

(Brief) Discussion on the Assinippi/Jacobs Lane Area of Norwell

According to Joseph Merritt, author of *A History of South Scituate-Norwell*, the word “Assinippi” is a Wompanoag Indian term meaning “rocky water.” Merritt explained that the Assinippi area, is home to the Jacobs, Farrar, Collamore, Simmons, Curtis, Damon, Briggs, Grose, and Loring families—who have lived there for generations. Merritt referred to today’s Route 53 area as “Gilman Plain”—named for a family that once lived there. The Collamore family had large land holdings in Gilman Plain, Enoch Collamore ran a tavern there, and (what is today) Route 53 was mostly agricultural until the mid-1900s!

The only known factory in the immediate Assinippi/Jacobs Lane area was the Grose Box Factory behind the house at 129 Prospect Street. We have very few specific details of the factory, but boxes were used to ship shoes, and since shoe making was a big industry in Norwell, we might assume that the boxes were used for that purpose.

The first Jacob family American settler was Nicholas Jacob. We think he was born near the town of Hingham, England around 1597—but records are scarce from that time. Nicholas was fairly “middle class,” he married a Mary Gilman in 1629 and they sailed to the Massachusetts Bay Colony in 1633 with their two young children: John and Elizabeth. The family first lived in Watertown (Mass.), but in 1635 they moved to Hingham—probably because many from their former English community members had settled there. Nicholas became an innkeeper, and he served in the Massachusetts Bay General Court (the colonial legislature) for a couple of years. Nicholas died in 1657 at age 60, having fathered eight children, all but one surviving him.

Nicholas’ son, John (his first) was the only son to survive both parents so he inherited the family’s assets. He lived in Hingham, married Margery Eames in 1653, and had 5 sons and 6 daughters. John’s eldest son, John, was killed by Indians on their land in King Philip’s War around 1676.

Another of John’s sons, David, married Sarah Cushing in 1689, and David purchased land from a relative in 1688 in Scituate (Please note: Scituate at the time encompassed all of today’s Scituate and Norwell, and parts of Hanover, Marshfield, and Cohasset!). This relative, George Russell, had run a mill in the Greenbush section of Scituate for many years. By age 36 in 1700, David Jacobs owned a lot of the land around Third Herring Brook in western Scituate (Assinippi area). David also served as a Scituate Town Surveyor and he laid out a road where

Indians had traveled on a path from their Summer to Winter camp sites—this road is documented as existing in 1704 and is today's Main Street in Norwell (Route 123).

In the 1600s, Third Herring Brook had been dammed and used to power at least a couple grist mills. Sometime about 1720 (probably with much assistance!) David Jacob cleared trees and dammed up the brook to form what has become known as Jacobs Pond. Two of David's sons, Joshua (born in 1702) and Dr. Joseph (born in 1707) are given credit for building a grist mill and a saw mill in about 1725. Today, the foundations of these mills can be found near the entrance to the Woodworth baseball fields (Note: be careful if exploring the area! Poison Ivy is pervasive!).

As a side note, the last name "Jacob" and "Jacobs" are often used to refer to the same family name. Originally, "Jacob" was used into the 1800s, but later some Jacob family members chose to add an "s" at the end. This may have happened as a result of the possessive form being used to describe the two mills (grist and saw) that the family owned.

When Joshua Jacob married Mary James in 1726, they became the first couple to occupy the newly-constructed, two-story house on the edge of the mill pond (what is today the Jacobs Farmhouse).

Eventually, the Jacob family would be well represented in houses on what is now Jacobs Lane, Main Street, and Prospect Street. Joshua's brother, Dr. Joseph, was a physician who lived near the Collamore-Jacobs graveyard on Jacobs Trail (across the pond). His son, Elisha built a house in 1759 known as "The Line House" on Assinippi Avenue (today it houses the Hingham Institution for Savings Bank). The name "The Line House" comes from the fact that it strides the town lines of Hanover and Norwell. It is made of brick made from the Elisha Jacob's kiln on the property. Brick-making would become a secondary trade for Elisha and his family (perhaps more for chimneys and fireplaces than entire dwellings, since there are not many brick homes in the area).

The Jacobs Farmhouse stayed in the Jacob/Jacobs family until the 1930s—when the house was willed to the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities (SPNEA)—which is known today as "Historic New England."

