



The Chronicle Quarterly

Weston Historical Society

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VALLEY FORGE ♦ THE VILLAGE

One of Weston's most scenic areas at all seasons is the Saugatuck Reservoir. When driving by, it is so hard to imagine that an entire community lived in this area until 1943 when Bridgeport Hydraulic took over the land to build a reservoir. Once in a while when there has been a drought, you can see some remains of foundations from some of the homes and businesses that were located there.

We were recently given a biography, written by Mr. Andrew L. Winton (1864-1946), who visited his grandmother in Valley Forge and was a member of a family with long lines in the Weston/Easton area. Andrew's grandfather, James Winton (1778-1857), was a colonel in the militia who served to defend the town of Bridgeport from foreign invaders. During the War of 1812, it is told that a British man-of-war sailed into Bridgeport Harbor.

The militia was called out and Colonel Winton, for lack of something to do about the situation, rode up and down the streets telling everyone "the British are landing." Nothing ever did happen and the ship weighed anchor and sailed out into the sound. Bridgeport had been "saved" by Colonel James Winton. When not fighting off the enemy, Mr. Winton kept busy with 13 children and

keeping a tavern "Horse Tavern" located just off Newtown Turnpike in Bridgeport. He also, like so many men during that time, held yet another job, that of a tanner. James' wife Perthenia (Seeley) Winton (1784-1850) died in a little house in Valley Forge that was later the site of a store owned by Andrew Winton's father.

On Andrew's maternal side of the family was Isaac Gorham III (1802-

and moved into his wife's family home, the Bennett house (later to be called the Gorham/Bennett house as referred to in Weston: the Forging of a Connecticut Town.). Isaac lived to a ripe old age giving light to many tales of his hunting prowess. In fact, his rifle was his entire estate at the end.

Despite wonderful memories of his grandfather, it is his grandmother that evokes emotional memories of his quarterly, and annual visits to her home. Andrew remembers that his room was a lean-to reached through his grandmother's room two steps down from the kitchen. Grape vines grew over the window keeping the sun out making it the coolest room in the house. "He would blow out the tallow candle at night and the wick would give off a tiny wavering streak of smelly smoke." In the morning Andrew said it is almost

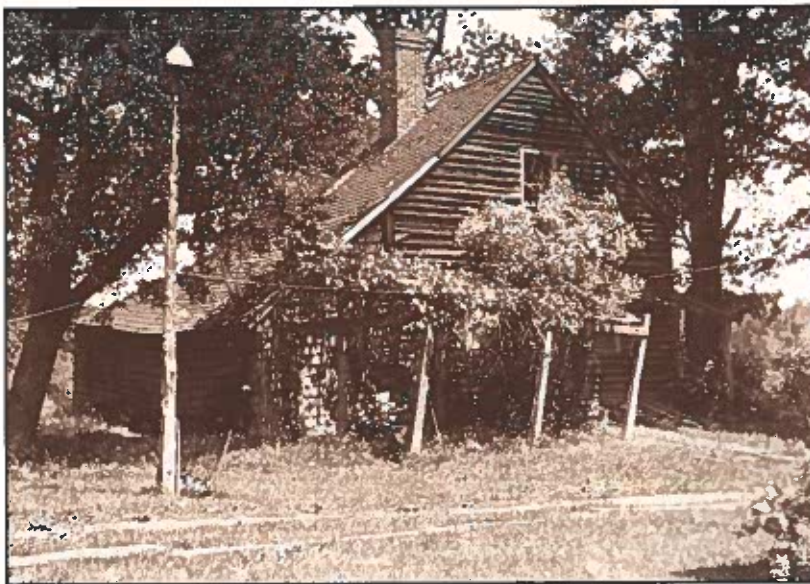


Photo courtesy of Mary Diskgeisser - taken by Lewis Bennett Winton.

The Gorham/Bennett House (circa 1915). The house was flooded by Bridgeport Hydraulic in 1943.

1881). He was the last of three Isaacs, described as a small man with a small foot. It is told that he had the family failing which was rum. When Isaac married his bride, Adaline Eulina (Bennett) Gorham (1804-1854), they built a house in Valley Forge in 1830. Isaac's hunting and tipping the elbow, his two favorite pastimes, did not help the family finances. He lost his farm

impossible to describe the "flavor of bread made from home-grown rye, and gristmill ground flour, home churned butter, and preserves made from wild grapes, to go with his breakfast."

