

Then & Now – Famous Citizen Honorable Moses Gill



***Lt. Governor Moses Gill - Original
Portrait by John S. Copley***

"He was born at Charlestown, Mass., on the 18th day of January in the year 1734. He was bred to the business of a merchant, early went into that line in Boston and for a long course of years maintained the character of an upright and liberal merchant.

In his youth he was married to the amiable and accomplished Miss Sarah Prince, the daughter and only child of the Reverend Thomas Prince, then pastor of the Old South Church in Boston; in whose right he held while he lived, and afterwards in his own, a large landed estate in Princeton.

The increasing value of that property depended on the industry and enterprise of the owner; and in its improvement he set a valuable example and did much good in this part of the country.

Rev. Peter Whitney in his History of Worcester County, 1793, wrote:

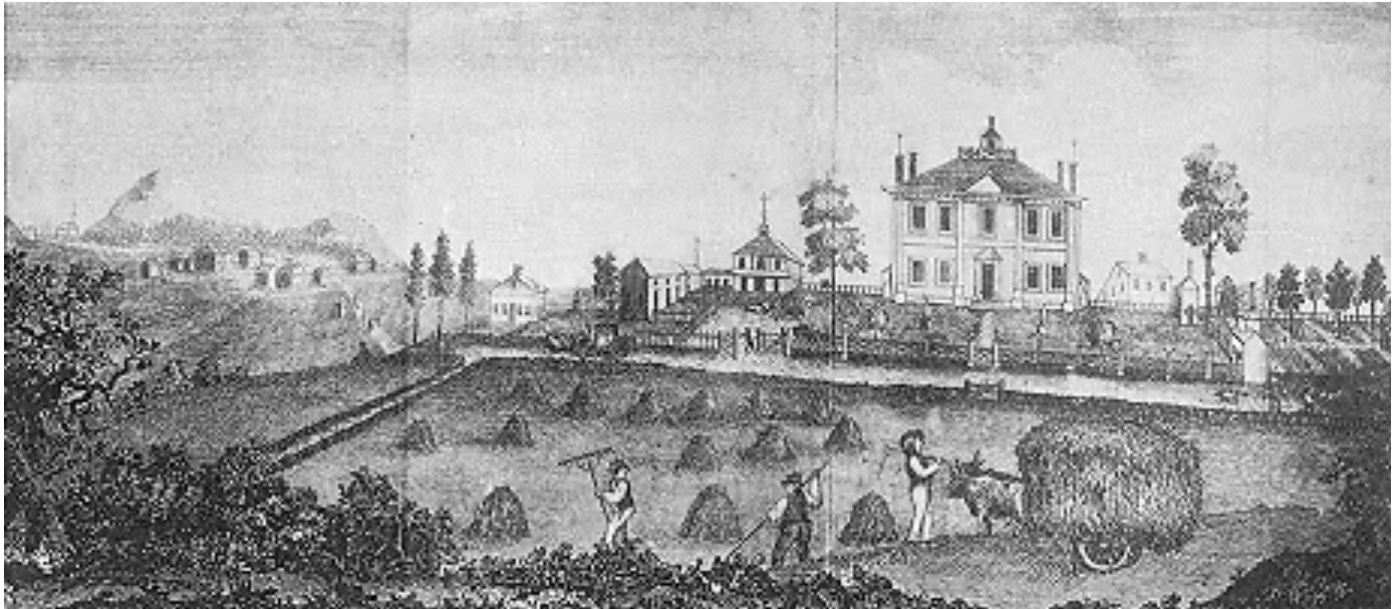
" In this town is the country seat of the Hon. Moses Gill, Esq., who has been from the year 1775 one of the judges of the Court of Common Pleas for the County of Worcester, and for several years as councilor of this Commonwealth. His elegant and noble seat is about one mile and a quarter from the meetinghouse, to the south. The farm contains upwards Of 3000 acres. The county road from Princeton to Worcester passes through it in front of the house, which faces to the west.



***Mrs. Sarah (Prince) Gill 1728-1771
- Original Portrait by John S. Copley***

"The buildings stand upon the highest land of the whole farm; but it is level round about them for many rods, and then there is a very gradual descent. The land on which

these buildings stand is elevated between 1200 and 1300 feet above the level of the sea, as the Hon. James Winthrop, Esq., informs me.



*View of the seat of the hon. Moses Gill Esqr. at Princeton, in the County of Worcester, MA,
Engraved by Sam Hill, State Street, Boston c. 1792*

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"The mansion house is large, being 50 x 50 feet, with four stacks of chimneys; the farm house is 40 x 36 feet; in a line with this stand the coach and chaise house, 50 x 36 feet; this is joined to the barn by a shed 70 feet in length - the barn is two hundred feet by thirty-two. Very elegant fences were erected around the mansion house, the outhouses, and the garden.

"The prospect from this seat is extensive and grand, taking in horizon to the east, of seventy miles at least. The blue hills of Milton are discernable with the naked eye, from the windows of this superb edifice, distant not less than sixty miles, as well as the waters of the harbor of Boston, at certain seasons of the year.

"When we view this seat, these buildings, and this farm of so many hundred acres, now under a high degree of cultivation, and are told that in the year 1766 it was a perfect wilderness, we are struck with wonder, admiration and astonishment.

"The honorable proprietor hereof must have great satisfaction in contemplating these improvements, so extensive, made under his direction, and, I may add by his own active industry. Judge Gill is a gentleman of singular vivacity and activity, and indefatigable in his endeavors to bring forward the cultivation of his lands; of great and essential service, by his example in the employment he finds for so many persons, and in all his attempts to serve the interests of the place where he dwells, and in his acts of private

munificence and public generosity, and deserves great respect and esteem, not only from individuals, but from the town and county he has so greatly benefited, and especially by the ways in which he makes use of that vast estate, wherewith a kind Providence has blessed him.

