

# INCOMPLETE NOTES ON WASHINGTON VILLAGE

BY  
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**Editor's Note - The late Frank G. Bates of Indiana was a native of Coventry and a devoted student of the period starting shortly after the founding of Warwick. In this phase of Rhode Island history he was preeminent. The following study is taken from a letter which Mr. Bates wrote to his long-time friend, the late George Parker of Washington village in 1941.**

In 1673 the Warwick purchasers voted to lay out the Township of Cowestee making the dividing line a line drawn westward from the "footway" which went over Apponaug brook. This was the origin of the Seven and Ten Line, so-called, and all the land south of it was thence forward known as Cowesett. For some reason, probably the King Philip War, action was delayed, but in 1685 the "Cowesett Farms" were ordered to be laid out. These extended westward as far as the present east line of Coventry.

The next year, 1686, there was an order voted to lay out sixteen hundred acres into farms of a hundred acres each with an additional lot of meadow for each, in the land "above the saw-mill" and east of Great River. The saw-mill here referred to is the "old saw-mill" which was at Centerville. These lots were to be located by each proprietor as he chose and not on any regular plan. Some went in at once and located their claims but as late as 1710 not all had done so. The whole subject of these lots is confused. There is a crude plat at the R. I. Historical Society probably made in 1710 which shows some twelve or thirteen lots but the lots do not seem to be drawn to scale and are confusing. When, in 1728-29, the complete division of the land into farms was carried out it seems to bear no relation to these earlier lots. This plat of 1728-29 is the one in the Coventry Town Clerk's office. This leaves the whole subject of the 1600 acre lots to be studied further before it is untangled. It has a bearing on later developments at Washington.

As early as 1677, just after the Indian War, the purchasers of Warwick granted 100 acres, one acre and two acres of land, apparently lying substantially together, to four men as partners, Henry Wood, John Smith, (of Prudence Id.), John Greene and John Warner, on condition that they build a saw-mill "on yo fresh river in yo township of Cowesett". This seems to be the first reference to the locality that is now Washington. In 1682 Wood sold out to John Greene and James Carder his right in "the saw-mill being erected". This fixed definitely the date of the first mill there. Fuller in his History of Warwick confuses this with the older saw-mill at Centerville. I think it has been confused also with the Greene forge and mill at the Greene homestead. There is evidence refuting this and placing that mill at a later date.

Then followed a series of land transfers in that connection which have thus far not been traced in detail due to lack of time. In 1687, Carder, Greene and Warner had 3/4 of the mill property and Smith 1/4. In 1691 Warner sold his share to Mark Roberts "of the saw-mill belonging to said Warwick". Does this mean that Roberts had been connected with the older mill? I suspect it does, and it is borne out by the following transaction. In 1700, James Carder, Richard Greene, (to whom John Greene had transferred his right), Nathaniel Cahoone of East Greenwich and Mark Roberts, "owners of a saw-mill in the precincts of Warwick", entered into an agreement whereby Carder and Greene grant, for as long as they shall keep up the mill, to the two newcomers equal rights with themselves in two acres "adjoining the mill" and equal rights in the timber which had been originally granted along with the mill site.

There is some ground for the theory that Roberts had been connected with the Centerville enterprise. Also it seems likely that Roberts and Cahoone were the persons actually to run the mill for it seems fairly certain that Carder and Greene never lived at the mill but were found at the time actively concerned with things in the older part of town.

In 1707, Carder and Greene sold to Nathaniel Cahoone 90 acres "near the saw-mill", they reserving of the hundred acres ten acres "where the mill stands" "as also one share in said saw-mill" and full right and privilege in the river to build or erect mills or any other edifices as they should see cause". In 1712 Mark Roberts sold to Cahoone 1/4 of a saw-mill "on the south side of Pawtuxet River now in the possession of said Cahoone" but reserves the timber rights granted to the mill.

