

Princeton Post Offices

A 1915 Talk Given Before the Princeton Club by Josiah D. Gregory

Your Committee asked me to speak of some of my remembrances of the earlier days of Princeton, and I have gathered a few facts and incidents that have come to my mind and knowledge that may not be familiar to all present. When our ancestors came to these hills, the man on horseback with his wife and child on the pillion behind them, they found the land heavily timbered. This they cut and burned to make an opening on which to place their cabin. The ancestor who built on the Gregory farm said the spot was so closely set with trees that wherever he stood and stretched out his arms he would reach a tree with each hand.

They had few conveniences and lived a simple life. They got along with out many things, which to us seem quite necessary. If their fire on hearth did not keep over night in the morning, the boy was sent to the neighbors to borrow and bring home the live coals or the lighted candle in the old tin lantern. If you people should be deprived of the little friction match, which you all have in your pocket I am, sure you would find it inconvenient. If they wished to send a message to friends in Weston from which town many of our early settlers came, they would be obliged to send a special messenger on horseback. Not until 53 years after the towns incorporation was the Post Office established here, and I thought perhaps a little of its history might be of interest to you.

Benjamin Franklin was appointed Postmaster of Philadelphia in 1737 and made Postmaster General of the Colonies in 1753 by the King. It was he who startled the people by proposing stage wagon to carry mail between Philadelphia and Boston; starting from each city Monday and reaching their destination Saturday eve.

After the Revolution in 1769 the United States established a Post Office department and that year 75 offices were opened. Worcester was our nearest office until 1812. The Diary of Elizabeth Fuller the daughter of Minister Fuller written in 1790&92 mentions "Father has gone to Worcester for the paper." In 1812 Samuel Stevenson who had married a sister of Charles Russell and probably lived on the old Russell place, where Mrs. Richardson now lives, was appointed postmaster. There was a two-story building north of this house, situated about 40 feet away, which was built for a store. Stevenson seems to have been the storekeeper with Charles Russell a young man of 19 as assistant P.M. This was on the principle road through town leading from Lancaster to Barre, up the hill past Mr. Hobbs, Charles Thompson, and Roper's Mill. Mr. Stevenson resigned and Mr. Russell was made Postmaster in 1817. The increase of his business and the need of a public hall led him to build in 1820 the brick building at the corner, now called The Mansion House. It was built for a store and Masonic Hall. A lodge of Masons was established here in 1812, as they had been obliged to meet in private homes.

This reminds me of a story told by Wilkes Davis, who was born and lived in the house that used to stand back of the elm trees this side of Dr. Stimson shop. A Mr.

Cheaney, I believe it was, who owned the place previous to Mr. Davis father, was a member of the lodge and rented a chamber for their meetings. When they went into the room one evening a little pile of something white attracted their attention. Upon examination it seemed like fine plaster. They looked above and saw a small hole in the plastering. Mr. Cheaney immediately went to the attic and found his wife, whose curiosity had overcome her discretion, intent upon discovering some of the secrets of the order. What was said or done was not reported. Another story is told in connection with the lodge holding its meetings at the home of a member. The wife knocks on the door and says to the husband, who answers, "Mr. Richardson, if you are through with my gridiron I should like it to use."

After the building of the brick store the Post Office was removed there and the Masons occupied the hall. As children we remember the bottomless pit, an opening about three feet square at the back of the ball, its depth we never knew. The lodge continued in existence until 1826.

From 1830 to 1840 several attempts were made to have the office removed to the store, which stood between Mr. Dwight Davis and Mr. Jackson now. Dean Sturgis. Copies of letters and remonstrance's among Mr. Russell's papers, which have lately been placed in the library vault, show the efforts made to hold the office, which were successful until 1846, when it went to the Goodnow store, Mr. G. Cheever, Mr. Moses Goodnow's grandfather, as Postmaster. Here it remained until 1849 when Geo. F. Folger & successor to Mr. Russell in the brick house, was appointed. But the people were not satisfied, business was active in the Center and West Village, and but little doing at Russell's Corner. Much complaint was made and Mr. Folger felt that if he attempted to keep the office in his store a new man would be appointed, therefore he arranged with Mr. Ivory Wilder who lived in the house now occupied by the Telephone Co. to take the office and care for it as Assistant Postmaster. This was about 1850. In 1854 Mr. Wilder was made Postmaster and continued caring for the mail until 1856. The room used was on the corner at the right of the front door. The old boxes that he had are in the attic over the center store.

