

**PROCEEDINGS OF LEXINGTON  
HISTORICAL SOCIETY AND  
PAPERS RELATING TO THE  
HISTORY OF THE TOWN. VOL. II**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649048205

Proceedings of Lexington Historical Society and Papers Relating to the History of the Town. Vol. II by Lexington Historical Society

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Cover @ 2017

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HISTORY OF THE TOWN

READ BY SOME OF THE MEMBERS

VOL. II

LEXINGTON MASS.  
PUBLISHED BY THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY  
1900

## THE FIRST ENGLISH PROPRIETORS OF THE SITE OF LEXINGTON VILLAGE.

READ BY REV. C. A. STAPLES, MARCH 12, 1889.

IT would be interesting to know when and where the first clearing was made and the first house built on the land now occupied by the village of Lexington. The ground, no doubt, was covered by a heavy growth of timber and by fallen trees, large monarchs of the forest that had been uprooted by the tempests and lay strewn in every direction. To cut down the trees, clear away the fallen wood and prepare the land for gardens and fields must have been a difficult and laborious undertaking. Who began this work here it is impossible to determine; and yet it must have been commenced soon after the first settlement of Cambridge. As early as 1636 a road was cut through the woods from Cambridge to Concord for Rev. Peter Bulkeley and his company to transport their goods to that place, where they formed a settlement. It probably ran through the woods near where our main street and the Concord road are now located.

In 1635 Rev. Thomas Shepard came from England with several friends and parishioners, and located at Cambridge. Being a Puritan, he was ejected from his pulpit in England, and for a time remained in concealment, to escape the persecuting zeal of Archbishop Laud. At length he was able to elude the vigilance

of his enemies and take ship for America with some of the men who had befriended him. In his company was Roger Herlarkenden, a young man of twenty-four, in whose house he had lain concealed.

When they arrived at Cambridge, then called Newtowne, they received a warm welcome from the settlers, whose numbers had been greatly reduced by the emigration of Rev. Mr. Hooker and his party to Connecticut, where they formed the settlements at Hartford, Windsor, and Weathersfield. The church at Cambridge was without a pastor, and Mr. Shepard was immediately installed in that office, where he remained until his death, widely useful and greatly beloved. Roger Herlarkenden had left an elder brother, Richard, in England, also a devoted friend to Mr. Shepard, whom he desired to bring to America. Probably to induce him to come, he obtained an extensive grant of land for him from the Cambridge proprietors. According to the records that grant was made January 2nd, 1636, and contained 600 acres of upland and meadow at a place called Vine Brook, in the Shawshine country, midway between Newtowne and Concord.

Richard Herlarkenden was to have this land upon the following conditions, viz: "1st. He was to send over his man, or order some other man to build upon it and improve it for him, the next summer after this next ensuing, that is the summer of 1637, and this spring, give certain intelligence that he will do so. 2d. That he come himself the next summer after, being the third from this time (that is, the summer of

1638), and if he shall fail in any or all of these conditions, then this grant to be void."

Now, there can be no doubt but that this grant covers the site of Lexington village. It was on Vine Brook, midway between Newtowne and Concord, and lay on both sides of the brook, and on both sides of the highway, as we learn from other descriptions of it. But Richard Herlarkenden did not send over his man, nor order some other man to begin a clearing and build a house on the grant; nor did he come himself, so this great tract of 600 acres, nearly a mile square, was lost to him. However, on April 2d, 1638, the grant was transferred to his brother, Roger Herlarkenden, who promised to fulfill the conditions imposed by the proprietors. But whether he made an attempt to clear the land and build we cannot tell, as he died the same year, Nov. 17th, 1638, at the age of 27, leaving a widow and two children. His loss was a great grief to Mr. Shepard and the Newtowne church. At this time they were sadly disheartened, owing to the abandonment of the place by so many families which had removed to Connecticut, and to the death of prominent men. But the college had been planted there, and soon began to draw about it generous supporters and friends.

The Herlarkenden name now disappears from our history; the children were girls and grew up in Cambridge, but probably returned to England, and we hear nothing further of their connection with the Shawshine Grant.

