



RUINS CHRISTINE BROOKS COTE

Stacyville is a small township in northern Maine with a population of around 400. The area is heavily forested—much of it managed for timber harvesting—and patches of land here and there have been cleared and planted with potatoes. The center of the township lies along a mile-long stretch of Route 11 where small houses line both sides of the road.

This piece of Route 11 is also called Sherman Station Road. Sherman is the next town to the southeast and holds great importance

for those who are interested in the history of the North Maine Woods. Sherman was the site of a popular train station in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and was the gateway for people coming from Portland or Boston or New York to spend time outdoors camping, fishing, hunting, tramping (an old-fashioned word for hiking), or relaxing. Sherman Station was the place to get off if one wanted to stay at any of the many sporting camps or hotels in the region.

“Sports,” as the guests were called, would be met at the station by their host and a horse and buggy and from there set off on their journey into the Maine wilderness. For those adventurous enough to attempt a tramp up Katahdin—the highest peak in Maine—Sherman brought you as close to the mountain as you could get by mechanized transportation. There you’d meet your guide and take off in a westerly direction for several days of tramping through the forest, canoeing brooks and rivers, and climbing the rocky scree to the tablelands and peak of Katahdin. Guiding and hosting visitors and

sports was big business in the area back then. It still is, though people no longer ride into town on the train and take a horse and buggy to their final destination. Stacyville is now just a town people drive through, hardly deserving a mention on their GPS.

For about a century, Stacyville was also home to the Sherman Lumber Company. Founded in 1894, it was for a time the oldest independently owned and continuously operated sawmill in the state. It began as a producer of sawn lumber, and in 1911 it began to produce hardwood flooring and panels for the furniture industry. Keeping with the times, in

image info



1967 it turned to supplying wood chips for the pulp and paper industry. The company closed its doors in the late 1990s. Despite strong efforts, a buyer has never been found to successfully update the facility, attract and employ local workers, and revive the town's presence and spark.

Though Stacyville is hardly the high point of any trip up Route 11, there is something about it that is difficult to miss, something I take note of every time I pass through. Many of the houses—perhaps most—are abandoned and falling into disrepair. A few have burned down in re-

cent years. A couple have caved in due to heavy snow loads in winter. Most have broken windows, peeling paint, and warped roofs. Virtually all of them are disappearing under the trees, grasses, and wildflowers that have grown unchecked. Nature takes over as soon as it is able.

To me, Stacyville is a sad little town, a town that grew old and no longer had a purpose, a town that became too weary to make a go of it, a town that was ignored and left to die. All of us see places like this from time to time: abandoned houses, factories, churches, stores. But in

Stacyville, nearly the entire town is abandoned and in ruins. It's hard to know what the future holds for Stacyville. Without places to work, it's unlikely people will move in and consider rebuilding these old homes or tearing them down and start over.

In recent years, many communities of Amish have found places to live, farm, and run small businesses in Maine. Some years ago, an Amish community moved into Smyrna Mills and Oakfield, just a short distance from Stacyville. They opened a small general store and a shed-building business. A few years ago, a com-

munity moved into Patten, the town north of Stacyville. They are growing and expanding, buying up farmland, building barns and houses for themselves, and selling goods and services—everything from fresh donuts and pumpkins to porch swings and sheds to carpentry and roofing services. This year, an Amish family purchased an old house in Stacyville; renovations have begun and horses and cows now roam the pasture.

Maybe that's the next chapter for Stacyville—once a popular train station, then a mill town, next a thriving Amish community. ❖