Dinner was at noon. Andrew remembers having boiled pork, potatoes, vegetables, and berry or apple pie. Often the meat was chicken that had "died on the lethal chopping block after a meal of corn." *Continued on page 2*



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VALLEY FORGE - THE VILLAGE

Andrew called his grandma's foul "roast bird of paradise." There were also partridge, quail, woodchuck, duck, trout, bass, pickerel, perch, and eels. He would "bob for eels from a scow under the branches of elm, alder, and witch hazel from twilight until midnight."

Andrew writes that "at supper we always had bread and milk. Huckleberries and blackberries, when they were in season, were added to the bowl, and at all seasons, apple pie. Sometimes Andrew pounded slices of dry bread browned in the oven in a wooden log mortar (which was a gift to the Historical Society from Mrs. Dickgeisser, Mr. Winton's daughter). They called the crumbs "somp" and added milk with a lot of honey or maple syrup - of course, "made from the hives along the north fence and the sugar maples along the south side of the property."

Andrew fondly remembers noises of the farm, "the filing of the scythe, the blast of the horn at dinnertime, the ticking of the old wooden clock and at night the songs of the whippoorwill, the locust and the katydids." These sounds combined with the smells of grape flowers, apple blossoms, new-mowed hay, ripening cream, frying ham, and even the barnyard and the



Artifacts sold at the General Store in Valley Forge, donated to the Society by Mary Dickgeisser.

pig pen. His memories also include his grandmother's tales of corn husking, the fiddle and the dance and of "General Training" (of the troops-where her husband pounded the drum.) To punctuate the love of a woman who was not only strong, but humble, on the occasion of her 50th wedding anniversary, relatives from Danbury, Newtown and Monroe came to honor Adeline "sweet Adeline." She was buried with five generations of Gorhams in the Hill Cemetery later "desecrated by the Bridgeport Hydraulic Company."

Mary Esther (Gorham) Winton (1829-1889) was Andrew's beloved mother. His daughter Mary (Winton) Dickgeisser (who so kindly gave us all this information) was named for Mary Winton. Andrew remembers her as a slight woman with black hair and eyes with a rich contralto voice which often brought warmth to their old Victorian house. Mr. Winton was a store-keeper (see picture of artifacts) who boarded his clerks and a miller/tanner who boarded his mill hands. With all this work Andrew's mother had little time for pleasures with the exception of tending her flowers. Roses were her favorites. Andrew recalls that her "chocolate, coconut, marble, and -- made once a year for state occasions -- fruit cake, as well as her mince, pumpkin, apple, berry and custard pies have never been equalled. Mary Esther's brother was Dr. Frank Gorham who saw to the medical needs of Westonsites for years.

Apparently life in the village of Valley Forge was both difficult and wonderful for a young boy. There were several small factories, one of which was a cigar factory and a school. Of course, there were many homes as well as Mr. Winton's.

Fortunately some of these homes were moved to nearby places in town, preserving some of our history.



Mary Dickgeisser, daughter of Andrew Winton (1864-1846)
Descendent of the Gorham/Bennett's of Valley Forge.

(We would like to thank Mary Dickgeisser for sharing her father's biography with us and for all the thoughtful gifts she gave the society. Mary currently lives in Stratford and has had an exciting life of her own. Both her mother and father were scientists. Her father attended Yale and her mother, the University of Rhode Island, and received her PhD from Yale. Mary herself holds a degree in organic chemistry after which she worked in a medical lab before she married and had five children. Mary's parents were into food chemistry and analysis. In the early 1900's Mr. Winton was head of the Government Lab in Chicago where all food came through. Mr. Winton wrote a four volume compilation concerning the structure and composition of food. Mrs. Winton was the artist for the drawings in the book. We are most grateful to Mrs. Dickgeisser and will treasure her gifts to us.)



“LITTLE EGYPT”

At its May 1845 session, the General Assembly agreed to separate Weston into two towns, Weston and Easton. On a map done in 1867, School District No. 8 was called “Little Egypt.” This area once was in Weston until the splitting of the two towns. In May of 1989, Calista K. Cleary of Redding wrote a research project to fulfill her requirements for a Barton L. Weller Scholarship competition. Calista researched the towns of Easton, Redding and Weston to write about “Little Egypt: Black History in Three New England Towns.”

