832,000 Acres: Maine's 1825 Fire and Its Piscataquis Logging Aftermath, Chapter 1 and Introductory Material

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832,000 acres - Maine’s 1825 Fire & Its Piscataquis Logging Aftermath

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December 2019
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832,000 Acres

Maine’s 1825 Fire & Its Piscataquis Logging Aftermath

Bill Geller
Billings Falls near head of Gulf Hagas. (courtesy of photographer Jim Geller)
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Loggers, like the ones for this birch logging camp c.1900 in Monson township, cut the birch that grew in the 1825 fire burn.  (from a glass plate negative, gifted to the Maine State Archives by John Beaufain)
Introduction

You are curious about Maine's great fire of 1825 that burned an astounding 832,000 acres, much of it in the Piscataquis River watershed and along the west side of the Penobscot River. Few of all the folks I mentioned it to know anything about it or its aftermath—like me—prior to this book.

This book is the only one that has more than a couple of paragraphs about Maine's great fire; it includes all the limited amount of recorded information about the fire that started in the township of Guilford and burned in every direction on the compass. And, it is the only publication of any form that uses existing information to create a possible map of its boundary lines.

Equally surprising is that this is the only book focused on the history of logging in the log-driving era within the Piscataquis watershed. As I read the histories of the townships in the watershed I did not find the level of logging detail that I expected I might find. Thank you to the departed folks who wrote their village news for The Piscataquis Observer beginning in the 1850s. As the footnotes attest, they provided a great deal of this book's content.

The central focus of the book is logging in the aftermath of the fire, the log-driving era of the Piscataquis watershed, c.1800–1953. To know about the great fire (chapter one) leads to a greater understanding of the logging history that followed. Each subsequent chapter is devoted to a major artery of the river and includes two major focal points, “inside the burn” and “outside the burn.” “Inside the burn” the three most predominant trees cut were white birch, poplar, and second-quality white pine. “Outside the burn” in the extremities of the arteries, loggers cut the pine, spruce, and fir typically associated with the logging and log-driving of Maine's lumber barons.

Lumber barons were just as interested and active “inside the burn;” they delayed resumption cutting until the 1870s. Henry Prentiss, Charles Stetson, Sprague Adams, William McCrillis, Frank Drummond, John Cassidy and others knew what trees were growing on the burned lands and, beginning in the mid-1860s, they started amassing the property. By 1880 every township but one along the Piscataquis River had a birch mill, eight more were on the Sebec River drainage, six were on the Pleasant River drainage, and five were on the Schoodic and Seboeis drainages. The Dwelley mill used a million board feet of birch logs a year in the mid-1880s. These logs do not float so teamsters were hauling them; in one case 16 miles from the Seboeis Lake area to Milo. When Lombard log haulers became available, loggers used them to haul birch in Abbot, Bowerbank, Lake View, and Katahdin Iron Works townships.

Poplar was a worthless tree until the late 1870s, when excelsior mills dotted the watershed from Blanchard to Milo villages. The Currier mill in Upper Abbot village operated from 1876–1913 and in some years produced nine tons of excelsior per day. With the developing pulp and paper industry in the mid-1880s came a big increase in demand for the same tree. From 1907–1915 the yearly drive of poplar on Kingsbury Stream was 2 million board feet of logs. A great deal of poplar reached the paper mills via the railway, as opposed to it all being driven on a waterway.

Hackmatack was another tree they harvested in the burn, especially in the Seboeis Stream drainage. I am purposely using “harvested” so as to not spoil the story of those who had stumpage contracts for hackmatack (chapter six).

Hardwood, not necessarily a product of the 1825 fire, was cut for a variety of markets. People in the cities used it for heating. The first trains that ran up and down the Piscataquis River valley burned it, a cord for every 27 miles. Cords of such wood were in piles at the Abbot villages. The woolen mills of the watershed’s valley used two cords of hardwood per ton of coal used for heating.

I read about birch bolts and sticks or bars, shoe blocks, last blocks, ash handles, wagon wheel hubs, ship’s prows,
ship’s knees, juniper knees, cloth boards, peg wood, excelsior, boxwood, and more. Each of these is associated with a tree that grew in the burn and loggers harvested for a mill, but I had no idea what the words meant. Not all these types of trees grew in all the drainages of the watershed, but where they were harvested, I’ve shared that with which these words are associated.

“Outside the burn” a great deal of logging and log driving took place on each of the watershed’s arteries. My research righted my misperception that log driving was the same throughout Maine. Log driving in the Piscataquis River watershed was quite different from that on the West Branch of the Penobscot, Penobscot, and Kennebec rivers. Some reasons are independent of the fire. The Piscataquis watershed has sections that are every bit as fascinating as those with considerable collected log-driving lore. It took lumbermen nearly 37 years to figure out how to successfully drive long logs through Gulf Hagas on the West Branch of the Pleasant River. In a 25-mile segment of the East Branch of the Pleasant River, lumbermen built over 20 dams and side dams, and thousands of feet of abutments. On Little Wilson Stream loggers drove logs over an 80-foot-high falls into and through a narrow 1,800-foot chasm. In 1882 loggers drove 20 miles from East Branch Lake down the small East Branch of Seboeis Stream to the Piscataquis River with only two dams. Between 1824 and the late 1860s sawmills like those in Blanchard, Sebec, Brownville, and Medford villages drove rafts of milled lumber to the Bangor market.

As I assembled my collected information for the Piscataquis River watershed, I felt that for the first time I had an appreciation for the magnitude of its logging operations during the log-driving era. To help readers grasp that, some chapter sections are chronologies. River improvements, like dam and abutment building and rock removal, revealed the year-after-year effort it took to conduct a successful drive. Each year of a log drive with its associated information through c.1953 is a vivid motion picture revealing the probable number of men, board feet of logs, timing matters, and water level struggles.

This text also includes chapter sections on how logging operations and log drives functioned. Chapter three has detailed information pertaining to towing boom bags across Sebec Lake. Considerable information appears in chapters two and three for both river and stream driving. Chapter four strategies focus primarily on Gulf Hagas.

In compiling the book’s information, I have drawn from The Piscataquis Observer, Bangor Daily Whig and Courier, The Industrial Journal; other newspapers; histories of Maine towns and counties; family papers of lumbermen archived at the University of Maine Raymond Fogler Library; maps at the University of Southern Maine Osher Library; Maine Register and Year-books; Acts and Resolves of the Maine State Legislature; Piscataquis and Penobscot registry of deeds offices; old maps, and surveyors’ and cruisers’ records of Maine State Archives; records held by Maine Bureau of Public Lands, the James Sewall Company, and Katahdin Forest Management (the Maine Operations of Acadian Timber); and conversations with people familiar with the history of the watershed.

The picture that this text paints is a combination of hundreds of little bites of information and deductive reasoning. Where I have used my own reasoning, I have used words like probably or might have. Given I have no idea what information is missing, my reasoning and logic might be faulty in places. Some readers may know what I’m missing or what is incorrectly presented, and, if so, I hope you will contact me. I will post any errors or additional information on my website, Mountain Explorations.

My final thought returns to the fire of 1825. It burned in townships outside the Piscataquis watershed. These townships are included in chapter one with the information I found, but with only enough logging history to confirm the fire’s presence and location.

The challenge of finding information about the 1825 fire is still with me. Where might I find more information? I don’t know, but a couple of years ago, I thought I had found what was available, but I kept finding leads in the most unlikely places, and some of them led to more information. So my interest in the topic continues and anything more I find, I will post on my website.

If you would like to communicate with me, then please do so. One of my joys of research is hearing about what someone knows, sometimes a polite way to inform me of an error, and trying to answer other people’s questions.

Thank you for your interest. 

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Bill Geller exploring a streambed in 2018. (courtesy of Jim Geller, photographer)
Acknowledgements

The content of a history book like this reflects the collective input of many individuals and institutions. Contacts with people provide me with two kinds of invaluable assistance, either content information or stimulation through interest or both. The stimulation helps to keep me focused on sorting and organizing the thousands of content information pieces, as I use them to put together what I hope readers view as a detailed verbal mural.

My starting point for this project was libraries, town, college, and state, where friendly staff connected me to resources. The University of Maine Farmington Mantor Library, a short walk from my house, provided access to documents beyond those on their shelves. The University of Maine Raymond Fogler Library Special Collections staff pulled a tremendous amount of information from their archives. The Maine State Library and Maine State Archives have substantial resources. I spent time in many town libraries, where staff, eager and proud to share what they had, kept looking while I read; they have valuable local information not available elsewhere. Those public libraries included the towns of: Guilford, Sangerville, Dover-Foxcroft, Milo, Lincoln, Enfield, Old Town, Bangor, Hartland, Stetson, Corinna, Dexter, and Bradford.

Local historical societies are another important source of information. I appreciate the assistance from members of Charleston, Milo, Dover-Foxcroft, Greenville, Monson, Brownville, Guilford, and Sebec historical societies.

I was a frequent visitor to the registry of deeds offices of Piscataquis and Penobscot counties, where staff members were always helpful as I looked for and discovered land ownership and old maps.

The folks at the town libraries and historical societies identified people I could talk to and those people helped that list grow. The most common initial reply from most individuals was: “oh, I probably can’t help you much.” I smile and ask about their experiences and what they heard from their ancestors; everyone has helpful information. I am appreciative of the interest, time, information, materials, and encouragement that the following individuals shared with me through personal visits, phone, mail, and e-mail.

Included in this thank-you list are people I spoke to back in 2016 when I put together a four-part manuscript on sporting camps in the Piscataquis River watershed. ¹

¹ Each of the four parts is a free download from the Raymond Fogler Library Digital Commons, under 2017 and Piscataquis Project and Geller at the following link: http://digitalcommons.library.umaine.edu/mainehistory/
Those conversations also shed light on logging and provided encouragement. I’ve enjoyed my communications with you since then.

Thank you all!
Bruce Allgrove, Milton (Nick) Anderson,
Suzanne AuClaire, Greg Bassett, Mrs. Alfred Bauer,
Alexandra Conover Bennett, Tootie Bennett,
Ray Bickmore, Carolyn Brown,
Desiree Butterfield (University of Maine Fogler Library),
David Carlisle (Prentiss and Carlisle Company),
Tony Cesare, Chip Clements, Lois Sherrerd Clements,
Bill Cobb, Barbara Cole, Deborah and Rodney Cole,
Colleen Congdon, Charles Connors, Oscar Cronk,
Al Cowperthwaite (North Maine Woods Association),
Tom Coy, Bill Dauphinee, Darryl Day, Helen Deag,
Carol Dolan, Carol and Andrew Dow, Heidi Dow,
Jim Dow, James Draper,
David Edson (James W. Sewall Company), Betty Ellis,
James R. Erwin, Matthew Ewing, Bud Farwell,
David Field, Dave Fuller, Mary and Philip Gallagher,
Genie Gannett, Ray Goldback,
Erika Gorder (Rutgers University Libraries),
Florence Grosvenor, Frank Haley, Mathew and Peter Hamlin, John Hannigan (Massachusetts State Archives),
Ester and James Hardwick, Joan Henderson,
Jeannette Hughes, Nancy Henry, George Hussey,
Irving McNaughton, Chuck and Rosemary James,
William Krohn, Ron Kronholm, Norman Lamson,
John Leathers (retired State of Maine game warden),
Arlene and Bob LeRoy, Isabel Lesure, Jim Logan,
Bill Macomber, Chris Maas,
Marcia McKeague (Acadian Timber —Katahdin Forest Management), Jay McLaughlin, Jean Megquier,
Tim Merrill, Michelle and Stan Moody, Paul Mills,
Susan Morris, James Murray (James W. Sewall Company), Richard Neal, Harry Nelson, Kent Nelson,
Tom Nelson (Prentiss and Carlisle Company),
Chris Offutt, Nancy Perham Offutt, Mike Otley,
Sarah Otley (University of Maine Library),
Jerry Packard, Sherrie Patterson, Bob Pederson,
Charles Pernice, Glenn Poole, Rodney Preble,
Doug C. Reed (state forester Seboeis Unit—Maine Bureau of Public Lands), Andrew Riley, Candy Russell,
Greta Schroeder, Robert Seymour,
Henry D.M. Sherrerd, Jr., Gary Stevens, Eric Stirling,
Bill Stoner, Erland Torrey, Fred Trask,
Elsie Nason Watters, Dick Welsh, R. Michael White,
Cindy and Brian Woodworth.

Thank you all for joining with me in this endeavor.
The Great 1825
Forest Fire of Maine

Legend:
- Village
- Township
- Railroad
- Route, Tote Road
- Birch Bar Mill
- Stream
- Lake, Pond
- Fire Area
- Mountain Area

Townships:
1. Maxfield
2. Mattamuskeet
3. Howland
4. Willimantic
5. Barnard
6. Williamsburg
7. Brownville

Lakes:
A. Schoodic Lake
B. Seboeis Lake
C. Endless Lake
D. Ebeemee Lakes
E. Sebec Lake
F. Boyd Lake
G. Lake Onawa
Chapter 1: The Fire of 1825

A small number of loggers were already cutting white pine (pine) along the edges of the waterways when settlers started moving into the Piscataquis River watershed soon after 1800. They did not leave after the fire of 1825 and the population continued to grow. By 1830 loggers from the large sawmills on the Penobscot River in the Bangor area were cutting in unburned sections of the watershed and driving their logs to market on the waterways. Fifty years after the fire, loggers began harvesting in the burn: poplar for the excelsior mills, birch for the spool mills, pine for boxwood, rock maple (sugar maple) for shoe blocks, hackmatack for “ship’s knees,” and ash for handles and wagon wheel hubs. Nearly every community in the watershed had one or more mills that sawed logs in the burn.

