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A Cage For John Sawyer The Poor Of Otisfield, Maine

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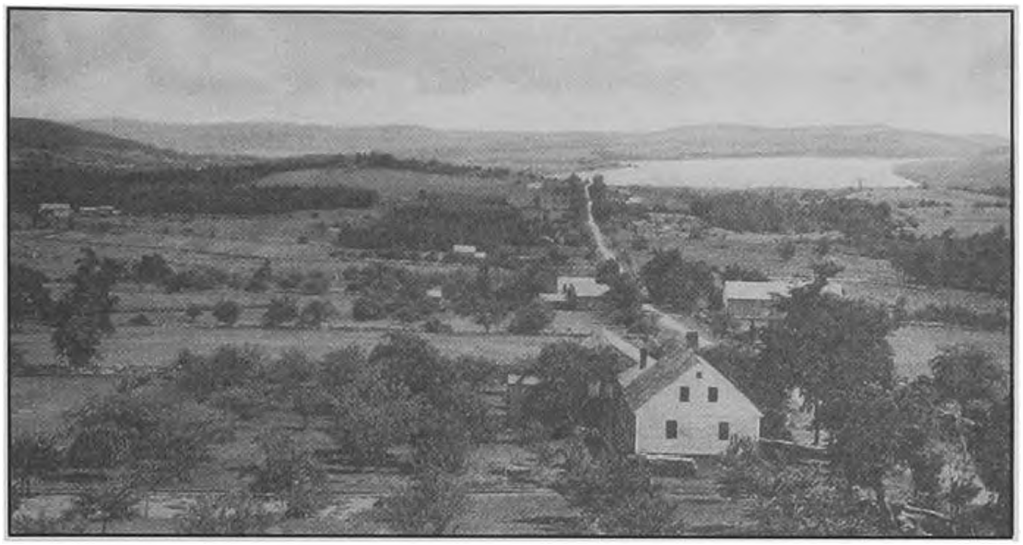
THE POOR OF OTISFIELD, MAINE

Each year from 1790 to the end of the Civil War the townspeople of Otisfield wrestled with the dilemma of town relief. Examining this issue from two perspectives – the town taxpayers and the town poor – Jean Hankins sheds light on the politics, the finances, the hardships, the family life, and the burdens of responsibility in Maine's nineteenth-century small towns.

On the first Monday in April, 1826, the good people of Otisfield, Maine, met together, as they had each spring since 1798. Their task was to conduct the town's affairs for the next year. After electing the town officers and voting appropriations for highways and schools, the voters turned to one last piece of business. That final duty was to make some arrangements for the town's paupers, a job the citizens faced every year. In 1826 they decided, as they usually did, to auction off each pauper to the lowest bidder.[1] Included in this group was John Sawyer, aged fifty-seven, who had been confined to a cage for the past fourteen years.[2]

Although the early nineteenth century was a generally prosperous period for Maine's farmers, the number of poor people in Otisfield, and the amount the town was obliged to spend on them, had been growing steadily in the twenty years since 1806, when the town spent its first sum on poor relief.[3] But except for John Sawyer, who was insane, Otisfield had few persons requiring full relief until 1816, when the number of residents supported by the town jumped dramatically. The



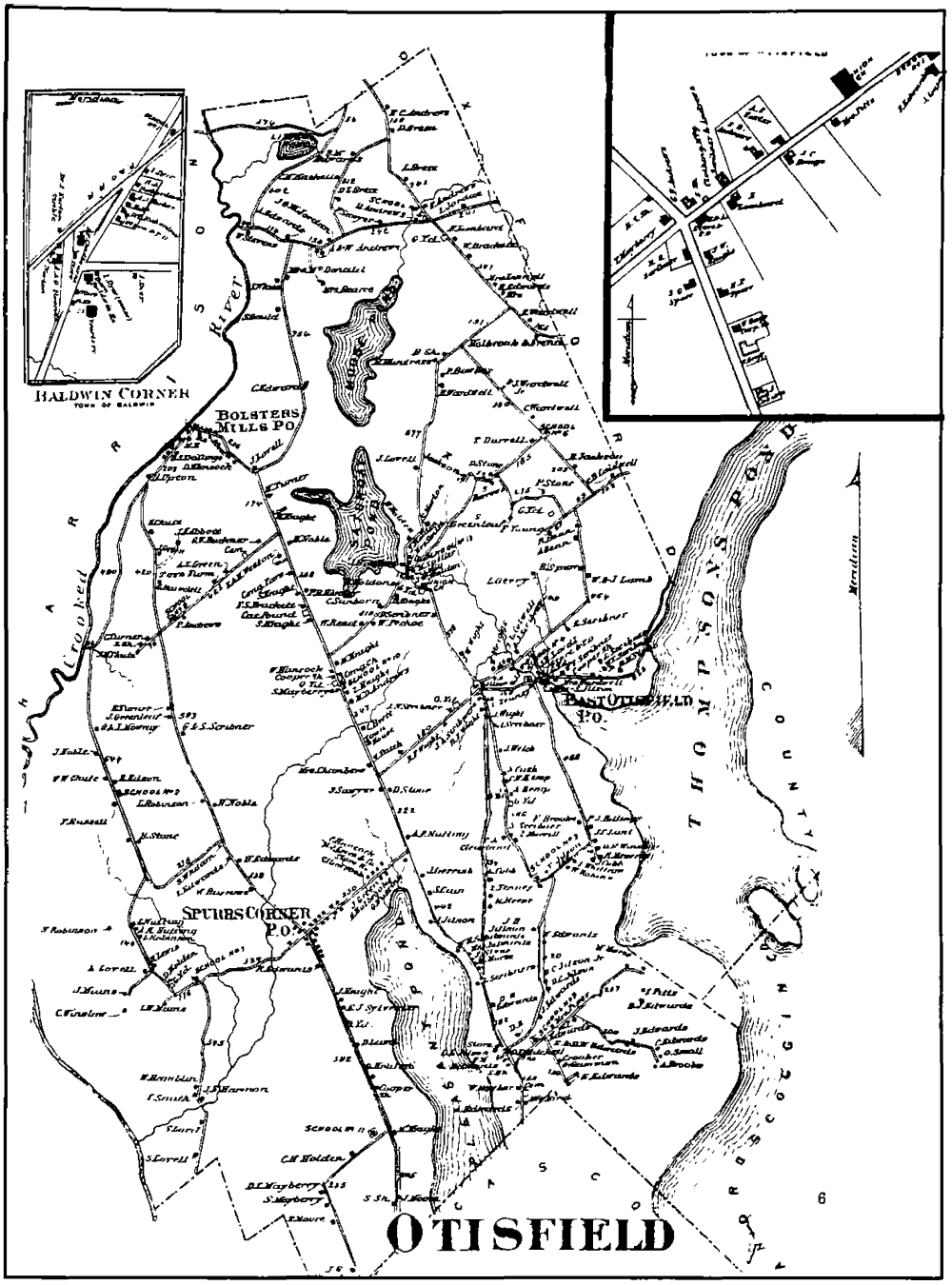
A view of Pleasant Pond (Otisfield) from Bell Hill. Like other small communities in the nineteenth century, Otisfield met annually to deliberate on town affairs. Among other things, citizens arranged for the care of the dependent poor.