"Upon the whole, this seat of judge Gill, all the agreeable circumstances respecting it being attentively considered, is not paralleled by any in the New England States; perhaps not by any one this side of Delaware."

Many of the older families in Princeton today are glad to consider among their treasures, articles of furniture and bric-a-brac that came from the Gill mansion.

Mrs. Sarah (Prince), wife of Moses Gill, died on Monday, August 5, 1771, aged 43 years.



Rebecca Boylston Gill - Portrait by Erik Gould

After his first wife's death, he was married to Miss Rebecca Boylston, niece of Thomas Boylston, Esq., and sister of Mary Hallowell, mother of Ward Nicholas Boylston, later known as Madame Rebecca Gill. She died at Princeton on Monday, March 21, 1798 in the 70th year of her age. Both wives died childless. He adopted a son of his brother John, who was named for him, Moses. The last named died in South Boston, May 1887.

In Nicholas Boylston's will of Aug. 1, 1771, Suffolk Probate 70. 445. He devised to Rebecca (Mrs. Gill) " Negro Man Jack and Negro Woman Flora."

Mr. Moses Gill was one of a committee sent by the provincial Congress June 20, 1775, to repair to Springfield, there to receive Generals

Washington and Lee " and escort them to the army before Boston."

When the controversy between Great Britain and America became serious and it was seen that a resort to arms would be the probable consequence, Mr. Gill, came forward with his property and cast it liberally into the lap of his country's fortune. His person and property were laid at the foot of the altar of liberty, ready for the sacrifice, if his country needed them.

In the year 1775, he was elected into the council under the charter of 1692; by which fifteen councilors were to act as Governor. This was done in pursuance to the

recommendation of the American Congress. Under this authority, troops were raised, ships provided magistrates and judges appointed, and commissions issued to defend the country. Mr. Gill continued in the council under this form of government, elected annually by the General Court, until the new constitution was formed in 1780. From that time to the year 1795, he was continued one of the Executive Council. In that year, he was elected Lieutenant Governor, and continued by annual elections, from that time in the same office until June 1799, when by the death of Governor Increase Sumner he became Acting Governor. He died May 20, 1800 and from this date until the 30th of May 1800-ten days-when Caleb Strong was inaugurated the state was without a Governor.

From the Boston papers of that period, we learn:

"The Funeral Solemnities of the late Lieutenant-Governor and Commander-in-Chief, His Honor Moses Gill, Esq., were performed with marks of the highest respect. Order of Procession. Funeral Escort, Officers of the Militia with Side-Arms, justices of the Peace, judges of Probate, Municipal Court and Common Pleas, Attorney-General, judges of the Supreme judicial Court, Members of the House of Representatives, Members of the Senate, Sheriff of Suffolk with his wand, Q. Master-General, Adjutant-General, Members of the Honorable Council, Secretary, Treasurer, "Paul" Bearers, Hon. Mr. Jones, Gen. Lincoln, Hon. Mr. Robbins, Rev. Dr. Howard, Hon. judge Dana, Hon. Mr. Phillips, Relations, Members of Congress in Boston, United States judges and District Attorney, Other Civil Officers of the United States, Foreign Consuls, President, Corporation, Professors and Instructors of Harvard University, Ministers of the Gospel, Selectmen of Boston, Corporations in Boston according to Seniority, Citizens and Strangers. "

"The escort was composed of a troop of cavalry, commanded by Capt. Davis of Roxbury, a regiment of Infantry, two companies of Light Infantry, and a company of Artillery; the whole under the command of Lt. Col. Gardner. The civil part of the procession was directed by Majors Cunningham and Blanchard, Capt. Gardner's company of Artillery fired minute guns; - the places of business were closed; the colors in the harbor and in the town, were suspended half mast and staff; and such evidences of general respect were given, as the notice unavoidably brief, would admit." (Colombian Centinel and Massachusetts Federalist, Wednesday, May 28, 1800.)

"The procession moved at the hour appointed, from the late dwelling-house of the deceased in School-street, his winter home where the Parker House now stands, through Long-Acre, Common-street, Hollis-street, Main-street, down and up State-street, through Court-street and Tremont-street, to the place of interment; probably the Granary Burying Ground."

From an Inventory of personal estate belonging to Moses Gill (original Mss. in possession of the American Antiquarian Society.)"

Throughout his life, Gill was a philanthropist, donating to his church and community including the donation of land which became the town center of Princeton. Gill, Massachusetts was named in honor of Moses Gill and all his contributions to the state of Massachusetts.

Resources:

- Blakes – History of Princeton
- Wikipedia - https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Moses_Gill

The Princeton Historical Society has in its collection a number of items attributed to Moses Gill or donated by him. A few examples are:

- A Martha Washington style chair
- Photographs of paintings by John Singleton Copley's portraits of him and his wives
- Some deeds
- A photo of a Pewter Tankard made by Thomas Swanson in the 1760's given to the Princeton Church
- Photo of pewter plate, marked on front "Gift of Moses Gill to the Church Princetown Sept 1767." Attached to the back is a Worcester Art Museum label stating that the makers were Thomas Burford and James Green, and that the plate was made about 1760.

This document was compiled William "Bud" Brooks in 2023-24, and approved by the Princeton Historical Commission. Photos used are from the PHS digital files.