A more imposing personage now appears upon the



scene, viz.: Herbert Pelham, of Essex County, England, who came over in 1638 or 1639, and in 1643 married Elizabeth, the widow of Roger Herlarkenden, for a second wife, and adopted her children. He came into possession of the 600 acre grant made to the Herlarkendens on Vine Brook, and for more than fifty years it remained in the possession of the Pelham family. At this time, viz.: in 1642, a house had been erected on the Herlarkenden estate, as we learn from the Cambridge records, built either by Roger or his widow. The grant of this 600 acre tract to Herbert Pelham mentions a house standing upon it. No doubt this was the first erected within the bounds of the present village. The fact that this land was granted to Pelham by the proprietors shows that by some failure to comply with the original conditions, the Herlarkendens had forfeited it.

Let us look for a moment at the location of this great estate. It is impossible to fix its boundaries with precision, but from deeds given when it was finally sold by the Pelhams in 1693, we can roughly trace its outlines. On the south-west it was bounded on Matthew Bridge, who owned what is now the Valley Field Farm, and on the ministerial land, now known as the Blasdell Place. On the north-west it was bounded on the Eight Mile line, which ran back of the old burying ground from east to west, and out between Mr. Holt's and Mrs. Brigham's to the Woburn line, striking it near what is known as the Round House. On the north-east it was bounded by the farms of Garver and Rolph, and on the south-east by

John Adams, John Russell and Cambridge town commons. From these few points we learn that it extended from somewhere near Bloomfield Street over the hill to the Bridge farm on the south, and on the west, across the meadows to the foot of Concord Hill. On the north to some point perhaps near Mr. Bettinson's, and east, through the Hayes estate out towards the Scotland district, and so round through the cemetery to the starting point. Thus it covered the entire site of the present village of Lexington, with the exception, probably, of John Munroe's farm, which included Mr. Saville's place, with Belfry Hill and the land extending back a little beyond Parker Street.

Here, then, was the Herlarkenden Grant, of which Herbert Pelham came into possession in 1642, the year before he took Roger's widow for a second wife, and became the guardian for her children. Such was Mr. Pelham's manor, or farm, which he cleared and tilled while living in Cambridge, and which remained in his family for half a century. What do we know about these different proprietors? As already mentioned, Roger Herlarkenden, the first proprietor, died in 1638. He was evidently a man highly esteemed by the Cambridge people, and his death, at the early age of 27, was a great loss to the infant settlement. He was Lieut. Colonel of a Regiment of Militia. In his will he leaves £20 to the Church for the benefit of the poor, and a mourning ring to his friend John Bridge. When his estate came to be settled, the Church took a cow in payment of the bequest and kept it for the use of its needy members. First one family had the

cow for a time, and then another, and so the creature was passed around among the beneficiaries of the Church, until she fell into the decrepitude of years and was given outright to the last family, and so Herlarken's provision for the poor finally disappeared. What became of the mourning ring it is impossible to say. Bequests for mourning rings to friends were common in the wills of a century ago.

The second proprietor of Lexington village, as we have seen, was Herbert Pelham, a country gentleman of Essex County, England, where he possessed a large estate, and was connected with the nobility, both on the paternal and maternal sides. His mother was the daughter of Lord Delaware, for whom one of the American colonies was named. He was born in the year 1600, and in 1624 married Jemima Waldegrave, who died before he came to this country. Probably he brought a large fortune with him, as we find that he became the owner of extensive tracts of land in Cambridge, Sudbury, Watertown and elsewhere. He bought the house built by Governor Dudley in Cambridge, and the large estate connected with it, where he lived while he remained in this country. Soon after his arrival he became interested in the college, then just established, and was chosen its first treasurer. His sister, Penelope Pelham, came with him from England, and his daughter, Penelope. The former became the second wife of Governor Bellingham, and the latter the wife of Gov. Josiah Winslow, of Plymouth. In 1643, he married, for a second wife, Elizabeth Herlarken, by whom he had several