

History of Walpole

By Maude R. Greaves

The first entry in Walpole town records is the first town meeting, December 24, 1724. At that time or to be accurate, on May 15, 1724, our town was set off from Dedham and named for Sir Robert Walpole. Whatever parts our citizens took in the preservation of our liberties prior to that is recorded in the history of Dedham. Sir Robert Walpole was an eminent English statesman, leader of the Whig party and prime minister in the reigns of George 1 and 2. He was accused of corrupt practices and not without some grounds as it was his custom to win public men to his sides by giving bribes, either in money or in public office. He is said to have been the author of the memorable saying "Every man has his price." Notwithstanding this trait of character, he was recognized as one of the foremost statesmen of his days and his own acts in public life stand above reproach.

Early in Colonial days, two great townships had been granted the land in this section south of Boston, extending to what is now the Rhode Island line. "Contentment" the name changed to Dedham included what is Wrentham, Plainville, Franklin, Norfolk, Medfield, Norwood, and Walpole. The adjoining town was Dorchester. The line as far as we are interested is about the line of Washington Street, was later annexed after the territory had become known as Stoughton. Thinking of the geographical features of the territory, the reason is suggested why Medfield and Wrentham were chosen by the early adventurers for the establishment of their homes. They quite likely followed the choice of the Indians and it is an accepted fact that the Indian always chooses for his camping ground land free from swamps and still or slowly moving water. South Walpole, with its numerous little streams and cedar swamp, was probably not an attractive spot for the Indians' camping ground or for the early settler looking for farming locations. Anyway, we have the stories of the big Indian attacks upon the towns of Wrentham and Medfield and in these places interesting and historic spots are found, like Indian Rock in Franklin, The Devil's Oven in Medfield (The cave in the rock where the Indian picked off the white men by using the trail) and Moose Hill where the Indians retired to view the burning of the town. No one knows of historic spots in Walpole or of any serious trouble from the Indians in this territory.

We are told two trails passed through this town, quite easily distinguished to this day. One practically known as "the Old Post Road" is Pleasant Street passing through East Walpole until lost in the woods, emerging again very near P.R. Allen's residence and becoming a used road from that on through Foxboro to Attleboro. The other trail passing through Walpole center was "the Old Saw Mill Road" which contented Dedham with the saw mill at cedar swamp. Probably they followed the Medfield trail from Dedham through what is now Westwood until they reached Bubbling Brook and then the trail branched off and ran through the woods along what is now North Street to Main Street at the concrete bridge and then to Walpole Common. From here it followed West Street to Stop River and then King Philip's Road to Wrentham. It is claimed as late as 1690 these trails were easily traveled by foot or horseback; probably ox teams were used in carting out the lumber especially from the cedar swamps to the old saw mill.

An important step was taken at the town meeting when the town voted to grant money toward a school. On March 17, 1732, 30 pounds was voted for the upholding of the school of the town; 15 pounds of this to be used for the instruction of small children in the summertime-to be a woman's school, the other 15 pounds to be used for a writing school in the winter season-a moving school to be kept at each side of the town and to have equal proportions of time.

During the Revolutionary period, this town did nobly its part in supplying soldiers and supporting their families. A group of Walpole men under Captain Seth Bullard took part in the battle of Lexington and Concord. The population of the town at this time was 800 and about 190 men took part in the Revolution. There graves are decorated with flags every year by our townsman, Isaac Newton Lewis.)

East Street was laid out in 1793 from the old Saw Mill to Allen's Corner. In the French and Indian War a large part of the company under Captain William Bacon for the invasion of Canada, came from Walpole. There were also several men from Walpole in Captain Eliphalet Fales' company from Dedham. At one side of the square in Walpole, almost in front of the town hall, stands a granite monument in the shape of a fountain which was presented to the town by George A. Plimpton in 1907. On the front of the fountain is the inscription "1755-1763. Erected in grateful recognition of the service of the men of Walpole and vicinity in the French and Indian War. They enlisted not for a livelihood but with intent to return to their farms and trades being influenced to take up arms by a regard for the honor of the King, the defense of their country, and the preservation of their religion and liberties."