The fire’s enormity

“…. The August [1825] draught did little damage, because the [Medford township]’ settlers planted early and had been able to harvest early. By September small brooks were dry and fish died, if they did not gather in large pools. Springs and dug wells dried up. Fields were crisp brown stubble and leaves dried on the trees before they fell. October was the third month without rain. Farmers to the west [in the Piscataquis River valley] were clearing land with small fires, and haze and the smell of wood smoke predominated in the atmosphere for some time; no rains came. On October 8 Elizabeth and James Campbell, who lived on the south side of the Piscataquis River, immediately west of the mouth of the Pleasant River, woke to a windy day still filled with smoke, as it had been. James went off to work in the Center and Elizabeth tended to their baby and regular farm chores. At some point in the morning a dull roar interrupted her work and she knew immediately of the impending danger. She took up her baby, rushed to the river, waded as far as she could to some open rocks, drenched the blanket she had grabbed and drew it over them. Elsewhere in Medford township men and women and their children set fire to the fields around their homes, tore down cedar fences, and plowed safety rings around their buildings. That night, James returned home through a smoldering land to find his destroyed cabin and no wife or child around. His anguished wail reached the river and elicited a similar cry. Racing to the river’s edge he saw his wife and child on the rocks still alive ….”

832,000 acres burned, a staggering expanse of land. Within a few hours beginning in the early evening on October 7, 1825 a raging forest fire was on its way to engulfing much of the Piscataquis River watershed. The fire, which for a time was known as Maine’s Miramichi fire, eventually burned 1,300 square miles. The conflagration started in the townships where the southerly flow of the Piscataquis River bends to continue east to the Penobscot River. For two weeks or more the fire burned and smoldered.

Before the fire

The villages along and near the Piscataquis River were still in their infancy in 1825. Between 1802 and 1810 the first settler was in the townships of Howland, Medford, Milo, Brownville, Sebec, Foxcroft, Dover, Sangerville, Abbot, Williamsburg, and Barnard. Between 1811 and 1820 Maxfield, Blanchard, Parkman, Monson, Wellington, and Katahdin Iron Works (KIW) townships had a first settler. Orneville township had only two settlers.

1 “township” in this book denotes a parcel of land of a recognized government entity. In this sentence it is the parcel of land named Medford. To designate a village area of “Medford township,” I write “Medford village.”

2 A paraphrase of the most complete and vivid account of the fire; written by a Medford person that appeared in Medford Notes 1808–1958, “prepared by Cold Brook Grange, Number 436, as part of the Sesquicentennial Program.”

3 The Miramichi Fire was a forest fire in northern New Brunswick Canada. It burned at the same time and was far more devastating and larger in terms of acres burned.
in 1820, a result of its landowner holding the land for logging. Shirley and Greenville townships did not have a first settler until 1824 or 1825. Kingsbury township’s first settler arrived after the fire.

At the eastern edge of the fire along the Penobscot River, the townships were sparsely populated to unsettled. Edinburgh township had ten settlers. Argyle township had its first settler in 1810. Chester township had six families at the time of the fire and Mattamuskeet and Woodville township had none.

Eleven other townships within the path of the fire had no settlers in 1825.

**Memories of the fire**

At the time of the fire only a few brief notes appeared in the Bangor Register, Eastern Argus of Portland, Norridgewock Journal, and Niles’ Weekly Register. They were local accounts, not stories about the overall extent of the fire. Information about the fire did not appear in other print material until the early 1880s, when some of those who could remember the fire wrote about it; Amasa Loring in Guilford and contributors to his 1882 book, *History of Piscataquis County*; John Godfrey of Bangor in his *Annals of Bangor*; Pliny B. Soule of Lagrange; Mrs. Nelson of Lincoln; Charles Davis of Monson; and unknown writers living in Bradford, Medford, and Ripley townships. Some of those who contributed to the Williams and Chase Company’s 1882 *History of Penobscot County* mentioned the fire in a particular township. Later, in 1912, Lynton Oak’s *History of Garland* shared Garland township’s experience with the fire. As townships in the line of fire reached their 100th, 150th, 175th, and 200th year of celebration, citizens put together their township histories, with some capturing the oral tales of the fire. Given the magnitude of the fire, the stories about it are few in number.

The fire started when a sudden violent gale, reported by writers as blowing from the north and northwest, fanned small and numerous land-clearing fires in Guilford township, and probably in other nearby townships, into a single inferno. Fire-rich material, decaying stumps in cleared fields, stubble left from the fall harvest, dried grass, wooden fences, and tinder-dry woodlots, covered the countryside. Water was low to nonexistent in some places and many peoples’ wells were dry.

Initially the settlers organized to fight the fire, but they quickly realized they could not control it. The high winds drove the fire and sent burning debris through the air. The wind-blown firebrands dropped into the forest crowns of settlers’ woodlots. Burning limbs dropped to and ignited the forest floor. The fire seemed to be burning everywhere. Folks retreated to their own farms and clusters of homes, filled anything they could with water, took down wooden fences, ploughed up the earth, and set backfires. Some settlers took long poles and made them into swabs, which they dunked in water and then...
rubbed their roofs to keep them wet and put out the flying firebrands. Other people soaked woolen bedding and laid it on their roofs.

Miraculously, no reports included loss of human life. People escaped the fire in a number of ways. A horseman rode through Sebec township alerting farmers of the advancing flames. At the west end of Sebec Lake, people floated into Bucks Cove on a raft. In Largrange township, families buried their belongings in the earth. In Sebec and Cambridge townships parents and children moved into the middle of freshly ploughed fields. In Maxfield and Medford townships the middle of the river was sanctuary for some individuals. One young lad returning home from school got badly burned. Two persons traveling the road between Harmony and Cambridge villages ran through the burning brush that was on both sides of the road.

The fire burned irregularly in the settled townships and that perhaps accounts for what appeared to be a relatively low loss of barns and homes. In Guilford township families lost four houses and five barns. To its southwest in Parkman township the loss was one house and five barns. The Ripley village was a total loss, 11 houses and nine barns. Harmony township residents lost four houses and five barns, and one family lost all the lumber set aside for a new home. One barn burned in Dover township and at least one farm in Chester township. Monson township lost many acres of valuable forest. To the east Milo township lost all its valuable pine, Medford township lost three-fourths its taxable property and all its pine, and Maxfield township was totally devastated. The loss that many faced was their wood lots. Unrecorded numbers of farm and wild animals and birds perished and the fire’s heat killed fish in the Piscataquis River. It seems likely that there were additional unrecorded losses in these rural townships that had no newspaper.

The descriptions of the fire varied little. Some wrote that it moved as fast as running horses until late in the day on October 8, when the wind let up. Its roar sounded like thunder and could be heard 12–15 miles away. The sky glowed red at night. Dense smoke covered the land, darkened the sky, was painful to the eyes and lungs, and cattle fell sick and some died. The smoke hung in the air for a week or more and was so thick on the Penobscot River that the ferrymen had to use compasses as opposed to the usual line of sight to guide

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5 Robert Pike in Tall Trees, Tough Men (1967) wrote: “… Contemporaries tell of sparks as big as bushel baskets being carried for miles, of … , of blackened bodies of women and children…,” but he did not list his source and I have found no account of death of Maine settlers.

6 An account in the Bangor Register of November 3, 1825 stated that residents lost 12 buildings and those wishing to assist these families could donate materials.

7 Eastern Argus of Portland, October 25, 1825. This newspaper took the content of this article from the Norridgewock Journal and is the report from six towns, Guilford, Parkman, Ripley, Harmony, Dover, and Mooresville (Abbot). Another article appearing in the Bangor Register of October 20, 1825 described a rescue of two elderly women by Elder Hatch from their burning home in Ripley.
them. In Lincoln township, at the east edge of the fire, the “smoke was so thick we could not see the sun in the middle of the day.”9 The fire continued, slowing some when a slight rain fell at the end of the first week. After two weeks of burning, a heavy rain put out most of it, but it continued on to the north, especially in the swamps.

The terror of the fire was felt in the places that escaped it. “The town of Garland was in the line of advancing flames, but before it was reached the wind ceased and the town escaped injury. Nevertheless, its inhabitants suffered keenly with terror and anxiety.”10

These recollections reveal some of the locations of the fire, but these few localities fall far short of 832,000 acres. Where did it burn?

Federal commissioner’s 1882 letter and Maine forest commissioner’s 1894 report

In his 1882 “Report on the Subject of Forestry” Franklin B. Hough relied on an unnamed correspondent to provide the 1825 fire information that he included in his report.11 Accordingly, the fire burned an estimated 150,000 acres from Moosehead Lake 40 miles down the Piscataquis River valley to the Penobscot River in a six-mile-wide swath.

The first person to try to gather information to map the boundaries of the fire was Charles E. Oak, Maine Forest Commissioner in 1894. Oak assigned the task to Austin Cary, who collected information from many volunteers, landowners, farmers, lumbermen, timber cruisers, and explorers. Even though the report provided only a general sense of the fire’s bounds, they estimated the burn area at 1,300 square miles (832,000 acres), a calculation that has always been accepted. Oak produced no map in 1894, but wrote that he would at a future date. Whether or not he did is still unknown.12 He did not subscribe to the idea of the fire reaching or starting from the foot of Moosehead Lake.

The information Cary collected did not cover the whole of the probable area burned as evident in the general description of its outer boundaries. The fire started in Guilford township, and perhaps others, where farmers were clearing land with small individual fires. A sudden high wind late in the day fanned the small, smoldering fires into a single tempest that moved in every compass direction within the Piscataquis River valley. When the wind finally died the fire was of such enormity that it remained burning for weeks.

The fire burned along six predominant axes. To the east it burned to the Penobscot River. The conflagration raced northeast from Guilford township across KIW township into Long A township, crossed the West Branch of the Penobscot River after “passing under the Twin lakes” (95 miles), and ended some place in Grindstone township (T1R7 W.E.L.S.). It moved north from Guilford township upriver 16 miles through Elliottsville township into Shirley township. Due west of Guilford township, it burned through Kingsbury township into Mayfield township (16 miles). Southwest of Guilford township it burned into Wellington township, stopped in the northeast corner of Harmony township (15 miles), and engulfed Cambridge and Ripley townships. On the south side of the Piscataquis River Oak provided no definitive fire lines and simply wrote that in some places the fire “burned into the third tier of townships below the river,” with the added caveat that it burned very irregularly along the Piscataquis River. At the Penobscot River it burned through every township on its west bank from Chester to the Old Town north town line (56 miles). Cary noted that the fire crossed the river, but did not state the location. He made no attempt to name all the townships the fire burned through; consequently, the omission of a township in his report should not be interpreted that the fire did not burn there.

Contrary to some contemporary histories, Commissioner Oak clearly wrote that this fire, called by some Maine’s Miramichi fire, was not connected to the Miramichi fire in New Brunswick, Canada. They burned at the same time, but they were miles apart.

Cary discovered one large pocket of unburned land that was west of Endless Lake and perhaps included the lower two-thirds of T3R9 N.W.P. and much of T2R9 N.W.P.13 His report was not clear on whether or not the

8 Niles’ Weekly Register, H. Niles, editor, November 5, 1825, pp 148–149; available online through Hathi Trust
9 A January 10, 1873 letter from Mrs. Nelson of Lincoln; available at Bangor Public Library
10 Lyndon Oak, History of Garland, Maine (The Observer Publishing Company, Dover, Maine, 1912)
11 This report is available online through the Hathi Trust. The cover to the letter has the date 1892, but the letter is clearly dated 1882.
12 Neither the Maine State Library nor the Maine Archives nor the Maine Forest Service has the Oak records of the 1894 era.
13 A map of this burn area and others appear in Philip T. Coolidge’s book History of the Maine Woods (Bangor, ME: Furbush-
Chapter 1: The Fire of 1825

The 1825 fire missed Dover village area, as it burned east down the Piscataquis River valley. Much of the land close to the river was probably already cleared as in this picture. (unknown photographer (1868–1878), courtesy of the Maine Historical Preservation Commission, Augusta, Maine (MHPC.S.8872))

fire burned on the north and east sides of the pocket; that area was the land along the south side of the West Branch of the Penobscot River and the west side of the Penobscot River. The townships on this edge are Township 3 Indian Purchase (T3 I.P.), TAR7 W.E.L.S., and Medway and Woodville townships.

The research called for by Commissioner Oak included a study of the current (1893) forest growth in different townships where he determined the fire burned; the evidence being the presence of charred stumps and burn debris under the forest floor’s composting vegetation. It was from this work that he hoped to fix the general fire lines, especially in the unsettled northern townships.

The report included reflections on six study sites, but did not reveal their exact locations. Whether or not there were others is unknown. The reported sites were: the Bangor and Aroostook Railroad (B&A) right of way in Brownville and Long A townships; a small area above the KIW village; Grindstone township (T1R7 W.E.L.S.); some place on Seboeis Stream; and in Mattamiscontis township. His report for the studied areas noted differences in the type and age of tree growth. White birch (birch) and poplar were the two most prominent trees that seeded in after the fire, particularly in the western areas of the fire. Their seeds are light and travel easily on the air currents. By the 1870s loggers for the birch mills were cutting these six-to-twelve-inch diameter trees.\(^\text{14}\) The excelsior mills, which used poplar, appeared on the waterways about the same time. In the early 1880s the new pulp and paper mills wanted the poplar. Hackmatack, a favorite for knees and ship’s knees, grew in, matured quickly, and loggers harvested it in abundance between c.1870 and 1900.\(^\text{15}\)

Oak’s and Cary’s interest included more than the fire’s borders; they wanted to project future harvests in burn areas. In the Seboeis Stream area they calculated birch 30 to 40 years old would be mature enough to cut and that at 50 years of age the birch mills would have their largest crop. Mattamiscontis township had a large quantity of white pine (pine) that matured in open areas with many limbs, rendering it a poor saw log, but good for boxwood (for making boxes). The butt of the tree was often free of limbs and could be used at a clapboard mill. In other ar-

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\(^{14}\) Spool wood is the product from milling birch. In this book a “birch mill” is one that does any of the following: cuts a birch log into four-foot lengths; squares the four-foot birch log so it has four square corners; rips the four-foot squared timber lengthwise into square-four-foot long bars of various dimensions. A “spool mill” turns the bars on a lathe and produces the actual spool, and it might also do all the previous cutting steps.

