

# **Then & Now - by Josiah D. Gregory**

## **A Talk on Princetons' Early Settlers**

There is on file in the State House at Boston; a petition to the General Court of 1742 from Joshua Wilier; Jr. of Lancaster which reads "That the distance between Lancaster a new town called. Nichewaag (now called Petersham) is about 25 miles; that 10 miles west of Lancaster meeting house there is a tract of Province Land which contains about 120 acres lying between land formerly granted to Mr. Plaisted and Allen; and the Blagrove farm which lye out of bound of any town} that your petitioner though a poor nan, yet, he humbly apprehends he hath the character of an Honest and Laborious man and is very desirous of obtaining a grant of said lands on as easy terns as may be, and should he obtain it; he apprehends it would be of great service to people traveling from Lancaster to the new town now settling westward to have a house to depart to in their traveling."

April 7, 1743, we find that the legislature ordered that the land be



***Location Today on Houghton Rd.***

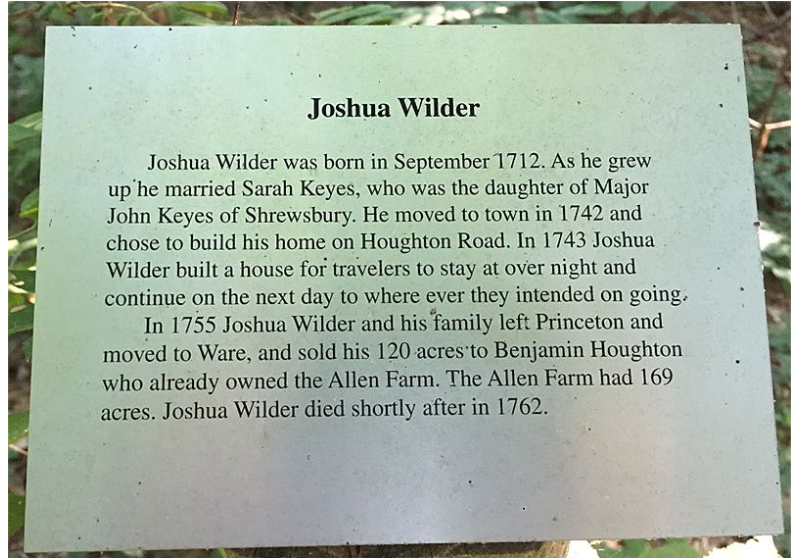
granted "provided the petitioner does within one year build a good and convenient house thereon for the accommodation of Travelers, and have 10 acres cleared and brought to English Grass or ploughed within four years and that he will dwell thereon with his family or have one other good family dwell thereon."

This was without doubt the first settlement in town - Mr. Wilder lived here until about 1760 when having lost his property by a speculation in cattle for the supply of the Army in Canada, he sold out and moved to

Belchertown where he died in 1762. (Part of the NORCO Club property today.)

Benjamin Houghton; an ancestor of Herbert P. Houghton bought this farm, and it has remained in the family until the

present time (1920). The site of the Wilder house was below the present houses across the brook on the left. It would be well to have a tablet placed near the spot.



***Memorial Plaque - Part of the Town-Wide Scavenger Hunt Called Can You Find it?***



***16 Merriam Rd. - The Road to Russell Corner was not built until 1768***

The second home was erected a little further west by Abijah Moore in 1748 at 16 Merriam Rd. today. The first Town Meeting was held there 1750, and the late Albert

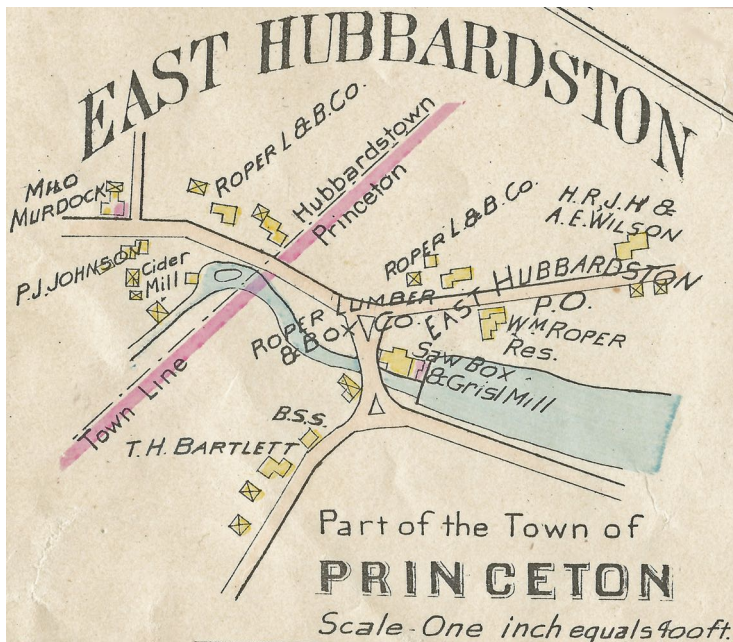
C. Howe used to say that his Grandmother; Mrs. John Gleason, whose house stood near the site of the Wachusett House, told him that she went across lots by using marked trees down to Mr. Moore's in 1759 to hear the first sermon preached in town.

