

THE HISTORY OF OLD TOWN HILL

On May 6, 1935, "Quascacunquen," the Indian name meaning "waterfall," which referred to the falls on the river, later named Parker River, was allowed by the Court to become a plantation and "its name hereafter shall be Newbury." At this time, the business of the town was transacted by a committee. This lasted for about a year. However, the planation increased so rapidly, there were sufficient numbers to become a competent town.

The gathering of the Church was on a sabbath, in the open air under the branches of a majestic oak tree which stood on the north bank of the Parker River, about one hundred yards from where the bridge now stands. This year, 1635, the first Meeting House was built on the Lower Green, near the foot of the Great Hill, as it was then called. A fieldstone marker now stands in a stone wall on Newman Road near the property lines of Mary L. Johnston and Lucy M. Plumer to mark the spot. The first graveyard was near it. The Court ordered that no dwelling house should be built over one-half mile from the Meeting House, except for mills and farm houses.

Mr. Horace Plumer, who owned the east end of Old Town Hill and lived at 6 Newman Road, told me that once, while plowing his field he hit a slate slab which covered a grave. He believed that the first settlers were buried deep, lest the Indians would know how many died.

In 1636, the General Court enacted a law that every township should have control over its affairs, and the liberty to choose prudential men (not to exceed seven in number) to order the affairs of Town. This body was eventually called "selectmen."

In 1639, it was ordered by the Body of Freemen that "a walk sixteen feet broad should be made on Top of the Great Hill, made running North and South from the Green to the top of the hill." Near the center of this walk, the place is still pointed out where the sentry box or watch house was erected. The position is a commanding one, and far better to stand sentinel than at the doors of the Meeting House.

"So once, for fear of Indian beating,
Our grandsires bore their guns to meeting,
Each man equipped on Sunday morn
With Psalm book, shot, and powder horn;
And looked in form, as all must grant,
Like the ancient true church militant,
Or fierce, like modern deep devines,
Who fight with quills, like porcupines.

This year, the common land was divided into the "ox common," "cow common," and "calf common." The sheep and goats, of which there were many, had prescribed limits. Each flock was the charge of a keeper, who was obliged to fold them at night to protect them from the wolves. In 1642, it was estimated that there were twelve thousand cattle and three thousand sheep in Town. Many of these grazed on the Hill. Originally, the livestock was imported from Holland. To quote from The Prophecy of Samuel Sewell of 1697 The New Heaven Upon the New Earth, a religious book and paraphrased by John Greenleaf Whittier:

"As long as cattle shall roam at will,
The green grass meadow by Turkey Hill,
As long as sheep shall look from the side
Of Old Town Hill on the marshes wide,
And Parker River and salt sea tide,
So long shall Christians here be born,
Grow up and ripen on God's sweet corn,
The Island still in purple with plums,
And up the river the salmon comes."

In 1644, the Town paid three pounds to John Emery for a parcel of land containing about three acres, forming a triangle, of which twenty rods was reserved for a burying ground with a way to it from the east. This is situated just north of Old Town Hill and was known as the "Emery Lot." Now it is known as the "First Burying Ground of the First Settlers."

On the south side of the Hill, near the Johnston lot line and about one hundred feet back from Newman Road, is a dugout. As children, we played on that part of the Hill, which was then owned by Mr. Stephen P. Hale. He told us that it was the cellar hold of one of the first houses in Newbury. Wild roses used to grow there and Mr. Hale told us that the original bush came from

England. It is also said that there is an Indian cemetery on the Hill, which was once designated by piles of small stones. Now it would be impossible to locate it because of the overgrowth.

On July 13, 1700, Samuel English, the Indian heir of Masconomo, Chief of the Sagamore of Agawam, gave a deed to all the land in Newbury to the selectmen of the Town. For this, the Town paid ten pounds in current money of New England. At that time the selectmen were: Cutting Noyes, Joseph Knight, Richard Dole, John Worthing and Joseph Pike. This deed is recorded in book 14, page 67, Essex Registry of Deeds, Southern District, Salem, Massachusetts.

The "Muster Field" lies north of Old Town Hill and gets its name from the Grand Reunion of the Massachusetts Regiment, which took place in the summer of 1868. The event was called "The Muster," and the whole field was thickly dotted with tents for a week or more.

Once upon a time, a local farmer had a large peach orchard back of the Hill. This was known to all fox hunters as "The Peach Orchard." It was located on land owned by an Adams family, and is still known as the "Peach Orchard."

As years passed, an elm tree grew where the Block House once stood. This became a landmark for many years, but eventually it gave way to time. Here, also, a flag staff was erected and in 1898 a flag was flown by Mr. Stephen P. Hale in honor of the volunteers who entered the Spanish-American War.

A prominent funeral directors in Newburyport, Mr. Robert J. McKinney, was in California at an Easter Sunrise Service. He was so impressed with a cross at the ceremony that he had one made of California redwood, which he presented to the religious workers of Newburyport and vicinity. This cross was erected near the elm tree in 1926.

On Sunday, July 1, 1928, a patriotic service was held at the Cross on the Hill. Those taking part included Rev. Harry O. Hannum, minister of Central Congregational Church in Newburyport; Rev. A.C. McGilton, minister of People's Methodist Church in

Newburyport; Rev. Myles Stotts, minister of Old South Presbyterian Church in Newburyport; and Rev. Lawrence Hayward, minister of the First Religious Unitarian Society in Newburyport.

On Sunday afternoon, July 13, 1930, a Tercentenary Service was held at the Cross. Those taking part included Rev. Glenn T. Morse, rector of All Saints' Church in West Newbury; Rev. Arthur C. Peabody, rector of St. Paul's Episcopal Church in Newburyport; Rev. Edward P. Holton, brother of Charles S. Holton and a missionary in India for many years, who spent his last years in Newbury; and Laura E. Humphreys, organist at the First Church in Newbury for nearly fifty years.

The organ used for this ceremony was the one in the Lower Green Schoolhouse, and was carried up the hill by truck on a roadway on the back of the hill. Both these services were sponsored by the Federation of Religious Workers of Newburyport and Vicinity. For many years thereafter, the Easter Sunrise Services were held at the Hill.

In the early 1900s, Wilmot R. Evans of Boston purchased the Old Town Farm from the Newman Family. A section of the Hill was owned by the Newmans. Newman Road was then known as Hill Street. Mr. Evans had the name changed to avoid confusion with the Hill Street in Newburyport. Gradually, Mr. Evans acquired ownership of other sections of the Hill, with the exception of the east and west ends. His daughter, Florence E. Bushee gave that part of the Hill to the Trustees of Reservations. She acquired the east end of the Hill and also deeded this to the Trustees.

THE NEW HEAVEN UPON THE NEW EARTH

I see, far southward, this quiet day,
The hills of Newbury rolling away,
With the many tints of the season gay,
Dreamily blending in autumn mist,
Crimson, and gold, and amethyst,
Long and low, with dwarf trees crowned,
Plum Island lies, like a whale aground,
At stone's throw over the narrow sound.

(from a religious book published in 1597.)

This unique article was written by our member, Mrs. Mary P. Barton of Newbury.