Postcard courtesy of the author.

sharp rise in the number of poor occurred because the year 1816 was so disastrous for northern New England farmers. It has been called "the year without a summer," the year of famine, and even "eighteen hundred and froze to death." Two inches of snow fell on June 7; the winter wheat survived, but the corn crop was insufficient even to provide seed for the following year. The entire crop of hay failed, and many livestock perished during the winter.[4] It was no coincidence that by 1817 Otisfield was providing full support for a number of individuals and even families. The laws of Massachusetts and Maine, following English precedents, required each town to provide support for any of the town's legal residents who required it. In 1817 the town formally designated its selectmen Overseers of the Poor and asked them to report on the best method for relief for the town's paupers.[5] Each year the townspeople wrestled with the dilemma of how, on one hand, to give the needy the compassionate treatment expected from a Christian people, and how, on the other hand, to limit this charity so that their own independence would not be jeopardized.

Being poor in Otisfield was nothing new and certainly no disgrace. The town's first settlers, most of whom came from eastern Massachusetts in the years following the American Revolution, were for the most part poor men and women with limited options. Located forty miles north of Portland amid the hills and lakes of western Maine, Otisfield offered fine stands of timber and productive agricultural soils, but in the late eighteenth century young New Englanders with ambition and money headed for the more fertile Connecticut River Valley of New Hampshire and Vermont, or, better yet, for western New York.[6] Poorer families, like most of those who settled Otisfield, took the cheaper and faster sea route to Maine. The result was, according to one rather snobbish Boston merchant, that Maine was "peopled in general by the lower order..., who are not of much consequence any where else."[7]

Even if being poor was no disgrace, a man asked for town support only as a last resort. Some of the reasons may not be obvious at first glance. In Maine, as in several other states, those designated "paupers" surrendered their rights to vote and to hold office.[8] The town also had the authority to sell the property of the dependent poor as a practical means of supporting them.[9] But a greater deterrent to seeking help from the town was the stigma against doing so. New Englanders classified the poor as either "deserving" or "non-deserving." The first group consisted of those whom some have called the "impotent" poor: the elderly, the mentally and physically handicapped, and the very young. The second category consisted of the able and non-deserving poor. Because the number of poor in New England, as in Otisfield, had increased rapidly in the first decades of the nineteenth century, the general opinion grew that helping the poor too much would lead to their proliferation. Too much charity, in the words of a Massachusetts legislator, would "encourage habits of idleness, dissipation, and extravagance among the class which labor." When the town provides relief for those in need, he continued, "the poor begin to consider it as a right; next, they calculate upon it as an income."[10]



Located forty miles north of Portland, Otisfield was typical of the small, inland towns that wrestled with the problem of poverty in the mid-nineteenth century. "Going on the town" subjected the needy to public scrutiny; voters discussed their names and conditions openly.

