

Parkerville historical notes uncover past of old buildings

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The following is an account by May Balch (1875-1961), who was a resident of Parkerville in the early years of her life. Best known for her artistic talents, May Balch helped to organize the 200th pageant for the town. Her father was the last surviving Civil War veteran from Westford. She is memorialized in the "Westford Women Remembered" doll series.

Nonesuch, or Parkerville, was the first part of the town to be settled. While the town was a part of Chelmsford, a winding road was built from Chelmsford (Old Lowell Road) in 1663. Originally it came as far as the Vose place (yellow Victorian home at #20), then crossed the meadow, and came out around the Gilbert Parker place, crossed Nonesuch Brook and went on towards Groton. (In early maps the Concord Road was called the Groton Road.)

The present section of the Old Lowell Road, dividing the Wilder land, was built in 1726, just a "bridle path" to the main road being built to Minots corner and beyond. It started as the first road at Vose.

Early namesakes

The first Parker in Westford was Aaron, born in 1689. There were several descendents of the same name. He lived on the Vose place and he, or his descendants, made bricks on the hill. With these he built a home. This was taken down when George Hutchins built the present Vose house (large yellow Victorian at #20 Old Lowell Road). I think in the early 1870s.

Lt. Samuel Chamberlain (1685-1769) bought and sold wild land in different parts of the state and played an important part in the affairs of the town. He was an original member of the First Church and one of the first board of selectmen.

His home stood at the junction of Concord and Old Lowell roads, now Henry Wilder's land at the Y (Robert Johnson home). That section of the Old Lowell Road was not built until 1726, although to be a "bridle path." It evidently made some changes in his home place, which may account for the odd positions of the two roadside wells.

After his death, his son Samuel lived in the homestead. It may be that both the Wilder (Johnson) and Berchtold (Maguire) farms belonged



Photo courtesy June W. Kennedy

The exact location of the house and the identities of its occupants have been lost over the years, but sketchy notes indicate the unidentified woman poses on the doorstep of the O'Tool home on Texas Road sometime in the last century, with an amused onlooker peering out at the camera from inside the doorway.

to him originally, for when the Groton (now Concord) Road was built, it is recorded as crossing Chamberlain's meadow.

Using homemade bricks

A deed was given by Timothy Prescott to George Fletcher for the present Berchtold (Maguire) farm, 72 acres, in 1825. And George Fletcher built the house soon after with bricks made on the hill. It was said some of the floor boards were taken from the old house which may have been the Samuel Chamberlain house or one standing near it by the second well. The carpenter was Mabel Drew's grandfather, who walked each day from Chelmsford.

This deed, as to bounds, was copied when Wayland Balch bought the place from George Fletcher's son Varnum, in 1878. Varnum reserved several acres (now John Leonard's land) (presently Snow Drive) and one of the barns, which was moved across the street and still stands. He built a small house which was later remodeled and improved by Mr. Gladue.

Adison Parker (1793-1836) married Martha Leighton in 1819 and probably built the Wilder (Johnson) House soon after, for by the old 1825 deed he owned Brickyard Hill and Wilder land and

worked the clay kilns at the brickyard.

Lieut. Moses Parker, son of Aaron, married Bridget Cummings in 1744. He owned the Lester Carter (McKenna) farm, the home being where the old cellar hole is. His daughter Elizabeth (1749-1829) was living in the home in 1825.

After her death the present home was built (date uncertain) by a Parker, believed to be James. The land to the east was owned by an Aaron Parker.

The big impressive old house that stood at the foot of Bear Hill was the Gilbert Parker house. This was burned a number of years ago. This house had a double-welled room as protection against the Indians. George Parker and his family lived here, and his six children went to the old brick school nearby. He was the last Parker in the village. He died in 1901 at the age of 76.

The early Parkers were in the Revolution and all held important town offices. Many moved into other communities nearby and the women often married other Westford settlers.

The first Kidder in Westford was Thomas, born 1690. He was the

■ PARKERVILLE-PAGE 18 (Sec 2)

Parkerville recollection of buildings

PARKERVILLE-FROM PAGE 5 ■

son of George and Lydia Parker. He had considerable wealth and had quite a fine home for those times. He lived on "Texas" Road where a cellar hole marks the spot near the bend of the road beyond the Cohen place. His son Thomas was known as Cornet Kidder. He died in 1793. Cornet Kidder's son James, in 1825, owned the Homer Chandonait farm. It was said that the old shop that until recently stood near the road was part of the original home. The Kidders were enterprising people.

Matthew Griffin of Pepperell married Mary Adams in 1777 and built the first Griffin house, marked by an old cellar hole on the right side of the road near Bear Hill. His son Matthew married Sally Kidder Adams in 1810. Their son Timothy married Lydia Gates. Their son Charles married Ellen Collins and became Fred Collins Griffin's parents. Fred's great-grandmother, when a girl, lived on the Thifault place (later Wilkins) and while berrying on the hill, saw a huge bear behind the big rock halfway up. She ran home and the men of the village all turned out to hunt for it. They found and shot it, and as far as is known, this was the last bear seen

in the town. The hill became known as Bear Hill.

There were Proctors living in Parkerville in the early days and a Proctor probably built the Heathcote place (Emmet); at least a Proctor lived there. Another Proctor lived on the Jacque (Mutrie) place.

In a walled off section of this farm at the junction of Old Lowell and Carlisle Roads, two unlettered stones mark graves. This may have been a holdover of an early pioneer custom of burying the family on its own grant of land.

The name of this family is forgotten and date of burial unknown, but it was before the days of modern surgery, at least. Buried there are a man and his wife and a woman's arm. The injured arm was sawed off on a table in the house now owned by Homer Chandonait (later Kern family).

A Leighton built the house now owned by T. Arthur Wilson, and some Parker built the Alphonse Chandonait (Queenan) house. The barn used to stand west of the house and some distance from it. It was moved and attached to the house all by Charles Osgood who lived there a number of years.

Schoolhouses

In 1757 there were four school squadrons in Westford, one being

in Parkerville. The children were taught a few months each year by a traveling teacher at the home of Aaron Parker Jr.

In 1787, the town voted to build schoolhouses in each squadron. This was, no doubt, the time the brick school house (now the Odell home, later Chorney) was built.

The white schoolhouse was built in 1880 to replace the one built a short time before and destroyed by fire. While the new house was being built, school work was carried on in the west room of the Henry Wilder house, then owned by George Eliot.

The teacher at the time was Rebecca Sweetser, who lived with her brother Judson, at the site of the Hagberg home (later Johnston). Their first home stood near the road, was similar in type to Lester Carter's. The buildings were destroyed by fire some time in the 1890s and they built upon the hill.

Soon after their death, this house and other buildings were destroyed by fire. The new home was built upon the site (recently L. Johnston).

Another old Cape Cod style house, similar to Fred Griffin's and owned by George Hutchinson, was burned about 1896. It stood opposite the John McIntosh home