

LISBON AREA HISTORICAL SOCIETY MOMENTS IN HISTORY – JUNE 2019

THE PARKER-YOUNG FIRE OF JUNE 1, 1891



It was 128 years ago on the first day of June when the whole town of Lisbon was threatened after a fire started at the Parker Young Manufacturing Company facility on South Main Street. A Parker Young Mfg. Co. billhead from the 1880s (pictured above) shows what the trackside of the South Main Street facility in Lisbon looked like before all of its buildings burned in a great fire on June 1, 1891. There were three signs on the building. On one side there were two signs: PACKING BOXES and CHAIR STOCK AND BOBBINS. The sign on the back was PARKER YOUNG MFG. CO. and PIANO SOUNDING BOARDS. The square smokestack pictured on the letterhead was the only thing left standing after the fire.



The Northern Herald newspaper which was published in Lisbon featured the story “SWEPT AWAY BY FIRE” on the front page of its June 3, 1891 paper. At 2pm a fire believed to have originated in the sawmill area the Parker Young Mfg. Co. quickly engulfed its whole campus. As soon as it was determined to be such a dangerous fire, a telegram was sent to Superintendent Cummings of the Concord & Montreal Railroad who promptly sent a special train from Woodsville, NH, 10 miles south of Lisbon, carrying all the Woodsville firemen and available railroad men, as well as a special train from Littleton, 10 miles north of Lisbon, with its fire

company. However, in a few short hours the fire devoured all the Parker Young buildings, an estimated 1 million board feet of piled boards, storehouses, drying houses, offices, nine dwellings and their contents, barns, outhouses, and more. The town water at the time came from Pearl Lake. The Parker Young factory had fire sprinklers which could not be shut off, so all the water went to the sprinkler system, and there wasn't enough to save the houses which did catch fire. Private homes as well as tenements owned by Parker Young were all on fire at the same time, and none could be saved. Everything was dry and burned quickly. The Concord and Montreal Railroad Company lost four cars to the fire, as well.



The smoking ruins of the South Main Street, Parker Young Mfg. Co. fire of June 1891

High wind carried burning cinders across Lisbon's Ammonoosuc River causing sixteen house roofs on the west side of town to catch fire. Roofs of several stately mansions on today's Park Ridge caught fire as did barns and houses on School Street and Moore's Peg Mill along the river behind today's Boynton Block. Everyone in town was wetting their house roof. Eighty barrels of flour safely taken out of a store house ended up being burned, and a hose carriage and part of a hose burned, too. At one time it was feared that the whole town would catch on fire. The fire was fought from one end of town to the other.

Every available person was busy saving contents from burned structures, and every available horse-drawn wagon was used. People were exhausted, and some fainted. The lawn of the Methodist Episcopal Church on Main Street was stacked with rescued furniture, bedding and clothing. Porches of homes thought to be out of reach of the fire were also stacked with contents taken from burning homes. People wandered the streets until late at night trying to collect their possessions, and many homeowners opened their doors to the less fortunate.

Not only did Parker Young lose everything, but its employees lost their personal tools, money and watches that they had left in their clothing which was hanging in the factory. One man lost \$100 and a gold watch. One hundred employees were left without a job.

After the fire, discussion around town focused on a hot area in the saw mill as well as sparks from a locomotive that had been switching cars in that area earlier in the day. A large amount of wood stored below the mill was not touched by fire, and that probably was the impetus to immediately rebuild the facility on the same site, which Parker Young did accomplish within six months. By the middle of July of 1891 frames for three buildings had already been built, and 18 men had been hired.

Started in the 1840s in Lyman as a starch mill, the Parker Young Manufacturing Company owned by Charles Parker and James Riley Young had moved to the large field along the west side of the Ammonoosuc River in Lisbon by 1869 and began a saw mill and manufacturing facility. As early as 1862, there was a Parker Young store selling dry goods, clothing, hardware, furniture, West India goods and groceries in Lisbon.