\(^{15}\) Hackmatack was also known as juniper, tamarack, and eastern larch. More information about knees is in this book’s glossary and in chapter six.
The post-1894 writings generally acknowledged the rough boundaries set forth by Oak and Cary and, in particular, did not subscribe to either the Loring account or the Hough report of the fire burning down from or reaching to the foot of Moosehead Lake at Greenville village, north of Shirley township. Coolidge, an experienced woodsman, wrote that a fire of the magnitude that Hough reported, and starting at Moosehead Lake, would have had a far wider path than six miles as it burned down the Piscataquis River valley.¹⁶

Few people have tried to map the burn and those who have generally reflect the 1894 report. Neither Oak nor Cary, who would become Maine’s Forest Commissioner, ever produced a map, and all subsequent forest service commissioners’ reports simply reiterated the 1894 report information. In 1963, Philip Coolidge included in his book a map of the burn area, but it did not show a crossing of either the West Branch or the Penobscot rivers. Coolidge doubted the fire burned as far as Mount Katahdin as apparently some believed, but he was not definitive about its crossing of the West Branch of the Penobscot River. He was also silent on the 1894 report of the fire’s crossing of the Penobscot River. A map found by Kent Nelson in a publication held at the Maine Forest Service placed the fire line on the east side of the Penobscot River in Greenbush township.

Refining the fire’s boundaries

Information from land surveys, logging operations, forest cruises, stumpage reports, land sales, and birch and excelsior mill operations, perhaps part of the information Oak collected, is available and suggest probable burn areas. Township histories also contain fire stories that have been passed down through generations.

Every account of the fire that mentioned wind direction recorded that it blew violently from the west and northwest for the first 20 hours and made no wind references after that. The stories of people’s experiences in the first 20 hours gave some signs of the fire’s initial movement. Sometime during the middle of the first night the fire reached Sebec Lake’s Bucks Cove, 10 miles due north of its starting point. Soon after mid-day October 8 its front line passed over the Pleasant River 22 miles due east of Guilford. Late this day the wind subsided in Guilford. At some unknown time the fire moved northwest, west, southwest, and south. These movements may have started after the first 20 hours. Curiously, the fire lines emanating in these directions all ended 20–22 miles from Guilford; a far shorter distance than those to the northeast (95 miles) and the east (40).

Each of the following sections traces the fire through a set of townships. If any person ever wrote something, even one sentence, about the fire in the township, then it is included here. The remainder of the text for each township recounts enough of its logging history and mill activity to suggest that the fire did burn within the township. These journeys help build a map with more definitive fire lines than Oak or any of his successors articulated.¹⁷ Once the journeys are complete the question then remains, do the number of acres burned in the resulting map compare favorably with the 832,000 acres estimated by Oak and Cary?

East from Guilford on the south side of the Piscataquis River

From Guilford township the fire burned east in an irregular manner down the Piscataquis River to the Penobscot River. Commissioner Oak noted that in some places the fire burned into the third tier of townships on the south side of the river. However, no account suggested where the fire jumped from Guilford south across the Piscataquis River, and Commissioner Oak suggested neither a location nor the towns of the third tier. The Coolidge book map and the map in the possession of the Maine Forest Service puts Sangerville, Dover, and Atkinson townships and their southern neighbors Dexter, Garland, and Charleston townships (second tier) in the burn area, but not their southern neighbors. What caused the makers of these maps to locate the line to include these townships is unknown.

Sangerville, Dover, and Atkinson townships: Whether or not the fire jumped to the south side of the river in any of these three townships remains undiscovered. Sangerville township, Guilford’s neighbor on the south side of


¹⁷ A review of the post 1894 Forest Commissioner’s Reports revealed that any mention of or reference to the 1825 fire cited the information from the Oak 1894 report.
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the river, was probably not the crossing site. Historian John Francis Sprague, who delivered the Sangerville centennial speech, talked about Sangerville township’s early history and made no mention of the fire. No other historical accounts mentioned a loss of structures or forests.

Sangerville township’s four mill sites, Sangerville village, Broadway Mills, South Sangerville, East Sangerville, continued to operate as local saw and shingle mills, probably sawing logs hauled in from local owners’ woodlots. With the exception of a short-lived clothespin factory in Sangerville village in the mid-1870s, no other mill that used birch or poplar ever opened.¹⁸

The only report of a loss in Dover was a barn at an unspecified location. Local Dover-Foxcroft historian Louis Stevens, who seemingly read all the past Piscataquis Observers, made no mention of the fire in any of his voluminous works. The township’s mills south of the Piscataquis River continued to operate after the fire and none of them ever used birch or poplar.

In the mid-1870s Dover village had a spool wood business.¹⁹ Like the mill in Foxcroft, teamsters probably hauled birch from the north, given no birch or poplar mills in other portions of the township. At East Dover on the Piscataquis River, Gray and Pollard put in place a machine to make wood pulp and had a paste-board factory,²⁰ but it only operated through about 1882. Whether or not the mill used poplar for its pulp is unknown, as is the source of its logs.

No found Atkinson township historical documents tell about or hint that the fire burned in this township. Early Atkinson settlers established their farms well south of the Piscataquis River. If the fire jumped the river it might have burned between the farms and the river and been of little consequence, hence, unrecorded.

Atkinson Mills had its first dam and sawmill in 1807. The dam at this site apparently always hosted a sawmill, as opposed to a birch or excelsior mill.²¹ Across Atkinson’s northern border, the Piscataquis River, in South Sebec village, also known as Sebec Station after the railroad arrived in 1869, a birch mill did exist. Teamsters hauled some of the mill’s birch from the north, but whether or not any came from Atkinson to the south is unknown.

The most probable scenario for the fire’s river crossing is that the fire did not jump into Sangerville township, burned that part of Dover township on the north side of the river, and jumped to the south side some place in Atkinson township.

¹⁸ Maine Register, State Year-book, and Legislative Manuals, 1872–1899
¹⁹ Spool wood is the product from milling birch. In this book a “birch mill” is one that does any of the following: cuts a birch log into four-foot lengths; squares the four-foot birch log so it has four square corners; rips the four-foot squared timber lengthwise into square four-foot long bars of various dimensions. A “spool mill” turns the bars on a lathe and produces the actual spool, and it might also do all the previous cutting steps.

²⁰ The Piscataquis Observer, May 29, 1873 and June 3, 1875
²¹ Maine Register, State Year-book, and Legislative Manuals, 1872–1899

Teamsters, like the ones for this birch logging camp c.1900 in Monson township, hauled the birch that grew in the 1825 fire burn. (from a glass plate negative, gifted to the Maine State Archives by John Beaupain)
The fire’s bypassing Sangerville township was a function of the starting location of the fire, forest fire behavior, and wind direction. Given that the first settlers had formed communities around the water mill sites, the land clearing fires were away from the river. The wind came from the west and northwest so by the time the individual fires joined together in one roaring inferno, the front line of the fire might have already moved east into Foxcroft township. The land between the fires and the river was perhaps mostly open farmland and might not have resulted in firebrands flying south across the Piscataquis River into Sangerville township.

Once the single conflagration formed and began moving east, the width of the fire’s front line began to broaden. At some point the south edge of the fire line was the north edge of the Piscataquis River, probably burning through the already cleared farmland.

By the time the fire’s front line exited the east border of Foxcroft township, which is on the river’s north side, into Sebec township, it was burning along the north banks of the river. The fire might have jumped to the south side of the river at the northwest corner of Atkinson township. Here the river twists and runs in a north-northeast direction for two miles, a likely place for a northwest or west wind to push the fire across the river.

The eastward movement of the fire on the south side of the river would have naturally broadened as it moved east through unpopulated areas. By the time it reached the town line of Orneville, a township engulfed by the fire and Atkinson’s eastern neighbor, the fire’s front was broad and was moving both easterly and southerly.

If the fire did not cross the river as described in the preceding scenario, then it might have as it reached the southeast corner of Sebec township where the Piscataquis River bends from its due east flow to a northeast flow. In this area the easterly-blown fire brands might have fallen into the Milo township woods on the south side of the river, igniting a fire that soon spread south and east into Orneville township.

Around mid-day on October 8 the fire was burning on the south side of the Piscataquis River on the southwest edge of Medford township, where it destroyed Elizabeth and James Campbell’s home.

**Medford township:** Even though Medford township lost three-fourths of the taxable property, everyone survived. “For a week there was no rain and the smoke hung dense in the air. Cattle and sheep that survived the holocaust grew sick and even died. Some families left and returned south from whence they came; some on the Bannock Road and others by raft down the river. Elizabeth and James Campbell lost everything, but with the help of neighbors they rebuilt and stayed. No one prospered as before for many years. The resourceful inhabitants saw the timber gone, but they also saw an opportunity to enlarge their clearings. They set about at once to get ready for the next year’s plantings. The fury of the fire had resulted in much crowning and the land itself was still good. For two generations the existence wrested from the land was in the form of crops and dairy products, for only the blackened trees and scattered islands of green remained where once had been one of the world’s richest timber areas.”

In 1835 Elijah Johnson, John and George Hichborn, and John and C.L. Hastey built a sawmill and a separate gristmill on Cold Brook in Medford Center. By 1876 the mill at Medford Center on Cold Brook had teamsters haul in poplar. The Perkins brothers had a crew of 60 men and eight to ten teams hauling cords of birch to the Cold Brook mill in 1889. In total they expected to cut 4,000 cords of birch. In 1895 J.G. Sawyer’s mill at Medford Center cut birch. A year later A.J. and W.E. Weymouth cut 500 cords of birch in that part of Medford north of the Piscataquis River and ferried it across the river in scows. Tibbetts, perhaps operating this same mill, was still cutting birch in 1900.

**Howland township, south side of the river:** From Medford township the fire’s path was through the tiny southern portion of Maxfield township and into Howland township. Oak’s account had the fire burning in every township on the west bank of the Penobscot River, from Chester township south to and a little over the north town line of Old Town.

In 1881 Searsport Spool and Box Company bought the Thomas Egery mill in Howland village on the south side of the Piscataquis River at its mouth on the Penob-

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22. Crowning means the fire burned through the treetops, staying above the ground, thus preserving its fertile state.
23. Medford Notes 1808–1958, prepared by Cold Brook Grange, Number 436, as part of the Sesquicentennial program. The current USGS map uses the label Cold Stream for what settlers called Cold Brook.
24. The Piscataquis Observer, April 13, 1876
25. The Industrial Journal, February 14, 1890
26. The Industrial Journal, April 3, 1896
27. The Piscataquis Observer, April 19, 1900
scot River. Three years later the company bought about 2,500 acres of wild-land, nearly all of it on the south side of the Piscataquis River. The company probably bought it for its birch resources. Searsport mill workers sawed the birch, and ferried it directly across the river to a Central Maine Railroad siding below West Enfield. Trains hauled the material to Bangor, where ships took it to Searsport.

Below Milo, Medford, and Howland townships to the fire’s southeast terminus

Orneville township: The predominant course of the fire into Orneville township was probably from its northern neighbors Sebec and Milo, and it probably engulfed the whole of the township. In the late 1860s Rice and Hallowell (of Bangor) opened an excelsior mill. The Hallowell, Clark and Company spool mill operated in 1876 at the outlet of Boyd Lake, as did an excelsior mill at the same site by 1881. F.A. Cushman, owner of the excelsior mill in 1889, turned out 1,500 tons of excelsior per year, plus box shooks, spool bars, and long and short lumber. Bradford township: "Roaring like thunder, it ate houses, cattle, birds, trees, and all else that stood in its way. The tragic result was the loss of 12 towns in Penobsct River and 28 towns in Piscataquis counties. The area … was blackened before the rains quenched the holocaust. It did happen here (Bradford)."

Lagrange township: Some families in the southwest corner of Lagrange township buried their belongings in the earth, and others, like the Bishops, put items down into their well shafts to save them. Pliny B. Soule wrote that the fire burned in the Dead, Hemlock, and Birch valleys of Lagrange township. To the west of Lagrange village at a mill on Dead Stream, Thomas S. Head and Son cut spool bars (1881). East of the village on the road to Howland village, the Perkins and Danforth Spoolwood Company opened a birch mill that they later sold to Lewis Blake. If Perkins and Danforth operated as they did at their mill on the B&A at Perkins siding on South Twin Lake, then they hauled from anywhere within 6 miles of the mill. Thus, they could have hauled from no less than the west half of Edinburg township. Some birch loggers moved their cut by railroad from Lagrange village to Milo village and other mill sites.

Edinburg township: Pliny B. Soule wrote in his Lagrange township history that the fire burned in the valley of Hemlock Stream, which drains from Lagrange into the southwest corner of Edinburg and out to the Penobscot River through the northeast corner of Argyle. Additionally, the fire came across the south townsline of Howland township. Edinburg township never had any birch or excelsior mills, but it was a source of wood for the Searsport Spool and Box Company in Howland village and the pulp and paper industry on the Penobscot River. In 1871 the township may have been the supplier of poplar for the Milford excelsior mill, a short log drive on the Penobscot River. In the mid-1870s the Bangor mills on Kenduskeag Stream milled poplar driven down the Penobscot. When the Penobscot Chemical and Fibre Company (paper company) opened on the Penobscot River at Great Works in Old Town in 1882, any poplar that grew in the burn suddenly had great value.

