

F 74
.G9 B7
Copy 1

OLD

HIGHWAYS AND LANDMARKS

GROTON, MASSACHUSETTS,

BY

FRANCIS MARION BOUTWELL.

GROTON:

1884.



OLD
HIGHWAYS AND LANDMARKS

OF

GROTON, MASSACHUSETTS,

BY

FRANCIS MARION BOUTWELL.



GROTON:
1884.

F74

G9B7





TO THE MEMORY OF

Elizabeth Farnsworth,

To whose clear recollection of persons long since passed away, and of events which occurred even before the birth of most persons now living, I am indebted for much valuable information relating to the early history of the town,

THESE CHAPTERS ARE RESPECTFULLY INSCRIBED.



NOTE.—Miss Farnsworth was born October 19, 1792, and died February 2, 1884.





CHAPTER I.

OLD HIGHWAYS.

FROM an examination of the records I find that there are many miles of road now in use in Groton, that were laid out two hundred years ago or more.

Hollis street from the first meeting-house, or near the present site of my father's barns, south and to its intersection with Main street, the latter south of the corner of Hollis, and the Boston road certainly as far as the present site of Ridge Hill Tavern, seem to have constituted the main, and no doubt the original highway of the town. This piece of road appears to have been in existence before the twenty-third of June, 1662, the date of the first record of which we have knowledge, for I find no account of its being laid out. I am also firmly of the opinion that fully twelve families, or nearly one-quarter of the inhabitants, were living upon this section of road within the first twenty-five years after the settlement of the town. This latter fact, which an examination of my pamphlet upon the Old Homesteads of Groton will show, seems to be very good proof that this road has existed in the main as it now exists, from the very beginning. The present Boston road was originally known as the Bay highway, because it led to Massachusetts Bay.

Our first settlers laid out many of the highways six rods in width, and hardly any were less than four rods. Hollis street in many places, especially near the Champney place, and Main street and the Boston road, still bear the marks of this elaborate beginning.

The road now known as Chicopee Row has been in use fully two centuries; also the highway running from the cemetery as far as the Nashua River, at the present village of East Pepperell (Babbitassett). All this latter territory has been included within the limits of Groton, since the memory of the present generation. This road appears to have been built in three sections, and at three different times. It was first laid out from the present Hollis street to the house of William Longley, the father of William Longley in memory of whose family the monument upon the farm of Zachariah Fitch was erected. But father and son both occupied the same farm. The road was next extended as far as the four corners at the foot of the hill north of the house of Zachariah Fitch, and these four corners were then formed, for the road from the four corners at "Nod" to Reedy Meadow seems to have been built before the time that the road was extended beyond William Longley's house, and the section between the four corners first mentioned and the river at East Pepperell was built subsequently, but at an early period.

The present Martin's Pond road from the corner of Hollis street to the north side of Baddacook Pond, is probably one of the very oldest highways in town. It led from the old meeting-house to the region called in the records Baddacook Woods. When this road was first built the end near the meeting-house was fenced, and bars had to be taken down whenever a team passed.

The road leading from Hollis street, near the house of Charles A. Murphy, was laid out first as far as the house then occupied by Richard Blood, which was, no doubt, near the site of the house known as the Captain William Shattuck place, now unoccupied. This road cut through the farm of

Joseph Gilson, who lived near the site of the present house of Charles A. Murphy. Mr. Murphy's recent purchase of the Champney place probably reunites, in a measure at least, the original estate of Joseph Gilson. The lower portion of this road, from the house of Richard Blood to the four corners at "Nod," and also the road from Nod to Reedy Meadow, were not laid out until a few years later at least than the road between Mr. Murphy's and the Captain Shattuck place. There seem to have been *paths only* at first from the house of Richard Blood to that of John Lakin, and thence to James Blood's, which latter two men lived near the four corners and upon the road from Nod to Reedy Meadow respectively. I am satisfied that my statement in regard to these two latter roads is substantially correct, and thus the theory is dispelled that the first meeting-house was originally at Nod—for it seems probable that, as our early settlers had roads elsewhere, they would certainly have had one leading to their meeting-house.

What was known in my boyhood as the Break-neck road, leading from the East Pepperell road, near the house of Amos P. Carlton, to the Captain William Shattuck place before mentioned, is an old highway.