Above is an image of a Nov. 1, 1862 coupon redeemable at the Parker & Young Store in Lisbon. The location of the store is still being researched.

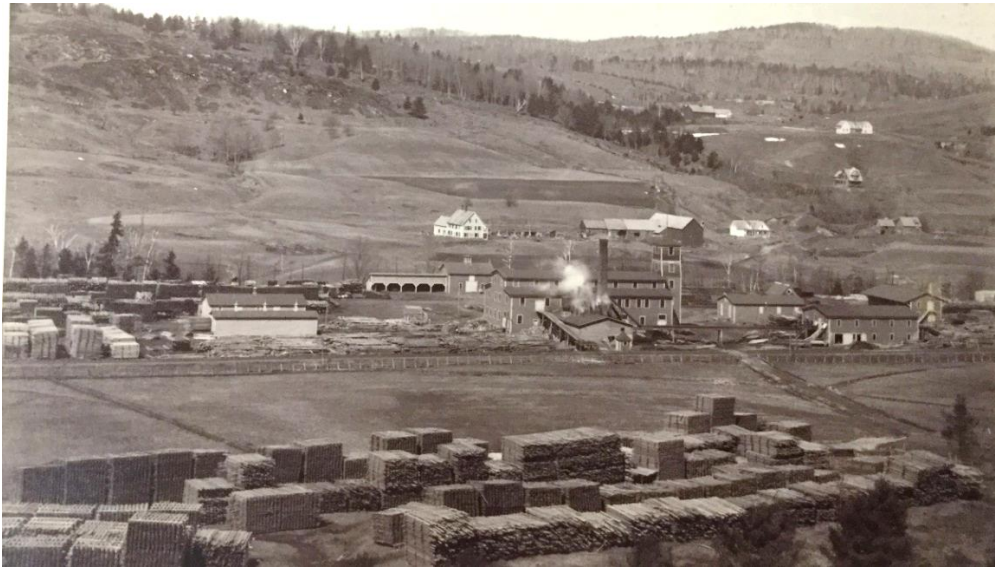
The 1869 Parker Young mill on the west side of town was destroyed by fire in 1876 and rebuilt on the same site.



Above is a portion of the 1883 Bird's Eye View of Lisbon which shows the Parker Young Manufacturing Company site at the north end of the present-day Lisbon Lions Community Field. There are piles of boards stacked and ready for the manufacturing of piano sounding boards, boxes,

and chair stock. The mill was accessed by a road going down to the field from Meadow Street which branched off School Street as it does today by the Lisbon Public Library. Note the covered bridge at center right where today's School Street Bridge is located.

The mill was destroyed by fire for the second time after being depicted in the 1883 Bird's Eye View. The mill was soon rebuilt on the other side of the river at the end of South Main Street. It was that new mill that burned in June of 1891.



After the fire of 1891, Parker Young Mfg. Co. immediately rebuilt on the same site. This is a view of the trackside looking west across the Ammonoosuc River.



A c. 1893 view of the front side of the rebuilt Parker Young Mfg. Co. at far right center, looking up the Ammonoosuc River from the west side of town.



About one-third of the employees of the Parker Young Mfg. Co. posed for the c. 1895 picture above. At one time the company employed 300 men and was the largest manufacturer of piano sounding boards in the world. The mill also made butter tubs, butter boxes, box shooks, hardwood flooring, custom mill work and manufactured lumber. In the mill's heyday, teams of logging horses with loads of logs would line Main Street. The mill's blacksmith shop and horse barn stood on the riverbank across South Main Street from the mill.

Ironically, the Parker Young factory whistle was used to sound the town fire alarm as late as 1922.

In the late 1920s the Parker Young company was reorganized under the name Lisbon Company. Plymwood Furniture later used the factory to make its popular Sugar Hill Pine. The site is now home to contract furniture manufacturer Design Contempo, Inc.

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