

HISTORIC LANDMARKS

By Martha E. Sewall Curtis

Reproduced from the Woburn News, Oct. 14, 1890

The fields and hills of Burlington are rich in associations with the memorable past.

The student of New England history is strongly attracted to the meeting-house built in 1732. The whole cost of the building at the time was 237 pounds 2 schillings, or \$943.17. This, however, was a larger sum of money to our forefathers than it would be to us to-day. According to the vote of the parish, it was "decently finished as a House for ye publick worship of God requiors, having one tear of gallires with sutable and Neseary seats and two tear of Lights" The "two tear of lights" were casement windows, opening with hinges, and furnished with glass of diamond shape in sashes of lead.

The meeting-house was not painted for many years. There was no steeple and no bell to call the people to the Sunday services. At first, there were no pews but long seats on either side of the broad aisle. The women were seated on one side and the men on the other. To prevent the confusion that would arise from all sitting promiscuously as they might choose to come, it was necessary to "seat" the meeting-house. We can hardly envy the committee who had this in charge and were chosen from year to year to assign proper places to the worshippers, according to age, rank, and the amount of tax assessed on individuals. In some towns, this process was called "dignifying the meeting house."

In 1777 and in 1824, the meeting-house suffered from the ravages of the elements. These injuries were carefully repaired and, in 1846, it was a well-preserved building in decent condition. In that year ten feet were added to its length, the porch was built and the steeple with its bell. Two years ago, in 1888, the meeting-house was remodelled. The ancient frame, however, remains and the original oaken timbers, sturdily resisting the "the tooth of Time," are to be seen in the loft.

Very near the meeting-house, as was the custom of olden time, our forefathers selected as the records say, a "sutabel pece of land" for a burying ground. It was probably laid out for this purpose in 1733, although the records regarding it are imperfect. Here were buried the first three ministers of the parish, with their families, the worthies of the town and strangers who "laid their weary bones among us."

Two graves are of special interest. One of these is the grave of Cuff, the negro servant of Rev. Thomas Jones, who faithfully served the family for sixty years, and at his death, in 1813, was borne to his grave by the selectmen of the town, personally, as a mark of respect to him and his beloved master and mistress. It is marked with a slate headstone, suitably inscribed. The other is the grave of Miss Ruth Wilson, who from the carefully saved earnings of her youth, gave the fund which keeps in preservation and in good order the ancient burial ground. She also bestowed a similar gift upon the church in Burlington. Her name is held in grateful remembrance among her townspeople.

Several historic houses are mentioned in the sketch of Burlington in this paper. The house owned by Mr. Joshua Reed is considered by good judgement to be one of the oldest in the state, although its exact age cannot be ascertained. It is situated on the famous "Wyman farm" of olden days. This farm, containing about one thousand acres, was owned by John and Francis Wyman, two of the first settlers of Woburn. Five hundred acres of it were purchased by them, about 1669, for fifty or sixty pounds sterling. There were several houses upon it but only the Reed house now remains. It was used as a garrison house and from the port-holes still to be seen, the pioneers of old Woburn kept ward in the dark days of Indian massacres or watched the Indians lingering on the banks of the Shawshin—the last to leave this region. This house has come down to the present generation; an eloquent witness of the past centuries. It is to be hoped that a seasonable effort will be made to preserve it as an object of interest and lustruction [*sic*]. The public-spirited people of the town should consider this matter.