The third settlement seems to have been on the Parmenter Place at the end of the old road leading off to the left below Mr. Ways. Here Richard, father of Bartholomew Cheever, the great, great grandfather of our townsman Moses Cheever Goodnow, settled in 1750 at 113 Goodnow Rd. .



Robert Keyes was the fourth settler. He moved, from Shrewsbury to this town in 1751 taking the farm now known as the Pine Hill Place near 19 Pine Hill Rd. today. As you drive from the house toward, the mountain you will notice the foundations of buildings and the old well by the roadside. These mark the home of Tilly Littlejohn who bought the land from Robert Keyes in 1759. From this Pine Hill house, little Lucy Keyes strayed on the afternoon of April 14, 1755 and was never found. The story is well known to most of you.





The next settler was Oliver Davis who bought 1000 acres in the west part of Princeton and Hubbardston, building probably on the Wheeler place and erecting a mill where the Ropers are now, near 8 Old Colony Rd. today.

Soon after this came the Mirick's. In 1752 Caleb, the great, great grandfather of J.C.F. Mirick purchased a Lot #4, and I find in 1779 reference in some highway limits that indicate that the house now standing and occupied by Mrs. Fay was built previous to that date. We find it referred to later as covering 1080 square feet and containing 27 windows and 150 square feet of glass.



**68 Hubbardston Rd.**

It has been thought that this house, the Capt. Frank Smith house, was the oldest in

town. A part of it formerly stood near the house of Mr. Edwin Grimes (46 Hubbardston Rd.) and was standing there in 1798, 30 by 12 feet. Dr. Wilson built the Grimes house about 1795. I don't know of any way of ascertaining when John Gleason built the 30 x 12.



Without doubt one of the oldest houses is that owned by A. B. Wetherbee, at 136 Hubbardston Rd. and built in 1762. It was found when referencing the Registry of Deeds

that Samuel Woods, "Schoolmaster Woods" as he was generally called, bought Lot #13 of Moses Gill on March 6, 1761. It consisted of 292 acres, the eastern line crossing the road just beyond Charles Smith's and the western line a few rods beyond the Wetherbee's home. In 1798 it had 672 square feet, eight windows with 33 sq. ft. of glass. Here was kept the first school in town. His son Leonard graduated from Harvard with the highest honors given by the college and became President of Andover Theological Seminary. The son of Leonard became President of Bowdoin College.

The site of the first parsonage and some of the history connected with it have been of much interest to me. Mr. Fuller was settled as

the first minister September 9, 1767. He purchased the farm west, of that of "Pea Green" Ephraim Mirick on ~31 Westminster Rd.. On the south side of the road beyond Chas Gates, you will find a lane leading south. A little to the right of the end of the lane is the cellar hole where stood, the home of Parson Fuller. In 1768, we



*Approximately 31 Westminster*

find him petitioning the Legislature, saying that he accepted his position with the small salary of 53 pounds, 6 shillings, 8 pence per annua, and he thinks it all they can afford to pay - but since most towns have ministerial lands and this town has none, he asked for Wachusett Hill, which belonged to the Province. This land covered about 500 acres and consists mostly of the Minn's Wildlife Sanctuary today. Almost all of it was "barren and unfruitful but on the south side of the hill might possibly be made into pasture land." The Legislature ordered that the mountain be granted "as an encouragement to him to continue on the faithful discharge of his office in said Princeton." A sermon preached by request to the "Minute men" in 1775 from the text "Let not him that girdeth on the harness boast himself as he that putteth it off" was the beginning of the dissatisfaction which ended in his dismissal in 1776. He returned to his farm in 1783 and was prominent in town affairs, was chosen representative to the convention, which adopted the present federal Constitution. He removed to Merimack, N.H. in 1798 where he fitted the boys for Harvard. They became prominent men, one a member of

Congress.