The Prentiss 1874–1899 stumpage records for his 2,236 Edinburg township acres showed considerable birch and poplar logging. He issued the first permit in 1875 to Luther Haynes and continued in 1892 with a permit for Hathaway and Whittier. A logger wanted a contract for birch in 1896. A year later and in 1898 a logger had a contract for poplar pulpwood; the scaled cords in 1898 were 5,920. Lancaster cut birch from 1896 through 1899 across the full extent of the Prentiss Edinburg land.

Argyle township: The fire burned between Birch Stream and the Penobscot River and touched Argyle township’s...
southern border with Old Town where it burned out. By 1880 Isaac Foster had a birch mill on Hoyt Stream (Hart Stream) about a mile from the Penobscot River and near the Argyle and Edinburg town line. The Milford and Bangor mills using poplar could have cut in Argyle.

**Alton township:** Birch Stream is Alton’s east town line; Dead Stream runs close to its western border; and both streams cross into Old Town township. Pliny B. Soule, a Lagrange pioneer and prominent citizen, described the fire as burning up the Birch and Dead Stream valleys. Some time after 1869, Roy Philbrick cut white birch and pulp and loaded this cut on rail cars on the B&A line near Birch Stream. James Ham sold white birch to the Lewis Mill in Brownville village; it went by rail car. In West Alton, the Hellebrand novelty mill, using birch and located between the bridges, made pillboxes, rolling pins, checkers, and paint brush handles in 1899.

**Hudson township:** In 1975 when the town history committee began work on *The History of Hudson: 1825–1976*, a number of residents mentioned hearing about a fire at an early time. They apparently had no particular stories, but the committee took the matter seriously and did some research. Based on what they read in Morse’s *The American Universal Geography* (1819), they cited a fire of 1811. “In 1803 a fire burned north of the Waldo Patent, south of Spencer Mountain in the Moosehead Lake area, and 50–60 miles west from the Penobscot River with a mean breadth of 10 miles. Either lightning or careless Indian hunters caused the fire. A much smaller fire in the same general area in 1811 spread a few miles over a few days before rain put it out.” No one has used this vague description of a geographic location for the 1803 or the 1811 fires in order to place it on a map with other major forest fires in Maine since 1795.

The Morse fire description for 1811 does not match up with the 1825 fire accounts. Coolidge reviewed Maine forest fires in his book *History of the Maine Woods* and cited Morse’s paragraphs on the 1803 fire. He made a passing reference to the 1811 fire and gave no specific location, the implication being it was not a major fire.

Another possibility for the fire mentioned by the townspeople is the fire of 1825. Hudson township’s northeast corner seemed to be in the line of fire as it moved south from Bradford, its northern neighbor. To the east, in Alton township, it burned down Dead Stream valley. Given the fire came down the valley from Boyd Lake in Orneville its front line would have naturally spread and might have reached into the eastern portion of Hudson.

**Other second tier townships**

**Garland township:** The fire might have burned into Garland township. Lyndon Oak wrote in his *History of Garland, Maine* that “the town of Garland was in the line of the advancing flames, but before it was reached the wind had ceased and the town escaped injury. Nevertheless its inhabitants suffered keenly with terror and anxiety.” Whether Lyndon Oak meant Garland village or Garland township is not evident. A Dexter township history simply noted that the fire burned into Garland township. The fire’s approach to Garland township was probably from Ripley township through the southwest corner of Dexter township, as opposed to advancing south through Dover township.

**Charlestown township:** No Charlestown township historical records mention anything about the 1825 fire. However, the history of Charlestown township includes one story that suggests the fire did not burn over the north central town line, one possible location given the fire’s location in Bradford and Alton townships. In 1837 Thomas Bunker, a coastal man, who worked the sea, owned some forested land just south of the midpoint of the north town line. Folks wondered why a seaman came north. He used his timber to build on his Charlestown lot a 60-foot, 30-ton coastal vessel. To move it to Bangor, a 25-mile journey, he cross-cut rounds of sugar maple, bound each one with iron, and used them for wheels for a “truck” he built, and had 50 teams of oxen pull. The “Betsey Bunker” floated and worked the coast. Had the 1825 fire burned his land, he would not have had sugar

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40 “Argyle” in Williams, Chase and Company, *History of Penobscot County Maine*, 1882
41 “Lagrange” in Williams, Chase and Company, *History of Penobscot County Maine*, 1882
45 Frank Spizuoco and Carol Fuertado, *Dexter – Spirit of an Age* (Dexter Historical Society, 1999)
maple trees large enough to cut into wheels or the other wood necessary for a vessel.

**Third tier townships**

Third tier townships include Corinth, Exeter, Corinna, and St. Albans, and no recording of 1825 fire experiences were found for any of them. In *Stories of Exeter Maine*, Fred M. Young described the forested land in a manner that suggested that if the fire did burn in the township, then it was of a minor consequence. He mentioned fires, but all of them occurred after 1896. Corinth, Corinna, and St. Albans histories provided no clues related to the fire.

An unpublished St. Albans township story from the Hall family revealed that they knew about the fire and wondered if it might have crossed into St. Albans’ northeast-most corner from Ripley, where it did burn. In the early 1950s the Hall family farm was on Rand Hill, a half-mile south of the Ripley town line and 1.5 miles east of St. Albans northeast corner. As a child Jay Hall’s mother told him stories about the fire and one day they took a shovel, went into their woods, and dug a hole to see if they could find a buried charcoal layer. They found some blackened wood, but it was close to the surface and might have just been decay.47

**East side of the Penobscot River**

Oak wrote that the fire crossed the Penobscot River, but he did not define a location. Since Argyle, Edinburg, Howland, Mattamuskeet, and Chester townships were enveloped in the fire, it could have jumped the river into their eastern neighbors, Greenbush, Passadumkeag, Enfield, and Lincoln townships. Godfrey, in his *Annals of Bangor* (1882), told of fire burning on both sides of the river. On the east side he described the forestland between Passadumkeag and Lincoln as being devastated. Fellows emphatically wrote in his history of Lincoln, Maine (1929) that the 1825 fire did not burn in Lincoln township; it stopped before crossing the river into his township.48 A map of the fire’s bounds held by the Maine Forest Service shows the fire line on the east side of the Penobscot River in Greenbush township, where it remained close to the river.49 In 1830 John Webber surveyed all the Greenbush township lots except for those along the river.50 This unsurveyed collection of river lots created a 1.6 mile-wide river border that extended from the south town line to the north town line.

Webber’s survey field notes used the words “burnt land.” Moving west on the north town line from the northeast corner, he reached burnt land 1.82 miles from the Penobscot River. His burnt land phrase was connected to the east line area of lots 79 and 80. His field notes indicated a fire burned no more than a mile south in the area of these lots. Whether or not the fire burned the 1.82 miles to the river is unknown. No other portion of his survey suggested any fire activity elsewhere in Greenbush; his consistent description was of a robust forest.

Assuming the fire jumped the river here, then it might have done so from the southeastern corner of Edinburg or from Argyle. Numerous islands are packed into this area and John Godfrey wrote that islands in the river burned over, but he did not specify which ones.51 Even though the area of burn in Greenbush was small, it may have later yielded some of the birch that in 1890 Holmes and Redman, owners of a long-standing sawmill on Olamon Stream in Olamon village, began to mill.52

**East from Guilford on the north side of the Piscataquis River**

On the north side of the Piscataquis River the fire burned east from Guilford township in a two-township-wide swath to the Penobscot River.

**Guilford township:** The fire probably did not burn every acre of Guilford township, but no part of the township escaped other than scattered forest pockets. Isaac Herring (on Anderson Road), Steadman Davis (near Bog Brook on the road to Upper Abbot village), Captain William Stevens (Guilford Center Road), and Chandler Robbins (Butter Street)53 all lost their buildings. The American Bobbin, Spool and Shuttle Company opened

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47 conversations with Jay Hall
49 Information about the map’s date and source is unavailable.
50 John Webber, “Field Notes, Greenbush, 1830,” available at Maine State Archives; no land surveys of post-1825 were available for Passadumkeag or Enfield townships.
52 Eleanor M. Crouch and Joyce M. Sanborn, *The History and Genealogy of Greenbush, Maine* (Salem, MA: Higginson Book Company, 2001) and *Maine Register, State Year-book, and Legislative Manuals, 1872–1899*
53 The home locations are from H.E. Walling, *Map of Piscataquis County* (New York: Lee and Marsh, 1858); the locations in parentheses are from a 1995 Delorme *Maine Atlas and Gazetteer.*
in Guilford village in 1889 and Guilford Lumber Company bought it in the mid-1890s. In North Guilford village about 1892 a mill at the mouth of Davis Pond started sawing and had 800 cords of birch for milling. Teamsters hauled it here from the surrounding area. In late May and early June 1893 a crew near North Guilford village peeled poplar. Northeast of the mid-point of the township in 1904, W.R. Pendleton lumbered on Buker Mountain, cutting 200 cords of poplar as well as 75,000 board feet of hemlock that he peeled for 50 cords of bark. The hemlock suggests an unburned pocket.

**Willimantic township:** The fire raced north from Guilford township into Willimantic township, around the west end of Sebec Lake and across the southeast end of Lake Onawa just over the Elliottsville township south town line, and headed east. The Weston family, early settlers at the west end of Sebec Lake, 10 miles from Guilford village, and in close proximity to Bucks Cove, found themselves in the path of the fire; they got on a raft and floated out into the cove to escape. Another rendition of this same story is that Peleg Weston and John L. Leavitt were trapping on Bucks Cove, went to bed, and were later awakened by the roar of the fire and a red sky. They covered their heads, picked up their dog, and raced for the water. They all survived, but the dog lost its hair.

In 1879 the Willimantic Thread Company built a birch mill on Big Wilson Stream at Lower Greeley Falls not far from Sebec Lake and two years later a haul road connected it to a smaller mill east of Lake Onawa’s east shore.

**Bowerbank township:** The fire crossed Willimantic township’s east town line to burn through most of Bowerbank township. Beginning in 1889 the east-west running Canadian Pacific Railroad (CPR) passed through the township above the Buttermilk ponds with Benson Siding at Mud Pond, a couple miles from Bowerbank’s western border. This siding and all the others west of the Penobscot River were not only home to the railway’s section workers, but were also staging areas for loggers who loaded birch and other logs on rail cars. The American Thread Company (ATCo), successor to the Willimantic Thread Company, cut birch in the Buttermilk ponds area beginning in the early 1900s and Lombard log haulers hauled it to their Milo mill. In the winter, teamsters hauled birch across the lake to Blethen Landing in Foxcroft. Clarke and Robinson opened a Bowerbank mill (1897–1912) near Newell Cove and cut birch. A 1924 James Sewall cut map for Bowerbank township’s northern portion, with white birch, yellow birch and hardwood areas marked, had ATCo haul roads and older haul roads crisscrossing the township.

**Foxcroft township:** In Foxcroft township, east of Guilford and south of Bowerbank and Sebec Lake, no one seems to have recorded information about the fire other than it jumped around with great irregularity. Beginning in 1874 Foxcroft village had an excelsior mill with a yearly consumption of 1,000 cords of poplar hauled to the mill by local teamsters or loaded by farmers on

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54 Guilford.mainememory.net and John Frances Sprague, editor, *Guilford, Maine, 1816–1916*
55 *The Piscataquis Observer*, March 31 and May 19, 1892
56 *The Piscataquis Observer*, June 1, 1893
57 A story Delmont Weston shared about 1965 with Jerry Packard of Willimantic. The family continued to reside in the area into the mid-to-late-1900s with Delmont Weston serving on the Willimantic board of selectpersons.
60 “Canadian Rail,” Number 173, January 1966, p.9
61 *Maine Register, State Year-book, and Legislative Manuals*, 1872–1899
62 “American Thread Company, Maine Mills, North Part of Bowerbank,” a map, from Exploration March - 1924 (James W. Sewall Company archives)
rail cars at sidings. The excelsior mill soon closed, but by 1873 L.H. Dwelley and Company, a spool mill operation, opened and ran with various subsequent owners through 1964. Dwelley was milling a million or more board feet of birch logs per year. He also had a mill at Sebec Lake, but he did not use it for the 1878 season. Teamsters hauled in his birch from north of Foxcroft village. David Greeley took over Andrew Blethen’s mill at Blethen’s Landing on Sebec Lake in 1882 and cut birch for both the Dwelley mill (1886) in Foxcroft village and the Willimantic Thread Company mill.

**Sebec township:** Stacy Lanphear, in his Sebec centennial address of 1912, spoke about the damage the 1825 fire did to timber and dwellings in the southern part of the township. He also recounted the story of saving the Ben Robinson home that was on a side road at Alder Brook a mile southwest of Sebec Corner. A horseman came galloping along the road from Foxcroft village warning the families of the coming fire. Ben and his daughter yoked up his oxen and attached the plow. The daughter tended the oxen and Ben the plow, as they turned over all the open earth around their home. This act helped save their home, but an older one on the other side of the road burned.

South of Sebec Corner at South Sebec in 1892, the A.J. Chase mill (established c.1889) had a contract for 500 cords of peeled poplar for the paper company at Great Works on the Penobscot River. Beginning about 1898 Chase began cutting birch and did so into the late 1920s. His birch could have been hauled in from Atkinson, on the south side of the river, or the southern half of Sebec township or the southwest corner of Milo township.

At the foot of Sebec Lake the fire line on the south side of the lake joined the fire line burning on the lake’s north side, and moved east across Sebec township’s east town line.