Among the very early roads was one which seems to have been a semi-private way. This left Hollis street, near the present site of my father's farm-houses, and passed along the eastern base of the hill upon which his barns are situated. This road seems to have been built originally for the accommodation of Timothy Cooper, who appears to have owned a piece of land bordering on the west side of Martin's Pond road, and running back toward Half-moon Meadow. At a later period Timothy Allen, the first sexton of the town, seems

to have had his house upon this lot. What I believe to be a portion of this old cross-road is still in existence and used by my father as a farm road. It was fenced at its junction with the present Hollis street, as in the case of Martin's Pond road.

The roads at present known as School, Elm, and Pleasant streets from the corner of Elm to Farmers' Row, the last named road in its entire length, and the road passing through the Community, as far as the house on the Pollard place, all seem to have formed a part of the Lancaster highway, and are probably more than two hundred years old. Instead of making the two turns, one at the Pollard place and the other at the Major Amos Farnsworth place, (now owned by Solomon Achorn,) as it does now, the road ran directly down to the Nashua River from near the site of the Pollard house. It then ran up the right bank of the stream, crossed by a ford about a mile above the present site of Page's Bridge, and so on to Lancaster.

The late Elizabeth Farnsworth is my authority upon the location of the Lancaster highway. Her grandfather Farnsworth, as well as her father, lived upon the farm now owned by Solomon Achorn. The old house occupied by her grandparents, however, stood just below the present site of Mr. Achorn's barn. Miss Farnsworth's grandmother she well remembered, and the former lady recollected well the old highway. From the foregoing statement as to the situation of the old Farnsworth house, it is obvious that it stood back from the old road just about the distance from the present barn of Mr. Achorn to the Pollard house. Miss Farnsworth's grandmother gave her an interesting account of the difficulty experienced by her husband, in several successive town-meetings, of convincing the citizens that it was their duty to

change the course of the Lancaster highway so that it should pass his door. The peculiar elbow in the road at present, is proof of the success of his efforts. A most casual observation shows that the town finally built about one-half mile of new and indirect road in place of a direct one, for the single purpose of passing one man's house. Those of us who are familiar with the exciting town-meeting debates of the present day, can easily imagine the warm discussions upon this proposition, the success of which speaks well for Mr. Farnsworth's will and determination.

A perusal of the foregoing pages shows the great importance which the early settlers in our New England towns placed upon their house of worship. It was to them the centre of all things.

The first meeting-house probably stood upon the high land now belonging to my father, between his barns and Hollis street, and it is evident that most of the roads thus far described, radiated, as it were, from this central point. In fact most of the votes for laying out these roads, as they are found recorded, begin thus: "Beginning at the meeting-house," &c.

Until comparatively recent years the meeting-house in a small New England town was the only public building, except the district school-house, which was not large, and thus unfit for any but small gatherings. And the meeting-house was the place for holding town, and other meetings. Our present town-house was the first building ever erected or owned by the town for the ordinary purposes of a town hall, and this building dates back only to November, 1859. Before that time a large room under the old (Unitarian) meeting-house was used for town-meetings, and known as the town hall.

Liberty Hall, which was situated upon the site at present occupied by the store of Thomas K. Stevens, though private property, could be hired for public purposes.

The New England Puritans adhered to the policy of supporting the church with the public funds, and the meeting-houses were originally built and the churches supported with the town money. This being the case the meeting-houses were public property, and could be used for such purposes as the town might choose.

There was, no doubt, always a road from the main street as far as the house now owned by Joseph F. Hall, for in the very early days of the town that farm was occupied by Nathaniel Lawrence, an ancestor of Amos and Abbott Lawrence, who subsequently bought the farm now owned by William Peabody, upon which latter place Abbott Lawrence's father and grandfather were both born. The road to Nathaniel Lawrence's first house may have been the same which now passes the south side of the Unitarian meeting-house, but this is not certain; it may have left the main street farther north, near where the hotel stands.

In early times there was a road, long since discontinued, which left the present Lowell road near the house of Nathaniel Lawrence, (the Joseph F. Hall place,) and followed along the western base of Gibbet Hill until it connected with the Martin's Pond road near where the latter crosses James's Brook. There seems to have been but one house upon this highway, and that was the home of Nathaniel Blood.

