

VI.

Early Homes in Rumford.

The report of the 1731 survey of our town credits Capt. Ebenezer Eastman with the most notable achievement in meeting conditions of settlement: "He had six sons on the spot-six men in his family. He paid the charges of building a corn-mill; and he has broke up, cleared and mowed upward of eighty acres of land, and had very considerable buildings, out-houses, barns &c there." Four of the Eastman sons ranged in age from fourteen to twenty; to account for "six men in his family" we assume that Jacob Shute remained in Eastman's employ during this period of great effort. The first Eastman home was on the village street on Lot No. 9, Range 2 (the site of 193 No. Main St.) In the Second Division of Interval surveyed in 1727, the Captain received a grant of land on Mill Brook Interval on the east side of the Merrimack. In 1729, he leased the Sewall Farm nearby and transferred his home to this new location. (For Sewall Farm see Chapter II)

The original indenture of the Sewall Farm is now in the Concord Room at our Public Library. Its terms are of interest: For a period of thirty years the rental was ten shillings for the first year, with an advance of ten shillings each year until, in the thirtieth year, the rental would amount to fifteen pounds, to which was to be added "half the Rates & Taxes". Many other conditions were made: no timber to be cut except for the family use on the farm and for fencing: "all Dung or Murk" to be used in cultivation of the farm: a hundred pounds worth of good fencing, a hundred pounds worth of labor in turning land to English grass: a timber house and barn worth at least one hundred pounds and orchards of five hundred apple trees with another hundred or more trees, "cherry, pear, quince, apple and Plumb."

This indenture bears two receipts: the first dated May 14, 1730 for ten shillings, the other May 18, 1736, for thirteen pounds, ten shil-

lings, indicating that Capt. Ebenezer completed his payments in these few years. The "timberhouse" waited accomplishment and the large family's home continued to be a log house. Its site is marked by a garrison stone in the field a few rods south of No. 23 Carpenter St., East Concord. This land does not seem to be a part of the Sewall Farm but rather it is part of the Eastman "Mill Farm" which extended eastward from the homestead, across Mill brook and northward to the vicinity of present Eastman School. Its south boundary was on the intervale lots where Ebenezer Virgin made his home at the same early period. North of the Mill Farm stretched the Sewall Farm, which had presented such a problem in the first survey of Pennycook, with its four hundred and seventy acres without thirty seven acres on Sewall's Island in the Merrimack. With its comfortable buildings, its wide fields and young orchards, its busy grist and saw mills, Capt. Ebenezer Eastman had the show place in all Rumford.

Proprietor Ebenezer Virgin, near neighbor to the Eastmans, had drawn a lot on the intervale near the mouth of Mill brook and made this the nucleus of a farm. In the 1731 report he had a house built and inhabited on his lot, No. 6 on the Island Range north of Abraham Bradley's homestead. In brief time, Virgin followed Capt. Ebenezer and dared the isolation of a home across the river. Family tradition tells that in 1731 he built his house south of present Portsmouth St. and facing the river. Enlarged and rebuilt, that house stands today as pictured and it is said that loopholes for Indian fighting have been found in its walls.

A year later, according to tradition among his descendents, David Kimball was building a frame house at the ferry landing near the foot of the hazardous road down Sugar Ball hill. The original site of this house may still be found near the edge of the old river channel, but when spring freshets brought the river to the window sills, the house

was moved to higher ground on the north side of the road. The picture shows it as it then appeared, but even this location was not too safe for Benjamin Kimball, grandson of the builder, notes in his diary- "June 5, 1831. More rain, cannot pass to the other house without a boat"; and again in December of the same year- "water covered the whole interval and came to within ten feet of the house." the "other house" referred to still stands on the south side of the road.

The old house with the gambrel roof as pictured, was built because of the ferry to Hale's Point and it remained in the family for three generations of ferrymen until, at the end of a full century, the great freshet completely changed the river channel leaving only a small pond at Sugar Ball. These memories of the old house were written by a descendant of David Kimball's in the fifth generation who, during her childhood, loved to visit "Aunt Mary" (Kimball Clifford)-b. 1801- who occupied this ancestral home.