**Barnard township:** On the north side of Sebec Lake and east of Bowerbank township the fire line split at about Barnard township’s west boundary line. The fire’s easterly path into Milo and Brownville was between Sebec Lake’s north edge and the southern-most portions of Barnard and Williamsburg townships. Well’s 1867 report on waterpower in Barnard township mentioned an immense amount of timber, spruce, cedar, and hardwoods, and in particular an almost inexhaustible amount of hemlock, in the northern portion of the township. The trees mentioned by Wells could not have been in the fire of 1825. Both hemlock and spruce take over 100 years to reach the maturity of a saw log. The *Piscataquis Observer* of April 25, 1872 reported “a large lot of logs was hauled from Williamsburg and Barnard.” Wells listed a saw and gristmill in operation on the west branch of Bear Brook and a saw and shingle mill on its east branch, all presumed to be in the area of the settlers on the south end of the township a mile or so above Sebec Lake. Barnard still had three unused mill sites on Bear Brook in 1879. The *Maine Registers* published between 1872 and 1899 recorded slate and lumber companies, but no birch or excelsior operations. In 1897 a drive of spruce and pine came down Bear Brook from the unburned pocket. In 1901 E.W. Downes with a 12-man crew drove saw logs on Bear Brook for William Engel’s sawmill in Bangor. Bear Brook drains the middle third of the township (north to south) so the pine or spruce logs most likely came from the unburned pocket. In 1913 on the lower end of Bear Brook, C.E. Wingate and R.P. Lamson both had a crew peeling poplar, a tree from the 1825 burn area.

**Williamsburg township:** In 1879 the northern half of the township was still “uncleared” with the same kind of substantial timber as listed for Barnard. No one defined what constituted the northern half of Williamsburg. The upper north portion of Williamsburg is sliced by the lower end of Roaring Brook and its northeastern corner by the West Branch of the Pleasant River, both drivable waterways. Williamsburg had several mills, but apparently no birch or excelsior mills.

The 1825 fire perhaps passed through this uppermost area of Barnard and Williamsburg. A *Piscataquis Observer* note of April 18, 1850 described the general area of Sebec Road’s crossing of Roaring Brook as unattractive scenery and “a tangled forest of scrubby trees,
832,000 Acres

barren bogs, and a flat, wide plain destitute of a cultivated spot.” “Scrubby trees,” perhaps a result of the 1825 fire, suggested a different forest than that described by Wells. If the fire did not burn into this area of Barnard or Williamsburg, then it just missed it on its northeasterly course into KIW and Ebeemee townships. By 1885 a sawmill was at the Roaring Brook crossing, but what and for whom it milled is unknown. Milo township: From Williamsburg and Sebec townships the fire continued on its eastward journey. The Piscataquis Observer of May 9, 1878 referenced the fire, but only that it swept through part of Milo township “destroying original growth trees.” Oral history captured the story of the Luther W. Keen family, farmers on the Pleasant River a little over two miles south of Brownville village, who raised a wheat crop in 1825. In the late afternoon on that fateful day, Lydia Keen and her seven-year-old son Lyman smelled and saw the smoke, and heard the roar of the approaching fire. Lydia gathered all the wool blankets, quilts and other coverings, soaked them with well water and Lyman spread them out on the roof of the house, and covered the wheat pile in the unroofed barn. Burning twigs and leaves blew into the farm area and started little fires that they put out, with Lydia drawing water and Lyman running from fire site to fire site. Luther, who had been in Brownville village to get some wheat ground, was on his way home when the fire blocked his path. He drove his cart and team of young steers into the Pleasant River and began to follow it. His animals were frightened by the noise and smoke, so he unhitched them from the cart, loaded his goods on them and lead them by hand, and arrived safely at the farm that his wife and son had saved.

The Milo village milling operations that used the birch and poplar were large and operated for many years. Beginning about 1878 Jeremiah Fenno and Sons milled birch. Two years later Parker and Bailey bought the operation and also opened an excelsior mill. In 1897 a new mill with 50 machines turned 15,000 cords of poplar per year into excelsior. It sold its birch operation to the American Thread Company (ATCo) about 1902 and operated the excelsior mill through the late 1920s. ATCo closed in 1975.

Medford township: East of Milo township, Medford township lost three quarters of its taxable property and pine. The settlers saved the large sawmill on Schoodic Stream at the mouth of the Piscataquis River, but it soon closed and in 1831 moved to Bangor. In 1858 J. Hickborn had a sawmill at the site, but it only milled to meet local needs. Log drives on Schoodic Stream were with poplar for the paper mill at Howland and those on the Penobscot River.

Maxfield township: The township was almost totally leveled and most settlers left, never to return. The Joseph McIntosh family lost a home, a barn full of hay, store and tool house, and escaped to the middle of the river. The Maine Register, State Year-book and Legislative Manuals listed no birch mills, but an old undated map has a “McIntosh mill.” Any harvested boxwood, poplar, or birch logs were within hauling distance of the Seaboard Spool and Box Company at Howland village.

Howland township, north side of the river: The only clues of the fire in this part of the township came from logging. Henry Prentiss owned 3,500–4,000 acres of Howland township’s Seboeis Stream valley, excepting the lots closest to the mouth of the stream at the Piscataquis River. The Prentiss stumpage book revealed that he offered birch contracts in 1879 to Foss, 1885 to Hathorn and Foss Company, 1886 to T.S. Heal and Sons, and 1892 Hathaway and Whittier. In 1897 Lancaster was interested in a permit, but whether or not he received one is unknown.

Mattamiscontis township (T1R7 N.W.P): Oak had a test site in Mattamiscontis township, an area he knew the fire leveled. On this lot he found that the predominant tree that seeded in was pine, a log useful to the Seaboard company and to the MacGregor spool mill across the river in South Lincoln village. He acknowledged that this one acre was unusual, but it reflected how fast pine could mature in fine soil. He found that in general birch and poplar predominated in the burn of this and nearby townships.

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72 Piscataquis County Maine Map (Houlton & Dover, ME: George Colby, 1882)
73 William R. Sawtell, Of Brownville and The Junction (Milo, Maine: Milo Printing Company, 1983) Sawtell cites “The Fire of 1825” by Ellen M. Warren of Dover, Maine. Sawtell spelled Keen as Keene, but the property deeds have Keen.
74 The Piscataquis Observer, April 1, 1897
75 H.F. Walling, Map of Piscataquis County (New York: Lee and Marsh, 1838)
76 Williams, Chase and Company, History of Penobscot County Maine, 1882
77 John E. Godfrey, History of Penobscot County: Annals of Bangor 1769–1882
Chapter 1: The Fire of 1825

The township had a small mill by 1859 on the north side of Mattamiscontis Stream at the Penobscot River. When the Roberts sold to David Plumley of Lincoln township in 1869, the deed included a mill and buildings, which were on the south side of the stream. At a minimum the mill probably cut birch. Another mill was directly across the river at South Lincoln village, where in 1871 James C. Emerson cut a variety of timber, but specialized in birch.78 John MacGregor, who worked for the Clark Thread Company, came north to the Emerson mill in 1873 and 1874 to supervise the cut for Clark. The mill cut only birch spool bars of various dimension. In 1875 MacGregor bought the mill and added a spool turning operation in order to create the actual spools.79

By 1878 MacGregor was looking to expand his operation west across the Penobscot River. He purchased the Plumley land lots 43 and 44 with the mill operation in Mattamiscontis township in October 1878. Whether or not he used the mill to saw birch is undiscovered. At the very least it was a staging and a storage area for birch MacGregor brought in from Mattamiscontis and Seboeis townships.

Brownville township: Brownville township is the westmost of the second tier townships above Milo, Medford, Maxfield, and Howland townships. East of the Williamsburg township unburned pocket, the fire lines on its north and south sides rejoined and continued easterly across the full length of Brownville township and on into Lake View township. Oak did discover a square mile of unburned land in Brownville, but he did not describe its location. He also studied the tree growth along the new B&A line that bisected the northern half of the township. He noted the fire burned the area, but many old cedars survived. Elsewhere the Jeremiah Fenno birch mill at Horseshoe Pond had birch-hauling roads that went south to Brownville. When the B&A went north in 1894, the Ebeemee Siding in the northeast corner of the township served birch loggers and perhaps the Fenno mill.

Lake View township (T4R8 N.W.P.): The fire engulfed the whole plantation. Loggers were cutting birch by 1878 and came for the poplar beginning about 1882. They drove the poplar on Schoodic Stream to the paper mills between Howland village and Great Works. In 1882 A. Bradeen had a birch mill at the outlet of Schoodic Lake. Merrick Thread Company (later ATCo) built a large mill at the southwest corner of the lake and a year later in 1889 the CPR crossed the end of the lake. A few years later it built another mill 5 miles up the lake at Five Islands on the east shore. At some point they built a third birch mill on the CPR at the southeast corner of the township on Hardy Pond. The mills closed by August 1925. In 1902, Lovejoy of Milo drove 2 million board feet of poplar on Schoodic Stream. Joining him that year with two drives of poplar was F.M. Strout of Milo.80 The following year Strout again conducted poplar drives from Schoodic Lake on Schoodic Stream.81

Seboeis township (T3R8 N.W.P.): A fire predating 1820 engulfed Seboeis township’s east and south town lines.82 In 1831 Rufus Gilman performed a lotting survey for the plantation and found all but about 200 acres of the township burned in 1825 and did not bother to complete the survey.83 Land manager Henry Prentiss offered his first birch permits for the east half of the township in 1874. Soon after the CPR cut across the middle of the southern half of the plantation, F.A. Cushman opened a birch mill at the railroad’s crossing of Seboeis Stream. His five saws and crew of 30 men processed 35 cords of birch per day; he cut for the Willimantic and the Dwelley mills, and companies in Scotland. Beginning in 1904 mill teamsters hauled birch bars east to South Lincoln village’s John MacGregor spool mill (opened 1871);84 by 1920 MacGregor owned the Cushman birch mill and it operated until 1927.

T2R8 N.W.P.: By deduction the fire burned through T2R8 N.W.P.; a function of the fire leveling Seboeis Plantation to its west and Chester township to its east. The township had no known mills.

Chester (T1R8 N.W.P.) township: Oak determined that the fire burned in Chester township. The only account of the fire reported that it stripped settler Roberts’ lot.85

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78 Joey Karikala, “MacGregor’s Spool Mill,” Lincoln.mainememory.net
80 The Piscataquis Observer, April 10, 1902 and May 15, 1902
81 The Piscataquis Observer, April 9, 1903
82 Alexander Greenwood, “Field Notes for Seboeis Township, 1820,” available at Maine State Archives; R. Holden “Field Notes for Maxfield Township 1812,” available at Maine State Archives; they mention an early fire
83 Rufus Gilman, “Field Notes for West ½ Seboeis Township, 1831,” available at Maine State Archives
84 Lincoln.mainememory.net
85 Williams, Chase and Company, *History of Penobscot County Maine*, 1882
No Chester township survey or lumbering records have been discovered.

**Oak’s unburned pocket**

Oak’s unburned pocket began about Endless Lake in T3R9 N.W.P. and continued east through T2R9 N.W.P. and into Woodville, whose eastern border is the Penobscot River. To the north of Endless Lake Oak and Cary provided one hint about the fire; it crossed the West Branch of the Penobscot River “below the Twin lakes.” That hint meant it passed into and through T3 I.P. on an unknown route. The report was silent on the townships of Hopkins Academy Grant, TAR7 W.E.L.S., and that part of Medway on the west side of the Penobscot River. Were any parts of them in the unburned pocket and where is “below the Twin lakes?”

In 1830 Joseph Kelsey’s survey started on the west bank of the Penobscot River and went west to pick up the north town line of T2R9 N.W.P. and follow it west to the road “from Milo to Pemadumcook Lake [Nahmakanta Tote Road].” Between the river and the northeast corner of T2R9 N.W.P. he found fine woods. He noted no evidence of fire along Woodville township’s north town line. He wrote that the strip of land on the north side of the township was well covered, mostly in hemlock and hardwood, and that he found the blazes from the 1825 survey at one-mile intervals. A mile west of the corner of T2R9 N.W.P. and T3R9 N.W.P. he noted burnt land for the remainder of his westward route.

**Woodville township (T2 Indian Purchase):** According to Joel Wellington’s 1826 Woodville township survey field notes, the fire never burned across Chester township’s north border into Woodville township. His notes did not include the word burn or fire and appeared to have found the surveyor’s marked trees of 1818. In 1835 Noah Barker conducted a Woodville township lotting survey starting at the northwest corner and noted the nature of the land of each lot. He mentioned burned land for lots 87, 96, 107, 109, 119, and 120. All of these lots are either on the river or about a lot on the river. Lots 87, 96, 119, and 120 are at the southeast corner area of the township, an area the fire could have drifted into from Chester township. Lots 119 and 120 are somewhat below the northeast corner. Whether the word “burn” had anything to do with the 1825 fire is unknown; it might have meant land-clearing fires, as single families owned each of these lots.

Given Wellington’s Chester township survey, Barker’s Woodville lotting survey, and Kelsey’s notes for land between the Penobscot River and the northeast corner of T2R9 N.W.P., the fire might have only torched a few lots in Woodville township’s southeast corner.

**T2R9 N.W.P.:** Given the Woodville surveys and the logging records for T3R9 N.W.P., it follows that T2R9 N.W.P. was largely unburned, excepting perhaps some areas along its southern border.

**T3R9 N.W.P.:** The Kelsey survey noted a road a mile east of the T2-T3R9 N.W.P. corner on the north town line. It led to a camp and cut of the prior year. Neal and Estes were hauling logs west along the town line destined for the Penobscot River. This suggests they went into Nollesemic Lake and down Nollesemic Stream to the West Branch of the Penobscot River.