The road now known as Love Lane, and its extension east as far as Brown Loaf, is a very old highway. Though the Lowell road east of Joseph F. Hall's house is very old,

at least for several miles, it does not appear to have been built for some time after the settlement of the town.

The Broad Meadow road, which leaves Main street between the houses of Charles Gerrish and of the late Benjamin P. Dix, is very old until it reaches the meadow, and so is also the west end of the same highway from Farmers' Row to the meadow, but the early settlers did not incur the expense of building roads upon soft meadow land, if it could be avoided; and in this case it was not necessary, for the records make it evident that the east end at least, of this road, was built originally to enable the farmers to get hay from Broad Meadow. It may have been for the same reason that the west end was laid out, but in the latter case the object, in part at least, might have been to provide Joseph Parker with means of going to Farmers' Row, then the Lancaster highway, which was his only way of getting from his home. His house seems to have stood upon the James Farnsworth place, now owned by Prescott Lawernee.

The road called in the records the Mill highway is no other than the section of the present road from Groton to Ayer, between the corner near the residence of the late John G. Park and the corner of the Ayer and Harvard roads, a short distance south of the present house of Sumner Graves, in Ayer. The old road beyond this latter point is the present Harvard road. This highway was built to enable the inhabitants of Groton to go to their grist-mill, which was upon the stream near the present Harvard town farm. This was indeed a long distance to go to mill through an Indian country, but as all the machinery, including the mill-stones, had to be imported, a mill was a very expensive thing to build and maintain, in proportion

to the resources available for the purpose. Because of these facts, it was probably thought necessary that the building should be so situated as to accommodate as many persons as possible, and it is likely that by having it where they did, some of the inhabitants of Lancaster could avail themselves of its benefits. The town of Harvard was not then in existence, and the mill was within the limits of Groton.

The Mill highway, as originally laid out, was six rods wide, except the section along by the hill upon which the houses of William Peabody and Charles Jacobs stand, as far as the crossing of James's Brook, near the house of Henry M. Gaut. This part of the road was but four rods wide, because of the fact that the hill came so near to the valley of James's Brook as to render a wider way impracticable. Evidences of the great width of this road are still plainly visible, noticeably near the house of the late Stuart J. Park, and also upon the high land near the present residence of Sumner Graves. It is obvious that the road for some distance south of the hill below Mr. Graves's place must of necessity have been quite narrow, but the records show the fact that the road was but four rods in width upon the section first mentioned.

The road leading from the old road to Ayer at a point near School-house No. 2, to the road formerly the Mill highway, and intersecting with the latter just at the foot of the hill south of the house of Sumner Graves, is very old, and was built to furnish a direct way to the mill for the men living upon the present Farmers' Row, and in that vicinity.

The Snake Hill road, so called, which leaves the road to Ayer at a point a short distance south of the house of Henry M. Gaut, was built very early, and partly at least for the pur-

pose of enabling farmers to get hay from the south and east portions of Rock Meadow, which is described in the next chapter. Miss Farnsworth once told me, however, that Matthias Farnsworth, the father of Matthias who lived upon the farm now occupied by Henry M. Gaut, lived near Sandy Pond, so it is possible that this road might have been built for his accommodation, at least in part. It is now mostly in Ayer, and but little used.

The highway which we know as the old road to Ayer, leading from the south end of Farmers' Row, past the house of Nathan F. Culver, is a very old highway. It is probable that this was the way for going to Nonacoicus, which was near the present village of Ayer, and the road may have been in use before Groton was burned by the Indians.

Major Simon Willard, the father of Rev. Samuel Willard, and the commanding officer of the troops in this region during the early part of King Philip's war, lived at Nonacoicus. Major Willard's house was burned at the time the town was destroyed, in March, 1676, when he removed to Charlestown, and died in a short time. It is hardly necessary to say that Nonacoicus was a part of Groton.

The road which intersects with the old road to Ayer at a point just south of where the above-named road crosses James's Brook, and which extends across to the road from Groton to Shirley, is an old highway. Also, the road leading from Farmers' Row along the south end of James Lawrence's farm, certainly as far as the river, is very old, and probably was in use on the west side of the river at an early day, for there was a ford just below the present Red Bridge, and a beginning was made to lay out the lands west of the river as early as the year 1681.