A new name now appears, Samuel Bennett, Jr., born in 1690, the son of Samuel Bennett of East Greenwich. He married, in 1716, Mary Stafford, daughter of Amos Stafford of Warwick. In 1719 Cahoone, who by this time seems to have acquired sole ownership of the mill sold to Bennett Jr., for £300:- (1) 85 acres on the "north side of Pawtuxet River and adjoining to the saw-mill there", bounded W. and S. on the river; E. and N. on land undivided belonging to the proprietors of Warwick". (2) 5 acres on the south side of the river, bounded W. on the "brook" that comes down from Mishnock Swamp and falls into the said Pawtuxet River", N. on the river and S. and E. so far as to make up five acres. (3) 1/2 of one saw-mill in Cowesett standing upon Pawtuxet River with one acre of land adjoining the mill. (4) 1/4 of 117 of all undivided land below Carr's River. (5) Some miscellaneous pieces of land including 1/2 of two lots in Mishnock Swamp.

In 1722, Mark Roberts sold to Bennett 100 acres "in the jurisdiction of Warwick near the saw-mill", bounded E. by the grantor's father's land and by land undivided; S. on the highway and W. and N. on undivided land. "with housings, fencing and edifices". It appears from various evidence that Mark Roberts had acquired one of the 100 acre lots originally granted to some one lying somewhat to the east of the saw-mill lot but probably not directly adjoining it.

In 1726, Thomas Stafford sold to Bennett 1/4 of a saw-mill on Pawtuxet River, 1/4 of the "Utensils" belonging to it, and of 5 acres of land, all of which Stafford "bought of George Hazzard on May 16, 1726".

March 20, 1732 Bennett sold to Theophilus Ellis part (58 acres) of one of the hundred acre farms "on the south side of Great River". Probably not at the mill. In the same year John Greene sold to Bennett 1/4 of nine acres on which Bennett's house stood, bounded W. "on the river that the saw-mill stands on" and N. E. and S. on undivided land, also 1/8 part of the saw-mill.

Just how all these transactions fit into each other can be discovered by further investigation. It is not clear how Cahoone could appear to sell as sole owner of the mill when later these other fractions are sold. The whole period of 25 years seems to be very confused but I have no doubt that it could be uncovered if one wanted to.

As a result of several divisions of the Seven Men's Land made from 1700 to 1729 two tracts were laid out on the north of the 7-10 line opposite the saw-mill land in the rights of John Wickes and John Greene. In 1730 the John Wickes of that generation and Elisha Greene, a descendent of John, brought suits against Samuel Bennett over the title to land. The record of these cases has not been found since thorough search has not yet been made. There had been a long dispute over the location of the 7-10 line. It was re-run in 1700 and after arbitration finally run in 1736. The plat of the land below Carr's River of 1728-29 above referred to shows a row of small lots apparently restitution lots laid out to compensate for losses to some one by one of the re-surveys. The laying out of the Seven Men's land to the north apparently led to the above law-suits.

John Wickes who was present at the survey in 1700 testified in this suit that the line, had fallen so as to leave most of the Great Meadows north of the line, while William Greene, surveyor, also present said the Meadows fell mostly south of the line. The outcome of the case is not yet found. The location of the line was settled by arbitration in 1735. In 1739, Wickes sold to Bennett his whole 128 acre lot north of the line.

In 1740 Bennett petitioned for a sum of money to repair the "bridge by his house". In 1741, he was granted in town meeting L15 for the bridge on the south branch of Pawtuxet River "Below his dam against his house". In March, 1743, Bennett sold his homestead farm with saw-mill and grist mill, 300 acres, bounded W. by William Stafford, S. partly by the Great Meadows and partly "by a large river called Pawtuxet River", and then across the river on land of Richard Waterman of Providence; E. by a highway; N. partly by Benj. Blanchard and partly by Stephen C.... This must have included the Wickes land as well as the mill farm and some additional. The purchaser was Thomas Brayton of Portsmouth. This transfer is in Coventry Deed Book 1, p. 81. The earlier information was found in the records at Apponaug and at the State House and the Historical Society in Providence.