Calista became interested in the project when she discovered a small cemetery standing on a hill above the Aspetuck River. The cemetery contains early black and white inhabitants of the town. There are eight carved grave-stones, one undefined stone, and approximately 12 uncarved stones which are arranged in such an order as gravestone. Those dated stones are from 1820's - 1850's. The cemetery has been named “Wheeler Baldwin, Indian or Den Road Cemetery over the years (our own Coley Cemetery having also been called several different names over the years.) Perhaps the “Indian Cemetery” name may have come from the black family name of Baldwin who might have been part Indian.

Miss Cleary was most interested in two stones, those of a brother and sister, Aaron and Arity Baldwin. Both were children of Sylvanus and Delia Baldwin, free blacks living in Little Egypt. Although both of these children died within a year, many of their brothers and sisters survived, 10 in all. A neighbor of Mr. Baldwin, and a white resident of Little Egypt, was Stephen Thorp. He was a prosperous farmer who was reported to have 9 people under the age of 30 living with him in 1830. Calvin Wheeler, and his two wives, are also buried in the Wheeler Baldwin cemetery. The Wheeler names were among the first settlers of Easton.

Census data over a period of 110 years allowed Calista to interpret trends in population, living standards and occupations for the inhabitants of Easton, Redding and Weston. The 1780 census for Weston (which included Easton from 1787 until 1845) showed there were 24 free persons of color and 36 slaves in a population of 2,469. In 1800 there were 54 free persons of color and 10 slaves in a population of 2,680. By 1810 there were no slaves, although slavery was not abolished in Connecticut until 1848. Weston's black population soared to 76 in 1820 and decreased to 15 in the period between 1850-1860 (Calista stopped following Weston's statistics at this point). However, we believe that the significant drop was partially due to the “town's indifference to the temperance movement and lack of concern of the antislavery question.” Most of the blacks actually lived in the portion of Weston which became Easton. Perhaps the “antislavery” question was one of the factors in the split.

Looking over the censuses for the entire 110 years, Miss Cleary found that this area was truly integrated and that the life of the blacks was not so different from that of the whites. Most black males 18 and over were listed in agricultural labor as were the majority of whites. Since farming was seasonal, many men had part-time jobs, including domestic, basketmaker, blacksmith, painter and hatter. Most black and white women alike were listed as “at home” or “keeping house.” When farming became less profitable blacks and whites both set out for jobs in Bridgeport and Danbury.

Miss Cleary interpreted from her research that integration was the rule and not the exception in this area. Little Egypt was inhabited by blacks and whites who worked together, went to school and church together and were buried together in the Wheeler-Baldwin cemetery.



Little Egypt resident, Violet Evangeline Roberts with her mother, circa 1908



John Albert Baldwin, circa 1899 (1889-1975) descendent of Sylvanus and Delia Baldwin of Little Egypt.



John Albert Baldwin with friend and teammate, Ray Ezequell. Both men played for the Redding Baseball Team.

My thanks to Jane Atkinson for loaning me the research paper done by Calista Cleary.

ONE RIVER ROAD 18TH CENTURY



With all of Weston's new construction, we thought we would take you back to a time when George Washington and John Adams were alive, to a time before Thomas Jefferson was born. When you enter the home of Alan and Myra Aronow of River Road, you are immediately transported back to a time when horses were the means of travel, farming and black-smithing a means of support, and fireplaces the means of cooking and heat. We go back to a time when ships came up the Saugatuck River to dock in Westport, take on freight and unload cargo and mail - most of which was headed for Danbury.

Although there is no exact date on record, it is believed the original house (see diagram) was constructed circa 1725-1730. According to the histories done by various residents of the River Road house, and research by Mrs. Edna Lutz (one of the Historical Society's original members), as well as a visit by the curator of a state historical house museum, this "pre-revolutionary house started as a small Salt-Box built on the mail highway between the docks in Westport and the market in Danbury. It is in an area called Kettle Creek, named for the creek which flows just north of River Road. It is believed to have been built by the Godfree (Godfrey) family, one of the earliest settlers in the area and is probably the oldest house in Weston."