The Russell road, so called in old times, was discontinued many years ago. It left the road from Groton to Ayer at a point very near where the house on the Sumner Boynton place (now belonging to William H. Drake) stands, and went across to the old road to Ayer, intersecting with the latter at a short distance above School-house No. 2. There are marks of the road still to be seen at its west end, and at the eastern end back of Mr. Drake's house, where the road is now quite a good one, and is used for his farm teaming. This road is also plainly visible from the railroad.

The highway which intersects with the Boston road just south of Andrew Robbins's farm-house, and leads to Brown Loaf, is very old; as is the road leading from Ridge Hill Tavern certainly as far as the Pierce place, as well as the one which connects with the latter at a short distance east of the Pierce place, and joins the Boston road at a point nearly opposite to the house formerly known as the Blodgett place. The road leading from the tavern above mentioned, through the present Forge Village, and so on to Chelmsford, is one of the oldest in town. It was originally known as the Chelmsford highway.

The highway which leaves the road from Groton to Ayer, near the Eber Woods place, now owned by John McGilson, and leads to Farmers' Row, is very old as far as Broad Meadow End, described in the next chapter, or to a point just west of the present highway bridge over the railroad. This piece of road was originally built, as were several others before mentioned, to enable farmers to get their hay, but it was extended past the place now owned by Jackson N. Potter, known as the Stephen Kendall place, to its intersection with Farmers' Row, at a very early day, certainly as

soon as the early part of the last century, when John Longley was living on the Stephen Kendall place, and Benjamin Farnsworth resided on the opposite side of the same road, but nearer to Farmers' Row.

The end of Broad Meadow, above referred to, was spanned by a bridge in those days, no doubt to save the expense of filling such soft land, which then had probably not been drained at all, and was of course much more wet even than now. The structure, after a while, received the name of Swill Bridge, and I once learned from Miss Elizabeth Farnsworth the reason which she had heard alleged for this peculiar name. The following is the story, which I will preface by stating that John Longley, before mentioned, was Miss Farnsworth's great-grandfather, and that she remembered well her grandmother Farnsworth, who was Mr. Longley's daughter Lydia; and so we get this account thus directly from Lydia Longley Farnsworth, who was born on the Stephen Kendall place in 1716.

During the first quarter of the last century, or perhaps until a later day, there was a fortified house near the site of the present Eber Woods house, and at times of Indian alarm Mr. Longley placed his live-stock, and, among other animals, hogs, at the fort for safety. From Miss Farnsworth's account it seems that it was in the winter, and during such an alarm, that Mr. Longley had placed some hogs at the fort for safety, and was obliged to carry swill to them. As he crossed the bridge he naturally spilled more or less of the swine-food, and in the spring the spots were of course visible, and thus from this trivial cause the bridge derived its name, by which it has ever since been remembered.

CHAPTER II.

OLD LANDMARKS.

GIBBET HILL, BROWN Loaf, Broad Meadow, Half-Moon Meadow, Reedy Meadow, James's Brook and Hawtree Brook have borne these names ever since the settlement of the town, but there are names found in the records, which, to most of the inhabitants of the present day, are unintelligible. To these names I have given some careful attention and study, and venture to make known the result of my investigation.

The Indian Hill or the Indian Hills (both terms being used in the records) were probably one and the same, and the names seem to refer to the entire range of hills extending from and including the hill opposite to the house of Charles Jacobs, all the way to and including the hill upon which the house of Captain Moses P. Palmer stands.

Shepley Hill, mentioned in the records, is the range of hills extending in a northerly direction from the soapstone quarry, along the western base of which the Worcester and Nashua railroad runs.

Ferny Meadow is the large tract of low land on the highway which leads from the Boston road, nearly opposite to the house of Captain Moses P. Palmer, to Brown Loaf. This meadow extends along the south and southeast side of this road from near the Boston road, for quite a distance.

Rock Meadow is no doubt the one, the northwest end of which borders on the road leading from Groton to Harvard, and just over the hill south of the corner where the Harvard

road leaves the road from Groton to Ayer. This is a large tract of land, and is now entirely in the town of Ayer.

