

Nature Buds as Ever-Returning Spring Comes Back To Nashoba



AS IT HAS FOR OVER two centuries, Spring once again has come with all its color and glory to the venerable Captain Jeremiah Cogswell homestead, built in Littleton around 1750 and one of the town's oldest residences.

On a knoll, a far reaching view of the Beaver Brook Valley is seen over rolling fields and pastures. A large boulder in a field across from the house was a boundary line for Nashoba Plantation, and which is now the dividing line between Littleton and Westford.

By GORDON B. SEAVEY
LITTLETON - The blossoming of Spring, two weeks ahead weatherwise, again without fail has come to this area. It is a season that must have brought joy to the small band of Indians who occupied "Nashobah" Plantation three centuries ago for surviving a New England winter in these parts, in such a primitive way, took great endurance and fortitude.

Now the Indians have left for their Happy Hunting Ground, giving way to the white man and his more advanced manner of living. Some of the lands were stolen, other purchased for a pittance.

In Colonial days, the white people eventually took possession of all the land in the commonwealth by virtue of their charter from the Crown of England. Several large tracts of land came to early settlers in Littleton in this manner.

Nashoba Plantation, the sixth praying Indian town in the state, was set aside in 1654 on request of Rev. John Eliot for the local Indians. Daniel Gookin, who wrote much about the Indians of New England, described the Nashoba area as follows: "The dimension of the village is four miles square. The land is fertile and well stored with meadows and woods. It hath good ponds for fishing adjoining to it."

Only 10 Indian Families

"The people (some ten families, accounting for only a total of fifty persons) live here, as in other Indian villages, upon planting corn, fishing, hunting and sometimes labouring with the English...They have orchards of apples whereof they make cider, which some of them have not the wisdom and grace to use for their comfort, but are prone to abuse unto drunkenness."

"And although the laws be strict to suppress this sin, and some of their own rulers are

very careful and zealous in the execution of them, yet such is the madness and folly of man naturally, that he doth eagerly pursue after that which tendeth to his own destruction."

A substantial portion of Nashoba Plantation, about half, was purchased in 1686 for a mere 70 English pounds (70). The sale was made by a handful of Indians and their squaws, by deed, to Hon. Peter Bulkeley of Concord and Major Thomas Hinchman of Chelmsford.

Surveying Careless

The description of the land is limited but it ends with the following unusual terms: "The West line runs (from two little maples marked with H for the Northwest corner)...the most Southerly corner is bounded by a little red oak marked H, the north east corner is a stake standing about four or five pole southward of a very great Rock that Lyeth in the line between said Nashobah & Chelmsford plantation."

Most confusing to the layman! The "little" oak and maples and the stake are long since gone, but the very great "Rock" stands as proudly as ever. It can easily be seen from Beaver Brook Rd., near the Littleton-Westford town line, in the pasture land opposite the so-called Captain Jeremiah Cogswell house. This house, built around 1750, is one of Littleton's oldest homes, and is an attractive true saltbox design, now painted red.

It is understood that the farm at one time had over 200 acres, with the farm buildings on the northerly side of Beaver Brook Rd. and pastures, orchards and woodlands extending as far as the brook by the same name on the south. A bridge across the brook connected the property with a farm in Westford.

Burial in Town

Captain Cogswell came from Ipswich, was married twice and raised a large family, which was highly respected throughout the community. The family lot is in the old cemetery on King St.

It was sturdily constructed, with gunstock posts in the corner, on both floor. Entrance is through the center door and a ship's staircase (one that takes two turns) greets the visitor. The parlor has a five-foot

fireplace, a Bible cupboard and a corner cabinet.

The kitchen also has a huge fireplace, and between that and the "summer kitchen" in the ell is the "sink room", so familiar to old New England homes. The central chimney rests on an arch of brick, as large as a small room, in the basement. A "borning" room, where the babies were born or sick people were tended, is in the rear part of the house.

Two stairways lead to the upstairs where there are two master bedrooms with fireplaces. As the rear roof slopes rapidly, as in all salt-boxes, the ceilings are low, and this is where the small children slept. Over the ell is another room no doubt used by hired help or any slaves the captain might have had at that era.

Dodge Family

Many large and happy families have lived in this great old home over the years. Barnabas Dodge, on being sent into Southern New Hampshire from Beverly by his father to view new lands, was attracted by the Cogswell farm. Relying on his son's judgment, the father bought the place in 1818. It was to be the family home for several generations and "beautiful for situation" his descendants have called it.

There were ten children, and four daughters taught in the old North schoolhouse. He was a great reader and originated a number of neighborhood circulating libraries.

The Brown family occupied the homestead for three generations. George W. Brown, who died a few years ago at the age of 80, remembered the location of a small Indian burial ground in a woodland dell nearby and took pride in showing it to others. Descendants of the Dodies and the Browns still live in Littleton.

After the death of Fred Woodworth, who was the purchaser in 1930, a later occupant much of the acreage was divided up and sold. The Cogswell house, together with about 12 acres, was purchased then in 1948 by Arthur M. Covell of Lexington. The Covells, too, have a large family, as was customary in earlier days -- seven children, and the youngest, a girl, was born in the old homestead six years ago.

Home of Covells

Mr. Covell is principal of the Shattuck School and his wife, Marion, teaches Latin and German in Westford Academy. Two older girls are away at college.

In remodelling the summer kitchen, the Covells uncovered an inscription on a board which gave some indication of the age of the home. It reads, "T.K.

Barker, 1798."

With old houses, there "must be a ghost" but all these years the Covells are not fully convinced. It is said that a brave soldier, who was betrothed to a daughter of Captain Cogswell by his second marriage, was killed in Watertown during the retreat of the British from the Old North Bridge. And of course it is his ghost which comes nightly to a parlor window seeking his beloved.