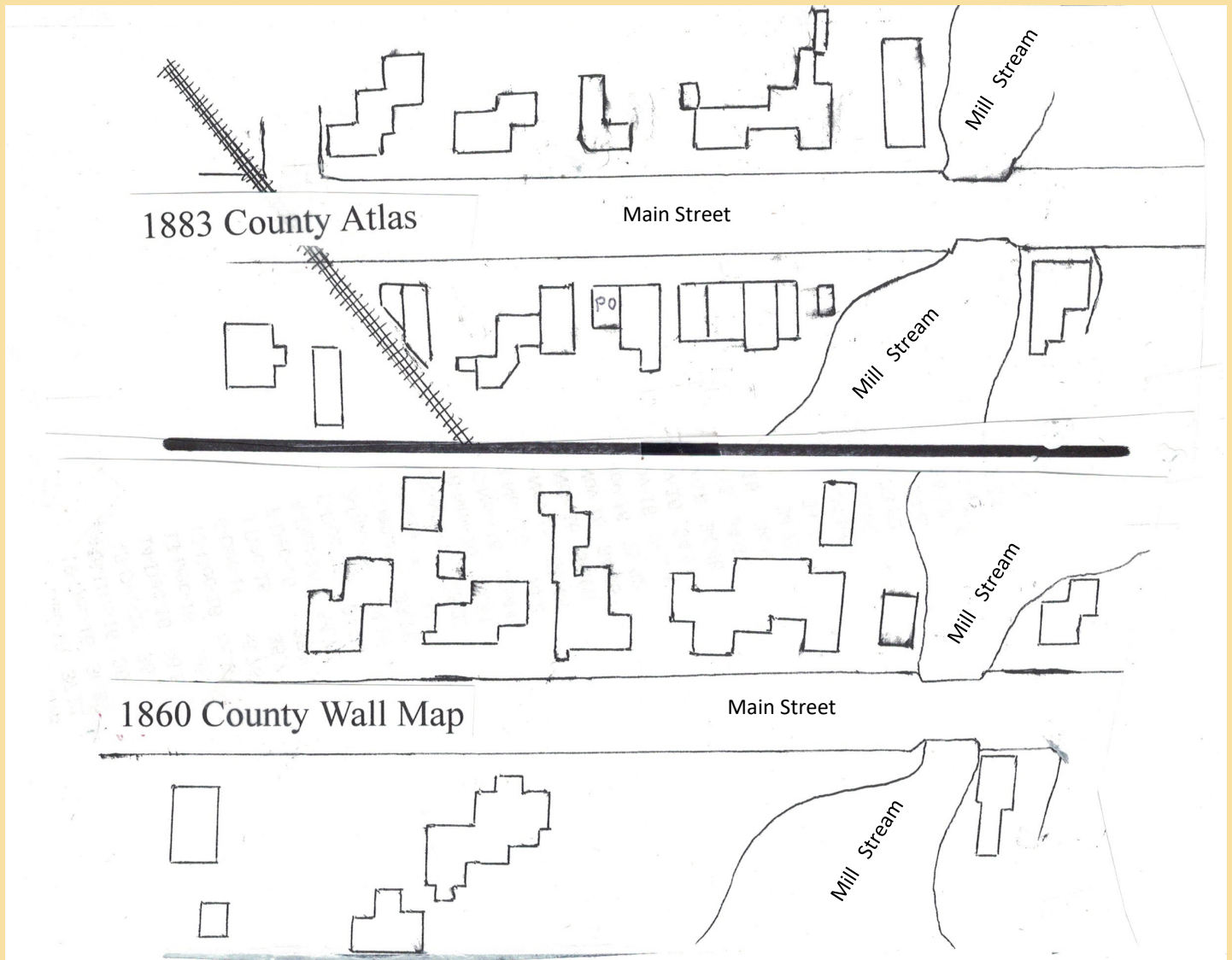


The big fire in May 1924 took nearly all the buildings on the south side of Main Street from the Mill Stream to the railroad tracks. The 1911 Sanborn map below shows the view before the fire. Again most of the buildings are not named.





The next view back is from the 1883 Colby Atlas. The atlas does show legible names on each building for anyone interested. One is the "South Norridgewock P.O.", indicating the north side of the river also had a post office. The last view is that of the museum's 1860 wall map. Buildings are shown and named, but very different from the ones we used to know. (Editor's note: Come to the museum and take a look!)



Main Street before the 1924 fire



Norridgewock firetruck fighting the 1924 fire.





