



# The SHIRETOWN CONSERVER

The Dover-Foxcroft Historical Society  
Volume 20, Number 2 Summer 2017

## Joseph Henry Bodwell



Joseph Henry Bodwell  
(1891 - 1974)

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(We love a good story! The story of Joseph Henry Bodwell, is long, but we think it provides a really good peek at life in early Twentieth Century rural Maine. We hope you enjoy it as much as we have!)

## Joseph Henry Bodwell

By Mary Annis

*Member Patricia Leland Mereen sent this article written by Joseph Bodwell as part of an autobiography written for his grandchildren. He is known as “Gramps” for this reason.*

Joseph Henry Bodwell was born in Hallowell, Maine on July 8, 1891, the fourth child of eight. His parents were Willard Arthur Bodwell (1859-1931) and Carrie Alice Gage (1863-1954). He attended the University of Maine, Orono from 1912, graduating in 1915.

On June 24, 1916 he married Irene Pearl Emery in Salem, New Hampshire. They had two sons, Walter Arthur Bodwell (1918-1998) and Ralph Emery Bodwell (1921-2001). Irene passed away on November 26, 1928.

On June 19, 1929 he married Eunice Shedd Clark. They had three children: Irene Pearl Bodwell (1929-1943), Robert Clark Bodwell (1930- ) and Joyce (1934- ). Eunice passed away on May 18, 1959. He then married Ethel D. Knapp on September 1, 1959.

We now begin the story of “Gramps” and his adventures as the first County Agent of Piscataquis County.

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### The Dover-Foxcroft Historical Society

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### From the *Piscataquis Farmer* (Observer)

#### THAT LITTLE BILL

What sound in this sad vale of tears,  
Can conjure up such fiends of woe,  
As that now pouring in mine ears  
Its mournful music - soft and slow?  
I cannot tear myself away -  
It follows me where'er I will,  
I hear it through the livelong day,  
"SIR CAN YOU PAY THAT LITTLE BILL?"

When summer's sun, pours down its rays  
With fiery, scorching, boiling power,  
I chose to spend the hottest days  
In some secluded country bower -  
'Mid shady groves I seek repose,  
Lulled by the music of the rill,  
It comes - the direst "foe of foes,"  
"Sir can you pay that little bill?"

When on the public pave I meet  
The beautiful Amelia Brown  
My gentlest bow her fair smiles greet,  
And I escort her round the town;  
I whisper honeyed words of joy,  
And think I feel love's raptures thrill;  
Oh horror! 'tis my tailor's boy!  
"Sir can you pay that little bill?"

The little stars enthroned above,  
Are twinkling in the mellow light,  
Relating each its little love  
To other little stars as bright,  
Entranced, I gaze upon the scene  
In all its beauty calm and still,  
A voice is heard - what can it mean?  
"Sir can you pay that little bill?"

At ball, at route, abroad, at home,  
In waking or in sleeping hours,  
When fancy loves betimes to roam  
'Mid groves of amaranthine flowers;  
Or floating on her buoyant wings,  
I soar above Parnassus' hill,  
Within my soul that voice still rings,  
"Sir can you pay that little bill?" (1839)

### WANTED.

A good faithful BOY is wanted, capable of taking care of two Cows and cutting wood for one fire. One who will consider his board near a good school house, a sufficient compensation for the above named service during three months of school, may hear of a good situation by applying to this office.  
Dover, Oct. 9, 1851.

“On September 1, 1915, “Gramps” started his new job as County Agent for Piscataquis County. Dr. Leon S. Merrill was the Dean of the College of Agriculture and Director of the Agricultural Extension Service for the State of Maine. He was an organizer and a wonderful director but he did not pretend to know much about agriculture itself. However, he did make it his business to know the people who did.

Before “Gramps” started his new job, Dr. Merrill invited him to spend three days with him going over his future work. He supplied “Gramps” with information about the Service, the men who were agents for other counties and the reports turned in by these agents. He also introduced “Gramps” to Maurice Jone who had worked two years as County Agent for Penobscot County and who was more help to “Gramps” in his new work than any other man. “Gramps” was also sent from one department head to another in order to get acquainted with all Agricultural College personnel and for whatever help they could give him in his future work.



When the three days with Dr. Merrill were over, “Gramps” expected that he would be given material to take with him to start his new job. Instead, he was surprised when told merely to report for work the next morning in Dover, Maine. “Gramps” asked “But who do I report to?” “You will start out by hiring a horse and wagon and making calls on the farmers to get acquainted. Then you select farmers with whom you will carry on demonstrations.