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"Going on the town" in the nineteenth century subjected the needy to public scrutiny. Nineteenth-century voters, trying to decide how to "dispose" of the town paupers, discussed their names and conditions openly. The voters had two possible courses: to authorize the selectmen to act at their discretion and settle needy individuals in homes where they would receive good care; or to conduct the "vendue" system, by which the town auctioned off each individual to the lowest bidder. The vendue system, considered less humane but more economical, was the one Otisfield voters preferred.[11]

In a story by Maine author Sarah Orne Jewett titled "The Town Poor," Miss Rebecca Wright describes what her old friends Mandy and Ann Bray went through when they reached the end of their own resources:

> They give their consent to goin' on the town because they knew they'd got to be dependent, an' so they felt 'twould come easier for all than for a few to help 'em. They acted real dignified an' right-minded, contrary to what most do in such cases, but they was dreadful anxious to see who would bid 'em off, town-meeting day; they did so hope 'twould be somebody right in the village. I just sat down an' cried good when I found Abel Janes's folks had got hold of 'em. They always had the name of bein' slack an' poor spirited, an' they did it just for what they got out o' the town.[12]

Jewett's account is fictional, but in Otisfield the situation of those who had "got to be dependent" must have been much the same. In 1826, for instance, the town "struck off" ten paupers, auctioning them off to the lowest bidder to keep, at the town's expense, for one year. Among them were the widow Elizabeth Bartlett and her adult son John, who was "subject to fits."[13] The town paid Stephen H. Stevens $64.50 for taking care of both for the year. Also in the group of paupers was John Sawyer, who had been "deranged" since 1812. He was auctioned off to Benjamin Stevens, who promised to feed, clothe, and contain Sawyer for $75. (The comparatively large amount was probably bid because

Sawyer was sometimes violent.) For only $4 James Gerrish bought off Huldah Potter, the young daughter of Susan Kimball. The low amount reflected perhaps her youth and her potential usefulness as a household worker.

Besides auctioning off these ten individuals, in 1826 the townspeople had to make more permanent decisions about at least four children, aged three to twelve, from two different families. Usually the townspeople were not asked to make annual determinations about such children, as they did with adults. Instead, when situations arose in which parents could not care for their children, as in these cases, the town meeting was asked to authorize the selectmen to "put out" or indenture each child until he or she reached a certain age, in these cases fourteen.[14] The foster parent, who became in effect the child's employer, usually gave bond to provide the child with food, clothing, and some education.[15] These indentures usually did not require the town to spend anything.

In addition to the public humiliation which children and adults must have felt at being disposed of on town meeting day, the poor also had to face the townspeople's resentment at spending tax money on a growing number of public dependents at a time when few had cash to spare. A small number of Otisfield citizens, like the Janes family in Jewett's story, may have benefited financially from what the town paid them to board the poor in their own homes.16 But the average taxpayer must have considered expenditures for the poor disproportionately heavy compared to town expenditures on schools and highways.

Otisfield's annual appropriations for poor relief, schools, and highways fluctuated considerably from year to year, depending on current needs and the previous year's appropriations. Nonetheless, there was a regular pattern. In nearly every year between 1800 and 1865, the town spent considerably more on highways and bridges than it did on schools or the poor. The large appropriations for highways, however, were offset somewhat by the fact that the highway tax was paid not in money but in labor, which was assigned an hourly or daily value. Second,

Otisfield's annual appropriations were divided among poor relief, schools, and highways. Although highways generally received the larger share of the budget, much of the tax was paid in labor.

Postcard courtesy of the author.

Otisfield generally spent more on the poor than on schools. Poor relief, in fact, occasionally amounted to more than a third of the town's total annual expenses. Moreover, while school expenditures remained quite constant from year to year, the amount needed for annual poor relief was less discretionary and less predictable. In 1826, for instance, the town spent $800 for the poor and only $300 for highways and $325 for schools. The next year, however, the town allocated $1,300 for highways and bridges, $325 for schools, and $1,000 for the poor. Ten years later, in 1837, highway expenses had risen to $2,500 but schools and the poor each were given $400.[17]

It is hard for a twentieth-century American to realize just how much of a burden those amounts were for the average taxpayer during a period when little actual money circulated in the town. For the most part, Otisfield's economic system in the early nineteenth century was based not on cash but on a produce and labor exchange system with accounts settled yearly. The town kept its school expenditures low partly because the parents furnished the teachers with room and board. Between 1800 and

1842, the highest recorded amount Otisfield paid any teacher was the $53.22 Stephen Rich received in 1817, probably for teaching one term. Depending on the teacher's sex, the number of students, and the length of the school term, the yearly pay for teachers normally ranged from $8 to $25.[18]

Those were small amounts indeed—especially compared to what the town spent on John Sawyer every year between 1812, when he first required town assistance, and 1837, when he died at sixty-eight. During these years Otisfield appropriated sums ranging from eight to ninety dollars for someone to care for Sawyer.[19] Sawyer's expenses did not end there. In 1812 the town passed a vote "to have a Cage built to keep John Sawyer in."[20] And on at least two more occasions the town had to pay damage and transportation costs when Sawyer escaped his cage and went to another town.[21]

Not until after the Civil War did Otisfield make any serious attempt to consolidate or set its poor citizens to work. As long as the system known as "outdoor relief" existed, whereby the town poor resided either in their own homes or were scattered around the community in other people's homes, it was not possible to do so. To be sure, almshouses and workhouses did exist in larger places like Boston, where the first workhouse in the English colonies was opened by 1740.[22] In 1821 a Massachusetts committee headed by Josiah Quincy concluded that a poorhouse, or almshouse, was "the most economical mode," because there the able poor could be "made to provide, partially, at least for their own support."[23] By 1852, most of the larger towns in Massachusetts and 28 percent of the towns in Connecticut had an almshouse.[24] But more sparsely populated parts of New England developed institutions like poorhouses, workhouses, and mental hospitals much later. Until the Maine Insane Hospital opened in 1840, Maine's towns could not segregate their emotionally disturbed citizens from the rest of the town poor. They had no choice but to provide for these unfortunate people as Otisfield did for John Sawyer.[25]