Flaggy Meadow is situated east of the highway leading from the old Captain Noah Shattuck place, now owned by the heirs of the late Captain William Shattuck, to the north side of Baddacook Pond. This meadow is near the house of Henry P. Shattuck, which stands in the field away from the road, and it forms a part of his farm. It is certain that this is the meadow referred to in the records, for Mr. George D. Brigham, the town-clerk, has told me that when calling at Mr. Shattuck's a few years since, Flaggy Meadow was mentioned by some one of the family as being a part of their farm; and when Mr. Brigham asked where it was, he was told that it is the low land which partly surrounds their house. It seems that the name had been handed down through the different owners of that estate, but had long been lost to public knowledge.

Little Half-Moon Meadow is situated between the Martin's Pond road and the knoll in my father's meadow east of his barns, which knoll is called by the farmers in the neighborhood "the Island," and has been so called from the early days of the town. An examination of the locality will show the reason why this little meadow was given the name it bears. One of the points of the half-moon is the strip of meadow between the high land upon which Andrew Spaulding's farm barn stands, and the Island, and the other point passes between the west end of the Island and the high land upon which my father's barns are situated. Both of these points pass through and unite with Half-Moon Meadow west of the Island. This knoll is entirely surrounded by Half-Moon and Little Half-Moon Meadows, and hence its name.

The Unquetenorset Meadows are the low lands along the brook at the north part of the town, now known by the name of Unquety, which is a contraction of the full name Unquetenorset, by which it was originally called.

I am of the opinion that Quosoponagon Meadow is the large tract of low land near the Captain John Rockwood house in Squannacook. This meadow is on both sides of the road, just east of the house, and forms a part of that farm. But in this opinion I may be in error.

Broad Meadow End seems to have been the name given to the narrow portion of Broad Meadow at its southerly end, near the present highway bridge over the Worcester and Nashua railroad, south of the station.

In this connection it may not be out of place to consider the reason why in New England we give a different meaning to the word meadow from that affixed to it in England. There the word is applied to all mowing land whether low or high, but here we call all low land meadow. The reason no doubt is that the first settlers in this country found the high land covered, for the most part, with heavy timber, and for a few men, with few and poor teams and tools, to reduce this land to a condition for cultivation, was very hard, slow work. But hay with which to feed their cattle in winter, was an immediate necessity. The low lands being usually covered with brush and small trees only, could be easily burned over, and with the ashes thus produced, serving as a fertilizer, grass, though no doubt generally of a wild and poor character, was raised. The records of this and other towns show that meadow land was a choice possession, granted to the inhabitants in small lots, and often in the outskirts of the town, no man having a large piece of this land in any one

place, unless, perchance, he were possessed of so much money, as was the case with Captain James Parker, as to enable him to pay rates (taxes) upon a large tract of this valuable land. Captain Parker, being well off, owned a large portion of Half-Moon Meadow, and also a great part of Broad Meadow, but men of less means were obliged to content themselves with small lots of meadow in widely separated sections of the town. Some of those who lived in the village owned small pieces of Rock Meadow, the situation of which I have described, and were obliged to go haying at that long distance from home, and in an Indian country.

The number of roads originally built to enable the inhabitants to get hay from the meadows of the town, as described in the former chapter, attests the value and importance which was then attached to this low land.

