

# A “Two for One” Story!!

This is the story behind The Brookside, a summer hotel located at 299 Webster Street, and what we know about our 1911 Maxwell Auto which was used by Hudson’s rural delivery mailman, Willie Stearns,

## ***Family of Mary A (Hill) and William B Stearns***

William Burt Stearns was born in Fitzwilliam, NH the son of Clarissa (Carpenter) and Jabez Stearns in November 1829. His wife, Mary A Hill, was born in Washington, NH in November 1831 a daughter of Celesta (Murdock) and Warren P. Hill. They were married in Peterborough, NH September 1854. Their oldest child, Mary C, was born July 1855 in Washington, NH. Their son, William ‘Willie’ was born March 1857 in New London, NH.

The 1880 US Census places this family living on a farm in the Concord, NH area. At that time William B, a farmer, was 50 years old; his wife Mary A was 49. Their son William “Willie” was 21 and occupied as a dealer in fancy goods; his sister Mary C. was 24.

Classified ads in the Nashua Telegraph place William “Willie” in Hudson by May 1890. He was looking for a good workhorse and selling hatching eggs for various strains of hens. He was also selling fresh eggs, and fresh killed poultry from Brookside Poultry Yards in Hudson. The family had moved to Hudson by November 1893 as William B had passed and was interred within Hills Farm Cemetery. The following October his widow, Mary A. Stearns from Penacook, NH purchased the land and buildings on Webster Street from L.W.P. Wilmot of Hudson. This land extended from the Merrimack River eastward on both sides of the road. Written as a single parcel divided by Webster Street, it is identified today as 288 and 299

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Webster Street. This was a portion of the Nathaniel Hills Tyng Land; some 900 acres of unsettled land Nathaniel, grandson of Joseph Hills, purchased from Jonathan Tyng in 1732. Currently, I have not been successful in tracing the detailed ownership of the land back to Nathaniel.

### ***The Brookside – A Summer Hotel***

The first ad for The Brookside summer hotel appeared in the Nashua Telegraph July 5, 1895. Summer boarders and parties looking for rest and comfort could find it at The Brookside. Large rooms, nice walks and drives along with fishing and boating were available to guests. These ads continued occasionally over the next few years and were signed by W W Stearns. The 1905 Hudson directory shows Mary A, William W's mother, Mary C, his sister, and his wife Mrs. William Stearns (Helena) as operating The Brookside. William W was employed by the US postal service as a rural mail carrier.

The trolley line from Taylor Falls bridge traveled north along Webster Street, through Litchfield, Goffs Falls, and Manchester was incorporated in 1905 and the line opened for public travel January 1907 with a 12-mile trip from the bridge to Goffs Falls at a cost of 20 cents and a running time of 45 minutes. This offered public transportation between Lowell, MA or Nashua, NH to Hudson bridge and then along Webster Street to The Brookside. It also provided transport from Manchester through Litchfield to The Brookside.

Activity at The Brookside as a summer hotel continued for a few years. In 1913 we find that W. W. Stearns offered to sell or lease

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The Brookside as well as the home farm and 26 acres. No action was taken, and we found various ads to rent, or sell the property after this time. In April 1917 Mary A. Stearns (Mrs. William B) passed in Hudson at the age of 86. She was interred in the family plot at Hills Farm Cemetery. On November 7, 1921, there was an article about an impetus to open and operate an orphan’s home at the Brookside by G. W. Buzzell. This would center around a trade school with a director of children. He intended to have a capable farmer installed as supervisor. I have seen no indication that this materialized.

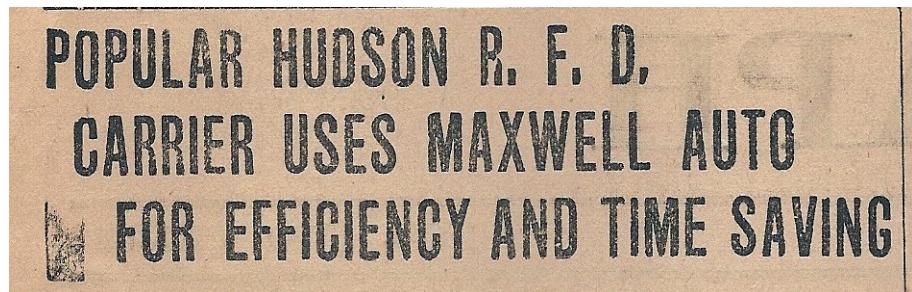
### ***“Willie” Stearns – Rural Mail Carrier***

William “Willie” Stearns joined the employ of the US Postal Service in 1903 as a rural mail carrier at the age of 45. His route started at the Hudson Post Office at the bridge and went up Webster Street over to High Range into Londonderry and then back into Hudson Center and Hudson Bridge area. This popular mailman had a record for punctuality and friendliness as he drove his route. At first, he used a specially fitted 2-wheel horse drawn apparatus for his route which ended up taking him a full working day to complete. He had two horses so he could use them on alternate days.

