

## Chapter XXIII.

### "The Fort"-East Concord Village.

Until the close of the eighteenth century there was no village on the east side of the river. It was still (as described in Chapter XIII) a place of quiet farms and a few scattered houses most of which were occupied by sons and grandsons of Capt. Ebenezer Eastman. Present Eastman St. was called Canterbury road and Mill brook crossed it and, in a short curve re-crossed to the east side of the highway. In these modern days a stone wall confines the brook to the east side of Eastman St. The only approach to the farms on the east side of the river, was by way of Eastman St., a highway dating back to the 1726 survey, but now (1949) partially closed in the name of modern progress.

The late Maj. Charles Eastman Staniels (b. 1845) whose knowledge of Ward 2, Concord, was of great value to the writer, said: "Within my remembrance, residents of the Mountain and other neighborhoods nearby, always referred to the village of East Concord in the oldtime vernacular, as 'The Fort', 'Going to The Fort' etc." Bouton confirms this and gives two possible explanations for the local name: the "Irish Fort" built by the Londonderry people shortly before our pioneers arrived in Pennycook, or, the garrison - commonly called "Fort" - built in 1746 by Capt. Ebenezer Eastman to protect his home.

This name, "The Fort", is not to be confused with "Old Fort" which, from as early as 1791, frequently appears in deeds describing land lying along Fort Eddy road - now renamed Intervale road. Fort Eddy, opposite Sug-Ball, is definitely Old Fort, since it refers to an Indian fort many years earlier than the white man's knowledge of this valley. The early settlers found the remains of this fort which, according to Indian tradition, was built by the raiding Mohawks for attack against the local tribe of Pennycooks.

An old newspaper clipping dated August 1856, describes a "Levee on Christian Shore" - a sort of fair - with a list of East Concord neighbor-

hoods represented in the gathering: Turtle town, Appletown and Snaptown, the Mountain, the Fort, Christian Shore, Hackett's Brook neighborhood, the Old Canterbury road people, the Intervale and all other portions of what is now known by the municipal title of Ward Two." Christian Shore was a group of houses on the river bank about half a mile north of Federal bridge. The Intervale is the section along the river and south of the Turnpike and the other localities have been identified in earlier chapters.

Of Capt. Ebenezer Eastman's seven sons, the oldest, Ebenezer, Jr., had died in 1778. Obadiah (b. 1721) had left Rumford and in 1750 was "of Salem in the provance of new hampshire" when he transferred his share of his father's estate to his brother, Jeremiah. Joseph (b. 1715) was living in Hopkinton at the time his father's estate was settled but evidently he returned to Concord later and lived near his father's old home. His house was inherited by his son, Capt. John Eastman (b. 1759) and is described as standing a few rods northwest of the railroad station at East Concord.

Philip Eastman lived into the nineteenth century at his house/<sup>215 Eastman St</sup> described and pictured in an earlier chapter<sup>-x-</sup> and he was succeeded by his son, Robert (b. 1742). Nathaniel Eastman (b. 1717) built his house not long after he received his share of his father's estate, but it burned and the house at 329 Eastman St. replaces it, although it is believed that a part of the ell may be the original. His son, Capt. Nathaniel, lived for a time in his father's house and then, in 1785, he built a low story and half house on the bluff above the highway and adjacent to the Eastman School lot. Capt. Nathaniel's brother, Jacob (b. 1763) owned property at Batchelder's where the original saw mill stood. In 1790 he built a new saw mill probably on this site and later he built a grist mill on the opposite side of the brook. The west boundary of his farm was "near Trumbull Falls" about 1830, suggesting that one of the old houses at Batchel-

der's may have been built by Jacob.

