

## [Wells, Reuben Thomas]

### DEATH TAKES REUBEN T. WELLS LONG PROMINENT IN BUSINESS LIFE OF THE COMMUNITY

Reuben T. Wells, long prominent in the business activities of Canton and for many years president of the First National Bank of Canton, passed away at his home on East Main street, yesterday afternoon following a week's illness of pneumonia. Mr. Wells was on the street attending to business matters one week ago yesterday morning and while in conversation with friends stated that he felt remarkably well. He went to his home and during the early afternoon experienced a chill. This was the forerunner of pneumonia which followed in a few hours and his condition was critical from then on till death came yesterday. His son and daughters, who were at distant points were notified early of their father's illness and arrived here, with one exception, during the week. Mr. Wells made a brave and determined fight for life during the sharp painful hours of his illness, retaining hope to the very last.

Mr. Wells had driven twice to West Pierrepont within two or three days of his illness and the Saturday previous attended the funeral of the late A. [Alonzo] Barton Hepburn, a close personal friend, at which he acted as one of the honorary pallbearers, and it is believed that exposure for considerable periods during chilly weather brought on fatal illness. Funeral services will be conducted at the Wells home Thursday afternoon at 2 o'clock. The remains will be placed in the vault at Fairview where burial will be made in the spring.

Reuben Thomas Wells was born on a farm located on the Crary Mills road, a few miles from this village, August 19, 1849, the son of Dr. Abner Wells and Permelia Thomas Wells. His father Dr. Abner Wells was a native of Vermont who came to St. Lawrence County in the early days of Canton, making his way on the tide of emigration that was then rolling in fast over the Chateaugay trail, seeking homes in the fertile valleys of the North Country. Dr. Wells first settled in Russell but removed shortly to the vicinity of South Canton where he acquired land and built a home which for a long period of years was in the Wells family. Dr. Wells in the early days of Canton was a practicing physician throughout that section of the town where his home was and in this village, many of the old time families employing him. The late Ebenezer Miner, the Delance family and other Canton families sought his services in sickness.

Dr. Wells was thrice married and by these three unions was the father of nineteen children. Reuben T. was the son of the last wife, Permelia Thomas, descendant of an old Massachusetts family. Of this marriage there were seven children, Reuben being the youngest son and next to the youngest in

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the family, the youngest a daughter, Mrs. Herbert Miles of Central Square, N.Y., now remaining the only survivor of this family of seven. Mr. and Mrs. Miles were with Mr. Wells at his home here for several weeks during the early winter and up to ten days ago. Joel, another son of Dr. Wells died early in November last.

Mr. [Reuben] Wells was joined in marriage with Ella A. Miles, September 5, 1869 and went to live on the Wells farm at first. It is interesting to know that two years ago September 5 last, Mr. and Mrs. Wells celebrated their golden wedding and that neighbors and friends joined the family at that time making the occasion one of the happiest in the lives of this worthy couple who had traveled along life's path so far together. Mrs. Wells died on March 16, 1920, while on a visit at the home of a daughter in Mobile, Ala.

Within a year of so after the marriage of Mr. and Mrs. Wells they removed to Clare, then a portion of the town of Pierrepont and there their home was for several years. While in Clare Mr. Wells became actively engaged in forestry. Sawyer & Russell had large timber interests in this section and he became their agent and looked after their interests. When A. Barton Hepburn became the owner of the east half of Clare, timber lands acquired of Marcus Thomas, he sought Reuben Wells to look after this property. Mr. Wells early felt that forest lands would at some time be of great value and gradually acquired of Hepburn and other owners virgin forests until he had considerable holdings, and as the lumbering business picked up with the coming of the Canton Lumber Co. and other lumber mills onto the Grasse River in the late seventies and early eighties he began to reap the harvest sown by foresight.

In these years of activities in Clare he took an interest in the political welfare of the section. He was one of the first to advocate the cutting off of Clare from Pierrepont and with others succeeded in making Clare a sovereign town. He was for a period of time collector of Clare and Pierrepont.