We're in the midst of a hot, humid summer and Valerie and I have struggled to keep everything alive and happy with lots of watering and mulching.

A few plants are in blossom at this time. The Hydrangeas look very good and the gladiolas are beginning to blossom. For some of them such as the Bleeding Heart, the Epimedium, the Columbine, and most of the Astilbes have already passed their time to show off. The Phlox that remains from the original garden has blossomed somewhat erratically so we expect to add some new plants in the spring.

The "Maidenhair" fern and "Wide Brim" hosta are showing their displeasure with being located in a bit more sun than they prefer. A move to a shadier spot is in the plans for them. That will make room for a couple of sun loving plants. The Achillea (Yarrow) "Moonshine" and "Desert Eve" decided to call it a day but were quite nice when in bloom. They will return next summer. The small Gallardia (Blanket Flower) named "Sunburst" located beside the extremely tall light purple dahlias is a joy with its continuous blossoms all summer – small but mighty! There are many other flowers that have blossomed or are blossoming – some are yellow marigolds, sunflowers, "Butterfly Blue" scabiosa (or pincushion plant) and coneflowers. Soon to come are the "Autumn Joy" sedum and another small sedum "Firecracker" located next to the slate border in the front of the garden. The petunias and geraniums in the bed under our NHS sign have flowered wonderfully this summer. We hope you had a chance to see them.



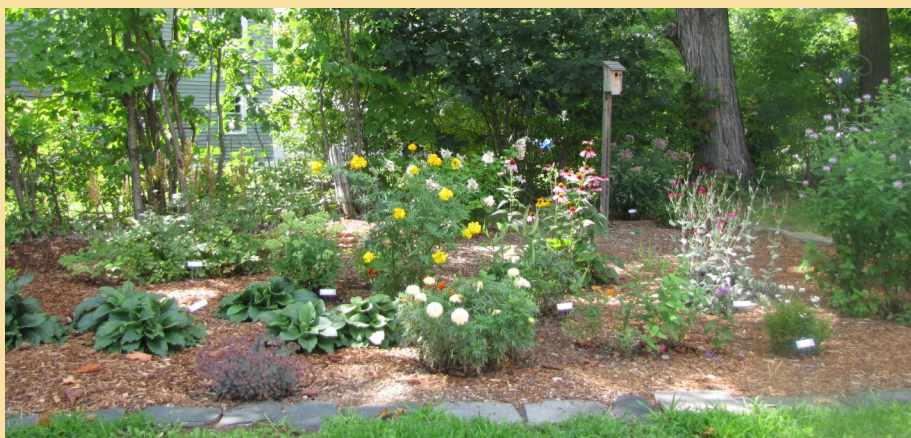
Take a look at the shade loving hostas. Once you become familiar with the various varieties you'll be able to discern their differences. Known as one of the largest hostas is the "Krossa Regal" and the one we have came from only half of the one that resides in my garden. The leaves are grey/blue and may become more so as it ages. It can grow up to 3 feet tall and 6 feet wide, but it may not get that large in this garden with its lovely lavender blossoms.

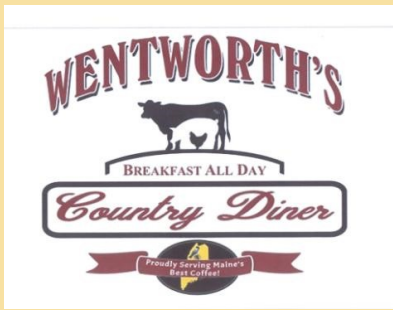
Compare "Krossa Regal" to the "Pure Heart" hosta which is a miniature growing only 4 inches tall. The leaves are quite striking with a creamy white or yellow center and blue-green edge. It sends up its lavender blossoms in midsummer. Just as an aside – it was named "Pure Heart" for the cartoon character Mighty Mouse's girlfriend "Pearl Pureheart". Not all hostas have such a whimsical name but the hostas in our garden are all named.

Earlier in the spring/summer we had a lovely small mountain laurel shrub named "Raspberry Glow" that was very pretty. It should be taller next year

and will have a sign to identify it.

Lastly, a few weeks ago we planted a Deutzia shrub next to the entryway steps named "Yuki Cherry Blossom". Its mature size will be 12 to 24 inches tall and will have pink bell like flowers. It attracts hummingbirds and it resists deer – although we don't expect deer to be sniffing around in our yard. We did however, have a chickadee nesting in our birdhouse. Last year it was a wren – we hope to continue with a resident next year.





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