All I expect from you,” Dr. Merrill told him, “is a report each week stating what you have done.” He went on “Just one more requirement. When you make an appointment with a person, a Grange or any other club, to tell of our Extension work, be sure to always meet at the time you agreed upon. Establish an office and I will come up to visit you when you get settled.”

If “Gramps” had not had the experience working for the American Steel and Wire Company for two summers, he certainly would have been lost right at the start. But upon arriving in Dover by train “Gramps” immediately set out looking for both an office and a place to stay. Right in the center of town, “Gramps” found both. There was a building between two roads that formed a Y in the center of town and upstairs in the building there was a room for rent which “Gramps” took. (The Observer Building?). Across the street there were two stores in a building. The Dover Water Department rented one and as the other was vacant, “Gramps” immediately rented it for his office. Across from the building to the left was a boarding house where “Gramps” arranged to take his meals when he was in town.

Remember, that first year that “Gramps” was County Agent he traveled either by horse and wagon, which he rented from the Annis Livery Stable (owned and operated by Stanley A. Annis, 1866-1939), or else he went by train. He would hire a livery rig and go from one town to another, putting his horse up at another livery stable and staying at a hotel at night in the town where he had worked that day. He made from 15 to 20 farm calls each day trying to make new friends.

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(Joseph Henry Bodwell, continued from page 3)

At first however, he did not make much headway. But because of the experience that “Gramps” had in organizing the demonstrations for the American Steel and Wire Company for two summers while going to college, along with his practical experience on his Dad’s farm, the work at the Agricultural Experimental Station, the feeding and supervising of hogs for his thesis, the work on the farm with brother Frank in the Dells of the Wisconsin, and his competing with the judging team while at college, all contributed finally in making it possible to get a start as County Agent for Piscataquis County.



To better tell of the many trials and tribulations experienced by “Gramps” during this period, he is going to include a story that was written about him earlier for publication. It was known as “The Whipper Snapper” and that is what your “Gramps” will be known as in the story that tells how he really got his start.

### **The Whipper Snapper**

“As far as I am concerned, I will have absolutely nothing to do with this little “whipper snapper” that they are sending over from the Agricultural College at the University of Maine. And further more, I would advise all of you farmers not to have anything to do with him either.”

This was the strong admonition of the Master of the Pomona Grange of Piscataquis County that evening in 1915 at the South Dover Grange Hall. The meeting had been called by Frank Merrill who discussed the news of the appointment of a County Agent and what to do about him when he arrived in their county.

Over 300 farmers and their wives were in attendance to hear “Uncle Frank”, as the popular Grange Master was known throughout the county, expound on what he thought of the appointment. From his remarks, nobody doubted that the going ahead would be anything but smooth for the young man that “Uncle Frank” had so sarcastically referred to as that little “whipper snapper”.

The Grange Master was certainly one of the best farmers in the whole county as well as one of the most influential. He boasted a nice herd of Holstein cattle and some Percheron draft horses that were the talk of the area. In addition, he grew more pigs than any other farmer around. But primarily he was a potato grower and annually raised 50 acres or more of Maine’s principle agricultural export product.

At the meeting “Uncle Frank” was heard to scoff, “Can you imagine the college sending us this fellow to show us how to farm? What will this young squirt know about the real problems of running a farm? All he knows is what he has read in books. Bah!”

But Dr. Leon S. Merrill was Dean of the Agricultural College and Director of the Extension Service at that time and he was just as sold on the merits of the program as “Uncle Frank” was set against them. Dr. Merrill was always thorough in selecting the men he sent out to pioneer the new county extension program.

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He hired only those who had been brought up on large farms. In the case of Piscataquis County, he had selected a young man who was now being referred to as the “whipper snapper”. For two years Dr. Merrill had his eye on this young man.

He had got him jobs testing milk at various large farms near Orono and had in general,

schooled him in all the latest advances in agricultural technology. In addition, the new agent had written his thesis on the proportionate gain of meat to grain in the raising of pigs. This work came in very handy later but his most important qualification for the new job was that he had been raised on a large farm very similar to those of Piscataquis County.

The “whipper snapper” began his new job with great expectations, not having been told what was said about him at the Grange meeting in South Dover. He called on farmer after farmer and was able to command their interest until each learned his identity. When he told them that he was the new County Agent, they immediately dismissed him and found other things to do. This went on for days and even weeks until it got to the discouraging point of his considering another position. But hating to admit defeat, he gave himself one more week in which to prove his worth to the farmers.