Otisfield even lagged behind some of its neighbors in consolidating its poor on the "town farm" or "poor farm." The

voters of Buckfield, who worried for years about what the voters called their "excessive pauper taxes for years past," decided on a poor farm in 1837.[26] The nearby towns of Norway and Paris followed suit in 1838; Oxford did so in 1842.[27] Otisfield waited until 1865 to authorize the purchase of a poor farm.[28]

Before the town bought the farm, most of those requiring town aid were able to remain in their own homes, a method of poor relief that Josiah Quincy judged "the most wasteful, the most expensive, and most injurious to their morals and destructive of [their] industrious habits."[29] Otisfield's selectmen and citizens used a number of creative strategies to assist families and individuals needing only limited or short-term help. They paid doctors' bills routinely for several. In order to keep William Gammon and his family in their own home, the taxpayers reimbursed one of his neighbors who provided Gammon with twelve bushels of potatoes and several days' plowing and hauling wood.[30] In 1831 the townspeople voted to purchase a cow to loan to the family of Joseph Noble.[31] In 1842 they voted to abate Levi Scribner's taxes as long as he supported his elderly parents.[32] And for Dorcas Wardwell, a single woman aged seventy-one, Otisfield's voters approved a supply of hardwood and authorized the town treasurer to furnish her with a few dollars "when he thinks needful, to get her a few necessaries for her comfort."[33]

For those without any resources – the "wholly dependent poor" – the strategy was different. In the first place, Otisfield, like all towns, vigilantly tried to prevent the indigent, particularly vagabonds, from drifting into town and adding to the town's financial burden. Towns frequently sued each other to determine where a pauper really belonged. In 1826, Otisfield, for example, sued the town of Raymond for the $32.28 incurred by Jemima Noble who, according to Otisfield, was an inhabitant of Raymond but was living in Otisfield in distress and in need of relief.[31]

The town's "wholly dependent poor" were never numerous, and few seem to have been stragglers or vagabonds. Yet the poor did include some of the town's first settlers, among them Revolutionary War veterans,

who had fallen on hard times in their old age.[35] Many of the other wholly poor were the children or grandchildren of those first settlers, and most seem to have been hard workers. Barnabas Sawyer (1773-1862), son of one of the town's founders, first seems to have gotten into financial trouble about 1832, when the Overseers of the Poor in the town of Norway notified Otisfield that he had "fallen into distress" and stood in "immediate need of relief." Following the usual procedure, Norway requested that Otisfield remove Sawyer and his wife immediately.[36] Sawyer's son Jonathan took in his parents but subsequently charged the town for "supporting and nursing" his father.[37] For some thirty years more the town continued providing for the couple.[38] Some years they were auctioned off; at other times it was left to the selectmen to provide for them "as cheap and well as they can the ensuing year."[39] The town paid at least three of the couple's nine children for supporting them, including their unmarried daughter Martha who complained in 1851 that the forty- or fifty-dollar subsidy Otisfield gave her each year was "as little as any one can afford to provide for two such oald [sic] people," for "if we spend all we earn to provide for them when we are well if we are sick we shall have nothing to support us."[40]

Barnabas Sawyer, who lived to be eighty-nine, was the brother of John Sawyer. Barnabas took John into his own home briefly in 1812 when John, then aged about forty-one, first required care. Barnabas himself was fifty-nine when the town began to assist him twenty years later. But what makes Barnabas unusual is that he was at one time a well-to-do mill owner and lumber merchant, considered the wealthiest man in Otisfield. "He was an honest fair dealing man," according to Otisfield historian William Spurr, but he lost as much as $14,000 at one time by signing notes to "Saccarappa [Westbrook] lumbermen."[41] Sawyer's financial crash is not hard to understand in this era of failed savings and loans institutions and personal bankruptcies. It is the consequences of such financial disorder that have changed, not the crash itself.

Nineteenth-century Otisfield also had a number of unmarried mothers for whom it was obliged to provide relief. Probably

the best documented case is that of Marsila Mark Winship (b. 1827), whose cause Otisfield took up in assisting her paternity suit against Nelson Jordan.42 Marsila herself came from a poor family. Her father, Enoch Winship, died when Marsila was only six, and her sisters five and three. In 1837, four years after his death, the townspeople voted to provide the widowed mother with seventy-five cents a week "to enable her to get along and support herself and children this season."[43] Although the widow received no further support from the town, by 1841 Gershom Winship, probably the brother of Enoch Winship and the uncle of the fatherless girls, was asking payment from the town "for keeping the Winship Girls."[44]

About that time, apparently, Marsila moved to Raymond, the next town, where she lived with Samuel Jordan and his family for about three years.[45] On February 2, 1843, the sixteen-year old girl gave birth to a son, whom she named Nelson David Jordan. By the time of her confinement she was probably back in Otisfield with her uncle Gershom, who promptly appealed to the selectmen:

> Marcilla [sic] Winship & Child now at my house came in need of help and assistance and I am entirely unable to support them therefore you are hereby notified that if she and her child tarries at my house I must have pay for the same.[46]

As the baby's father, Marsila named Nelson Jordan, probably the son of the Samuel Jordan with whom she had been staying in Raymond. The possibility of acquiring more paupers evidently worried the townspeople, perhaps more so since Otisfield had been supporting Marsila's grandparents and other relatives for some years.[47] Whatever their motives, Otisfield citizens encouraged Marsila to bring suit against Jordan, doubtless for child support. The first trial, on June 23, 1843, resulted in a hung jury, whereupon the townspeople voted to have David Andrews "assist in the prosecution of Marcela [sic] Winship against Nelson Jordan and collect evidence." At the second trial the following March, the presiding judge quashed the case.[48] Nathaniel and Joanna Andrews, a childless couple, adopted

Spurrs Corner — one of Otisfield's two main villages. In 1860 Otisfield reached what its historian, William Spurr, calls the "high water mark of all time, viz; 1,199." Population dropped rapidly after 1860 and began increasing again after World War II.