Jeremiah Eastman(b.1719) was living in 1800 near the Old Fort cemetery and his brother, Moses, (b.1732) had his hospitable home farther out on the Oak Hill road as pictured and described in an earlier chapter. Philip Eastman's son, Jonathan, built his house in the vacant lot north of his father's house and it was the inheritance of his son, Robert and of his grand daughter, Mrs. James Frye. Stilson Eastman(b.1738) son of Ebenezer Eastman, Jr. did not settle on his grandfather's estate but took up a farm on the "common land" north ward. In 1781 the Proprietors voted that he be allowed to "pitch" his lot where he had already made settlement

This serves to show how, at the close of the eighteenth century, the Eastman clan dominated the territory now included in East Concord village.

A century and more ago Mill brook was a rushing stream of considerable volume, protected by heavy forest around Turtle pond and by acres of swamp land long since gone dry because of destruction of woodland. Maj. Staniels could remember when, from Batchelder's down stream to the Intervale, there were no less than five dams on the brook and seven mills or small factories were utilizing the water power. We shall list some of the early enterprises which brought into being the present village of East Concord.

Having been provided with saw and grist mills, the next consideration was a tanyard and the first one on Mill brook seems to have been operated as early as 1795 by Stephen Ambrose down near Willow bridge on the Turnpike. His home was on the west side of Canterbury road about opposite present Shawmut St. and, being an enterprising young man, he opened a general store in his house. In the diary of Daniel Clark, the Millville potter, we find this entry under date of Jan. 28, 1799: "Carried ware to Ambrose." The rule at "The Fort" seems to have been that a man who was not an Eastman should marry an Eastman girl. Stephen Ambrose followed the rule by wedding Hannah, the daughter of Moses Eastman. One of their daughters

ters married Hon. Amasa Walker of Boston and became the mother of Gen. Francis A. Walker, first president of Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Their youngest daughter married William G. Webster of Plymouth.

In 1820, Mr. Ambrose kept a circulating library in his store, well patronized even by people on The Street. Asa McFarland, Jr. related that he and his father, The Minister, were among those who "took books", About 1807 (possibly 1811) Stephen Ambrose built a new house "in the mansion style". Our picture is copied from an old photograph but it was taken after the house had been modernized with a steep pitch roof, large windows and an elaborate porch. It stands today, the most impressive home in East Concord. The large elm in the yard was known in the village as the Webster elm, possibly in honor of the great Daniel who often visited there, or, perhaps, because Mrs. Susanna Webster lived there during her father's last years.

Stephen Ambrose was one of Concord's most successful and esteemed citizens—an ardent Whig, he served as member of the Legislature at various sessions and held many positions of trust and honor.

Edmund Leavitt established a second tanyard on the intervale with open tan pits on Mill St. Leavitt was a competent surveyor and bid off the job of making the preliminary map of Concord to be used by Philip Carrigain in making his famous map of the State (1816). He served as selectman in 1807. In 1824 he sold his tanyard to Cyrus Robinson of Methuen and Enos Blake of Chester. By this time the original grist mill had disappeared and the new firm of tanners built their bark mill on its site. The business prospered until the plant was destroyed by fire in 1864.

Mr. Blake had moved to the city and opened a tanning business there while Mr. Robinson and his two sons bought a steam mill property

on the south side of Horseshoe pond, for a tannery. This in turn, was taken over by two young men-George F. and Charles T. Page-who organized and developed it into one of Concord's major industries.

In the year 1775 it was voted at Town Meeting "that the Select Men be desired to purchase of Lemuel Tucker a Road Two Rods wide from Eastman's Ferry so called to the Gate near the dwelling House of Philip Eastman. There was some delay, probably because of the war, but in 1783 it was voted to "accept the road from Tucker's Ferry to the Mill Farm" and this road is West Portsmouth St. today. Also, at the 1775 Town Meeting it was voted "that the Road be laid straight from the Chandler Tree so called near M<sup>r</sup>. Philip Eastman's dwelling House to Eben<sup>r</sup> Eastman's Corner near Lt. John Chandler's Grist Mill in Concord." On our modern map this latter road is still "straight" from Portsmouth St. to Mill St. Thus a good road was assured from the ferry to the mill.