The house formerly owned by Daniel Davis on Old Mill Rd. from



Ball Hill Rd. down Lovers Lane toward Rutland., is probably among the oldest in town. Like many other places it was owned by Moses Gill, and we find in his will probated in 1800 this item - "I give to Obediah Thatcher in

consideration of his family connection all the farm on which he lives together with the saw-mill, during his life on payment of twenty-five dollars a year to Moses Gill." In this same will appears this item; I give to my very faithful friend Bartholomew Cheever, all the farm, I purchased from Samuel Davis, all the farm I had of Josuah Davis, also a woodlot in No. 17 opposite J. Baker's farm on the Peabody Howe road - also the farm I bought of him and which he bought of Paul Mathews and Ephraim Wilson to have and to hold until the youngest son Moses Gill Cheever, now an infant shall arrive to the age of 21 - also \$1000 in cash, 12 leather bottomed chairs, two beds, bedsteads and curtains with suitable coverings; Two yoke of oxen of good quality and a good horse such as he shall choose from all my horses." Mr. Gill owned most of the land around the center at one time or another.

In 1819, Mr. Boylston deeded to Rev. Samuel Clark the land in front of the Memorial Building, on which he placed the house now owned by Raymond Gregory. The lot on the corner, now occupied by the store, was owned by Dr. Ephraim Wilson in



1767. Solomon Bowman bought it in 1782 and sold it to said Moses Gill in 1785 at which time it had a house, barn and blacksmith shop on the road leading north. The Rev Joseph Russell, who was settled here in 1796, appears to have lived in this house, which has evidently been enlarged, by Mr. Gill. In the will referred to, Mr. Gill gives the use of the house and farm to Mr. Russell for ten years. Mr. Russell did not avail himself of this offer but asked his dismissal in 1801. The town seemed to think this the proper place for a parson to live and purchased it in 1802 and Dr. James Murdock the new minister came here to live.





The Watertown Farms, 2000 acres of land given to the town by Watertown to help them build a bridge across the Charles River, was divided into lots and sold to interested people in the neighborhood of Watertown and several families generally related to each other purchased the new lots and moved here; Paul Matthews from Marlboro on Lot #2; Elisha Hobbs from Weston in 1765 bought Lot #8 (Mountain House). His sister Elizabeth had married Phineas Gregory and evidently, he sold

them of Lot #9 with its fine building spot, for we find that in 1768 Phineas came here on horseback with his wife and baby on the pillion behind him. Mr. Hobbs had a log cabin on the nose of the mountain (back of Mr. Needham's), which he offered to them until they could build their home on Lot # 9. Mr. Gregory used to say that the lot where the house stands was so well wooded that stand wherever you would and stretch out your hands you would touch two trees. Abijah Harrington, cousins of the Gregory's, came in 1769 and settled on Lot #12 - the Brewer place.

COPY OF STATEMENT WRITTEN BY MRS. ALBERT HOWE  
RELATING TO THE SETTLEMENT OF THE HOWE FAMILY

Dea. Adonijah Howe Sr. lived, in his log cabin 35 years and brought up there his family of ten children at 26 Bullock Lane today. He was building his new house (lately owned by J.D. Reed) when he died on Sept. 10, 1800, aged 62 years. His son Adonijah Jr. occupied the house for eleven years, when he moved to the present site now occupied by Albert C. Howe. He owned the old homestead by buying out the others. The house on the new site was a small house just west of the present one which was built in 1829-30 and occupied in the spring of 1830. Four of his children were born in the old homestead and four were born in the new



***26 Bullock Lane***

house. The small house was built and owned by Adonijah Sr., also a blacksmith shop, situated at the corner of the road where the guide board stands. He left it and house to different

blacksmiths - one was Moses Harrington, another was William Bernis of Westminster. The latter returned to Westminster and died there. Adonijah Sr's land came up to the present Sterling Road. His father Abraham Howe of Marlboro purchased a large tract of land on two lots #7 and #14 and sold them to his two sons, Abner and Adonijah in 1765 (?). Abner's lot is the one now partly owned by Miss Sarah and Mr. Thomas Skinner - Abner being their great, great grandfather. Abner and Adonijah married in Marlboro and came directly to Princeton to occupy the new lands. Their children were all born in Princeton. Adonijah's lane (Bullock Lane today) was partly in the Watertown Farms, the remainder in Rutland East Wing.

This document written by Josiah D. Gregory was scanned and updated with photos by William "Bud" Brooks in 2025.