In 1886 Mr. and Mrs. Wells, wishing to give their children the advantages of better schools than the little Clare settlement afforded, removed to this village and lived for one year on Goodrich street, then in 1887 purchased the property on upper Main street where they lived the entire remainder of their lives.

While in Canton Mr. Wells was still immersed in lumbering interests for many years. About twenty years ago when the Canton Lumber Co. was in the throes of dissolution Mr. Wells and John Bird secured the mills of the company near this village for a term of years and they were conducted under the company name of R. T. Wells & Co. These were very prosperous years and the transaction just mentioned was one of the most financially

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productive in all the activities of Reuben Wells, who was from time to time taking on other lumbering interests in Canada and at other points.

While a resident of Clare he made one other connection not mentioned in what precedes, that of the Hinckleys of Boston. He was employed by them in their considerable timber industry of these years and later was taken by Hinckley Bros. to the south where he remained in their employ for some time.

During the years that A. Barton Hepburn, then rising to commanding influence in the world of finance, was interested in timber lands he ever sought the counsel and services of Mr. Wells in whom he had great faith. At one time he sent Mr. Wells into Hamilton county to make an exhaustive survey of the timber lands in which Mr. Hepburn and his bank were interested. In these days a warm and intimate friendship grew up between the banker and the agent, and Mr. Hepburn in the years that followed accounted days of hunting in the forest which they both loved, the happiest in his life. Occasionally when Mr. Hepburn came to Canton in trout season, he enjoyed a dinner of fresh trout at the home of Mr. Wells who would make an early morning trip to the woods to secure a catch for his banker friend. Among Mr. Wells' books at his home is one that he prized very highly, that of Mr. Hepburn on finance. The flyleaf bears a sentiment written by the banker, expressing the affectionate esteem in which he held Mr. Wells.

Mr. Wells while a resident of Canton did not allow business activities to cloud his interest in local affairs. He early took an active interest in village affairs and was for everything that was for the good and welfare of the village. He was a member of the village board of trustees and during the nineties was village president. He was a lover of good clean sports and a fine horse, especially one with speed, was dear to his heart. He was actively interested in the racing associations existing throughout Northern New York in the nineties and later and was for a period of time President of St. Lawrence County Agricultural Society.

In these years Mr. Wells had grown rapidly in public confidence and esteem as a business man and a man of performance. In July 1894 he was elected to the board of directors of the First National Bank, continuing thereon till 1897 when he retired. He was re-elected director of this bank in Dec. 1902 and on Feb. 6, 1903 was elected president to succeed the late Justice Leslie W. Russell who died just previous to that time. Mr. Wells continued president of the First National Bank for a period of sixteen years, up to Jan. 14, 1919, when he retired to be succeeded by Wriley N. Beard. Mr. Wells was at that time made chairman of the Board of Directors, a position which he held to his death.

Mr. Wells was the sort of man that made and retained warm friendships. His word was always good, and was never given to be slighted or withdrawn

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to the detriment of others. Many years ago he affiliated with the Masonic order and was a member of the local Masonic bodies, including the Shrine. He was also a member of The Club. He was a member of the First Universalist church of Canton and for a long period of years and to within a short time of his death served as one of the trustees of the church. He was on the board of trustees of this church when the present church was being built and took an active and helpful interest in its building.

Mr. Wells was a lover of the great outdoors, and delighted in going to the forest several times during the year, especially in the fall hunting season. Nearly fifty years ago while hunting he received a gun discharge in the arm, leaving the member crippled for life. He delighted in his home and he loved his family and sought their welfare at all times. He was the sort of man who makes for good citizenship, good community and good neighborhood. He will be missed.

Mr. Wells leaves one son and three daughters, as follows: Herbert R. of Marlboro, Mass.; Bertha—Mrs. Charles H. Mead, who has been spending the winter with her husband and daughter in Florida; Jessie—wife of Dr. Herbert P. Cole of Mobile, Ala.; Evelyn—Mrs. Edwin W. Finch of Birmingham, Ala. The son, Mrs. Mead and Mrs. Cole arrived here during the week and were at their father's bedside when death came. Mr. and Mrs. Finch were on their way here and are expected to arrive in Canton today.

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