

Plimpton Family

Plimpton Pond

Each of the dams in the Neponset Basin comes with its own small piece of history, and Plimpton Pond is no exception. At the age of 16, young Henry Plimpton was apprenticed to Joshua Stetson to learn the business of making farm implements. Mr. Stetson had begun manufacturing farm implements a little upstream at the Stetson privilege in 1796, which can be found today behind the blacksmith shop in Walpole Center. Stetson's reputation grew and by the early 1800's the Stetson hoe was famous for its high quality (DeLue, 1925).

Duly trained, Henry Plimpton bought the upper privilege at Plimpton pond from Roland Willett in 1816 and began to manufacture his own hoes. A few years later he acquired the lower privilege at Plimpton Pond, expanding the operation and branching out into the manufacture of axle springs. Eventually Henry's sons Calvin and H.M. Plimpton took over the mill. Calvin was the driving force behind the operation, shipping its products as far as California, but in 1864, while showing a group of visitors around the mill, his leg was caught in the machinery and broken. He died ten days later of blood infection. His widow had no choice but to sell the mill and the business, though she remained on Lewis Farm. The Linden Spring and Axle Co. was a willing buyer. The new owners continued operations, but business declined over the years and slowly but surely the buildings were lost to fire and decay (DeLuc, 1925).

Years later, Calvin's son, George Plimpton, reassembled and extended the family's former properties, even restoring the ruined dam and Plimpton Pond. At the close of the 19th century, George Plimpton established a working farm which revived some of the traditional practices of his Colonial American forebears. A large force of laborers tilled the land using traditional tools, raising cattle, sheep and selling its products: milk, homespun wool, and handicrafts. Family members spun and carded, and George Plimpton himself wore a suit woven of cloth from his own sheep. He was also fascinated by native American history and was an avid collector of Indian artifacts, Colonial documents, paintings, rare volumes and artifacts of early education like horn books.

Throughout his life, George Plimpton commuted between his business in New York and the farm in Walpole, becoming one of the town's major benefactors, endowing schools and public spaces. George's younger son, Calvin H. Plimpton Jr. who inherited Lewis Farm, spent his summers there as a child. Calvin became a doctor and went on to have a distinguished medical career, eventually becoming the president of the American University in Beirut and then president of Amherst College. In 1951, while working "full time as a doctor in New York City," Calvin was forced to sell the family house, Lewis Farm, and the property immediately surrounding. A doctor with fifteen children bought it, but sold off the tennis courts and other parts of the property piecemeal. The handsome barn which had served as a center for community theatricals was burned down by the doctor's children. The rest of the Plimpton holdings, the backland and the twelve houses were sold off in the late 1970's. The Plimpton tract along the pond which bears the

name, still a relatively bucolic and "unspoiled" spot along the Neponset, is now slated for residential development. (Special thanks to Mark Jayh Mirsky for the research, and Calvin H. Plimpton for the recollections that went into this segment.)

References

DeLue, Willard. *The Story of Walpole: 1724 to 1924*, Ambrose Press, Norwood, 1925.

Taken from The Explorers Guide to the Neponset River Watershed, Neponset River Watershed Association, Canton, MA, 1995.