In May 1911 Willie purchased a 2-cylinder 16 horsepower Maxwell runabout from City Carriage company located near Monument Square and the Hunt Building in Nashua. With this vehicle he was able to cover the same route and return to Hudson by 12:15. This was one of the first times an auto was used in business,

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they had been used primarily for recreation. Well worth it! Often his wife, Helena, would accompany him on his mail route, assisting as she could with organizing the mail between stops.



*May 30 1911 Headline Nashua Telegraph*

In September 1925, William “Willie” Stearns, the veteran mail carrier, retired after 22 years of service. He, and his able assistant Helena, developed a remarkable reputation for dependability, helpfulness, and punctuality. Their many friends wished them well in retirement.

Willie and Helena announced their plans to make a ‘road trip’ south to Jacksonville, Fla by way of a ‘house car’ which he had purchased and outfitted for their use.

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*299 Webster @1925 with House car*

After the trip they returned home to Webster Street. Helena Stearns died February 1935 in Hudson at age of 83. She was interred at Hills Farm Cemetery. By May 1, 1937, the land and buildings (both sides of Webster Street) were sold to Fred W. Knowlton, including a 300-foot strip which Mary A. (mother) had deeded to her daughter Mary C. By 1937 William W's title to the property was by inheritance; he was the sole survivor of his mother and sister; both of whom pre-deceased him.

William remained in Hudson until a few months prior to his passing in December 1942 in New London, NH at the age of 80. He was interred at Hills Farm Cemetery. He and Helena had no children. What about the Maxwell you might ask! The Maxwell was apparently placed with the Goyette Museum in Peterborough, NH as part of their auto collection. Bob Booth purchased it from the museum in 1959. The museum closed in 1961.

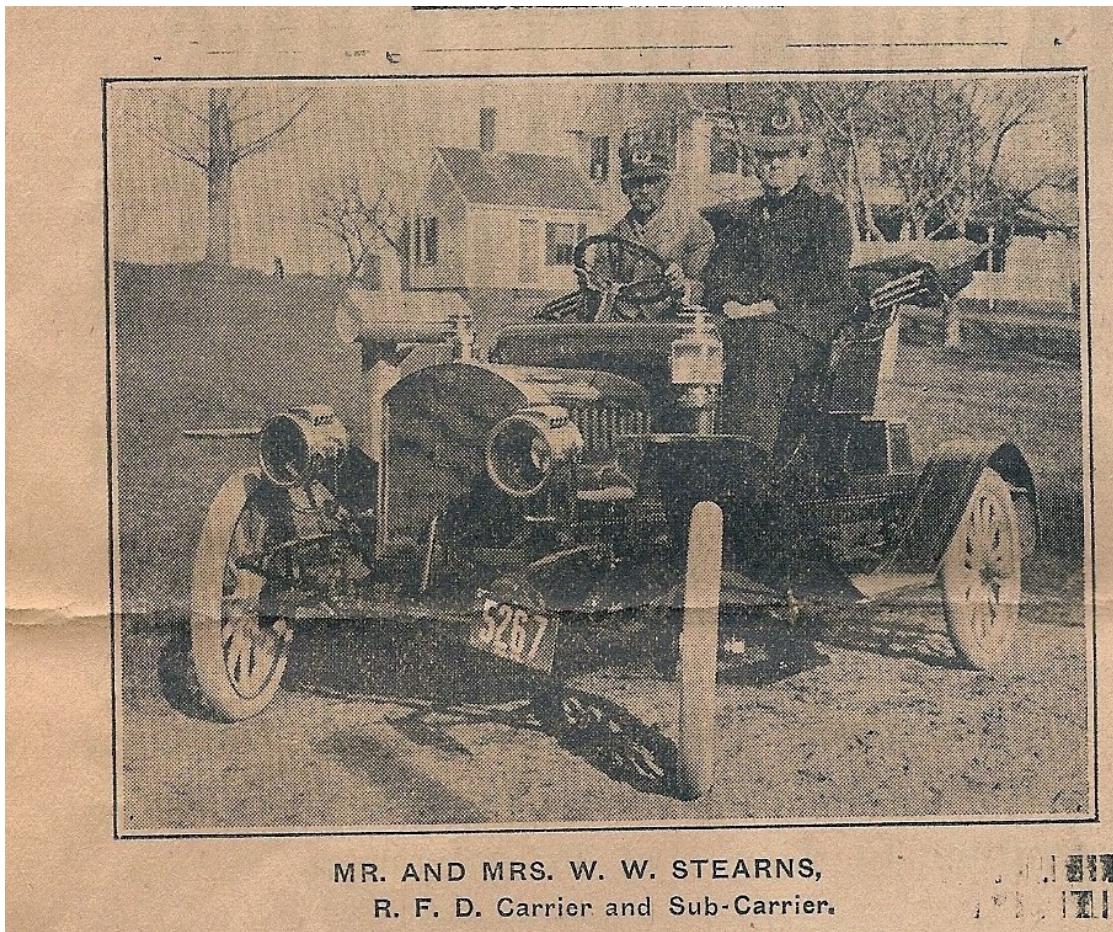
### ***Swap of the Century – Return of the Maxwell***