At a town meeting on January 11, 1802, at a time when dependent upon stage coaches, it was voted to act on the petition of Esq. Starkweather and others respecting a turnpike coming through the town and voted a resolution to be drawn up by the Selectmen and to send by Mr. Bacon to the General Court to have him use his influence against the turnpike throughout the town. The turnpike is on Washington Street. The Old Post Road had been used up to this time for travel between Boston and Providence. General Lafayette and other persons of note had passed over

In 1802 the Walpole Light Infantry was formed with Captain Fales in command and when the War of 1812 began they were ready and under Captain Warren Clapp marched to Dorchester and Boston. When Walpole was incorporated there was no meeting house in town. The first town meetings were therefore held at the house of one of the residents. After the meetinghouse was sufficiently completed, the town meetings were held in that structure and still later in the vestry of the First Church where they met as late as 1881 when the present Town Hall was completed, standing upon an eminence at the corner of Main and Stone Streets. (Note-when the town hall was built, Stone Street did not come up to the Town Hall.) The cost of the building was about \$30,000 dollars. There are tablets to the memory of the men who served in the Civil War. There are 146 names on the Roll of Honor, 12 of whom were either killed in action or died in hospitals. The building was thoroughly remodeled in 1916.

A small library started by Mary R. Bird at East Walpole (in the old Morse Tavern Building) was the mother of our present town library. It was offered to the town in 1876 when money was first appropriated towards a library. There were 700 volumes. These books were given to the public library upon the condition that books should be sent to East Walpole free, once a week, for 10

years. Mr. Carnegie gave the town of Walpole \$15,000 dollars toward our Library and Mr. Charles S. Bird gave the land. This building was dedicated May 14, 1903.

By an act of the legislature approved on May 2, 1893, the town of Walpole was authorized to supply its inhabitants with water, using therefore the water of Spring Brook, Trap Hole Brook, Mill Brook, artesian or driven wells, etc. The source of supply consists of 40 driven wells near Lower Brook just off of Washington Street, a pumping station equipped with machinery that pumps the water from these wells into three standpipes having a combined capacity of 675,000 gallons.

In our square in East Walpole is a fountain bearing the inscription: "Erected 1895 by Children's Sewing Circle in memory of Mary R. Bird." Miss Bird taught sewing to the children of the village and her sweet and womanly personality and loving kindness remains to this day a blessed remembrance to all who knew her. In Lewis Square is the fountain given by Mr. Frank Lewis in memory of Bradford Lewis, his father, in 1910; also the equestrian statue of Lieut. Lewis, officer in wars of King William and Queen Anne. This statue is to Sergeant William Lewis and Judith M. Lewis, 1864-1896, by their children, Isaac Newton Lewis and Mary P. Lewis, 1911

In response to President Wilson's call for men "to make the world safe for democracy" 305 answered to the appeal; 4 of this number were killed in action and 3 died of disease. The Roll of Honor in front of Town Hall is but a temporary tablet as it is made of wood. (this tablet is no longer there and there is no tablet bearing the names of those brave men.)

Upon the town seal of Walpole is depicted an old watermill, presumably the old saw mill of Eleazer Lusher and Joshua Fisher on the Neponset River, with a forest of trees in the background and in the margin are the words, "Walpole, Mass., incorporated 1724." Quite a change has come to the town since the conditions represented by the Corporate Seal existed. Walpole of the present day is one of the thriving towns of the Old Bay State with a population of 5,446.

This article on the history of Walpole was written by Mrs. Maude R. Graves (Mrs. George M. Graves) and was read before the Wednesday Club on January 4th, 1922.

:Corrections on "The History of Walpole" by Maude R. Graves 1

1-Dedham was first called "Contentment", but later changed to Dedham.

2-Dedham Grant of 1636.

3-After the burning of Medfield by the Indians in February 1676, the Indians retired to a high hill, possibly Noon Hill, not Moose Hill.

4-The Town Hall was not built until 1881. Stone Street was not built until 1885 or 1886.

5-A tablet placed on a boulder has since been erected on Walpole Common; to the memory of all the Walpole Servicemen in all the wars.

6-She says no one knows of historic Indian spots in Walpole, etc. That is not quite true. At Plimtonville near the Neponset River is an old Indian mortar in a lodge or rock in the ground. This was the Old Indian Reservation, reserved for them for hunting and fishing. At the Morse Farm off Washington Street in East Walpole was an old Indian mortar now at the Larrabee place on Union Street. At Water Street just over the Norwood line are a series of pot holes in the ledge extending into the Neponset River. Indian relics have been dug up in several parts of town. Mr. Howell years ago, every spring when he dug up his garden at the rear of his house on Union Street, he would dig up Indian arrowheads.