It was near the middle of what might have been the final week of a budding career that quite by chance he called upon a farmer named Frank Chandler. It was only then that he learned about the Grange meeting and the plot that had been advanced to discredit him.

Frank Chandler instantly took a liking to this young “whipper snapper” and said that before he gave up and quit his new job he should go over to Frank Merrill’s farm and show that one could work on a farm even if he did have a head full of theories.

So a counter plot was hatched and the final advice to the new County Agent by Frank Chandler was, “Now remember, young feller, do just what he tells you and don’t say much yourself until you get the lay of the land. And no matter what he says or how insulting he becomes, pay no attention to him. His bark is a lot worse than his bite.”

Mr. Chandler told him that he should arrive at the Merrill farm between 11:00 and 11:30 a.m. the next day as it was the custom of the farmers in the county to keep their clocks about a half hour fast. He would therefore arrive just before dinner and would find “Uncle Frank” busy feeding the horses as he did daily at this time.

He also said that all the farmers in the neighborhood would be at the Merrill farm the next day helping “Uncle Frank” fill his silo. It would therefore be a good time for the new agent to talk to a large group of local farmers in an attempt to promote his program, perhaps for the very last time.

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(Joseph Henry Bodwell, Continued from Page 5)

The youthful County Agent followed Frank Chandler's directions to a "T" and sure enough, the next day as he drove into the yard in his hired rig, there was "Uncle Frank" preparing to feed his horses. The neighbors who were helping him had already gone into the house to dinner, it being almost noon and the crew having had worked since early morning. As "Uncle Frank" was making haste to finish feeding the horses he was far from cordial. In fact, he could best be described as 240 pounds of pure sarcasm.

He bluntly told his young visitor "Feed that nag of yours six quarts of my best oats and then come to the house for dinner. We make it a point to feed dogs, tramps and anyone else that shows up here at mealtime. But in your case, I want the victuals to stop your mouth 'cause we don't want to hear anything around here out of you." The young man and his chief adversary had at last come fact to face and the opening round was all "Uncle Frank's" as the younger man refused to banter words with his host at that point and remained quiet as he had been advised.

It was a sumptuous meal prepared by Mrs. Merrill and the ladies of the neighborhood. Everyone enjoyed it, even the uninvited guest who was the butt of many caustic remarks by the head of the household during the meal. The "whipper snapper" remained silent until everyone had finished eating. Then he arose and said politely "Mr. and Mrs. Merrill, I want to thank you for this delicious dinner. This gathering reminds me of those we used to have at my own home back on the farm where I was raised. It is also reminiscent of the



threshing crews I worked with out in Sycamore, Illinois. It is good to see neighbors pulling together to help one another both in the field and in the home.

For those snide remarks made about me during dinner regarding my new job in this county, I know they were all said in fun. My job as County Agent can be compared to just what is happening here on your farm today, namely neighbors cooperating with one another to aid in a common cause. This is exactly the aim of the Extension Service, bringing to all farmers good practices that are found in other places. They might be from the University of Maine, from an experimental station or from other farmer just like yourself."

The room was quiet and the "whipper snapper" knew that he had captured the full attention of everyone. He quickly pursued his advantage by saying "I noticed as I drove up today you have a beautiful field of potatoes growing. I would appreciate it if you could find just ten minutes of your valuable time to show me that field of potatoes. After that I will go into your silo and help your crew tread silage the rest of the afternoon."

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Mr. Merrill hesitated, but the youthful County Agent would not be denied. He turned to the other men in the room and asked them the question, "Is that not a fair bargain, ten minutes for a half days work?"

The others were enthused and answered in unison, "Come on Frank, what have you got to lose?"

The men trailed out of the house and over to the nearby potato field. The "whipper snapper" knew that he had come to that moment when he had to do something spectacular, and do it quickly, if he was ever to win the confidence of the highly-respected "Uncle Frank" Merrill.

Fortunately for the new County Agent, he had spent considerable time working at an experimental station on tuber diseases and spied a hill of potatoes that he recognized as having rhizoctonia. He turned to his host and said "That's a funny hill over there, isn't it?"

Mr. Merrill roared back "What's so funny about it? It's one of the best looking hills in the whole field."

"That hill," and here the "whipper snapper" paused for effect before continuing on "has, I would say, maybe 30 worthless little potatoes and perhaps a couple of knobby ones in it."

