

Then & Now – Russell Corner Merriam Road



16 Merriam Rd.

The first house built at Russell Corner was built about 1748 at today's 16 Merriam Road. It served as an inn, run by its owner, Lt. Abijah Moore. In 1748, the road in front of this house was the main east-west highway between Lancaster and Barre, part of the Old Bay Path. A religious service was held here in October 1759, and the first meeting of the newly formed district of Princeton was held here on Christmas Eve 1759. Early settlers found their way to the tavern over rough trails blazed through the woods. Records show that a Town Meeting held at this tavern in 1761, the voters were asked whether they wanted to:

- Build a town pond for animals,
- Build a meeting house,
- Do anything about the existing roads,
- Vote to let swine run at large.

Abijah Moore sold to Joseph Sargent in 1765, who later sold it to Joseph Reed. Reed farmed the property for many years and had large barn behind the house until about 1882, when it burned.

Russell Corner, or on older maps Russell's Corner, is located at the junction of Merriam Road and Gregory Hill Road, and it served as the center of Princeton for many of its early years. John Russell was an owner of the house at 28 Merriam Road in the 1780's, and had many family members living nearby.

- His son Charles Russell, with his wife Persis Hastings, lived in the house at 49 Gregory Hill Road.
- In about 1822-23, Charles and his business partner, Ephraim Mirick, built a brick store at 19 Merriam Road.

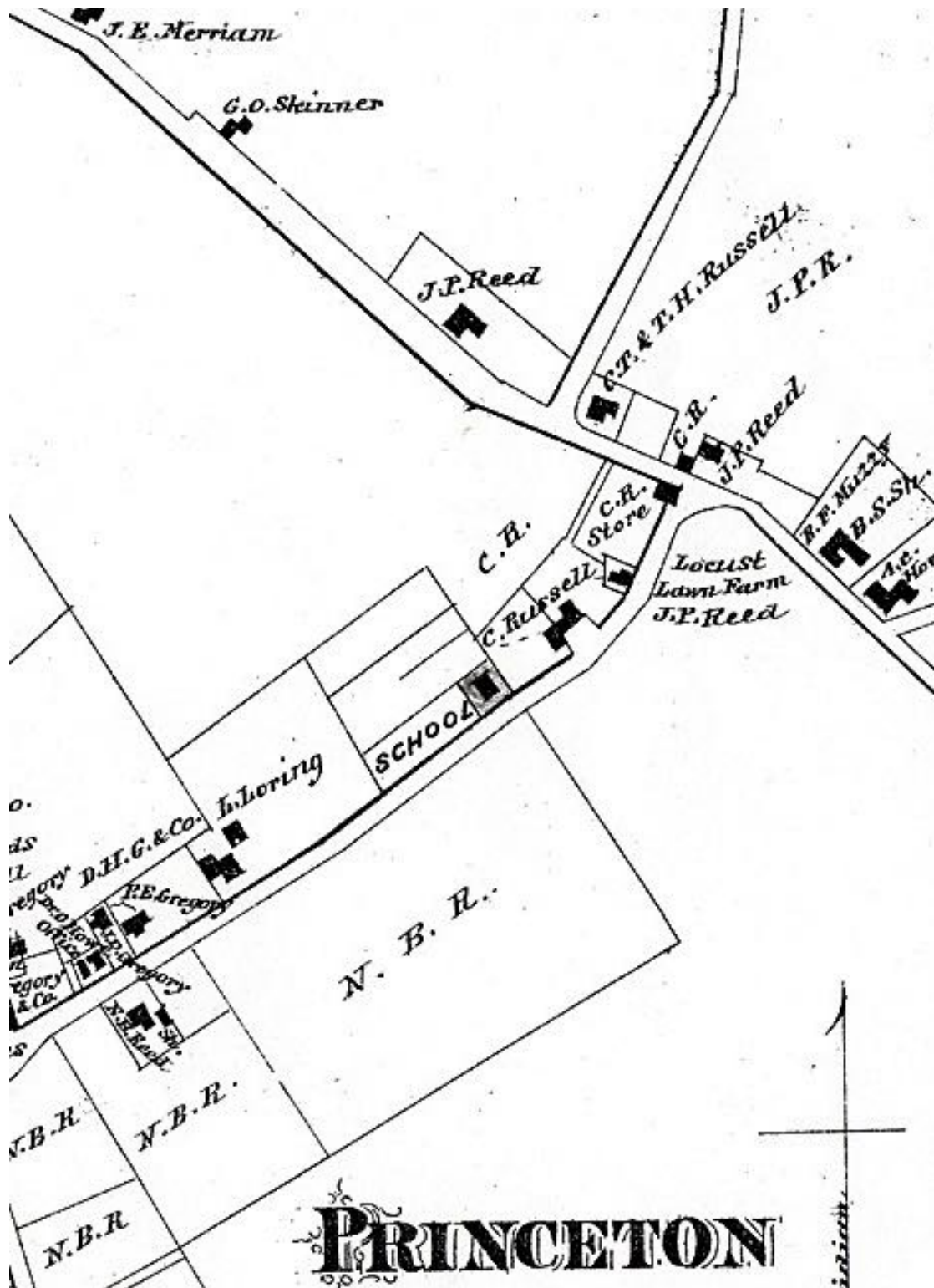
In 1812 Samuel Stevenson, who had married a sister of Charles Russell and probably lived at the old Russell place, was appointed postmaster. He served as postmaster until 1817, when he resigned and Charles Russell took over.