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The “Swap of the Century” originated in 1999 when Bob Booth, then of Cummings, GA, placed an ad in The Yankee Magazine. He wanted to swap his 1911 Maxwell for an antique clock with wooden works. This ad was spotted by Society member Shawn Jasper who brought it to the membership. After a series of donations and society funds, we purchased a tall clock from an antique clock dealer in NH. The swap was consummated in July 1999 when a moving van containing the Maxwell appeared on the Hills House lawn. The auto was considered to be in quite good condition, considering Booth kept it in his basement and moved it piece by piece each time he moved since 1959. The rebuilt, all-aluminum engine took four people to put it in the van was kept in a crate which he had made for it in 1963 after having it fixed. Mr. Booth received his new wooden works clock which was part of the swap.

Mr. Booth showed an old black-and-white photo which he received with the truck showing Willie Stearns and a woman, believed to be his wife Helena dressed in post office regalia. I have not seen this photo but would suspect it was like this one published in the Nashua Telegraph May 31, 1911.

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MR. AND MRS. W. W. STEARNS,  
R. F. D. Carrier and Sub-Carrier.

## *Epilogue*

The Brookside property has been transferred to various owners since William “Willie” sold to Fred Knowlton in 1937. In June 1950 Charlotte Bagley of Hudson purchased both sides of the road from the Nashua Building and Loan. Later she sold the west side to Gardner Griffin as farmland which was later used as farmland by Wilson Farms of Litchfield, NH and Lexington, MA. Within the past few years has been transferred to K + M Developers, Inc of Hudson.

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The east side, 299 Webster has likewise changed hands a few times. In 2021, what remained of The Brookside buildings was demolished in 2021 in favor of a new development by M.R. Lacasse Homes, LLC.



*What Remains at 299 Webster 2021 Photo by Kopiski*

The 1911 Maxwell which was returned to Hudson in June 1999, remains in the possession of the Hudson Historical Society. It has been displayed a few times during Old Home Days at the Hills House Grounds. A lot of restoration has been done; body work repaired and painted, upholstery and covering restored, and the engine runs! The pieces are there and working. But adjustments and tuning are needed so they all work together.

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## Sources:

1. FamilySearch.COM and Ancestry.COM for Birth, Marriage, Death Records, and US Census Records.
2. Hudson Cemetery Records as recorded by Kimbal Webster 1908 and Hills Farm Cemetery Records as recorded in 1953 by New Hampshire Daughters of the American Revolution
3. Nashua Telegraph Search via NashuaLibrary.ORG. Used search criteria “Brookside” and also “Stearns”
4. Hillsborough County Registry of Deeds
5. Nashua (Hudson) City Directory especially 1911
6. Nashua Telegraph July 10, 1999 “Swap of the Century” by Joshua Trudell
7. Photos of The Brookside from the collection of Hudson Historical Society.
8. Photo by Steve Kopiski 2021 of 299 Webster Street,

Written and researched by Ruth Parker with inputs from the Genealogy and research Committee.

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