"Now I know you don't know what you are talking about, young feller" roared "Uncle Frank" as he glowered at the younger man.

"Well, as it is near digging time, Mr. Merrill, and before you call me a liar, may I suggest that you pull that hill."

"By Godfrey, I will." With that, he lunged forward and with one mighty pull, yanked the hiss from the ground. Crestfallen, he looked at the nest of small, unsaleable potatoes that he had unearthed. He gasped, then said "You're right but it was only a lucky guess on your part."

"Well then, you might enjoy pulling up that hill over there."

"And what will I find in that one", the Grange Master asked.

"Roughly I would say in that hill you will find six or eight good potatoes and no small ones."



Again the host lunged to pull up a hill in an attempt to prove the new County Agent wrong, but again as before, the prediction given by the "whipper snapper" proved to be too accurate to be mere chance. The chiding ceased and "Uncle Frank" led a thoughtful group of farmers back to work. The County Agent trailed after them and for the remainder of the day, fulfilled his obligation by working in the silo with the rest of the men. At the end of the day, Frank Merrill astonished the group by asking the County Agent if he would consider returning to his farm early the following morning.

It was exactly 4 a.m. the next morning when the young "whipper snapper" arrived back at the Merrill farm. No one was up but he nevertheless pounded brashly on the front door. The noise brought forth a bellow from an upstairs window. "What in tarnation is going on down there?"

"Oh, you're not up yet?" the young called asked in mock amazement. "I thought farmers would surely be up and at work by this time."

Actually, he had hired a horse and left Dover at 2:00 a.m. that morning just to be sure that he would himself in this situation.

"I thought", he went on, "that you might like to teach me how to milk."

"Well, I will be right down and maybe I can teach a thing or two to you that isn't learned from books over at the college."

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(Joseph Henry Bodwell– Continued from Page 7)

Now milking cows certainly isn't learned from books, so "Uncle Frank" thought that he would be able to teach the your "whipper snapper" something when it came to milking. What he didn't know was that the young County Agent had grown up on a fram where his father had owned more cows than there were on the Merrill farm, and that the "whipper snapper" had been milking cows by hand since he was seven years old and at one time had milked 35 cows this way at one session.

Once his ability to milk cows had been established, he was more and more accepted at the Merrill farm and at other farms in the area. Mrs. Merrill, a kindly lady who had taken an instant liking ot the young man, told him that he should not hesitate to tell Mr. Merrill that "I learned that in college", every time that he brought up a point that proved the veteran farmer to be wrong. "Uncle Frank" proved to be a good sport and it was not long before the County Agent was invited to attend one of the Pomona Grange meetings.

During the course of the meeting, the Grange Master who had been a nemesis of all college-trained farmers only a short time before, rapped for attention, stood up and said, "Now Joe Bodwell, I want you to come up here while I make a public apology."

To the gathering he said "You all remember what I said just a few short months ago about that little "whipper snapper", but brothers and sisters, if you can't use his help and his knowledge around your places then he will be found working at my farm all of the time."

"Uncle Frank" Merrill was good to his word and did all that he could to undo any harm that he might have done to the young County Agent and to the Extension Service. He was a constant source of inspiration and gave unstintingly of his time, money and support to benefit the Agricultural Extension Service of the entire state as long as he lived.



To the youthful County Agent, he became a second father. When the "whipper snapper" married, he was given a baked bean supper by "Uncle Frank" for over 70 friends and neighbors, including Dr. Leon S. Merrill, Director of the Extension Service. He possesses to this day a picture taken at the supper, a picture not only filled with faces of friends of a by-gone era, but filled with many wonderful and poignant memories.

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(Joseph Henry Bodwell – Continued from Page 8)

There were many other interesting things that happened to your “Gramps” when he first started as County Agent. We have told about Frank Merrill and how “Gramps” won him over, but afterwards there were still many doubting Thomas types of people that he had to prove his worth to in his new career.

At college, “Gramps” had met a young man who came from Dover. His name was Clyde Brown but he had only stayed at the college two years before going back to his home town and starting in the poultry business.

He lived near the local Grange Hall and one day he came to “Gramps” office and invited him to give a talk at the Hall on how to tell by physical examination the probability of hens’ laying capacity. The date was set and the young man got 25 young poultrymen of the area to come to the meeting and to hear the lecture. They were all about the same age and they thought they would have some fun with the new County Agent.