Postcard courtesy of the author.

Marsila's son, who died before he was fifteen.[49] What happened to Marsila herself is not known, but after 1843 her name disappeared from the list of those receiving help from the town.

Nineteenth-century Otisfield clearly approved of having children like Nelson Jordan adopted by couples outside the family.[50] Some children born to young single women were evidently raised by their mother's parents as members of their own large families. Other children were less fortunate. In 1817 the Overseers of the Poor had recommended that as many of the poor children be indentured, or put "out for wages as can be done." In some years, like 1826, the selectmen had to "put out" a number of children.

Poverty was usually but not always the crucial reason for "putting out" children. Selectmen could also act if they believed the children were not receiving proper care. The domestic situation in the John Piper family, for example, seems to have been characterized both by poverty and neglect, or something worse, which caused several of the Piper

children to run away from home. Simon, the tenth of John Piper's fifteen children by two wives, may have been the first to leave. His case came to the selectmen's notice in a letter written on April 25, 1826, by Jonathan Piper and Dorothy Scribner, who were probably Simon's grandfather and married sister: "We have reason to believe that Simon Piper, a child of John Piper, is ill used & we wish you to take him into your care[;] he has left his Father & we wish he may have a place where he may be treated humanely."[51]

If anything was done to help the boy, the records do not show it. Over a year later the selectmen received another letter on the same subject, this one signed by eleven neighbors and relatives:

> Some of the young children of John Piper are much neglected by their parent and are in a pittyfull situation, living at the houses of their neighbors, destitute of food, afraid of their parents etc. etc. we the subscribers request your board of Overseers of the poor to make enquiry as soon as possible and do something for the relief of the said children.[52]

Without doubt Urania Piper (1806-1836) was one of these children. On November 9, 1827, just two months after the petition, Urania gave birth to a daughter at the home of a neighbor, James Wight.[53]

Finally the selectmen did act. The town paid Wight $100 to support Urania Piper until the child was old enough to wean. He also agreed to support Urania's child "untill it comes to the age of eighteen years or to the time of its marriage." Wight, who gave a bond, promised to see that the little girl would be taught to read and write.[54] And a few months later, in March 1828, the Otisfield selectmen bound out Jordan Piper, "a poor child, the son of John Piper," as a servant to Timothy Hancock, until he became sixteen.

There is no record of what happened in the next few years to Simon Piper or any of his brothers and sisters, with the exception of Simon's sister Ursula (1810-1829). Ursula was

nineteen years old when, on April 18, 1829, Elijah Scribner, the husband of Ursula's sister, wrote one more letter to the selectmen, complaining that Ursula had moved into his house and was "unable to take care of or provide for herself and has therefore become chargeable as a pauper." He asked the selectmen to order her removal, "or otherwise provide for her as you may judge expedient."[55] The selectmen had little time to take any action before Ursula's death, a mere two weeks later.[56]

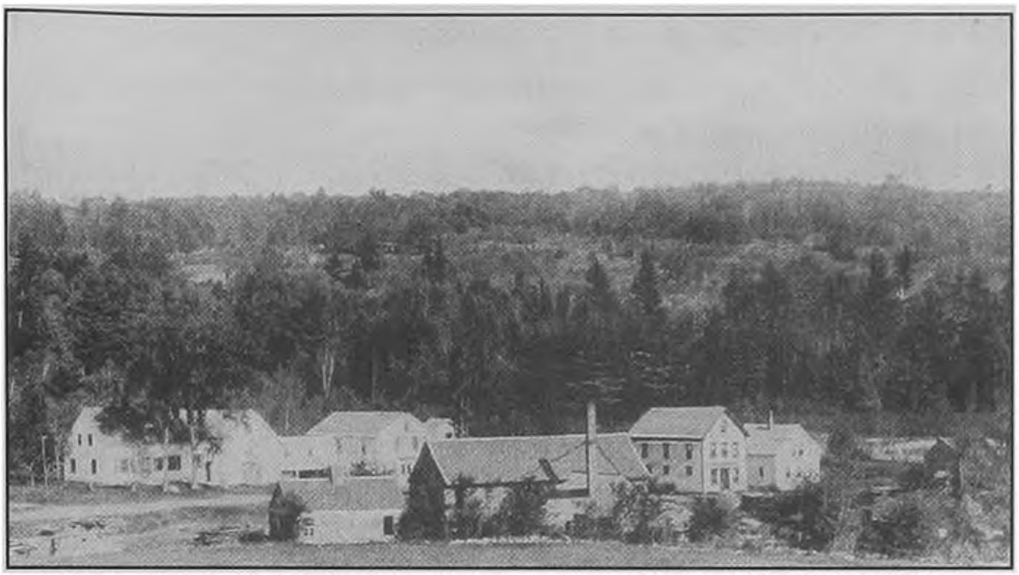
Regarding the treatment of the poor in early Otisfield, several conclusions may be drawn. First, for the taxpayers of Otisfield, the biggest problem was not that there were so many poor, but rather that their support required such a large portion of the town's annual revenue. The taxpayers were convinced that they had contributed generously to help the poor, but in reality their support was minimal. The town made sure they had food, shelter, clothing, and medical treatment when necessary, but it was quick to withdraw that support when it was no longer required. Second, although the system of auctioning off the poor to the lowest bidder seems harsh, there is no evidence that the poor were mistreated. Many, like Elizabeth Bartlett and Barnabas Sawyer, lived to a ripe old age. When problems did arise, the selectmen could and sometimes did exercise their authority to transfer a town charge to a different place. All in all, the selectmen's actions indicate that they were both hardheaded and humane.