Charles Russell served the town of Princeton in a variety of roles, including postmaster, town clerk, state representative and senator, and as a member of the governor's council.



19 Merriam Rd.

His sons, Charles Theodore Russell and Thomas Hastings Russell, were educated at Harvard and practiced law together in Boston, in offices at 27 State Street. Charles Russell was postmaster from 1817 until 1846. The store closed sometime thereafter as the center of Princeton moved from Russell Corner to the current center with its large common, churches, hotels, and stores.



During the religious discord of the first half of the 1800's, the anti-slavery movement was also gathering strength. Princeton people took the cause to heart and worked for liberation of slaves. In 1837, sixty-five men met at Charles Russell's to found an Anti-Slavery Society. The records of this meeting state that "in whatever views we contemplate slavery, we believe that it is wholly inconsistent with the Bible and the genius of our government, and that it is abolished the

happier it will be for the slave, the master, and nation." 2.

In the 1870's Thomas Hastings Russell, son of Charles and Persis, with his wife Maria Louisa Wiswell, modernized the store building by adding the third floor, with the mansard roof and cupola, and adding a covered porch on three sides. The carriage barn, now gone, included a bowling alley. Residents of Boston, they used it in the summers, sharing it with their children and grandchildren.



16 Merriam Rd. – After Porch Was Added

About 1880 Thomas and Maria Russell purchased the Moore/Reed farm at 16 Merriam Road, and updated it by moving the side ell to the rear and adding a veranda with an octagon along the front of the house. The Russell's daughter, Mary Russell Walley and her husband Edward, used that house as a summer home until their deaths in the 1920's.

There was a croquet court and a tennis court behind the house; the tennis court was used until the 1980's. The site has been repurposed as a riding ring, and a new horse barn stands where the old barn once stood.

The Russell descendants continued to own the properties for many years. The Charles Russell Peck family owned 49 Gregory Hill Road into the 1970's.



49 Gregory Hill Rd.

Three of the Walley daughters, granddaughters of Thomas and Maria Russell, were owners and summer residents until the 1970's. Theresa Richardson owned 28 Merriam Road.