When the administration changed from Whig to Democrat and Franklin Pierce of New Hampshire was chosen President, Moses Gill was appointed. This was in 1856. The people were not generally pleased with the change and Mr. Gill had difficulty in finding a place for the office. He lived in the house, now down beyond Dr. Comey's, and he could not take it so far from the center. He tried to hire or buy one of the horse sheds, which then stood on the Common back of the church; but they would not sell one. He finally rented a little shoe shop a few rods this side of William Brooks farm, Armstrongs now, just across the causeway. There it remained for several months. Mr. Gill was not used to the business and made some amusing mistakes. Papers kept coming addressed to P.M. He did not know, whom they were for, until one day he happened to think -P.M. -P.M. they must be intended for Paul Mirick. He made up a package and sent them over to Mr. Mirick by a neighbor. The shop was so far from the center much complaint was made and Mr. Gill succeeded in hiring a room

in the house now owned by Ellsworth Howe. There was a small sink in the room into which the mails were emptied from the bags. In a short time he hired the shoe shop that stood about where Dr. Howe's Office now stands, only on a bank. Here it was kept for several months. Mr. Gill, a man nearly 70, coming two miles each winter morning in season to have the mails ready at 7 o'clock. He lived on the Gireaurd place. It was quite a task, and it was a new business for him. He did not satisfy the people and much complaint was made. Dr. Brooks, who lived across the street from Mr. Roberts, was induced to act as Postmaster and take the office into a room just back of the sitting room. It remained here under his care until 1866. That year Mr. Beaman of the Wachusett House, Mr. A. Thompson of the Prospect House and others thought it would accommodate the majority of the town better if placed nearer the hotels and through their efforts D.H. Gregory was appointee Postmaster and the office moved into the store Sept. 27, 1866.

There was a change in the administration in 1884, Cleveland having been elected. In 1886 Mr. E.H. Heywood was interested to have the office placed in the hands of one of his party. Then he found he could not get appointed himself he succeeded in securing it for Leonard Chandler, John Chandlers father who lived 3 miles away, on the farm of Clayton Hubbard now. Mr. Chandler did not seek the office and when it was thrust upon him he came to see us in regard to the matter which resulted in my being appointed Asst. Postmaster, doing the work and paying him a specified sum each quarter when he came up to sign the reports.

There was another change in the administration in 1888, and John Wannamaker, who was Postmaster General, appointed me. Raymond J. Gregory was appointed April 15, 1915.

The office in East Princeton was established in 1849 with H.S. Pratt as Postmaster. In 1855 Joseph Whitcomb took his place. In 1870 J. Allen Mirick. In 1878 Warren Whitcomb, in Cleveland's administration of 1886 the same influence that placed Mr. Chandler in the Princeton Office put Samuel Jewett in the East Princeton office, In 1889 Warren Whitcomb was reinstated.

Within a few years the town had six offices in operation at one time; Princeton, East Princeton, Brooks Station, Princeton Depot, Ropers Mills or East Hubbardston, and Mt. Wachusett. The last two have been discontinued and West Sterling office moved over the line into Princeton so that now we have five offices within the limits of our town lines.

The Rates of Postage as listed in the book, which was given Samuel Stevenson printed in 1813, our first Postmaster were- (read from book). Now you can send your letter to East Princeton or 3000 miles to California, 5000 miles to Sandwich Islands or 8000 miles to Shanghai, with only a two-cent stamp on the corner. If you put on a blue 10-cent stamp your lives in letter will be specially delivered if the party addressed with one mile of the office. Parcel Post now adds much volume to the mails and has become a great convenience when you can send a dozen eggs (if you can get them) to your friend in New York, for 75 cents, or a suitcase weighing maybe 50lbs. for 54

cents it is proving or great convenience.

We are frequently required to keep a record of the weights of mail sent and received. The last one in May of this year showed that from May 16 To June 16 there was recorded 3917 lbs. and that we sent out during the same time 1487 lbs. and 70zs. The weight was kept in classes. Second Class (newspapers from publishers) was the largest amount received being 1773 lbs. Letters First Class 208 lbs. Circulars Third Class 252 lbs.

Parcel Post 1250 lbs & 100ozs. Pouches and Sacks 932 lbs. The record of mail dispatched from the office was

Letters	First Class	11,412.
	Second Class	39.5
	Third Class	35.
Parcel Post		385.15
<u>Pouches and Sacks</u>		<u>912.</u>
TOTAL		1487.7 lbs.