"The house was built in 1732 by David Kimball, and was one of the first houses" (in distinction from log cabins) "that was built in that part of the country. My earliest recollections are the drive over there with my father" (Dr. Ferdinand G. Oehme of Concord) "in the buggy, and he whistling and cutting the birches with his whip as we drove along. I can see us descending the steep, sandy hill with the railing at our left of the road, the buckets at times along the roadsides to collect maple sap.

"On reaching Aunt Mary's we drove into an open shed attached to the left of the house, which always had a carpet of big white chips, as they never sawed their firewood but chopped it; and the chopping block always had the axe handy. On entering the house my childhood attention was attracted by the musical jingling of the spring water running through the house in a wooden trough into the kitchen and then out doors. In this trough the big pans of milk were set to cool. When E., F. and I visited there in 1923, I could hear that spring gurgling into the sink when we

peeped into a window which used to be the bedroom window in Aunt Mary's time, but was now a kitchen.

"The old kitchen had gone to decay and the roof was all open. The new unattractive kitchen was once Aunt Mary's lovely, sweet smelling bedroom, sixty-five and more years ago. I have slept in her four-poster bed and had to climb into it by a stool, the big feather bed making it too high for me to climb in any other way. The floor of this room was always painted yellow, and the kitchen floor always had a covering of lovely white sand brought from the river to keep the floor clean. I presume that was a common way for kitchen floors in those days, when near the river, although that is the only one I can remember seeing. They changed the sand as often as was necessary. All kitchen tins were kept bright by cleaning often with sand.

"I think our ^{great} grandfather Kimball" (Benjamin b. 1759) "gave his daughter Mary this home and a part of the farm. To his other daughter" (Eliza Rolfe Kimball) ["]my grandmother, he gave a large tract of land on State St. near the ["]Methodist church, where my grandfather" (Hazen Walker m. Eliza R. Kimball, July 6, 1824) "built the Walker house still standing. My grandfather Walker was a carpenter-contractor.

"There was another Kimball family living near Aunt Mary's, and grandmother and I used to visit there: there was a melodeon in that house which I delighted to hear played by a daughter, Sophrony. Perhaps her father was grandmother's brother."

The house where Sophrony played the melodeon is shown in the picture. It was built by Hazen Kimball (b. 1796) only son of ferryman Benjamin Kimball who lived to maturity. Even he died at the age of thirty-six and his widow, Nancy Fifield, married Parker Whidden: hence the house came to be known as the Whidden house. The other old house at Sugar Ball was probably built by Joseph Lougee who married a cousin of Aunt Mary's. Date found in the chimney is 1789.

Aunt Mary told her little niece that the ancient house in which

she lived had a chimney so huge that, when the time came to rebuild it, one of the men on the place led a horse inside the chimney hole and turned him round without difficulty. In 1928 this old house—^(David Kimball's) one of the few original frame houses in all Concord—was tenantless and decaying. It was purchased, carefully taken down, moved to Webster Place and there re-assembled and restored. We may be thankful that it was not destroyed, but it is regrettable that Concord should lose her most genuine relic of a pioneer house practically in its original shape and an excellent example of exterior and interior construction.

The old Indian traditions connected with Sugar Ball were verified during the years when the Kimballs lived there for it was common occurrence during spring plowing, to find skulls and bones in the soil. As late as 1894 it was possible to see across the river, the traces of earth works south of the Fan, where the ancient Mohawks had entrenched themselves to battle against the local Pennycooks. Because of this relic of aboriginal days the locality south of the Fan and along the Fort Eddy road (Intervale road) was referred to in old deeds as "Old Fort"

The people who first settled across the river had some interesting experiences with the Indians who lingered in our valley. Pehaungun, the last of the Indian chiefs hereabouts, had been a famous warrior in his youth and now, at the reputed age of one hundred and twenty years, he lived on the "common land" north of the present church in East Concord. Tradition tells that in the year 1732, the neighboring Indians gathered at his wigwam for a celebration, during which they "drank from the bung-hole" of a keg of rum. The revelry disturbed Capt. Eastman and he went to investigate. The Indians insisted that he join in their wild

drinking bout, but he made only a pretence by lifting the keg to his lips and letting more rum run out of his mouth than in. Pehaugun noted this and flew into a rage, threatening to kill him, but Eastman escaped.

