

Benajah Leonard Bugbee in 1902



His obituary reads:

Southbridge Press, November 15, 1907

Benajah L. Bugbee, aged 32 years, son of the late B.U. Bugbee, was drowned last Saturday afternoon by the upsetting of a canoe on the Quinebaug river. Two others in the same canoe, Louis Krom and his sister-in-law, Mrs. M. B. Goodwin were nearly drowned, the lady being resuscitated with the greatest difficulty.

Early in the afternoon a party of six went to the river; it included Mr. and Mrs. Bugbee, Mr. and Mrs. L.B. Hopkins, Mr. Krom and Mrs. Goodwin. All of them were ardent canoeists, and had been on the river many times during the season just closed. Saturday they had planned to go as far as Brimfield, it being thought that the unusually high water in the river would make the undertaking feasible. They embarked at a point not far from John A. Hall's farm and started up stream in pleasing anticipation of the prospect of a long ride, through the delightful country lying in that direction. Mr. Bugbee, Mr. Krom and Mrs. Goodwin were in the lead, and some distance following came Mr. and Mrs. Hopkins and Mrs. Bugbee. They had proceeded but a short distance reaching the bridge which crosses the stream at Mr. Hall's place when the accident happened. The river was most turbulent as a result of the recent heavy rains, and not for 20 years has it been so dangerous for boating. At this point the water rushes through the narrow banks at great velocity, swirling and tossing like mad as it broadens out a little after passing the bridge, forming a whirlpool which reaches to a depth of at least 25 feet. This was the fatal spot. The canoe had passed the whirlpool and pushing its nose well under the bridge when it was struck with great force and instantly upset. Not a sound followed. The three occupants made no outcry, and their companions in the other canoe first knew that something had happened when they saw the empty canoe sweeping toward them and passing directly under their own on its way down stream. Mr. Krom seized Mrs. Goodwin who retained her self possession wonderfully and together they were swept down through the whirlpool to a clump of birches overhanging the stream. Here Mr. Krom threw his arm over a limb and managed

to hang on until assisted out of the water by Mr. Hopkins, the lady in the meantime having become unconscious. Mrs. Bugbee also assisted in the rescue.

Mr. Bugbee had no chance for his life from the first. He was not a swimmer and the fearful current took him with it almost without resistance. He was seen to try and cling to the slippery abutment of the bridge and then pass into the whirlpool. Mrs. Bugbee, it is said, saw the body swept past the birches where Mr. Krom found lodgement but this may not be certain.

As soon as Mr. Hopkins realized what had happened he rushed his canoe to the shore, placing his companions in safety, and then plunged in to the rescue of Mr. Krom and Mrs. Goodwin. This was no easy task, the lady hanging limp on Mr. Krom's arm who himself was nearly exhausted and could not long have held to the sapling that had so providentially come in his way as the current swept him and his companion down to almost certain death.

It appears that Mr. Bugbee went down with the current immediately, and that death might have ensued from the shock, this view being supported by the fact that no water was found in his lungs. Search for him was made as soon as possible but the body could not be found, and as the day wore on into the night, the anxiety increased. The authorities of the towns of Southbridge and Sturbridge acted promptly, and many friends of Mr. Bugbee spent the night along the river. The American Optical company, and Mr. Bugbee's fellow employees did everything that could suggest itself, and as soon as the day broke the watchers were joined by others in constantly increasing numbers. Every resource of the American optical company was early employed in the search, and in a little while several boats were placed on the river brought from ponds both near and far. These were manned by willing friends and a systematic prosecution of the work was carried on, beginning near the bridge and working down stream, every inch of the way being carefully scanned, and every appliance to further the work being quickly provided. As the forenoon wore away disappointment followed the unsuccessful efforts put forth, yet with no thought of giving up the search all set their faces resolutely toward the work. About 2 o'clock, Nelson Baker, L.J. Simonds and Royal Simonds, who had been among the most diligent of the leaders in the search, discovered the body lodged against an old tree that partly crosses the stream at a point about a half mile below the spot where the boat was upset. It was beneath the water. Quickly, and as tenderly as possible it was taken to the shore, and soon after removed to the undertaking rooms of Samuel Williams, whence it was taken to Mr. Bugbee's home.

Mr. Bugbee was one of the most promising young men in Southbridge and his untimely death, under circumstances so sad, causes deep regret. He was born here 32 years ago and here his whole life was passed. He completed his education young and entered the office of the Southbridge optical company, of which his father was treasurer and manager and showed such aptitude for the business that he soon became recognized as a most valuable man, and at the death of his father he filled his place in the business with marked success. Upon the absorption of the concern by the American Optical Company Mr. Bugbee entered that company's employ, and under new conditions again proved himself equal to whatever high task might be given him. In a little time he made himself familiar with the vast and varied business of the big company, and had come to be one of its most highly prized men. He leaves one daughter. The funeral was held Tuesday afternoon, and was attended by a large number of his fellow workers at the A.O. works. Rev. F.A. Warfield, a former pastor of the Union church officiated. The bearers were: Channing M. Wells, Albert B. Wells, J. Cheney Wells, C. Fred Hill, G. Clarence Winter and Earle Goodier.