THE WAYSIDE INN. ITS HISTORY AND LITERATURE. AN ADDRESS DELIVERED BEFORE THE SOCIETY OF COLONIAL WARS AT THE WAYSIDE INN, SUDBURY, MASSACHUSETTS, JUNE 17, 1897

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649199365

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SAMUEL ARTHUR BENT

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The Wayside Inn

Its History and Literature

AN ADDRESS

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SOCIETY OF
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Wayside Inn, Sudbury, Massachusetts
June 17, 1897

BY

SAMUEL ARTHUR BENT
Member of the Council

Boston
1897

THE WAYSIDE INN, ITS HISTORY AND LITERATURE.

Mr. Governor and Gentlemen:

This old town of Sudbury, to which on an anniversary dear to Massachusetts we make our summer pilgrimage, was one of the earliest inland settlements of the Bay Colony. The population on tide water was pressed by increasing immigration as early as 1637, and in that year it was proposed that a company should proceed westward from Watertown, "owing," as the record has it, "to straitness of accommodation and want of more meadow." Concord was already settled to the northward, and when in 1638 men of Watertown and Cambridge pushed their way into the wilderness, they formed the nineteenth township in the Colony, obtaining the grant of a tract of land five miles square, bounded east by Watertown, that part now Weston, north by Concord, south and west by the wilderness. Their route had been, however, already marked out for them. Through the south-east corner of their settlement passed the Indian trail, or the "old Connecticut path," along this very road from the sea-board to Connecticut, by which the ministers Hooker, Stone, their companions and families, had already journeyed towards the settlement of Hartford.

Our settlers were joined here by others coming direct from England, several of them, Haynes, Noyes, Bent,

Rutter, and Goodenow, fellow-passengers in the "good shipp 'Confidence'" sailing from Southampton, April 24, 1638, meeting on this common settling-ground Stone, of Cambridge, Parmenter, Treadway, Pelham, and Browne, of Watertown, and here, to the number of fifty-four, building their cabins looking into the darkness of the wilderness beyond.

It was natural that they should ask their pastor, the Rev. Edmund Browne, to name their settlement. He had come from England in 1637, and from his early home in Suffolkshire or from that of some of his family he called the town Sudbury, which was confirmed by the General Court in 1639 in the act of incorporation. And not only did he name it Sudbury, but he gave another Suffolk name to a section of it, Lanham, from the town spelled Lavenham, but pronounced Lanham on the other side of the water.

There exists no record of the dimensions of any of the first dwelling-houses of Sudbury, but we may judge something of their size by the specifications in a lease of a house to be built by Edmund Rice prior to the year 1655. It was certainly a very small house, "thirty foot long, ten foot high, one foot sill from the ground, sixteen foot wide, with two rooms, both below or one above the other, all the doors, walls, stairs with convenient fixtures and well planked under foot, and boarded sufficiently to lay corn in the story above head." Their earliest dwellings may have been even simpler, with the most scanty furniture, teaming being difficult from Watertown over the new road to Sudbury.

Sudbury had rich natural advantages for a successful settlement. The town was well watered; the heavy timber covering much of the land was free from underbrush; wild fowl, turkeys, pigeons, grouse, were plentiful; game was abundant, in the pursuit of which the Indians

had made clearings; while broad meadows lined the river and brooks. The settlers were all young men, the emigrants from England were also in the prime of manhood, and for many years not an old man was to be seen in the settlement. They prospered within their own limits, and pushed still further, sending their sons into the wilderness to build up other settlements; to Worcester, Grafton, and Rutland, forming municipalities within their own borders or adjacent to them, as Framingham and Marlborough. But one cloud rested upon their horizon, threatening them as all frontier and outpost settlements, until the storm of Indian invasion burst upon them, and every habitation, save sheepcotes, was swept into destruction.

Among the early settlers was one John How, a glover by trade. He was admitted a freeman in 1641 and was chosen selectman the next year. In 1655 he was appointed "to see to the restraining of youth on the Lord's day." He was a petitioner for Marlborough plantation in 1657, moved there about the same year, and was elected a selectman. He was the first tavern keeper in that town, having a public house as early as 1661. "At this ordinary," says the historian of Sudbury, "his grandson, who afterwards kept the Sudbury Red Horse Tavern, may have been favorably struck with the occupation of an innholder and thus led to establish the business at Sudbury."

The proximity of John How's house in Marlborough to the Indian plantation brought him into direct contact with his savage neighbors, and by his kindness he gained their confidence and good will, and they accordingly not only respected his rights, but often made him their umpire in cases of difficulty. He acquired, I have read, the reputation of a Solomon by his decision of a dispute where a pumpkin vine sprang up within the premises of one Indian and the fruit ripened upon the

land of another. The question of the ownership of the pumpkin was referred to him, when he called for a knife and divided the fruit, giving half to each claimant. This struck the parties as the perfection of justice, and fixed the impartiality of the judge on an immutable basis. John How died in 1680, at the age of seventy-eight years, and left an estate valued at £511.

His son Samuel, a carpenter by trade, born in 1642, married, in 1663, Martha Bent, daughter of John Bent, of Sudbury, the first of that name; and later widow Clapp, of Hingham. He is described as a man of great energy and public spirit. He could at any rate have given points to any real estate dealer of the present day on the expansive power of the English language as applied to land, as will be seen from the following incident. He entered into a land speculation with one Gookin, of Cambridge, sheriff of Middlesex County, a son of Major Gookin, well known as a writer, soldier, and friend of the Christian Indians. They bought, in 1682, of the Natick Indians a tract said in the deed to contain "by estimation two hundred acres more or less." The western boundary was not specified in the deed, and the words "more or less," when applied to "waste land," so called, were understood to give the purchaser a wide latitude. How and Gookin accordingly took possession of all the unoccupied land between Cochituate pond on the east and Sudbury river on the west, parcelled it out, and sold lots from time to time to *bona fide* purchasers. The Indians at length became dissatisfied and complained to the General Court of encroachments upon the grant of 1682. How and Gookin submitted to a committee of the court their deed, and a writing from some of the Indians for an enlargement of the grant, and a receipt for money paid in consideration thereof. The committee found that under these writings How and Gookin had sold *1,700* acres north of the Worcester

turnpike, which was confirmed by the General Court, and *1,000* acres south of the turnpike, which was not allowed, but remained in possession of the Indians, and later became a factor in a land controversy between the towns of Sherborn and Framingham.

In 1702 Samuel How gave his son David, born in 1674, a tract of one hundred and thirty acres of the so-called "new grant" of Sudbury, and on one of the lots of this grant, bounded easterly on the highway and westerly by Marlborough, David How began immediately to build a house. During its erection tradition says that the workmen resorted at night for protection against Indian attacks to the Parmenter garrison house, half a mile away. Soon after its construction How opened it as a public house, the fifth tavern on the road from Boston westwards. In a letter to an English lady, dated Dec. 28, 1863, Longfellow gives his version of the genesis of this house. "Some two hundred years ago," he says, "an English family by the name of Howe built there (in Sudbury) a country house, which has remained in the family down to the present time, the last of the race dying about two years ago. Losing their fortune, they became innkeepers, and for a century the Red Horse has flourished, going down from father to son. The place is just as I have described it, though no longer an inn. All this will account for the landlord's coat of arms, and his being a justice of the peace, and his being known as the squire, things that must sound strange in English ears." That a man of good family should open a public house in the early days of our New England towns would not to those who have read the history of the times need either explanation or apology. The institution of taverns in these towns followed quickly upon their settlement. Being a recognized need in a new and thinly settled country, no one thought of speaking of them as an evil,