Next day's sun woke the stupefied Indians and they found old Pehaugun dead. Fearing that his fierce spirit might return in vengeance, the superstitious savages devised a plan for their own protection. They buried his body in the hollow trunk of a pine tree with a slab of stone bound to it by withes and, after filling in the grave, they stamped down the dirt crying—"He no get out! He no get up!" Then they stuck willow boughs all round the burial place and danced about and wailed and howled and tore their hair. The ceremony ended with another drinking bout which left them in stupor on the ground.

It was about this time that Ebenezer Virgin was roused at early dawn by a gunshot and, going to investigate, he met an Indian from a settlement below Pennycook. The savage told his story readily enough—a story of treachery and speedy revenge. A certain chief named Peorawarra had stolen the man's wife and fled with her up the Merrimack in a canoe. Gun in hand, the husband followed on foot and at nightfall he sighted the canoe beached at Sewall's Island. Hiding in the alders on the river bank he waited, till in the early morning, he saw the runaway pair steal cautiously from their hiding place on the Island and push off in the canoe. As the little craft swung against the current, the outraged husband fired the shot heard by Virgin. Both occupants of the canoe were killed, fell overboard and sank while the avenger turned from the river toward his home. Having told his story to the white man, the Indian dispassionately added—"Peorawarra had good gun."

A few days later the body of the Indian squaw was washed up on the river bank and the bullet hole was found which proved the Indian's tale. The white men buried her near by and ever since that day the place has been known as "Squaw Lot". It lies on the south side of Pecker St.

(re-named West Pontsmouth St.) and its eastern bound is marked by a low granite post by the roadside. With such confirmation of the Indian's story, Ebenezer Virgin bethought himself of Peorawarrsh's "good gun" and so he searched the river and found it. Telling this tale, Bouton testified that he knew it to be the same "good Gun" except for a new stock, for he had seen it in the possession of descendants of Virgin. A much later generation can give the same testimony for, at Concord's bi-centennial (1927) Peorawarrsh's gun was exhibited by its present owner, a lineal descendent of Proprietor Ebenezer Virgin.

Ephraim Farnum was not long without neighbors on Rattlesnake Plain for James Abbot, a cousin of the Abbots on the village street, purchased shares drawn by Toppan and Emerson and built a log house about 1735. He chose a spot where a fine spring bubbled out of the hillside starting a brook which flowed through a deep gully toward the river. His house stood near the present site of the Swenson Granite Co. plant and his farm comprised lots stretching east to the river. His descendants still live on the homestead across the highway. (1954)

From time to time new lots were surveyed on the "common land": and apportioned among the Proprietors: sometimes, under stress for town funds such new lots were sold by committees appointed at a Proprietors' meeting, for this organization was maintained, entirely independent of the town government, until the "common land" was fully disposed of. Certain "Emendation Lots" were assigned to compensate for poor or undesirable land allotted in the first division.

Rumford men were farmers and so, as the remote sections of the town were surveyed and apportioned, the tendency among the settlers was to move from the village street to spacious farms. One of these new farms was the occasion for a new highway called, in an ancient deed, "the road leading to Benjamin Abbot's". In due time other settlers followed into this neighborhood, the road was extended and called "the Country road". Today we know it as South St.

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Benjamin Abbot(b.1711) was a younger brother of Edward and George

Abbot who continued to live on their farms bordering on the village street. Benjamin acquired land at the southwest corner of present South and Clinton Sts. before there was a road and probably before any clearing had been made. Adding to his farm from time to time, he became prosperous through hard work and thrift. The date when he built his house is uncertain, but it was after the day of log cabins and the studs were filled with brick and mortar. Since brick was not made in Rumford before 1734, the house was doubtless of somewhat later date. It was a lonely spot for a home.

Originally much smaller than it is today, it was solidly built for warmth and also for defence against possible Indian attack. It had projecting eaves—an unusual feature in those days—so that occupants might have protection in resisting attack, or a vantage point from which water might be poured in case the savages set fire to the home. The old elm which still guards the house has long been noted as the most shapely in our city, but neglect has shortened its life and marred its beauty.

In the Abbot Genealogical Register we find an intimate account of the personality of Benjamin Abbot:

"He sustained to a remarkable degree, the character of the Puritan. On the Sabbath he shut up his house and took all his family to meeting. He considered it a religious duty to work six days in the week, and to devote the Sabbath sacredly to the improvement of his heart and understanding, and to the moral and religious instruction of his family. He allowed no work, except of necessity or mercy, to be done on that holy day. On all days he had in his family morning and evening prayers, with reading of the Scripture. He had, considering his circumstances, a large library, but he called no man Master, and made his Bible his only rule of faith and duty. He was very hospitable, but very simple in his mode of living. His temper was cheerful and mild; and his children have stated

that an unpleasant word never passed between him and his wife. His house was for many years, half a mile from any other."