Some interesting stories about the notable Jacobs family members who lived in the Farmhouse, and about the Jacobs Farmhouse in general, are re-told below:

- A son of Joshua Richmond Jacob (1767-1840), Bela Tower Jacob (1808-1886), was refused money by his family for his plan to make his fortune in South America. Instead, he was loaned money (at age 22) by the wealthy and soon-to-be bank owner, Ebenezer T. Fogg (of Scituate Federal Savings “fame”) to travel to Chile. Needless to say, the loan was much to the dismay of his family (who lived in what is today Hornstra Farm on Prospect Street). In Chile, Bela made coffins for the many victims of yellow fever. After having made \$40,000, Bela smuggled his gold out of the country in the hold of his returning ship (it was against Chilean law to take that much gold out of the country). He succeeded and lived in South Scituate (Norwell) for the remainder of his long life!
- In 1839, Ichabod Jacob’s son, Benjamin (born in 1815) and his new wife Maria needed a place of their own to live. At that time there were four of Ichabod’s children still living at the Jacobs Farmhouse. So, Ichabod obtained another house and had it moved and attached to the old Homestead around 1840. The exact age or former location of that house remains a mystery. The attached house was made to appear as though it had always been a part of the original Homestead (at least as it was seen from the road—Main Street). Eventually, Ichabod, while still living there, divided the house between the families of his sons Barton and Benjamin. If you look at the Jacobs Farmhouse today, you will notice the two front doors and the fact that (if closely examined) it looks as if two houses have been put together... they have!
- Barton Jacob bought most of the remaining saw and grist mill shares from his brother Benjamin, who had many debts, and the mills thrived while Barton was in charge.

According to a historical diary entry of a Harwood Smith (age 16) of Hanover: Harwood and his brother were ice-fishing on Jacobs Pond in December of 1887 when Barton came out to give them a friendly warning that his mill would be operating for a couple hours that afternoon. Specifically, he told them “not to be alarmed at what would seem to be a general cracking up of the ice, which he said might occur due to drawing down the pond with his water wheel.” Barton went on to explain the origin of the mill and his family’s connection to it. Harwood characterized Barton as “pleasant” and “talkative.”

Barton also told the boys that of the 35-40 families in this Assinippi area, fully half were Jacobs family members at that time. The boys, who were successful catching twenty pickerel by setting traps and lines, later gave Barton two of them!

By the time of Barton's death in 1895, it is likely that neither the farm nor the mill was quite the same. The grist mill had ceased operation by then; the saw mill continued to function, but probably did its last work not long after 1900.

- Norwell resident Perez Simmons recalled that the Jacobs saw mill was very busy after the November 1898 Blizzard. ("The Portland Gale" blizzard of that year created the new mouth of the North River—look it up! It was the creation of "The Spit!") The 1898 storm had uprooted many white pines which became lumber for the local building industry.
- Unfortunately, the Jacobs' grist and saw mills succumbed to fire on July 4, 1920 when children celebrating the 4th of July burned it down.
- The last two Jacobs' sons to live at the Jacobs Farmhouse were Frederick and Henry Barton Jacobs. Fred kept a diary in 1883 when he was 19, and some notable stories from Fred's diary are:
 - In the winter there were skating parties on the pond and sleigh rides in my sleigh. In springtime, the young people went to Valley Swamp [down Prospect Street towards Hingham to pick] Mayflowers and Mountain Laurel. There were rides to the Third Cliff, Peggoty Beach, and the Glades.
 - Fred was a very attentive, attractive escort for a group of girls, and had quite a sense of humor. He wrote that with a couple girls "dressed as boys, I as a girl," they had "made calls around the village."
- After Fred graduated from Harvard Law School (about 1887) he was elected to the Norwell School Committee. His greatest achievement was to unite Hanover, Hanson, and Norwell under a single superintendent of schools to form a united school district. By February 1894, Fred had opened a law office in Boston, but by August he was struck by tuberculosis, a disease that would soon end his promising life. He sought treatment in Atlanta, Georgia and Saranac Lake, New York, but to no avail. It was no accident

that his older brother, Dr. Henry Barton Jacobs, became a doctor specializing in diseases of the lungs.

- In June of 1893, the Universalist Church at Assinippi was destroyed by a fire. Jacobs family members had attended there since its founding in 1766. Dr. Henry Barton Jacobs wrote to his mother at the time: “I was so sorry to hear the news of the burning of your little church that I almost cried. I don’t see how you had the courage to start right out to get subscriptions for a new one, of course there is no use in crying over spilt milk.” The new church was dedicated almost a year to the day from the burning of the old one—clearly Dr. Jacobs’ mother (Frances Ford Jacobs) was a wonderful advocate!
- The last Jacobs family member to occupy the Farmhouse was Frances Ford Jacobs. She would stay there in the summer with a female companion and a housekeeper, and in the Winter, she would stay near her son, Henry, at a nearby Baltimore, Maryland hotel. Around 1897, records indicate that the farm was run by cousin George Turner and his family, who lived in “the other house” until the 1930s.
- Dr. Henry Barton Jacobs, the last of this Jacobs’ line, died at age 82 in 1939. Having been a vice-president of the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities (SPNEA), and aware of an interest in Norwell history developing, Henry provided in his will that the Jacobs estate could go to either SPNEA or to the Town of Norwell. Therefore, SPNEA controlled the estate from 1939 until 1988—when the Town of Norwell took over the management of the property.