The West and the East branches of Seboeis Stream drain nearly the totality of T3R9 N.W.P. To have driven either of these small streams 20 miles to the Piscataquis River suggests great value in mature timber, land left unburned in the 1825 fire. In 1869 lumbermen Isaac M. Bragg, Ebenezer Webster, and William E. Mann recognized the value, and sought and received a charter from the Maine state legislature to improve “the navigation of Seboeis waters” between TAR8 & R9 W.E.L.S. (Long A township) and the Piscataquis River. Improvements included dams, deepening channels, removing obstructions, erecting piers and booms so as to improve river driving. In 1881 the legislature amended the company charter so it could collect a toll on the East Branch and at Endless Lake dam on the West Branch. In 1899 the legislature passed the rights to dams and river improvements to the Seboois Dam Company.

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86 Joseph Kelsey letter to Major William Hammett dated April 1830, found at Maine State Archives; Field Notes microfilm referenced as v3 page 258, but found in the hard copy of v4, p258. The Nahmakanta Tote Road ran from Brownville north to the southwest corner of South Twin Lake and was the main route for loggers into the West Branch of the Penobscot River between the foot of Ripogenous Gorge and the Pemadumcook and Twin lakes area.

87 Joel Wellington, "Field Notes for Woodville Township, 1826," available at Maine State Archives

88 Noah Barker, "Lot map Township 2 Indian Purchase (Woodville) 1835," available at Maine State Archives

89 Noah Barker, "Field Notes for Woodville Township, 1835," available at Maine State Archives

90 Seboois is the correct spelling. It was a dam company formed in
The early presence of a dam and the absence of a pre-1900 mill operation at Endless Lake suggested that the loggers were cutting softwood saw logs. If the lake had had a mill, then the implication would have been that the 1825 fire engulfed the lake and loggers were cutting birch.91 The fire may have burned near the western edge of the Endless Lake, but it left a substantial amount of unburned timber to the east within a hauling distance of the lake.

A dam was not necessary for any logging on the drainage west of Endless Lake, because all of that land burned in 1825 and no harvestable softwood for a drive was mature enough by 1869. Similarly the dam was not necessary for any early drives starting below the lake, given that the 1825 fire burned that area and it had no logs for a drive until later in the century. Consequently, there was enough quality timber within hauling distance of Endless Lake to retain loggers interest between 1870 and 1880.

The fire probably did burn in the northwest quadrant of T3R9 N.W.P.. The Kelsey survey noted the north town line went through the burn. That Cedar Lake did not have a dam was a function of the nature of the surrounding forest and the location of the B&A. The B&A’s Long A siding was 3 miles northwest of the lake and connected by a tote road. As soon as the B&A opened in 1893, loggers for the pulp and paper companies on the Penobscot River were in the area cutting poplar, an 1825 fire product that grew in abundance in this section of Long A township. Teamsters hauled it to the Long A siding. The fire burned, at a minimum, across the upper end of Cedar Lake and most of Long A township and not enough pine and spruce grew in to warrant the expense of a dam and a lengthy log drive south. Any pine and spruce that the fire missed, which could have been south and east of Cedar Lake, teamsters could have hauled the short distances to Endless Lake or to the impoundment of the dam below Rocky Bog, which is on Cedar Lake’s outlet stream.

The preceding paragraphs define Oak’s pocket’s south edge and its southwest corner. They do not help determine if the fire moved from Long A township due east into that portion of TAR7 W.E.L.S. and Medway township on the south side of the West Branch of the Penobscot River. Nor does it confirm Oak’s thought that the northeast line of the fire crossed the West Branch of the Penobscot River "below the Twin lakes." The following section explores the remaining pocket edges.

Northeast from Guilford

The fire's northeast path from Guilford township went northerly through Willimantic and Bowerbank townships before moving to the northeast, staying east of the Barren, Chairback, White Cap, and Boardman mountains, and below Upper Jo-Mary Lake and South and North Twin lakes. It crossed the West Branch of the Penobscot River "below the Twin lakes" and burned out at an unknown location in that part of Grindstone township on the east side of the East Branch of the Penobscot River.

Elliottsville township: In Elliottsville township the fire burned into the Greenwood Ponds area, where it probably stopped without engulfing Borestone Mountain. At Greenwood Pond in 1891 W.H. Jackson of Monson cut and then split out at his steam mill 500,000 board feet of spool bars that he hauled to the Willimantic Thread Company mill.92 Immediately east of Borestone, the fire burned up Lake Onawa and on up Long Pond Stream Valley, ending a little beyond the confluence of Long Pond and Vaughn streams. A mill of unknown ownership was on Vaughn Stream.93 Given that loggers could drive both streams, the sawmill cut birch or rock maple. Additionally, in 1898 A.J. Weymouth and Sons cut 4,000 cords of poplar along the lower end of Long Pond Stream.94 Near the southeast corner of Elliottsville, the Willimantic Thread Company had a birch mill north and east of the Lake Onawa outlet.

T7R9 N.W.P.: The fire entered T7R9 N.W.P. from the southeast corner of Elliottsville and Bowerbank’s north town line. It burned over the southern half of T7R9 N.W.P. by going over Benson Mountain through the Caribou Bog area and moving easterly under Big Houston Pond into T6R9 N.W.P. (Katahdin Iron Works township).

It apparently did not burn up onto the side of the Barren-Chairback Mountain range. Beginning in 1912 Joseph Ray set up hardwood and soft wood saw mills at the foot

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90 Bangor Daily Whig and Courier, January 31, 1891
91 The Guide to the Appalachian Trail in Maine, 1934
92 Bangor Daily Whig and Courier, September 13, 1898
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1870 for the Seboois River in T6&7R7 W.E.L.S. to the north.
91 About 1956 South Branch Lumber Company set up a portable mill between the road and the lake on the west side of the outlet; it milled pine. According to Carolyn Brown, who spent her summers at the lake beginning in 1936, no old sawdust pile was never evident any place on the lake before 1956.
of Caribou Bog, and built a rail line from the CPR’s Kuroki Siding to the mills and on to Indian Pond in the valley at the foot of the Barren-Chairback range. The hardwood mill manufactured bobbins and dowels, for which his crews cut birch. Pictures of a loaded log sled suggest that at least some of the pine grew up in open areas; probably the burn. The forest background in the pictures suggests a previous burn and the forest was of mixed growth. The mill burned in October 1916 and logging quickly subsided, but in November 1920 American Thread Company (ATCo) that now owned the spool mill in Milo village bought the township, presumably for its birch.

**Katahdin Iron Works (KIW) township (T6R9 N.W.P.):** In 1825 the settlement in this township was at the north end of Silver Lake and it was not in the line of fire. The fire burned in the vicinity of the east end of the lake, burning much of KIW township’s southern half and northeast quadrant before entering the southern edge of TBR10 and R11 W.E.L.S.. When the ironworks developed at the outlet of Silver Lake in 1843, loggers began harvesting the hardwood for the charcoal production. This suggests that they were able to cut in an unburned area, probably in the Big White Brook valley in the town’s northwest quadrant, as no hard wood in the burn area would have been substantial enough 17 years after the 1825 fire.

The iron works closed in 1890 and seven years later Perkins and Danforth Spoolwood Company moved into the ironworks buildings and cut birch, until they exhausted the supply in 1911. At the township’s southeast corner was the Livingston mill and a mill at Moorsville, both of which are presumed to have been birch mills because they were away from drivable waterways. Another unnamed mill was a half-mile west of the township’s northeast corner and just over its north town line. At an undisclosed KIW township location on an acre in the 1825 fire, Oak found 156 birch with an average diameter of 10.5 inches and all of them over six inches in diameter. The 212 maple trees were all a little less than six inches in diameter. This was on an acre that had not been cut since the 1825 fire.

**Ebemee township (T5R9 N.W.P.):** The fire crossed the full length of KIW township’s east town line and engulfed Ebemee township. On the east end of the south line of Ebemee township was a birch mill on the south edge of Horseshoe Pond of the Ebemee lakes; the B&A’s Ebeme siding was a short distance to the east. A haul road connected this mill to Brownville Junction and the B&A. **T4R9 N.W.P.:** The fire burned through the length of Ebemee’s east town line and Lake View township’s north town line into T4R9 N.W.P., and engulfed the totality of the township. The Stetsons owned the western half of the township and the northeast corner. Their stumpage records beginning about 1890 listed birch contracts for cutting throughout their property. Henry Prentiss offered birch stumpage contracts for the township’s southeast quadrant, which he owned. Lewis H. Park set up a birch mill c.1898 at the West Seboois siding on the B&A above the head of Seboosis Lake.

**TBR11 & TBR10 W.E.L.S.:** The fire swept across Ebemee’s northern border into TBR11 W.E.L.S.’s southeast most corner and into the southern area of TBR10 W.E.L.S. where it remained south of Saddle Rock and Wilkie mountains’ ridge. A birch mill was just north of the south town line in the shadow Saddle Rock Mountain. Beyond the ridge the fire crossed the East Branch of the Pleasant River, went over the lower few miles of Wangan Brook that flows into the north end of Upper Ebemee Lake, and then entered Long A township’s southwest quadrant.

**Long A township (TAR8 & R9 W.E.L.S.):** Complicating the understanding of fire lines was another fire that predated the 1825 fire. The Commissioners 1822 survey of the north town line of T3R9 N.W.P., Long A township’s south town line, noted much of it previously burned, but it was covered with young wood.

The 1830 Kelsey survey followed the south town line of Long A township and he noted burned land, pockets of hemlock and hardwood, and no young growth up through his stopping point at the Nahmakanta Tote

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95 R. Michael White, “History of Ray Town,” a website
96 R. Michael White, “History of Ray Town,” a website
97 The spelling of Seboois with “oo” as opposed to “oe” was the spelling used by the Bangor and Aroostook Railroad. The Canadian Pacific Railroad spelled the same word with “oe,” Seboeis. A review of maps at the Osher Map Library, University of Southern Maine offered the following: 1877 – Seboisis, 1879–1899 Hubbard maps – Seeboosis, 1881 – Sebocis, 1883 – Seboelis, 1894 – Sebois, 1902 – Seboosis, 1911 – Seboosis; 1915 – Seboosis, 1924 – Seboosis, 1926 and after – Seboois. For the lake and stream, Seboeis is the spelling in this text.
98 Land Commissioners, “Field Report Long A Township, 1827,” available at Maine State Archives
99 Commissioners report, “Field Notes T3 R9 NWP, 1822,” available at Maine State Archives
Road, which was within a mile of the southwest corner of Long A township. Isaac Small’s 1836 survey indicated the fire consumed much of Long A township and drifted north off its northeast corner into T3 I.P. In 1893 Oak and Cary found abundant pine growing in the burn in the B&A railroad corridor. Their butts were good for clapboards and the remainder went to box manufacturers. On another acre they studied in 1893 were substantial amounts of birch and cedar, both ready for harvest as was all of the poplar.

On Long A township’s southern border a birch mill was at West Seboois siding (c.1898–1914). Farther up the rail line was Long A siding with haul roads extending to the north end of Cedar Lake. The township had a great deal of poplar that loggers were cutting in 1893 for the pulp mill at Great Works just south of Old Town on the Penobscot River. This wood reached the mill via the rail line when it opened in 1893.

Another three miles north of Long A siding on the B&A was Perkins Siding on the southeast shore of South Twin Lake. Perkins and Danforth Spoolwood Company built a large birch mill here, finishing it as the B&A completed the rail line through the area. Haul roads from the mill went southeast across the southwest corner of T3 I.P. into Hopkins Academy Grant township and back into Long A township at the southwest side of Nollesemic Lake.

**Hopkins Academy Grant township:** Given the Perkins and Danforth logging operations, the fire passed west to east into at least part of the western portion of Hopkins Academy Grant township. The fire did not burn through the township into its eastern neighbor TAR7 W.E.L.S. Whether or not the fire passed across its northern town line into T3 I.P. is not clear on the basis of any surveys of the township.

The Kelsey survey of 1830 suggests that loggers had made their way south on Nollesemic Stream and down Nollesemic Lake and were cutting in the vicinity of the east end of Hopkins’s south town line. 23 years after the fire (1848) John Webber ran Hopkins Academy Grant township’s boundary lines. Webber did not use the word “burnt” or “fire” in his report or field notes. Webber noted “much of the timber” had been cut, but offered no explanation as to where on the borderlines.

**TAR7 W.E.L.S.:** The commissioner’s TAR7 W.E.L.S. survey of December 1825, performed by Joseph Norris, noted no burned land. Norris started at the northeast corner of the township and went south on the east line to its southeast corner on the T2R9 N.W.P. north town line. Here he went west on the line to the southeast corner. From this corner he went due north and intersected the West Branch of the Penobscot River 330 feet above Grand Falls. He marked or remarked a tree with his mark every 320 rods (one mile). Andrew McMillan’s marks from his survey of the west town line in November 1825 were present. Neither McMillan nor Norris mentioned any signs of a recent burn in their field notes, and neither of them ran the north town line. The field notes by Norris list an uncut forest, one with good trees, but few pine. Based on these surveys, the fire did not cross the west town line of TAR7 N.W.P.

**T3 Indian Purchase (T3 I.P.):** Since the fire did not cross the West Branch of the Penobscot River in TAR7 W.E.L.S., its crossing “south of the Twin lakes” was some place in T3 I.P. The fire passed out of Long A township or Hopkins Academy Grant township or both into T3 I.P. In 1836 Issac Small surveyed all 128 lots in the township. He noted either “burnt land” or “old burnt land” or both if it existed on any lot. When he used the term “burnt land” he made no comments about tree growth. For “old burnt land” he simply wrote “small growth” or “bushes of different kinds” or “growth small mix.” For all the lots in T3 I.P. on the south side of the river and east of Quakish Brook Small applied neither burn label.