Most of those for whom the town provided support – even temporary support – fall into categories which account for most of the poor today: the elderly, the mentally and physically handicapped, the very young, and, finally, single women, especially those with children. But Barnabas Sawyer, the rich man who lost everything and was supported by the town for the last thirty years of his life, does not fit easily into any of those categories. His life suggests that the "boom and bust" economy of the 1830s created at least one category of poor who, largely because of the reforms resulting from the Depression of the 1930s, have been less common in the late twentieth century.

On the other hand, one group of poor familiar today, the nominally unemployed, does not stand out in the Otisfield sample. They may be absent simply because Otisfield's economy included so few nonpropertied wage-earners. And perhaps Maine's rapidly expanding economy and its need for all kinds of labor meant that unemployment did not in itself cause poverty in the way it does today. During the 1830s Maine's young people began migrating in increasing numbers to the Midwest, thus reducing the number of unemployed within the state.[57] The fact that unemployment was not an obvious cause of Otisfield's poverty supports another conclusion: the younger the applicants were when they first went on town relief, the better their chances were of getting off.

Poverty then, as now, often extended from one generation to another. In early nineteenth-century Otisfield the Winship family, although certainly not unique, probably best exemplified intergenerational poverty. Hard times had fallen on the Winship family by 1828 when six of John Winship's neighbors complained that he was "in great want of support as he is not able to Labor for himself."[58] Winship, a Revolutionary War veteran and early town settler, was then sixty-five.[59] His poverty extended to his widowed daughter, Mehitable, herself the mother of three young daughters, including the luckless Marsila. The story of the young widow raising a daughter who subsequently also became a single parent strikes a somber but familiar note. In 1848, some twenty years after John Winship's poverty first became acute, Otisfield's citizens passed a vote in language which, paradoxically, expresses both their impatience with the Winships and their concern that they be dealt with compassionately: "Voted to instruct the selectmen to rout the Winship family forthwith and put them in suitable places where they can be taken care of."[60]

The Otisfield study raises one question which has no easy answer: To what extent did family members support their own poor relatives? The laws of Massachusetts and Maine required children who were "of sufficient ability" to support their parents.[61] But Otisfield records contain only one instance, in 1861, in which the selectmen attempted to enforce that law. In a



East Otisfield. The study of poverty in this small town raises questions about mutual family support. Although the laws of Maine and Massachusetts required families to support their own, the historical record is ambiguous.

Postcard courtesy of the author

notebook concerned with the town poor, one official wrote, "Tarbell Patch called for help for Mrs. Betsy Shed. The same day notified Dan & Thomas Shed to provide for her or be held accountable to the town for her support."[62]

Much more commonly, however, the town paid a relative for supporting his or her indigent or disabled parent, child, or spouse. The case of Barnabas and Sarah Sawyer provides the best example of such a practice. During the many years that the once-wealthy couple were supported by the town, Otisfield paid a succession of individuals for their care. The Sawyers were somewhat unusual in that both lived to be eighty-nine.[63] Among the care-givers were three of the couple's nine adult children, some of whom, one might assume, could have supported their parents without town aid. But the fact that the selectmen finally settled the problem of Barnabas and Sarah by paying Martha, the unmarried daughter, for their care suggests that the support law was usually unenforceable. In the case of Ursula Piper, who was dying at her sister's home, state law did not obligate her sister and brother-in-law to support her. The sharp tone of the brother-in-law's request that Otisfield's selectmen "order her removal"

suggests, once again, that in nineteenth-century Otisfield charity did not always begin at home.[64]

John Sawyer finally died on November 28, 1837, sixty-eight years old, still "deranged," and still dependent on town support. Four months before he died, Abraham Lombard contracted that for ninety dollars a year he would "support, maintain, victual and clothe" Sawyer "in as comfortable a manner as his situation will admit."[65] The town had been making similar arrangements for John for the past twenty-five years, and for twenty-five more years they would be obliged to find someone to care for John's brother Barnabas and his wife.[66]

Today the Otisfield taxpayers and selectmen no longer have to worry about auctioning off the poor, putting out children, or building cages for unfortunates like John Sawyer. Otisfield's town report now lists general assistance recipients only as anonymous "cases."[67] Few of us, indeed, would wish to go back to those nineteenth-century practices. Surely we are better off with the social and economic guarantees, the safety net that, while clearly imperfect, keeps most of us out of the poorhouse. If there was anything commendable in the system described here, it is that the town poor, for all their shame at being put on public display, were not anonymous. Poverty was not an abstraction: In nineteenth-century Otisfield one could not be indifferent to the needs of the poor. Otisfield's voters could judge for themselves the necessity of providing assistance, and, unlike today, they could see how each dollar of poor relief was applied. One of the unfortunate consequences of the nineteenth-century poor relief system was the visibility of the John Sawyers and John Winships, which meant that the poor were subject to public humiliation. On the other hand, the visibility of the poor in Otisfield's early welfare system meant that the townspeople could neither ignore nor deny their Christian and civic responsibilities.