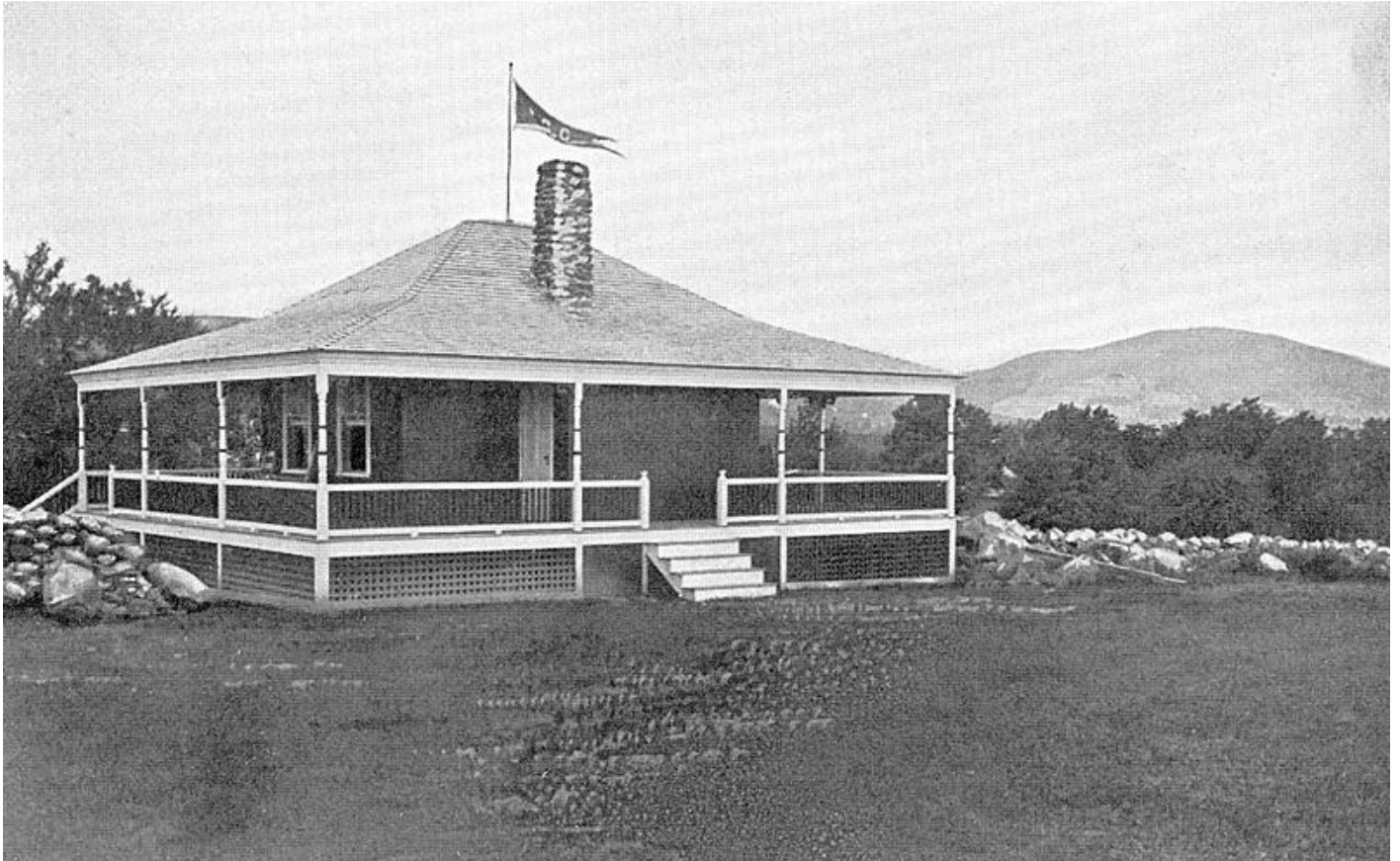
28 Merriam Rd.

Mary Littlefield owned 19 Merriam Road, and Annie Densmore owned 16 Merriam Road. Mrs. Densmore became a year-round resident in 1935. The present owners of 28 Merriam and 16 Merriam are Russell descendants. Other Russell/Walley descendants built the houses at 8a and 8b Sterling Road and 18 Sterling Road as well as 24 Mirick Road.

Golf Links & Tennis

In 1899 a small golf course was laid out on the land across the street from 16 Merriam Rd., which was leased from Mr. Russell. This was the start of the Princeton Country Club on rock-strewn terrain laced with walls, which caused the ball to rebound erratically. In 1902 a small clubhouse was built and the course gradually improved. A newspaper clipping of September 1902 states, "from the east side of the piazza the Blue Hills of Milton and Prospect Hill of Somerville are easily seen." A tournament closed the season every Labor Day, as it still does with tennis, and a silver trophy was awarded to the winner. The club continued for 20 years, until the automobile was more available, which enabled golfers to seek better courses than Princeton's six-hole "cow-pasture".





1920 Golf Clubhouse Post Card

A clay tennis court was built or rebuilt behind and on the east side of 16 Merriam Rd circa 1920. Family members and friends played it on until the early 1980's. In 1950 until its closing, it was an asphalt court.

Traffic from Sterling passed through Russell Corner until 1938, when the road on the far side of the triangle field was built. The old pasture walls were uncovered and the stones were used in the roadbed. Traffic from East Princeton passed this corner until the late 1950's when East Princeton Road was extended from Mirick Road to Gregory Hill Road.



1930 Densmore Tennis Court

In 1990 Elizabeth Densmore gave to the Princeton Land Trust the triangle shaped land across from 16 Merriam Road.

The above is compiled from articles written by:

- Phyllis Booth for the Landmark 1996
- Research done by Nancy Orlando
- George Bumgardner's "Princeton and the high road 1775-1975
- United States Department of the Interior National Park Service, National Register of Historic Places for PRINCETON CENTER HISTORIC DISTRICT
- Blake, Francis Everett. History of the Town of Princeton 1759-1915: Vol. 1

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