At that period we know of only one grist mill on Mill brook- the original "corn mill" for which Capt. Ebenezer Eastman had paid the charges. It seems likely that Lt. Chandler had become proprietor of this mill as well as tavern keeper at "The Fort". The grist mill was on the south side of the brook and the tavern on the north side. From that time on the little lane now called Mill St. became the center of the local development of industry. On the south side of the brook, Edmund Leavitt operated the second tannery at "The Fort" and a little above on the brook, Philip Johnson used the water power for a carding and fulling mill. About 1800, Isaac Eastman opened a blacksmith shop and the first machine shop in Concord, utilizing the same power. Later he bought the Johnson mill. About 1817 Josiah Fernald (Fernald) joined the group on the brook with a shop for dressing morocco leather which seems to have been the first and only one in town. It stood down the brook from Johnson's about where the stream turns southward to cross the Intervale.

Philip C. Johnson who owned the carding and fulling mill was the

son of Jonathann and Rhoda (Abbot) Johnson who once lived on the slope of Horse-hill. His home at "The Fort" was in the house here pictured. The ell of this house seems to ante-date his occupancy by many years for it is said to have loop-holes for Indian warfare in its walls. Philip Johnson moved to Maine and in 1824, a son named Eastman was born in Lovell. This son settled in Augusta and later moved to Washington, D.C. where he won fame as a portrait painter. He is mentioned in Rachel Field's "All This and Heaven Too."

The carding and fulling mill under Johnson and later under Isaac Eastman, was well patronized by the farmers' wives in the surrounding country. Isaac Eastman's machine shop was an 18 x 20 building and he used it also as a smithy. When Lewis Downing began to make chaises over on Concord Street, Isaac Eastman provided the axles. He was an ingenious workman as indicated by his improvement in the wooden plows commonly used on the farms. He made for them iron plates as casings which added to the effectiveness and to the durability of the plow. In time he added an up-to-date trip hammer to his equipment and opened a wood-working shop nearby where he manufactured road scrapers which were in great demand. In this shop his cousin, Robert Eastman, invented the first clapboard machine which eventually did away with the laborious process of making clapboards by hand. In 1826 the Eastman plant was destroyed by fire and it is said that the bell on the Meeting-house was rung so violently for the general alarm, that it cracked.

About the time that Isaac Eastman began business, Lt. Chandler's tavern was turned into a grist mill and much later it was used by Cyrus Farrar for a silk dye shop. Long ago this old building on the site now occupied by a barn on the south side of Mill St., was destroyed by fire. Another grist mill of long ago still stands farther up Mill brook and this, with the old mill known by this generation as Cate's cider mill (site of the original grist mill), are the only reminders today of all the industries along the brook in the early days at "The Fort".

About 1817, Josiah Fernald (Fernald) who had married Sophia, a daughter of Jacob Eastman, opened his shop for dressing morocco leather. The family made their home in the house still standing on the south corner of Shawmut St. and the Canterbury road (Eastman St.) About 1835 the father and mother with nine of their ten children, moved to Exeter, Me. making the journey over the snow by ox-sled. The oldest son, Josiah, Jr., remained in Concord to found a branch of the family well-known to this day.

In the eighteen twenties, Capt. John Putney had a joiner's shop where he made sleighs and coffins and did painting. On a cold February night in 1826, the shop burned to the ground and then Capt. Putney opened a store in rivalry with that of Stephen Ambrose. The competition developed into a contest for the local post-office which shifted from one store to the other according to which party was in power. The Putney home was the house in our picture and perhaps the Captain built it.

On the north corner of Mill St. stands the house here pictured. It was built about 1834 by Jonathan Sanborn and originally a store occupied its front part. It has been much changed from its original design but one may still trace that design. This house was long the home of Maj. Charles Eastman Staniels. On Shawmut St. stands the home of Maj. Staniels' grandfather, Gen. Isaac Eastman, built in 1809. There, in 1812, a daughter was born, named Ruth Bradley Eastman. From that home she married Edward D. Staniels and to that home when widowed, she returned to spend the last years of a long life.