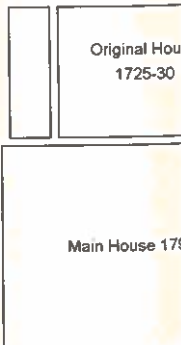
Alan and Myra told us that the first floor of the original house contained two rooms - one called the "borning" room (a small bedroom which was also used for births and funerals), and the "Main" room having a huge cooking fireplace with a 9 foot hearthstone. There was a small narrow staircase to a large upstairs loft space. In the 19th century, the present back stairs were added, cutting off a large portion of the fireplace.



Alan Aronow



Floor Plan of ac



Home of Alan and Myra Aronow. This room is part of the original house built in 1725 - 1730. (While watching a TV documentary on Thomas Jefferson, Mr. Aronow realized the room was built before Mr. Jefferson's birth.)

HISTORY & 20TH CENTURY CHARM



me in his den.

In 1790, the main house was added on and the building became a tavern called "Scribner's Tavern." It served as a coach stop on the route between New York and Danbury. Across Weston Road from the house there is currently a small red house which was part of an old carriage house (and blacksmith shop) used by the tavern. According to land deeds of the 1800's the original property consisted of 15 acres with a wood lot on the north side of the river. Also to the north lived a neighbor Aaron Burr, third vice-president of the United States.

The main entrance doorway to the house has a lovely fan light and the spacious entry foyer is believed to have been used as bar for the tavern's guests. The two bedrooms located over this area were one time a single large room serving as dormitory style sleeping quarters for the inn. Also, upstairs, the large loft (now a bedroom and two bathrooms) was said to have been used as a ballroom for entertainment.

The attic also gives the feel of the old house construction. There are hand-hewn boards to which the roof shingles were nailed (Alan and Myra kept these boards when they had the roof replaced, despite the roofers' objections). You can also see the post and beam construction. The cellar also contains many old beams (made from bark covered tree trunks) and part of the back wall (underneath the original house), contains an enormous bake oven. Apparently to keep the house cool in the summer, a fire was started outside and the coals were brought in and used to do the baking in the basement.

To round out this lovely home there is a sleeping porch which was added onto the house in the 1930's, constructed from a section of an 1870's barn located on the property. The modern kitchen was enlarged and updated in 1980 by the home's former owners, Charlie and Anne Pepper and was featured in Family Circle Magazine.

Continued on page 6

to original house.

Kitchen 1980

Sleeping Porch 1930
from the old 1870's
barn



Upstairs bedroom, originally part of a larger room used by "Scribner's Tavern" for dormitory style sleeping.

Photos by Roger Core

ONE RIVER ROAD

Continued from page 7.

When Alan and Myra took residence in 1991, they vowed to do nothing that would change the historical character of the house. Myra said she wanted to live somewhere which was either ultra-modern or extremely old. What she did was to get one of Weston's oldest houses (if not the oldest) and Weston is certainly better for this. They obviously have a love and an interest in the house and its long history.

We cannot thank Alan and Myra enough for being so gracious as to invite us into their home to tour and take pictures and for passing on copies of all the histories belonging to the property. Myra teaches art in Trumbull school system where she has taught for 27 years. In her spare time she has been building, and rebuilding stone walls on the property and developing garden areas. Alan is a consultant, writer and inventor.



The backyard of One River Road belonging to Alan and Myra Aronow. Myra has been rebuilding the stone walls and designing the gardens.



Myra Aronow relaxing in her living room built in 1790. Note the wide planking on the floor.



JARVIS ACADEMY BAKE SHOP

Two views of the old bake shop located on the property of the Jarvis Academy (located at the corner of Weston Road and Norfield - see Chronicle article Vol. 16 No.1). The Academy closed its doors in 1888 and the bake shop was moved about 1900 to 77 Hurlbutt Street in Wilton, where it was renovated over the years by various owners.

Our thanks to Barbara

Rosswessler for sending us both pictures - old and new.



ATKINSON HILTON HOUSE 2 OLD WESTON ROAD, CIRCA 1780

This picture was taken in 1884. Atkinson Hilton was a Sergeant during the Revolutionary War. He apparently lived elsewhere in Weston (called Norfield at the time) before 1780 because eight of his children were baptized at Norfield Church between 1764 and 1780. The home was bought in 1938 by the family of MacLennon Farrell.