Using lots with the “burnt land” label suggested a fire path. The fire exited Long A township’s northeast corner across T3 I.P’s south town line in lot 121 and perhaps lot 122 just off the northwest corner of Hopkins Academy township. The fire line shifted slightly east into lots 114–115, and moved north through lots 107–109 into lots 100–102; these lot pairs are all split by Quakish Brook. West of lot 102 are lots 97 and 96, which border the south side of the West Branch of the Penobscot River between the outlet of Elbow Lake and the inlet of Quakish Lake. Opposite these lots on the other side of the river are lots 65 and 66.

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100 Joseph Kelsey, “Filed Notes for Long A township, 1830,” available at Maine State Archives
101 Isaac Small’s 1836 survey of T3 I.P. indicated the fire touched its southern boundary in several spots on the eastern side. Isaac Small, “Field Notes for Survey of summer 1836 of T3 IND and Upper Section of T4 IND”
102 Charles E. Oak report of 1894
103 Charles E. Oak report of 1894
104 John Webber, “Field Note Hopkins Academy, 1848,” available at Maine State Archives
Oak's pocket is now defined. The unburned land started on the edge of the West Branch at the east side of the mouth of Quakish Brook, extended down the West Branch to the Penobscot River, and south to the Woodville and Chester townships' shared town line. Within the pocket were the townships of Woodville, Medway, TAR7 W.E.L.S., the east half of Hopkins Academy Grant, T3 I.P. east of Quakish Stream, the east two-thirds of T3R9 N.W.P., and T2R9 N.W.P.

Once across the West Branch, the path of the fire to the northeast was not clear, but a large block of lots (30–32, 39–42, 49–52) labeled “old burnt land” were where a fire crossed the eastern town line into Grindstone township.105

Grindstone township: Oak and Cary acknowledged that north of the West Branch the fire burned into the area consumed by either a 1795 fire or a 1803 fire or both. Oak wrote that he did not know if or how far the 1825 fire burned other than it reached into Grindstone township (T1R7 W.E.L.S.). Their one acre 1893 study in the township found a predominance of pine and spruce and only four birches. However, elsewhere in the township the abundance of birch attracted J. Lewis and Sons, who opened a spool and pegwood mill on the B&A rail line by at least 1897.106 Some time after 1902 the American Thread Company moved in and built a mill on the B&A near its crossing of the East Branch of the Penobscot River. Another 15 miles north on the tracks at Stacyville about 1894, Valentine and Soper opened a last block mill. The wood source for this mill was from a different burn area to the north.

The commissioner's report did not reveal Oak's and Cary's reasoning for believing the 1825 fire burned into the area, but the Lewis mill may have been one clue for them. If the 1795 and 1803 fires burned into the area and if the 1825 fire did not, then the birch that seeded into the burn would have been about 98 years old by the time rail service reached the area in late 1893. Such trees are well past the maturity desired by the birch mills according to Oak and Cary, who wrote that a birch 30–40 years old was suitable for harvesting and those at 50 years provided the maximum amount of useable wood. The life span of a white birch is 80–100 years. If the trees in either

Northwest from Guilford

From Guilford township the fire's northwesterly path included Willimantic township's southwest corner, Elliottsville township's southeast edge, Monson and Blanchard townships, and Shirley township's southeast quadrant.

Willimantic: After passing from Guilford into Willimantic township, the fire line stayed below Willimantic village, where in the early 1800s the Vaughn family put up a sawmill and clapboard mill at Big Wilson falls on Big Wilson Stream 5 miles from its mouth at the southwest corner of Sebec Lake. The mill received its logs from hauls by teamsters and from drives on the stream, which drains from the north through the western half of Elliottsville township. The settlers found the land to be poor for farming, so they cut off the timber and then could not sell the land, so they moved out. By 1848 Vaughn's mill was in ruins.107 Had the fire burned through the area to the north of the village, 23 years worth of timber would not have been there to mill.

The poor farmland settlers found to the north of Willimantic village extended north to the Little Wilson Stream drainage. Nelson Savage set up a sawmill on the stream above Little Wilson Falls in 1824, other families moved in, found poor farming, cut off all the timber, and abandoned the area by 1848. Had the 1825 fire burned through the area they would have had nothing merchantable to cut.

Monson: The area at the corner of Willimantic, Monson, Abbot and Guilford townships was in the fire line that extended east along Monson's south town line and continued northwesterly on across Monson township, exiting its northwest corner to end in the southeastern quadrant of Shirley. The fire probably did not burn much of Monson's northeast quadrant given its proximity to

105 “Township No. 3 Indian Purchase, 1836,” surveyed by Isaac J. Small, courtesy of James W. Sewall Company.
106 The year 1897 is the first year the mill appears in The Maine Register, State Year-book and Legislative Manual.
107 Amasa Loring, History of Piscataquis County Maine from Its Earliest Settlement to 1880 (Portland, ME: Hoyt, Fogg & Donham, 1880)
Willimantic village and Big Wilson Stream. In 1872 Davis wrote: “In this town [Monson], though no buildings were destroyed, great damage was done by the burning of large tracts of timberland. Many of the buildings were in great danger, and it was only by the direct interposition of Providence, that they were saved.” Varney in his 1881 gazetteer reiterated that the fire did a great deal of damage in Monson’s woodland.

The lot structure and ownership in Monson township included many land owners, as opposed to a few land owners holding land for logging purposes only. Teamsters hauled most of Monson township’s birch and poplar to the mills in the villages of Blanchard, Upper Abbot and North Guilford or to a B&A siding between Shirley and Upper Abbot village. In the mid-1870s Monson village had a birch mill for a few years.

The birch mill at North Guilford village on Davis Pond, just off Monson’s township’s southeast corner, in 1892 had 800 cords of birch to cut into spool bars. In late May and June of 1893 crews in the Davis Pond drainage were peeling poplar for the excelsior mill in Milo village. Other poplar drives on Davis Brook, which runs along Monson township’s south end of its east town line, occurred in 1894, 1896, 1902, 1903, 1911, 1913, and 1921. An Upper Abbot village excelsior mill operated from 1876 through 1912. Blanchard village had at least one active birch or poplar mill from 1883 into the 1920s.

Blanchard township: The fire burned through Monson township and across the full length of its west town line into Blanchard township. It consumed the forests in Blanchard’s southeast quadrant as far west as Bolt Brook. A crew landed a 1901 cut of 3,000 plus cords of poplar on Thorn Brook in the area of the Blanchard-Kingsbury town line and drove it to the Piscataquis River. The Piscataquis Observer reported that the 1906 poplar cut cleaned up all that was left in Blanchard township south of Russell Mountain, the southeastern quadrant. Two years later a crew cut the remaining poplar on Little Russell Mountain, hauled it to the river and drove it to the Upper Abbot village excelsior mill.

The presence of mills, their ongoing operation, and log drives suggest the fire did not reach the southwest quadrant. Thorn Brook, which drains much of Blanchard’s southwestern quadrant, had a mill by 1833 that cut softwood and another softwood mill from 1831 to 1892 near the mouth of Thorn Brook on Kingsbury Stream. In 1897 Guilford Lumber Company drove softwood saw logs (over two million board feet) on the stream for its Guilford village mill.

The fire apparently either did not burn or left a small pocket between the two Russell mountains, for in mid-April 1917 a 22-foot in circumference pine still stood. In 1867 John and Gardner Hilton logged the area and did not cut it because it was too large to drive. Guilford Lumber Company cut in the same area in the 1890s and also left it standing.

Blanchard’s northeast quadrant probably burned and as did some of its northwest quadrant. Bald Mountain Stream and the West Branch of the Piscataquis River drain the northwestern portion of the northwest quadrant; land owned by Gilman. For years Gilman cut and drove saw logs from his land suggesting the 1825 fire stopped short of this area. East of the confluence of the river and stream, loggers cut and drove a substantial amount of poplar for the Blanchard village excelsior mill and the I.M. Courier excelsior mill at Upper Abbot village. Currier cut poplar for many years in this area of the West Branch.

Area loggers and farmers cut birch for the Blanchard village birch mill, which opened in 1882 and operated through 1925. Some of the mill’s birch likely came from the western side of Monson.

Whether the fire burned across the summit mass of Blanchard’s Russell Mountain, just south of the center of Blanchard township, and then stopped, is a matter of speculation. Loring’s 1882 history noted that its blueberry crop helped to sustain the pre-1824 settlers. Perhaps the 1825 fire burned the mountaintop and enlarged the blueberry area; farmers continued to conduct yearly operations.

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108 Charles Davis, Semi-Centennial Address, Monson, April 22, 1872
109 George Jones Varney, A Gazetteer of the State of Maine (Boston: B.B. Russell, 1881)
110 Piscataquis County Maine Map (Dover, ME: Houlton & George Colby, 1882)
111 The Piscataquis Observer, March 31 and May 19, 1892
112 The Piscataquis Observer, June 1, 1893
113 The Piscataquis Observer, April 23, 1908
114 The Piscataquis Observer, April 12, 1917
115 Piscataquis County Maine Map (Dover, ME: Houlton & George Colby, 1882)
bunds that took place into at least the 1920s. Berry harvests were part of the sustenance of the local economy.117

**Shirley township:** The fire burned into Shirley township’s southeast quadrant from both Blanchard and Monson. It stayed south of Little Wilson Stream, where Shirley’s first settlers built on its headwaters in 1824, and probably below Shirley Mills at the foot of East Shirley Bog. It reached at least as far west as the East Branch of the Piscataquis River. Few drives ever took place on the East Branch, perhaps because the 1825 fire burned through its valley. At the foot of East Bog John Eveleth’s mill was sawing logs hauled or driven in from the north in the 1870s. The operations expanded when the B&A reached the mill in 1884. Below East Bog in 1910 Lamont Forbus cut and drove poplar down the river to the excelsior mill at Upper Abbot village.

By 1835 loggers were cutting in the western half of Shirley and driving wood out on the West Branch of the Piscataquis River. In 1835–1836 the owners sold the stumpage in the western half and loggers cut a great deal of wood over the next 30 years.118 Had the 1825 fire burned into the western portion, such a substantial amount of timber would not have existed.

**West from Guilford**

The fire’s westerly path from Guilford township passed into Moorestown, later known as Abbot township, where it burned at least one barn, and continued on through Kingsbury, and died out soon after crossing the Mayfield town line.

**Abbot township:** The Piscataquis River splits the township from its northwest corner to its southeast corner. The 1825 fire burned on both sides of the river. By 1882 small lots covered the whole of the township and, with the exception of the western border, no landowner held more than a couple of lots. Consequently, some of the birch and poplar for the mills at Upper Abbot village came from the lots of small landowners. In 1876 Upper Abbot village had an excelsior mill and a birch mill. In 1882 Currier’s excelsior mill had 700 cords of its popular drive hung in a jam above town.119 He drove for at least the years 1882 to 1913 and used about 800 cords per year,120 suggesting much of the popular his mill used was not within hauling distance. Some of the popular came from the northwest corner of Abbot township121 and some came from his lands on the south side of Bald Mountain Stream and north of Russell Mountain in the northern half of Blanchard township. The southeast corner of Blanchard township might have been another source of wood for these mills. In spring 1896 his mill turned out nine tons of excelsior per day.122 The excelsior mill closed c.1913.

**Kingsbury township:** Kingsbury Stream, also known as the South Branch of the Piscataquis River, which flows into the Piscataquis River at Lower Abbot village, drains the southern half of Kingsbury township. The eastern end of the valley is easily accessed from Guilford village. Substantial birch logging and milling took place along the full length of the Kingsbury Stream valley. After being closed for the winter, the cutting and hauling season, E.A. Flanders reopened his birch mill on Kingsbury Stream near Thorne Brook in late April 1887. His crew cut and milled 800 to 1,000 cords of birch.123 In 1890 Flanders cut 450,000 spool bars some place in Kingsbury, perhaps at Kingsbury Pond, and then he reopened the mill at Thorne Brook.124 Farther west on Kingsbury Stream near Bear Brook, a short south-flowing stream in the middle of Kingsbury township, L.A. Small had some form of a birch milling operation at an unknown location. During the winter of at least 1892, he was dealing with 40 cords of birch a day.125 Guilford Lumber Company, which opened in 1892 in a new steam-powered mill in Guilford village, owned land in Kingsbury and cut it. Given that the company’s loggers cut birch and hauled it to Guilford village, the operation probably took place in the Kingsbury Stream valley.

About May 3, 1893 the boom of popular behind the Kingsbury Pond dam broke and 1,800 cords went down river.126 The same thing happened again April 20, 1896 to the popular boom of S.D. Rice.127 From about 1900 to 1910 2 to 3 million board feet of popular per year went down

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118 Amasa Loring, *History of Piscataquis County Maine from Its Earliest Settlement to 1880* (Portland, ME: Hoyt, Fogg & Donham, 1880)
119 *The Piscataquis Observer,* May 11, 1882
120 *The Piscataquis Observer,* April 21, 1898
121 *The Piscataquis Observer,* April 21, 1910
122 *The Piscataquis Observer,* April 23, 1896
123 *The Piscataquis Observer,* April 28, 1887
124 *The Industrial Journal,* April 25, 1890
125 *The Piscataquis Observer,* March 17, 1892
126 *The Piscataquis Observer,* May 4, 1893
127 *The Piscataquis Observer,* April 23, 1896
Kingsbury Stream for the pulp and paper mills on the Penobscot River.\textsuperscript{128} In 1901 log drivers took 3,000 cords of poplar down Thorn Brook, presumably that section of the brook in Kingsbury township.\textsuperscript{129}

The Kingsbury stage road in about 1833 ran from Athens village due north to the Kingsbury Pond outlet and continued north near the west edge of Kingsbury township. At some place above Kingsbury Pond the road passed through 9 miles of mature forest that loggers had not touched. Thus, given the fire burned into Mayfield township on Kingsbury’s western border, it probably crossed the town line in the vicinity of Kingsbury Pond.