It was Mrs. Staniels who brought about the restoration of Old Fort Cemetery up the hill from her home. In that little cemetery thirteen Revolutionary soldiers had been buried, one of whom now lies in Pine Grove Cemetery. It was the wish of his family that Capt. John Eastman lie by the side of his son, Moses, who died years later. Capt. Eastman served under Col. Gordon Hutchins in 1777. Although a man of deep religious feeling and Puritan standards, he was one of those in his genera-

tion who hesitated to take the responsibilities of church membership and it was not until 1808 when he was nearly fifty years old that he owned the Covenant at the Meeting-house. His portrait reproduced from Bouton's History, was painted by his friend, Hon. Jacob Potter, about 1831 and reveals the sterling character of the man. He died in 1838, "leaving in property, character and example, a valuable legacy to his children", according to Dr. Bouton who was then his pastor. A man could not ask a finer obituary.

Town Records under date of March 5, 1800, tell of the first fence built around Old Fort Cemetery and ninety-four years later, Mrs. Staniels's vision and perseverance brought restoration of the sacred spot to completion when, through the generosity of Miss Annie M. Phelps of Brookline Mass., a kinswoman, the impressive tablet was set in the new retaining wall and dedication ceremonies were held.

A very human little story is attached to Capt. John Eastman's family. In 1823, his son, John (b. 1791) married Dorothy De Forrest of Canterbury, who is reputed to have been a beauty of the perfect blonde type. With beauty she combined the domestic virtues and was notable for her spick and span housekeeping. Her adoring husband said she was far too pretty to be smoked up cooking over a fireplace and so he bought her one of the newly invented cook stoves for her kitchen. This was the first such to be owned at "The Fort".

Mrs. Ruth Eastman Staniels had many tales to tell of the old days and one of these concerned an honored summer visitor at her girlhood home, in the person of Capt. Archibald McNeil who owned a rope walk on Federal St. in Boston. He fascinated the girl because he had been a member of the famous Boston Tea Party. When he first came to "The Fort" about 1830, he was a typical gentleman of the old school, dressed in green small clothes and ruffled shirt. Among her treasures, Mrs. Staniels kept the

commissions of her father, Isaac Eastman, from Ensign to Major General in the N.H. Militia, signed by Gov. John Langdon in 1808-10; by Gov. Bell in 1821 and by Gov. Woodbury in 1823,

In 1813 "The Fort" and its surrounding neighborhoods could support a resident physician and young Moses Long of Hopkinton took an office in Philip Johnson's house. After the Johnsons moved away he became owner of the house. He set out the elms in front of the house and many of those on the lower end of the village street. Shortly after his arrival, New Hampshire became alarmed at the threat of depredations by the British along our sea-coast and a rumor spread that it was the purpose to attack the U.S. ship of seventy-four guns, "Washington", then on the stocks at Kittery. A squad of twenty men in the village volunteered for emergency defence and Dr. Long was drill master. Leading citizens like Isaac Eastman, Robert Ambrose and Simeon Stevens were among the volunteers, but happily there was no call for their service.

After ten years of practice in the village, Dr. Long moved away perhaps because of the tragic death of his wife "from poison of white lead accidentally mixed in sugar used by the family." His successor was another young man from Hopkinton, Dr. Elijah Colby, who had graduated that same year (1823) from the Medical College at Hanover. He purchased Dr. Long's house and made it his home as well as the location of his apothecary shop. He followed the general rule and married into the Eastman family - his wife being, <sup>Susan</sup> the grand-daughter of Jonathan Eastman.

On the north corner of Shawmut St. is the old tavern shown in our picture. It was built by Aaron Austin who opened it as a tavern about 1800. He, too, married an Eastman girl - Judith, the daughter of Moses Eastman on the Oak hill road. During the War of 1812, Austin served with the troops on the northern frontier and there contracted spotted fever from which he died in Vermont. His body was brought home for burial and his funeral at the tavern was largely attended by the villagers. Contagion

spread among those present and a local epidemic of the dread disease followed.