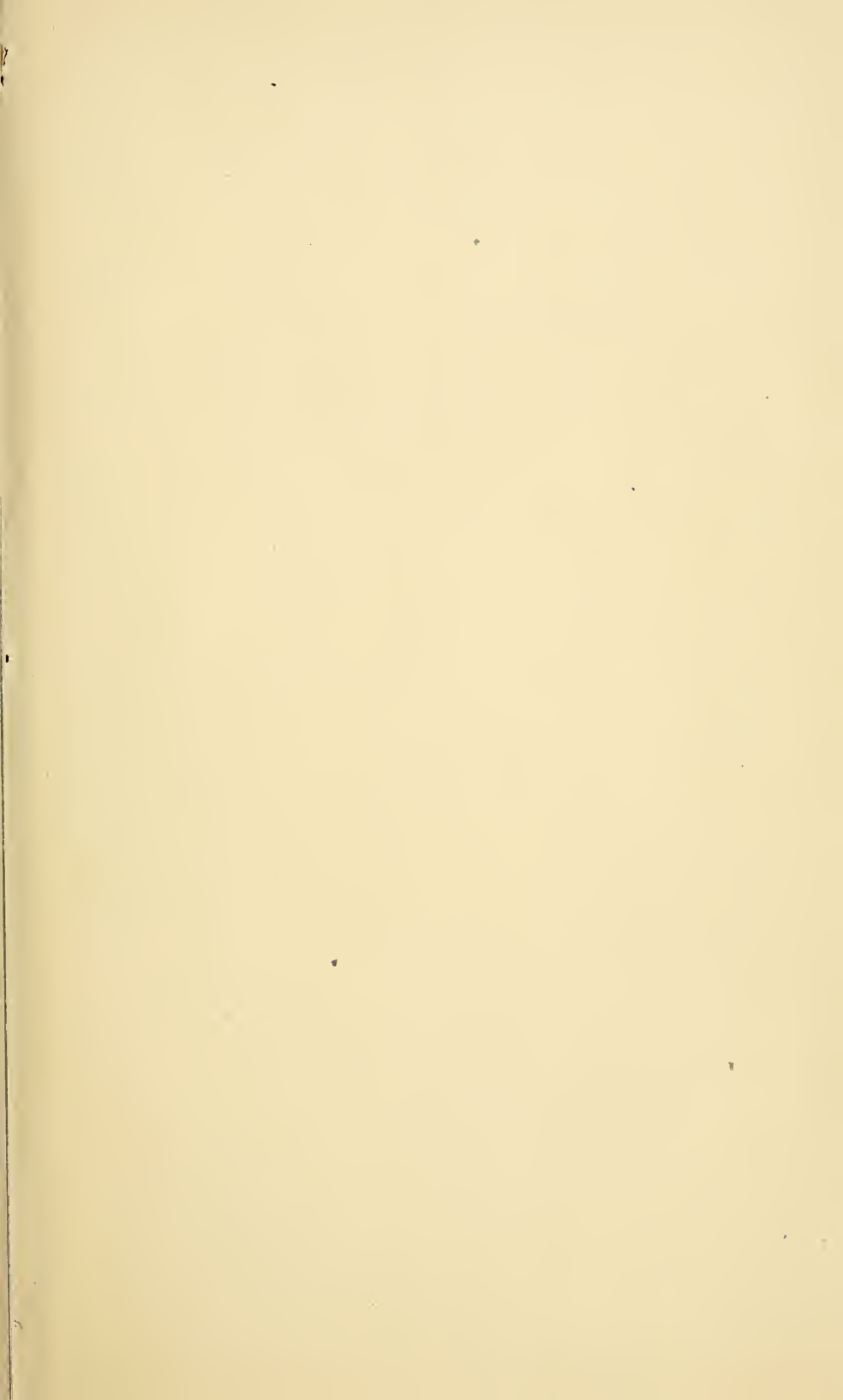
Thus these Englishmen, our forefathers, referred only to mowing land when they used the word meadow in their records; but as their meadow was at first low land in fact, the generations since have given this name to all low land.

The low tract of land at the northwestern base of Brown Loaf, and extending from the present Lowell road to the road which leads from Martin's Pond to the north side of Baddacook Pond, was no doubt the place designated in the records as Brown Loaf Plain. That portion of the record which relates to the laying out of the road which we call Love Lane, and its extension easterly, makes it seem certain that this tract of land is Brown Loaf Plain.

By the General Fields was probably meant the large tract of land bounded on the northwest by the road which passes through the Community, and which then formed a part of the Lancaster highway, and was also bounded in the same

direction between the present corner, near the Pollard place and the river, by the Lancaster highway, the old location of which I have described in the previous chapter. These fields were bounded on the east, southeast, and south by what is now known as the old road to Ayer, and they were bounded on the southwest and west either by the road leading from the corner south of the Benjamin Moors place to the present Shirley road, or they may have extended all the way to the river. The roads which I have mentioned were all in existence two hundred years ago, as shown in the previous chapter.

This tract was common land, and was used for pasturing the herd composed of the cattle which belonged to the men living in the west and south parts of the town. As the cattle owned by the first settlers were pastured, for the most part, upon the common land, the town was divided into three sections for this purpose, each section having a herd, and every owner of stock in a section was obliged to pay his proportion of the expense attending the herding of the cattle in that section, even though one or more owners might pasture their cattle within their own enclosure. But in the general absence of fences except for enclosing cultivated land, and as probably a good deal of this even was unfenced, the careful herding of the stock pastured upon the common land was considered of such general importance as to warrant an assessment upon all those who could be in any way interested.





0 014 078 554 4