ANNUAL MEETING MARCH 26, 7:30 PM

**LIBRARY
COMMUNITY ROOM**

Harry Audley will be the guest speaker, presenting his impressive collection of antique tools. Also, a brief business meeting will introduce new officers and board members.

Refreshments will follow.



COLEY HOUSE/GROUNDS UPDATE

All kinds of activity has been taking place at the Coley House the last couple of months. Under the direction of Jim Schaper, the grounds are being cleaned up and beautified. Roger Knoop of Shade Trees has been trimming branches and brush along the back border, and taking out several old dead trees. Kiwanis has also been busy cleaning brush and trash trees. Jim will be overseeing maintenance of the grounds during the summer months.

Under the direction of Gayle Beyea, a committee has been busy cleaning up the upstairs of the Coley House. With the help of Mary Anne Barr, Jackie Schneider, and Sandy O'Brien, Gayle has cleaned up two upstairs bedrooms. Papers are now in one place, clothing in another, and objects in yet another. Our little room off the kitchen has also been cleaned up and neatened. Lynne Barelle and Cynthia Williams have been in charge of junking the old copier and purchasing a new one which should be in use shortly.

Upcoming events that are planned for members in the coming months include a tour of the cemetery in the early spring, a tea for the membership in late spring, early summer, and perhaps an ice cream social during the summer. We are also excited about an encampment which will take place on the grounds of the Jarvis Academy on Memorial Day. Please watch the papers for news of these future events.

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WESTON'S OLDEST HOUSES ON PARADE by Herb Day

Your Society has been "plaquing" old houses in Weston for almost thirty years. So far, over ninety houses have received plaques showing a date at least 100 years earlier when either the house was built or when a certain family lived in it. In many cases too much research is needed to do a title search back farther than 100 years.

Many times it is relatively easy to trace a house back to the original family who built it. We have members of the society who have used their expertise in doing this. Part of their effort is shown below.

There is a charge of \$100 for a wood plaque giving the name of the owner when the house was built or at a time in the past when we know that a certain family lived in it (at least 100 years ago). We can refer you to a person who can do further research for an additional charge.

Dating an old house is not an exact science. Sometimes further title search several years later turns up more data which can change a date on a house. We feel that the dates given below are accurate, except for perhaps the first two houses. Because we feel that the earliest settlements in Weston were not until about 1725, the first two dates need some more research. For instance, Samuel Sherwood was the first minister of Norfield Congregational Church, starting in 1757. His father or uncle was given a long lot in Weston. This house is on part of that long lot. It could be that they had a small house built around 1700 with the idea of living here. We do not know where Rev. Samuel Sherwood lived in Weston when he began preaching here. It could have been in this house. We do know that his son Samuel B. Sherwood lived here for a time. Hopefully, further work will help us solve this mystery.

Here is our current list of old houses. If you take a tour of Weston looking at these houses, you will find that some of them do not look like an early colonial or saltbox house. This is because they have been added on to and the original shape of the house is almost impossible to see.