This record gives us an intimate view of the quality of a pioneer home in Rumford and there is reason to believe that it was typical of this period.

Benjamin Abbot's wife was his cousin, Hannah Abbot, and she played her part in that ideal home, for Bouton describes her as "a sensible, prudent and devout woman." Bouton also tells, that Mr. Abbot was noted among a generation of hardy men, for his remarkable physique and unusual strength-powers which he kept to old age. When past eighty, "he, with two other men, hoed four acres of corn in one day-he hoeing more than either of them before breakfast."

Four sons born in this home reached mature life in time to take their part in the Revolutionary War. Ephraim was a volunteer at Bennington and during the battle a cannon ball passed so close to him that, although it did not wound him, his body was so wrenched that he limped for the rest of his life. Theodore and Isaac were also at Bennington and Benjamin, Jr. fought at Bunker Hill, where a bullet cut through his whiskers but did him no injury.

Isaac Abbot succeeded his father on the home farm. He, too, was a man of athletic build and unusual strength. Honoring his father and mother, he maintained their standards of moral and religious worth. A granddaughter of Benjamin Abbot, Jr. (Sarah Abbot) married Stephen Noyes in 1805 and since that time the old house has been Noyes property until the death of the last descendant in 1948. In 1832, Jeremiah Noyes built on the farm the house standing at No. 94 South St. The picture of the old red house with the fine elm at the height of its beauty, was given for this book by Mrs. Maud Noyes Blackwood, last of the family.

Other frame houses were built before 1740, the outstanding one being that of the Minister. The townsfolk had made provision in their con-

tract with Mr. Walker, for a substantial grant of money to build such a house as befitted his position in the town. In October, 1731, Mr. Walker took advantage of the opportunity to buy the house lot next south of his log house and the next year he began to build the two-story, gambrel-roofed house which has remained in possession of his descendants ever since. In 1734 the town paid the last installment toward its pledge for the house and the Minister with his wife and two-year old daughter moved into their permanent home. This house is reputed to be the first two-story dwelling built north of Haverhill to the Canada line. Originally it set low on the ground and its ell was one story only. For more than twenty years it was unpainted either within or without, and for some years the family lived in the ell of three rooms because the main house was unfinished. Joseph B. Walker, great grandson of the Minister, describes its construction:

"The cracks in the boarding (of the roof) were battened beneath the shingles with long strips of birch bark. The timbers were of oak and hard pine. The boarding of the walls was feather edge and nailed to the frame with wrought iron nails made by the village blacksmith. The kitchen hearthstone of granite is still in use (1894) and is ten feet, one and one half inches wide.***** The chimneys of the house were very large and of stone. One which remained until 1847, was about five feet square and was constructed of ledge stones laid in mortar and plastered with a composition of clay and chopped straw."

This historic house has been remodelled both inside and out, but the main part has been little changed in its exterior. In remodeling, the front door was discarded and a porch built over it, but recently the front elevation has been restored to its original condition. The old front door was found on the place and has been re-hung. Our picture is a drawing of the original aspect of the house.

In the early years of occupancy of the new parsonage, the Minister and his wife had their baptism of grief when, in cold December

1734, death took their little daughter. In the Old Burying-ground at the North End, the gravestone with the earliest inscription is a small rough field stone. On it is rudely cut this sad record:

"Died Anno 1736
Sarah Walker
AE 4 years
& 6 m. "

But joy returned to the new home with a son and three daughters born into affection and godly family life. Here the Minister and his wife completed forty-seven years of wedded life, and here, left lonely by the death of Sarah Burbeen Walker four years earlier, the first Minister of Concord died on a Sabbath morning in the fall of 1782, while dressing for his service at the nearby Meeting-house.

During his long life of pastoral and civic activity, the Minister's home was the spiritual and intellectual center of this town. It was a place of continuing hospitality for traveler and townsman alike, for this was the home of the man of whom Dr. Bouton wrote: "More than any other single person, Rev. Mr. Walker is entitled to the appellation-'The Father of the Town.'"