“Gramps” started to tell them that the pigment color was an important thing to note. That on the beak, the skin, and on the front and back of the legs the color would be a deep yellow before the bird began to lay. Then, as the hen started to lay, the color would begin to fade, first on the beak, then the skin and then the front and back of the legs because this color went into the yolk of the egg. It was at this point that the audience began fooling and making foolish remarks, so “Gramps” knew he would have to give them a visual demonstration.



**East Dover Grange Hall**

He turned to Clyde Brown and said “Brownie, you have some hens in your hen house right next door do you not?” He said he did so “Gramps” asked him to take a couple of his friends and go bring back a crate of them so that he could show them what he was talking about.

A long table was placed in front of the group and a crate of eight hens placed on it. “Gramps” knew he would have to get their attention with something they had never seen before. He thought of something he had discovered when taking care of his own hens.

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## Annual Dues

Many thanks to all those who have sent in their Historical Society dues for 2017. We really appreciate having you as a member. If you haven't sent in your dues yet, please do so now so you can continue to enjoy all of the benefits of membership in the Historical Society, including receiving copies of the *Conserver*.

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### The Dover-Foxcroft Historical Society – Membership Application Form

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Street: \_\_\_\_\_ City/State/Zip \_\_\_\_\_

E-Mail: \_\_\_\_\_

Annual dues are \$10 per person and \$7.00 for senior memberships. Please make checks payable to: Dover-Foxcroft Historical Society, 874 West Main Street, Dover-Foxcroft, ME 04426. Dues cover January to December. If you are giving a gift membership, please include the name and address and we'll gladly notify the recipient of your gift.

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(Joseph Henry Bodwell, Continued from Page 9)

He told Brownie to hold one hen while he held another. He said, "Look at the legs on these birds. The hen Brownie has has hardly any color to them while this bird has a deep yellow color." He said he did so "Gramps" asked him to take a couple of his friends and go bring back a crate of them so that he could show them what he was talking about.

A long table was placed in front of the group and a crate of eight hens placed on it. "Gramps" knew he would have to get their attention with something they had never seen before. He thought of something he had discovered when taking care of his own hens.

He told Brownie to hold one hen while he held another. He said, "Look at the legs on these birds. The hen Brownie has has hardly any color to them while this bird has a deep yellow color."

This held their attention for a moment. "Gramps" was getting the birds ready to place on the table where they would expect to see it fly away, thereby having another laugh on him. But "Gramps" casually layed the bird on the table and, turning to Brownie, seemed to forget the bird completely.

"Gramps" said "Let's have your hen now and you get another one out of the crate for more comparison." You could here a pin drop.

Brownie, who had never seen this done before, pointed to the hen that "Gramps" had put one the table and then turned his back on. "Aren't you going to tie down that bird so that it won't be flying all around the Hall?" Brownie asked.

**(Continued in the Next Issue of the Conserver)**

## **Central Hall Progress**

### **A Brief Note**

We are getting closer to getting the building open. The new front doors are installed. All of the wainscoting is complete. Soon ceilings and overhead lights will be installed.



John and Keith, our carpenters, with the last piece of sheetrock!

### **Our Corporate Sponsors**

A grateful thank you to the following businesses whose funds support the Society and its efforts to preserve our history. When you shop or see these folks, please tell them 'thank you' for their support!

Ellen Anderson, D.P.M.  
Family Eyecare  
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**Thank you all!**

### **Items Available**

We thank Bob's Home and Garden on Lincoln Street for stocking our ornaments and DVD's. Please stop by their store and support this local business.

Glass Christmas ornaments: \$6.00 each (add \$4.00 for shipping)

- 2008 – Blacksmith Shop
- 2009 – Observer Building
- 2010 – Central Hall
- 2011 – Thompson Free Library
- 2012 – Foxcroft Academy
- 2013 – The Blethen House
- 2014 – Pleasant Street School
- 2015 – Mayo's Mill
- 2016 – Piscataquis County Court House

DVD's : Glimpses of Dover and Foxcroft - \$10.00 (add \$3.00 for shipping)

Memories of Central Hall/Lou Stevens - \$15.00 (add \$3.00 for shipping)

Dover-Foxcroft throws: \$40.00 (add \$8.00 for shipping)

**The Dover-Foxcroft Historical Society, Inc.**  
**28 Orchard Road**  
**Dover-Foxcroft, ME**  
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Mary signs the deed returning Central Hall to the Town!  
(Lisa makes sure everything runs smoothly)