NOTES

[1]William S. Spurr, *A History of Otisfield, Cumberland County, Maine* (Otisfield, 1950), p. 215.

[2]For John Sawyer see Spurr, *History*, p. 549.

[3]Spurr, *History*, pp. 41, 191. The individual for whom $7.33 and later $9 was spent was Mary Howard.

[4]Charles F. Whitman, *A History of Norway, Maine, from the Earliest Settlements to the Close of the Year 1922* (Norway: Lewiston Journal Printshop, 1924), pp. 72-73; Clarence Day, *History of Maine Agriculture* (Orono: University Press, 1954), pp. 109-110. The best general description of Maine agriculture during the period is David C. Smith and others, "Climatic Stress and Maine Agriculture, 1785-1885," pp. 450-64 in *Climate and History: Studies in Past Climates and Their Impact on Man* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

[5]Spurr, *History*, pp. 44, 204.

[6]Alan Taylor, *Liberty Men and the Great Proprietors* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press and Institute of Early American History and Culture, 1990), p. 63.

[7]John Southack, *The Life of John Southack* (1809), quoted in Taylor, *Liberty Men*, p. 63.

[8]Josephine C. Brown, *Public Relief, 1929-1939* (New York: Holt, 1940), p. 10.

[9]In 1818 voters at Otisfield's town meeting agreed that "the selectmen should dispose of John Sawyer's farm as they see fit" (Spurr, *History*, p. 152). The farm seems to have gone to Eliphalet Dunn of Poland, Sawyer's son-in-law, in exchange for Dunn's pledge to support Hannah Sawyer, John Sawyer's wife, "for and during her natural life." See Agreement between Josiah Dunn, Jr. and William Dunn and the Otisfield Selectmen, April 16, 1818, box 1/8, Otisfield Papers, Maine Historical Society, Portland.

[10]*Report of the Committee on the Pauper Laws of this Commonwealth* [hereafter referred to as *Massachusetts Report of 1821*] (Massachusetts, 1821), p. 5.

[11]In 1847 the Maine legislature enacted a law forbidding towns from using the auction system (*Maine Acts and Resolves, 1847*, Chap. 12, p. 8). I thank Douglas Hall of Otisfield for calling my attention to this legislation.

[12]Sarah Orne Jewett, "The Town Poor," in *Deephaven and Other Stories* (New Haven: College and University Press, 1966), p. 238.

[13]Spurr, *History*, p. 326.

[14]For the town meeting, see Spurr, *History*, p. 215. Elizabeth (Scott) Bartlett (d. 1833) was the widow of one of Otisfield's first settlers, Eleazar Bartlett (d. by 1801). John, their son, probably died about 1826, after which time his name disappears from town records (Spurr, *History*, pp. 326-327). John Sawyer (1769-1837) became insane before 1812 (Spurr, *History*, p. 549). Huldah Potter (b. before 1820) was the elder daughter of Susan Kimball (see Bond given by James Gerrish, April 5, 1821, in box 1/8, Otisfield Papers).

[15]Box 1/9, Otisfield Papers, contains several of these bonds and indentures. See, for example, Lovina Davis, dated April 5, 1832.

[16]In the *Massachusetts Report of 1821*, the selectmen of both Danvers and Pepperell stated the problems involved in "letting out the poor to those persons who would take them on the cheapest terms, at public auction." The Danvers selectmen said, "The person who receives the Pauper, generally does it from a principle of gain, or some advantage separate from the comfort and reformation of the individual" (pp. 34, 18).

[17]Spurr, *History*, pp. 192-254; boxes 1/8, 1/9, and 1/10, Otisfield Papers.

[18]Spurr, *History*, pp. 74-82. The Rich example is on p. 81.

[19]Spurr, *History*, pp. 196, 229-30; see also Abraham Lombard's bond, dated July 4, 1837, in box 1/10, Otisfield Papers, in which Lombard promises to "maintain, victual and clothe" Sawyer "if it is practicable to do so on the ground of his insanity."

[20]Town Meeting, July 6, 1812, Otisfield Town Records, book 1, p. 169. See Spurr, *History*, pp. 196, 44.

[21]Spurr, *History*, pp. 549, 44, 208.

[22]Brown, *Public Relief*, p. 9; Marcus W. Jernegan, *Laboring and Dependent Classes in Colonial America, 1607-1783* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1931), p. 202.

[23]*Massachusetts Report of 1821*, p. 9.

[24]Edward W. Capen, "The History of Connecticut Institutions," in *History of Connecticut in Monographic Form*, ed. Norris G. Osborn, vol. 5 (New York: The States History Company, 1925), p. 399.

[25]*The Maine Register and State Reference Book* (Hallowell: Masters, Smith and Co., 1852), p. 165. In 1852 the weekly bill at the hospital for a patient's "boarding, washing, medicines and attendance" was $2.

[26]Alfred Cole and Charles F. Whitman, *A History of Buckfield* (Buckfield, Maine, 1915), pp. 370, 375.

[27]Marquis F. King, *Annals of Oxford, Maine* (Portland, 1893), pp. 56, 64.

[28]Spurr, *History*, p. 244.

[29]*Massachusetts Report of 1821*, p. 9.