\textbf{Southwest from Guilford}

The fire’s southwest route touched the townships south of Kingsbury and west of Sangerville: Parkman, Wellington, Ripley,\textsuperscript{130} and Harmony.

\textbf{Parkman township:} From Guilford, the fire’s southwest path crossed the Piscataquis River and moved into Parkman, destroying a house and five barns.\textsuperscript{131} Loring did not identify the locations of the destroyed buildings, but the first settlers (c.1812) built their farms on what became known as Pingree Center Stream at about the mid-point of the township and then farther down stream (easterly) at Parkman Center. Consequently, the destroyed buildings were probably in the middle portion of the township. No birch or excelsior mills ever developed within the township, which suggests no large burned forested areas remained for later harvesting.

Both of Parkman’s first settlements had early saw-mills that flood waters washed away in 1828, but owners rebuilt, milled a small quantity of logs, and still operated in 1882. This suggests the fire left some number of unburned pockets that were close enough to the mills for teamsters to haul in logs, generally in the range of 4 miles for oxen or a couple of miles with horses. Some logs might have come down Pingree Stream on the spring freshet, but the stream is small and the upper mill only ran on the spring runoff.

The fire probably burned north of Pingree Stream given that in 1878–1879 the C.E. Valentine mill at Lower Abbot village on Kingsbury Stream cut blocks from rock (sugar) maple, some of which came from Parkman.\textsuperscript{132} Loggers cut it for shoe blocks in other burn areas, like Benson Pond in Willimantic.

Whether or not the fire burned into the southeast corner of the township is unknown.

\textbf{Ripley township (later Cambridge township):} At a minimum the fire burned over the mid-to-western portion of Parkman’s south town line into Ripley township, which the state of Maine reapportioned in 1834. Here it destroyed nine barns and 11 homes, leaving one, the “Lane House,” unburned at what eventually became known as Cambridge village in the northwest corner of the township. “The fire came so near the Jonathan and Mary Watson family home that they had to take refuge in the middle of a plowed piece of ground. Mrs. Watson had just been baking and had a loaf of brown bread in the fireplace oven. After the fire had passed, they found the loaf of bread in the ashes and the hungry children ate it for their supper. The only thing they were able to save was the family’s Holy Bible. Other people sought protection in streams and plowed fields, and no lives were lost.”\textsuperscript{133}

\textbf{Ripley township:} Where the fire crossed the Cambridge south town line, the Sebasticook River, into Ripley township is unknown. All that Oak wrote was that Ripley township burned. Warren Ramsdell who lived at the southwest corner of Ripley township, a few lots west of Todd’s Corner, saved his home with water from a nearby spring that had gone dry in the draught, but for some reason started to flow again a week before the fire.\textsuperscript{134} “The fire was followed by a great epidemic of typhoid fever caused by stagnant pools of water and whole families were wiped out by this terrible disease. Yet, the survivors of the fire and epidemic continued on, rebuilding their houses and barns and the small town of Ripley.”

Given the fire’s proximity to Ripley’s southern town line it might have burned into St. Albans\textsuperscript{135} and the

\begin{itemize}
\item 128 Chapter two has additional information.
\item 129 The Piscataquis Observer, April 11, 1901
\item 130 In 1825 Ripley was a typical-size township of roughly 6 by 6 miles with its northern border that of Parkman. In 1834 the state legislature re-divided the township with the northern half being Cambridge and the southern half being Ripley.
\item 131 Amasa Loring, History of Piscataquis County Maine from Its Earliest Settlement to 1880 (Portland, ME: Hoyt, Fogg & Donham, 1880)
\item 132 Amasa Loring, History of Piscataquis County Maine from Its Earliest Settlement to 1880 (Portland, ME: Hoyt, Fogg & Donham, 1880)
\item 133 The Official Town of Cambridge, Maine Website; cambridgemaine.com
\item 134 Sandra Wintle Blaney, Entering Ripley (Dexter, ME: Dexter Print Shop, August 2002); Todd’s corner is the area at the junction of routes 152 and 23 in Ripley.
\item 135 No St. Albans historical information mentioned the fire.
\end{itemize}
The road in Harmony township not far from its northeast corner, lost to the fire all the timber he had ready to build his home. The fire died out in Harmony after it consumed four houses and five barns at unspecified locations, but probably close to Harmony village.

Given a potential change in wind direction as mentioned by Loring, Herrick’s loss, the extent of Harmony township settlement by 1825, and the substantial sawmills at Harmony and Mainstream villages, the cited property loss may have been only in the northeast quadrant. The Harmony village sawmill still had a yearly output of 500,000 board feet of lumber and 150,000 shingles in 1882. At Mainstream the mill also sawed a half million feet of lumber per year and a million shingles. Neither village had a birch or excelsior mill. The volume of milled soft wood suggests the fire did not reach beyond the northeast corner of the township.

**Wellington township:** From either Cambridge or Parkman townships or both the fire burned into Wellington township, but determining the line of fire is speculative. The township’s mills’ locations, longevity, and log volume suggest the fire may not have burned too far into Wellington township from its eastern border. The township’s first settlers arrived in 1814 on the western side, probably in its southwest corner on Higgins Stream, the source of needed waterpower. John Davis built an early sawmill at Wellington Corner and then John and Cotton Weeks set up another sawmill on the same stream. In 1882 Watson had a sawmill on Higgins Stream just below Wellington village and C. Huntress had a shingle mill farther down stream. These mills did not handle birch.

Some information suggests the fire might have burned southerly from Kingsbury Stream valley into the area of Carleton Brook that runs east below the north border Wellington township. Loggers for Guilford Man-

136 No materials at the Corinna public library mentioned the fire and the town has no records of town meeting notes from 1825 and 1826.
137 Frank Spizuoco and Carol Fuertado, *Dexter – Spirit of an Age* (Dexter Historical Society, 1999)
139 Frank Spizuoco and Carol Fuertado, *Dexter – Spirit of an Age* (Dexter Historical Society, 1999)
140 The Official Town of Cambridge, Maine Website; cambridgemeaine.com
141 “History of Harmony Maine from the East Somerset County Register 1911–12” (Auburn, ME: compiled by Chatto and Turner), p.106–110; and the George N. Colby map atlas of *Somerset County Maine 1883*; and *Harmony, Maine: Celebrating 200 Years*, Paul Herrick, editor (Harmony Historical Society, 2005)
142 Amasa Loring, *History of Piscataquis County Maine from Its Earliest Settlement to 1880* (Portland, ME: Hoyt, Fogg & Donham, 1880)
143 No label for such appears in the *Somerset County 1883 Maine Historical Atlas* or Colby’s map of Somerset County and no indicators appear in *The Maine Register, State Year-book and Legislative Manuals* 1872–1899
144 This sawmill information came from *Piscataquis County Maine Map* (Houlton & Dover, ME: George Colby, 1882)
ufacturing in Guilford village cut birch in the eastern portion of this drainage. In 1912 and 1913 paper company loggers drove, what might have been poplar growing in the burn, on Carleton Stream into Kingsbury Stream from an unknown location.145

How far west in the Carleton Stream drainage the fire might have burned is unknown, but given the location of sawmills it might have stopped in the vicinity of the confluence of Carleton and Cook brooks. Settlers arrived c.1820 in the township's northeast corner and Henry Carleton built a sawmill in 1826 on what became known as Carlton Stream.146 J.W. Farrer had a saw and shingle mill at the confluence of Carlton and Cook streams and T.C. Frost had a sawmill a mile or so east on Carlton Stream in 1882. One of these mills might have sawed birch in 1891 for the Keene Brothers. They had a crew of nine men and six horses cut birch, which they had cut some place in Wellington, and then hauled them to the L.C. Bates Company in Guilford village.147

The amount of acreage burned

The information in the preceding paragraphs was available in 1894, when Oak and Cary estimated the burned acreage at 832,000 acres. How they might have used this information is unknown, and they offered no insight as to which townships or portions of townships they included in their estimate. These two men were well respected in their profession and well qualified to make a trusted estimate.

The text in this document suggests an approximated burned acreage of 798,155 acres, about the same as the Oak and Cary estimate.148 The chart with the calculations includes the estimated percentage of each of the 50 townships burned. A “100%” figure does not mean that the fire blackened every inch of the township nor does any other lesser percentage mean that percentage was totally blackened. Oak and Cary informed their readers that the fire left small pockets, like an unburned square mile (640 acres) in eastern Brownville township; I did not subtract acreage for such parcels.

The estimate in this document includes no acreage for Dover, Sangerville, Atkinson, and Charlestown townships, for which one might reason the fire burned. I assumed that the barn that burned in Dover township was on the north side of the river, because there are no indicators of the fire being on the river’s south side in this area. For the other townships I have no information about the fire or clues to the fire. However, every general township-based Maine map outlining the rough borders of this fire includes Dover, Sangerville, and Atkinson.

This was a mammoth fire in terms of acreage burned, 832,000 and one of Maine’s largest. By comparison the Maine fires of 1947 burned 220,000 acres.

145 The Piscataquis Observer, April 4, April 25, and May 16, 1912; April 17, April 24, and May 8, 1913
146 George Jones Varney, A Gazetteer of the State of Maine (Boston: B.B. Russell, 1881)
147 The Industrial Journal, February 20, 1891
148 The town acreages are the land acres with the principle source being Stanley Bearce Atwood’s, The Length and Breadth of Maine (Orono, ME: University of Maine Press, 2004)
### Table of townships with estimated burned acreage in 1825 fire

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<th>Township</th>
<th>Burned Acres</th>
<th>Land Acreage</th>
<th>% Land Burned</th>
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<tr>
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<td>1,316</td>
<td>26,323</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bradford</td>
<td>26,400</td>
<td>26,400</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hudson</td>
<td>6,114</td>
<td>24,454</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charlestown</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>26,292</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Garland</td>
<td>1,622</td>
<td>27,027.00</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dexter</td>
<td>2,875</td>
<td>23,955</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>East from Guilford on north side of river:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1st two tiers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guilford</td>
<td>21,939</td>
<td>21,939</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foxcroft</td>
<td>22,631</td>
<td>22,631</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sebec</td>
<td>24,658</td>
<td>24,658</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mattamiscontis</td>
<td>8,237</td>
<td>8237</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Willimantic</td>
<td>29,785</td>
<td>29,785</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bowerbank</td>
<td>20,390</td>
<td>20,390</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barnard</td>
<td>9,754</td>
<td>16,256</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Williamsburg</td>
<td>9,788</td>
<td>16,314</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brownville</td>
<td>29,959</td>
<td>29,959</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lake View</td>
<td>25,299</td>
<td>25,299</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seboeis</td>
<td>23,886</td>
<td>23,886</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T2R8 NWP</td>
<td>25,830</td>
<td>25,830</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chester</td>
<td>18,259</td>
<td>18,259</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Chapter 1: The Fire of 1825

The fire of 1825 was one of the most devastating events in the history of the town. The town was burned down, and the burned area covered a large portion of the town's land. The following table shows the data on the burned acres, land acreage, and the percentage of land burned in different townships.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Township</th>
<th>Burned Acres</th>
<th>Land Acreage</th>
<th>% Land Burned</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Northeast from Guilford</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elliottsville</td>
<td>7,973</td>
<td>31,891</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T7R9 NWP</td>
<td>4330.2</td>
<td>21,651</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KIW</td>
<td>15,026</td>
<td>25,043</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ebeemee (T5R9 NWP)</td>
<td>19,980</td>
<td>19,980</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T4R9 NWP</td>
<td>19,993</td>
<td>19,993</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T3R9 NWP</td>
<td>11,819</td>
<td>35,815</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TBR11</td>
<td>1,230</td>
<td>24,590</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TBR10</td>
<td>5,903</td>
<td>23,612</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Long A</td>
<td>18,322</td>
<td>20,358</td>
<td>90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hopkins Academy</td>
<td>6,499</td>
<td>12,998</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T3 Indian Purchase</td>
<td>8,009</td>
<td>32,037</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grindstone</td>
<td>4,728</td>
<td>23,642</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Northwest from Guilford</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monson</td>
<td>19,299</td>
<td>29,241</td>
<td>66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shirley</td>
<td>8,048</td>
<td>32,192</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blanchard</td>
<td>22,896</td>
<td>30,528</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>West from Guilford</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abbot</td>
<td>21,421</td>
<td>21,421</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kingsbury</td>
<td>17,037</td>
<td>22,716</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mayfield</td>
<td>1382.4</td>
<td>27,648</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Southwest from Guilford</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parkman</td>
<td>27,136</td>
<td>27,136</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wellington</td>
<td>6,091</td>
<td>24,365</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cambridge</td>
<td>10,899</td>
<td>10,899</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ripley</td>
<td>14,995</td>
<td>14,995</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harmony</td>
<td>10,222</td>
<td>30,977</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Estimated burned acreage</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>798,155</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The 1825 fire stopped in the valley a few miles down stream from Long Pond. From here to White Cap and Boardman mountains loggers cut and drove softwood saw logs and pulpwood for nearly 100 years. During the drive all you could see from here was a mass of logs. (photo from a Bill Geller exploration)
Chapter 1: The Fire of 1825

Brownville village 1870s. (William P. Dean photographer, courtesy of the Maine Historical Preservation Commission, Augusta, Maine, (MHPC.S.7183))