Dea. Nathaniel Ambrose who had kept tavern on the Mountain, moved to "The Fort" and became landlord of the Austin tavern. Under his management the house became a village center. A large hall added to the house was the scene of some of the political balls of the day introduced to make party converts. When Dea. Ambrose retired from the tavern business he moved to the little white house which stands as pictured on the south side of Portsmouth St. This house he built in 1816. In the early thirties he sold this house to Cyrus Robinson and built for his own home, the brick house on the opposite side of the street. There he lived out his days, honored and respected as a man of true piety. He served as deacon at the Meeting-house for thirty-one years and during much of that time it was his custom to hold a Saturday night prayer meeting at the brick schoolhouse which stood on the site of 257 Eastman St. Succeeding Dea. Ambrose at the tavern was a Capt. Smith whose grandson accumulated a fortune, changed his name to Durant and founded Wellesley college. From 1816 till 1821, Sarah Austin, daughter of the first landlord, kept a private school in the tavern.

One of the later taverns in the neighborhood is shown in our picture as it stands today. It was kept by Meshech Lang from 1825 till 1830. Lang had married one of the daughters of John Hoyt who kept the famous tavern in the far northeast corner of the town on what is now Hoyt road. This tavern on Lang's hill as it was then called, was sold to his wife's brother, John Hoyt, Jr., "Innkeeper of Newmarket."

An old-fashioned but very charming courtesy prevailed in the days when these taverns flourished, as witnessed by the following invitation carefully written on old English paper and preserved for many years:

"Saml. W. Lang presents compliments to Miss Polly Eastman and will

be very happy to accompany her to a Ball at Mr. Austin's on Wednesday the 5th of June at 3 o'clock p.m.

Please to answer by the Bearer.

I am, Dear Madam,

Your Humble Servant,

S.W.Lang."

During the years since the United States had won her independence the country had grown in extent and in wealth until men believed there could be no limit to prosperity. The prudent spirit of labor and thrift gave way to the spirit of speculation based upon unsound financial principles encouraged by the Federal government. The inevitable result was the panic of 1837. The New England phase had its roots in the sale of Maine lands which led to the wildest speculation. In conservative Concord local real estate rose to five times its normal value and men gambled the savings of years. When the bubble burst, the loss in Concord was staggering and men hitherto well-to-do found themselves ruined.

During the years leading to this calamity, several schemes for fortune making were initiated in Concord but the most expansive of all was launched at "The Fort". In 1833 a group of prosperous citizens incorporated as the Sewall's Falls Locks and Canal Co. with the purpose to develop the water power near Sewall's Island. Competent engineers approved the plan which called for a dam across the Merrimack river where the present dam is located and a canal two and a half miles long from an inlet above the falls to a point on the river immediately below the present railroad bridge. At that point locks were to be built to bring boats up to the necessary level and there were optimists who declared that steamboats would soon be running from Boston to Plymouth over a river route. In addition two water-courses were to be built running easterly from the canal with space between sufficient for twenty-three mills of a capacity of five thousand spindles each.

Some forty thousand dollars had been spent on the project, the dam was half built and the canal nearly finished, when a freshet destroyed much of the work on the latter. In consequence the work languished until doomed by the panic of '37. The advent of the railroad in the early forties wrecked the transportation part of the plan. For some time the solid masonry of granite walls built for the locks, mocked the defeated stockholders and then the stones were used, somewhat ironically, as piers and abutments for the bridge built for the railroad. The thirty foot wide canal trench was traceable for most of its course along the plain west of the village and, until very recent years the canal between the railroad and Eastman St. still had water in it. It is now filled in.

All this was for generations mute testimony to the shattered dream of more than a century ago. Had that dream materialized "Old Fort" might well have rivalled the mill towns on the lower Merrimack river.