[30]Bill from Johnson Knight to Town of Otisfield, October 22, 1824 (?), box 1/8, Otisfield Papers.

[31]Spurr, *History*, p. 223.

[32]Ibid., p. 236.

[33]Ibid., p. 224.

[34]June 3, 1827, box 1/16, Otisfield Papers. See also Certificate dated June 16, 1827, box 1/9, in which the agent (attorney) of Raymond acknowledged that Jemima was a legal inhabitant of that town.

[35]For instance, John Winship (1763-1848) arrived in Otisfield soon after 1790 (Spurr, *History*, p. 655). He, together with wife and daughter Abigail, were first vendued off in 1843 (box 1/1, Otisfield Papers; Spurr, *History*, p. 238).

[36]David Noyes to Otisfield Overseers of the Poor, November 13, 1832, box 1/9, Otisfield Papers. See also the bill from Jonathan S. Millett, December 24, 1832, for $24.50 for medicine for Sawyer (document in same location).

[37]Jonathan Sawyer's bill to Otisfield selectmen and receipt, dated February 5, 1833 (box 1/9, Otisfield Papers).

[38]See Spurr, *History*, pp. 230, 235, 237-40.

[39]Spurr, *History*, p. 230.

[40]Martha Sawyer to Otisfield Selectmen, July 19, 1851, box 1/10, Otisfield Papers. See Spurr, History, pp. 239, 240 for 1844 town meeting in which Martha Sawyer was given $300 plus $40 annually to support her parents "during the time that both of them remain living." The annual appropriation Martha received increased each year to a maximum of $100 in 1858 (unpaged notebook titled "Otisfield Town Poor, 1857-1877," Otisfield Town Records).

[41]Spurr, *History*, pp. 549-550.

[42]This was not the only time Otisfield was involved in a paternity suit. In 1818 the selectmen supported the complaint of Hannah Mayberry against John Lombard 2nd. See Affidavit of May 12, 1818, box 1/8, Otisfield Papers.

[43]Spurr, *History*, pp. 229, 659. See also Selectmen's order, April 16, 1833, for $1 to Mehitable Winship (box 1/9, Otisfield Papers).

[44]Gershom Winship to Otisfield Selectmen, November 15, 1841, box 1/10, Otisfield Papers.

[45]Certificate from Matthew Churchill, February 20, 1843, concerning Marzilla [sic] Winship, box 1/10, Otisfield Papers.

[46]Gershom Winship to Otisfield Selectmen, June 14, 1843, box 1/10, Otisfield Papers.

[47]John Winship (1763-1848) and his wife, Betsey (1761-1851), were the parents of Enoch Winship's wife (and first cousin), Mehitable (Spurr, *History*, pp. 229, 233, 237, 238).

[48]Spurr, *History*, pp. 440, 441, 659.

[49]Spurr, *History*, p. 317.

[50]Spurr's genealogy section includes two other unmarried women who permitted their children to be adopted: Susan Jane Barker and Lydia Ann Noble (*History*, pp. 323, 508). Doubtless there were other cases that went unrecorded.

[51]Box 1/8, Otisfield Papers. For Jonathan Piper, see Spurr, *History*, pp. 529-30; for John Piper, p. 530; for Dorothy ("Dolly") Scribner, wife of Elijah, see p. 560.

[52]Elijah Scribner and ten others to the Selectmen of Otisfield, September 10, 1827, box 1/8, Otisfield Papers.

[53]Spurr, *History*, p. 531. On November 12, 1827, Wight certified that Urania Piper was at his house "and stands in knead of immediate assistance" (box 1/9, Otisfield Papers).

[54]Bond given by James Wight, November 21, 1827, box 1/9, Otisfield Papers.

[55]Elijah Scribner to Otisfield Selectmen, April 18, 1829, box 1/9, Otisfield Papers.

[56]Spurr, *History*, p. 530.

[57]See Smith and others, "Climatic Stress and Maine Agriculture," p. 457.

[58]James Gerrish and others to the Otisfield Overseers of the Poor, February 21, 1828, box 1/9, Otisfield Papers.

[59]Spurr, *History*, pp. 655-656.

[60]Spurr, *History*, p. 245.

[61]For Massachusetts see *Massachusetts Province Laws 1692-1699*, edited by John D. Cushing (Wilmington, Delaware: Michael Glazier, 1978). For a summary of Maine's poor laws, see John P. Lord, *The Maine Townsman* (Portland: Sanborn & Carter, 1847).

[62]Entry dated July 15, 1861, "Otisfield Town Poor, 1857-1877," Otisfield Town Records.

[63]For Barnabas, see Spurr, *History*, p. 549. Spurr does not give the date of death of Sarah (b. 1775), but Otisfield records show that in 1864 Martha Sawyer, the daughter, received $30 to keep Sarah for one year ("Otisfield Town Poor, 1857-1877").

[64]Elijah Scribner to Otisfield Selectmen, April 18, 1829, box 1/9, Otisfield Papers.

[65]Abraham Lombard's bond, July 4, 1837, box 1/10, Otisfield Papers.

[66]The town provided for Sarah Sawyer for at least twenty-seven years. Barnabas died in 1862 but Sarah was still living in 1864 ("Otisfield Town Poor, 1857-1877," Otisfield Town Records).

[67]See, for example, *Annual Report of the Municipal Officers of the Town of Otisfield for the Year Ending December 31, 1992*, (Otisfield, 1993), p. 37.

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