

The Nutting Family

Presented by Derek Dorr

Nathan Nutting, Jr. 1804 - 1867 I'm Nathan Nutting, here to try to reconstruct the history of my family in Otisfield. It's an early and prominent family, for sure, but not one of the very first to come. The Nuttings from the get go seem to have been prosperous folks who owned more land and had more money than anyone else, and built bigger houses. They've always been considered pretty smart, and a lot of them got more education than the town offered. So they very often served as town and church officials.

The earliest ones to come came from Groton, Massachusetts. I'm not sure if my grandfather, Ephraim Nutting, was here at all, but I know that his two sons, Peter and Nathan, definitely moved up.

Peter Nutting, 1766-1856, was born in Groton, and actually came first to town as a kind of adopted son of the first settler in town, George Peirce. Peirce was the agent for the Otisfield proprietors and laid out the town. According to historian William Spurr, Peter was first here in 1775 at the young age of 9 or 10, with Peirce, but didn't stay. Back in Groton, he learned the carpenter's trade and became a master workman. About 1796 he finally settled here for good. It was then that he helped build the first meetinghouse on Bell Hill. During his long life, he moved around quite a bit before his death, at age 89, in 1856. He was then the oldest person in town

Nathan Nutting Sr., 1761-1847, was my father. He was also born in Groton, Mass., and came here in 1796, about the same time as his older brother, Peter. He built the first powder house in Otisfield

Nathan Nutting Jr., 1804-1867

As for me, I was born in Otisfield in 1804. Growing up in a family of builders, I became one myself, but even as a youngster became convinced that I had much to learn that couldn't happen in this small town. Consequently I spent a long apprenticeship down in Boston learning from some well-known architects like Charles Bulfinch, who himself had studied in Europe. Mr. Bulfinch was the first American Architect and the father of Architecture in the United States. You would recognize some of his buildings that still stand today like the Massachusetts State House on Beacon Hill, the Old State House in Hartford, Connecticut, and the enlargement of Faneuil Hall. By 1838 it was obvious that the first town meetinghouse on Bell Hill, built about 1797, partly by some earlier Nuttings, needed to be replaced. I was the person put in charge of the job. The result, completed in 1839, has stood the test of time. I served as architect and master workman for a number of other distinguished churches in the area, including some in Casco, Harrison, and New Gloucester. I also designed a number of houses in the area, including two or three in Bolsters Mills.

I was also responsible for constructing the first steam mill in town. Sadly, it no longer exists. Then when my brother Lyman needed a new home, I served again as master builder. Somewhat altered, it still stands at the junction of State Route 121 and Powhatan Road. I also designed the large detached barn built near the house. In it I was able to demonstrate some of the architectural principles I'd learned over the years. Recently the owners, themselves

descendents of my brother Lyman Nutting, refinished the impressive building, which now looks better than ever.

(Silas) Dexter Nutting, 1875- 1957 He was grandson of my brother Lyman Nutting and son of my nephew Albert. He inherited the Lyman Nutting house and barn that I designed. He was father of Charlotte Nutting Porter, Albert Dean Nutting, Theodore Nutting, Ruth Nutting Greenleaf and Martha Nutting Connell, all of whom at one time owned and lived in the Lyman Nutting house.

Known as Dexter, he was educated partly at Bridgton Academy and followed the family tradition of serving in leadership roles for town and church.

Like some of the other Nuttings, he was a man of means. Consequently Dexter Nutting sponsored the first three Finnish people who settled in Otisfield early in the 20th century. This sponsorship paid their immigration costs, and was required. Apparently the Nuttings also employed three young immigrants to work there as maids and farm help. Although the towns of West Paris and Harrison probably attracted more Finns than other area towns, many did settle in Otisfield, chiefly on Bell Hill Road. What was happening was that the Yankee families on Bell Hill Road had finally given up on farming. They were able to sell out to the incoming Finns, who worked harder than anyone else and consequently survived as farmers for at least a few more years.

Dexter Nutting's five children, born between 1903 and 1918, were all good students who received a formal education well beyond the reach of most. Martha, the youngest, graduated from Wheaton College and taught school for many years. She married William Connell. Her brother Ted, who was eight years older, had a distinguished career as a high school administrator. And Albert Dean, usually called Dean, went on to get a Ph.D. in forestry. Eventually he became dean of the School of forestry at the University of Maine. The children took turns living in the Lyman Nutting house. Martha, then a widow, was the last. On her death Martha's children, named Connell, inherited the Lyman Nutting place. One of them has restored the prominent old barn which now stands, as well as the house, as a fitting monument to the ingenuity and prominence of the family since its arrival in Otisfield early in the 19th century.