Date	Name and Address	Date	Name and Address	Date	Name and Address
1695	Andrews-Brown 42 Steephill Rd.	1790	Joseph Morehouse 209 Goodhill Rd.	1820	Joseph Godfrey 111 Godfrey Rd.
1700	Samuel Sherwood 42 Steephill Rd.	1792	Banks-Morehouse 195 Goodhill Rd.	1822	Hezekiah Osborn 12 Covenant Lane
1730	Thomas Banks 266 Lyons Plains Rd.	1793	Job Lockwood 220 Newtown Tpke.	1825	Godfrey Carriage House 19 Broad St.
1734	The Godfrey Barn 269 Newtown Tpke.	1795	Kettle Creek School Old Weston Rd.	1825	Anson Beers 263 Newtown Tpke.
1739	Peter Thorp 84 Steephill Rd.	1796	Jarvis Military Academy Norfield Corners	1825	William Bradley 195 Goodhill Rd.
1745	Ebenezer Thorp 167 Lyons Plains Rd.	1797	Samuel Brown 15 Steephill Rd.	1829	Curtis Wood Barn 38 Carbridge Rd.
1749	Simon Couch 14 Old Redding Rd.	1800	Silliman Godfrey Jr. 78 Godfrey Rd.	1830	Moses Burr 191 Lyons Plains Rd.
1750	Nathan Adams 108 Goodhill Rd.	1802	Pinckney Diman 35 Kellogg Hill Rd.	1830	Norfield Cong. Church 64 Norfield Rd.
1750	Thorp-Fanton 10 Old Easton Tpke.	1804	James H. Dikeman 31 Steephill Rd.	1830	Eliphalet Coley Norfield Rd.
1755	Morehouse-Nichols 183 Goodhill Rd.	1805	John S. Andrews 295 Georgetown Rd.	1830	Old Coley Onion Barn Weston Rd.
1760	Daniel Godfrey 4 Norfield Rd.	1805	Eliphalet Coley 55 Fanton Hill Rd.	1830	Walter Perry 187 Georgetown Rd.
1770	Site of David Coley Mill River Rd.	1808	David Osborn Barn 69 Georgetown Rd.	1830	Andrews Godfrey 94 Godfrey Rd.
1770	David Godfrey 106 Godfrey Rd.	1808	David Osborn House 61 Georgetown Rd.	1831	Wakeman Godfrey 189 Godfrey Rd.
1772	Jabez Lockwood 68 Godfrey Rd.	1810	Hannah Hubbell 24 Steephill Rd.	1831	Miles Oakley 1 Kellogg Hill Rd.
1774	Jonathan Cole 2 Steephill Rd.	1810	Albert Lockwood 228 Georgetown Rd.	1832	Gershon W. Bradley 115 Lyons Plains Rd.
1780	Stephen Hurlbutt 73 Goodhill Rd.	1813	Reuben Lockwood 144 Georgetown Rd.	1834	John Clapp 114 Lyons Plains Rd.
1780	Atkinson Hilton 2 Old Weston Rd.	1813	Alexander Nichols 183 Goodhill Rd.	1836	Joseph Banks 121 Goodhill Rd.
1786	Redfield-Wakeman 14 Old Redding Rd.	1813	John Stillman Andrews 18 Godfrey Rd. W.	1838	Samuel Banks 227 Lyons Plains Rd.
1788	David Adams 212 Weston Rd.	1813	David Lockwood 144 Georgetown Rd.	1840	Joseph O. Sturges 118 Weston Rd.
1790	Eliphalet Taylor 2 Norfield Rd.	1813	Daniel Andrews 18 Godfrey Rd.	1841	David Dimon Coley 104 Weston Rd.
1790	John Lord Lord's Highway	1814	Gold Nichols 36 Davis Hill Rd.	1841	Wilbur Sturges 35 Godfrey Rd. W.
1790	Ann Gilbert 81 Davis Hill Rd.	1815	Simon Fanton 98 Redding Rd.	1841	Upper Parish School 47 Godfrey Rd. W.
		1818	David Richmond 25 Fanton Hill Rd.	1844	Toll House and Cobbler Newtown Tpke.
				1844	John Crossman Barn 81 Kettle Creek Rd.
				1845	Curtis Wood 145 Lyons Plains Rd.
				1845	Walter Treadwell 293 Lyons Plains Rd.
				1845	Buckley House 446 Newtown Tpke.
				1848	Samuel Lockwood 139 Lyons Plains
				1850	Hanford Nichols 165 Goodhill Rd.
				1850	Thomas Dimon 35 Old Redding Rd.
				1850	Warren Nichols 78 Steephill Rd.
				1850	Aaron Banks 54 Davis Hill Rd.
				1850	Albert Sherwood 132 Weston Rd.
				1850	Levi Coley's Store 29 Weston Rd.
				1851	Hanford Nichols 282 Lyons Plains Rd.
				1851	William H. Croft 269 Lyons Plains Rd.
				1851	Bradley Tenant House Lyons Plains Rd.
				1852	Henrietta E. Nichols 179 Lyons Plains Rd.
				1856	William and Susan Beers 101 Georgetown Rd.
				1859	Lester Fanton 31 Fanton Hill Rd.
				1859	Miles Bradley 110 Lyons Plains Rd.
				1860	Francis Smith 95 Lyons Plains Rd.
				1863	Charles Croft 265 Lyons Plains Rd.
				1864	Miah Perry 94 Georgetown Rd.
				1870	James R. Perry 178 Newtown Tpke.