

Elbridge S. Oliver



November 2, 1849 - December 25, 1930

As does anyone who delves into dusty files in search of all but forgotten places and the obscure people who made them successful, I have now and then come across a single name in connection with such a variety of enterprises that my curiosity has been aroused and I would give much to meet and talk with this extraordinary individual whose life and works touched so many others. Alas, he slumbers peacefully in the company of his wife and children in the Black Point

Cemetery, almost within sight of the several places he held forth in a long life of public service. He passed away on Christmas Day, 1930, at the age of 81 years, 1 month, and 22 days.

The person who has so captured my interest was named Elbridge S. Oliver. His signature appears on thousands of documents as a result of his three principal jobs--as station master at Scarborough Beach Station starting at age 24 in 1873 until 1908, as Scarborough Town Clerk from 1893 to 1915, and finally as postmaster at Scarborough Beach from 1915 until 1926. He appears in countless postcard views among the throngs of summer people who came and went at the original 1873 Scarborough Beach Station. As Town Clerk, he issued licenses and documented the births, marriages, and deaths of all the town's citizens in lengthy annual reports still to be found at the Scarborough Public Library. As postmaster, he ran a busy operation at Newcomb's store which catered to the owners of Prout's Neck's great hotels in the off season in addition to the local community. And yet, when he died on that long ago Christmas Day in 1930, hardly a word appeared in the local press. A brief death notice sufficed; there was no obituary. Despite lots of looking, I have been unable to pinpoint where he and his family lived the major portion of their lives. His residence is variously described as a rent in the Dunstan area and a map of the 1890's indicates he lived in one of the two houses on the Prouts Neck side of the railroad overpass just before St Max's driveway. His father resided in the cape cod house formerly the residence of L. Norton Payson and currently owned by Dr. Benjamin Russell. The elder Oliver ran a grocery store on the ground floor of the grange hall just up the hill from the station.

Elbridge's wife, the former Lynda Sylvester, was the daughter of Asa M. Sylvester who had built Sylvester's Store and Grain, adjacent to the Oak Hill Railroad Station.

Oliver's career had it's share of tragedy along with high accomplishment. One can but imagine his grief when, after 35 years in the employ of the Boston & Maine railroad, it was his misfortune to be on duty on August 27, 1908, when a spectacular fire reduced the Scarborough Beach Station to a pile of ashes and twisted metal. The Eastern Argus reported "The fire apparently started in the baggage room, presumably from a lamp that either dropped or broke. The station agent got out the baggage and checks, and also the tickets and ticket money, office papers, and telegraph instrument. But he could do nothing toward saving the building and it burned down rapidly." It marked the sad end of 35 years of faithful service to the railroad. A railroad coach on the siding became a temporary station at the site until the new station opened the following spring.

The Black Point Cemetery silently shows a second, earlier tragedy. A poignant reminder in the form of a tiny angel, wrought in marble, marks the grave of 4 year old daughter, Sadie, who was born in 1879 and died in 1883.

Wife, Lynda, had reached the age of 78 when she passed on in 1928. And so it was that by the time Elbridge came to the end of his days on that Christmas in austere 1930, there was no one left to write an obituary.

But now, 69 years later, we can but wonder why so remarkable a life drew so little notice when it ended. Here's a salute to the Mr. Oliver who sped the departing guests on their way and

welcomed the new arrivals for 35 years on the platform at Scarborough Beach Station, resplendent in his well-pressed black suit, jaunty bow tie, and square-cut black cap; to him who documented the births, marriages, and deaths of his contemporaries for more than 20 years as town clerk; and in his final career, he became the unsung hero at the post office who collected and dispensed all the daily joys, sorrows, and pathos of a couple thousand of his peers for eleven uneventful years (if you discount World War I) before retiring, at age 77, to reflect on it all.

We thank you, Mr. Oliver, for a job well done!