The mails at first were by stage, going to towns north of us. Afterwards a line ran through from towns west to Boston. Upon the completion of the Worcester and Nashua R.R. about 1840 the mails were carried by stage to Oakdale and this continued until the Boston, Barre, and Gardner R.xR. was completed to Gardner in 1872. Some one has said the road was given this name because it did not start at Boston did not go to Barre and did not end in Gardner.

During the building of this road there was held two town meetings probably as exciting as any on our records. The road needed money and private subscriptions were insufficient. Friends of the road got a special act through the Legislature of 1868 allowing towns on the line to subscribe 5% of the valuation to capital stock. A town meeting was called Sept. 2 1868. The center and west part of the town led by William Goodnow and S.S. Hastings favored the plan, while most of the people east of the center led by Albert C. Howe, and William Brown of East Princeton were opposed. The location of the road was fixed, so that no subscription from the town would have brought it nearer the center. There had been an old survey, crossing the valley below Quinapoxet thence near the Daniel Davis place following up the brook that crosses the road by Mr. Pembletons thence south of Mr. Weatherbees up to the height of land above the present Depot. It would have added to the length of the road and there was not enough business in Princeton to warrant the added expense.

The town meeting was well attended. Mr. Hastings who used to live in this house (Mr. Roberts) made the motion that "The town subscribe for \$20,000 of stock." There was not much talking. It had been well argued out side. The vote was taken by the reading of the Ccheck List, each party present responding by "Yes or No". The result was 91-Yes and 97-No. 188 having voted. Mr. Goodnow offered some remarks

moved to make the amount subscribed \$10,000, and the roll was called again, “90 Yes and 99 No”. Another meeting was held Sept. 25 and the question tried over again. Both sides had made a thorough canvas. The old and young the blind and lame were brought out and the vote taken in the same manner with result – 120 Yes and 120 No.” 240 persons voting. Time has proved that we of the center and west side were fortunate in being defeated. The stock was turned over to a new organization at about 10 cents on a dollar. The town was saved a heavy loss. Holden and Hubbardston both made subscriptions. Hubbardston to the amount of \$45,000 5% of its valuation.

I remember one other town meeting where we had a tie vote. It was in 1885 when meetings were held in Wachusett Hall after Boylston Hall was burned. The question was on Licence. The vote stood 17 to 17. At this same meeting I noticed that a vote was passed granting a bounty of 10 cents a head for all woodchucks killed within the limits of the town. I don’t know wether the Brunson Boys were interested in the matter but the friends of the plan were not out in force at the adjournment of the meeting and the vote was rescinded.

With one more incident that comes to my mind I will clost my rambling talk. On the morning of the 4’ of July 1885 my mother looked out of a chamber window toward the west village and saw suspended over the road, the form of a man, Apparently there had been a murder or suicide during the night. There was much excitement at first but when the object was reached a placard was found attached saying, “School Committee, Three in One”. Somebody cut the rope and threw the stuffed old clothes back of the sheds. That 4’ of July afternoon our band, we had a brass band then and a band stand, gathered, placed the form on a stretcher, marched to the top of Meeting House Hill where cremation was made. I was about 10 years old but remember well the awful dirge which was sounded as they assended the hill. M.B.Reed had the bass horn and made it very effective. There had been some opposition to the ruling of the Committee and it was publicly expressed by the young man, Rev. J.B. Bigelow, Asa N. Goddard, and Geo. E. Pratt, were the Committee.

Princeton Depot, Est	Jan. 29, 1877. Dis, 1916
Postmasters, Geo. F. Wetherbee	
John E. Boyer	Sept. 18, 1886
G.A. Bibelow	May 28, 1889
Brooks Station Est.	Jan. 17, 1877
Postmasters, C.R. Bartlett	Jan. 17, 1877
Chas. Winship	Oct. 22, 1877
W.K. Parker	Mar. 12, 1888
Daniel Davis, Jr.	Sept. 13, 1888
Geo. F. Pratt	Jan. 16, 1893
Edw. W. Sheedon	Jan. 13, 1894
Alex St George	July 3, 1896
M.H. Warner	May 10, 1910

Mt. Wachusett Est.

Postmasters, D.A. Putnam

M.H. Bullard

W.L. Bigelow

M.H. Bullard

G.H. Derby

Discontinued

July 28, 1873

May 25, 1875

June 26, 1884

Mar. 11, 1886

Mar. 29, 1895

Oct. 14, 1903