

An Informal History of the Freedom Green Property

by Frank Wemple

Freedom Green was once part of a very old farm which went with the old white Cape Cod farmhouse at 223 Puddin Lane that I now own. I spent countless hours researching the history of the house and farm and the results turned out to be quite different from previous histories written about the house and property. The full extent of what I learned is contained in a twenty page document that is on file at the Mansfield Historical Society, but here is a synopsis.

While I was able trace the ownership this property back to about 1700, the trail prior to 1714 is very fuzzy and rather convoluted. However, it was in 1714 that Oxenbridge Thatcher acquired two parcels of land that included what is now Freedom Green. In 1720, Thatcher sold this land, which at that time was described only as “a farme”, to Ephraim Chapin. In 1723 Chapin sold the property to Joseph Jacobs and it is in this deed that I found the first mention of a house. At this time, the property amounted to well over a thousand acres.

The house that was here in 1720 sat where the ell on the present house is. It had a half cellar which still exists under the back of the ell. The original well is still adjacent to that foundation and the water is still potable. To the south of the old house was an early English Bank Barn that I believe was built around this time. It survived into the mid Nineteen Sixties when it was unfortunately demolished. The old house didn't survive nearly as long and it was gone by about 1737. However, a number of fireplace and chimney stones from the original house were incorporated into the foundations of the present house and others can be found in various walls around my property. By 1737 the house that went with this property was located on the north side of Puddin Lane about 100 yards northwest of the present house. It was on the extreme northeast edge of the property and part of the house site was actually on the adjoining property. The well head for this house can still be seen on a flat area east of a ledge of rock adjacent to the driveway to the McPhee residence.

Between 1737 and 1803 the house and property changed hands several times and by 1756 the size of the property had been reduced to about 100 acres. In 1803 the land was sold to Eleazer Coburn, a young man of 24 who lived in Hampton. Although the house on the north side of Puddin Lane was there in 1799, there was no house on the property when the approximately 100 acre farm was sold to Coburn in 1803. I did not find a clue as to what happened to the house, but fire was its likely fate.

Eleazer Coburn elected to use the site of the first house on the south side of Puddin Lane as the site for his new house. As he already had a place for his family to live in Hampton, he was not under pressure to get the new house up quickly and he took about a year to complete it. He built the house and the ell at the same time and the house is still in its basic original configuration except for the huge cooking fireplace that was originally in the center of the ell with a three foot square chimney going through the center of the roof. Coburn moved his family here around the middle of 1804.

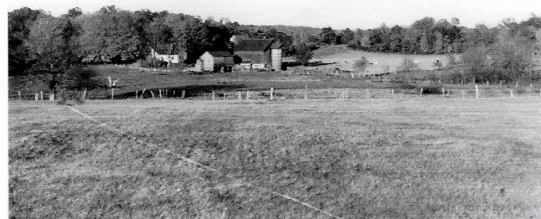
Coburn sold the place in 1813 and it continued to pass through different owners as the acreage was increased and decreased several times. In 1932, newly weds Foster and Virginia Pike Richards bought the old farmhouse along with the land upon which Freedom Green now sits as well as the land up the hill north of Puddin Lane that is now the Jacobs Hill Road development. Foster served six terms in the Connecticut legislature. He was active in the 4-H movement and was a 50 year member of the Echo Grange in Mansfield. He served 14 years on the Mansfield Board of Education and was a member of Mansfield's first Town Council in 1971.

Foster Richards retired from dairy farming in the mid Seventies and in 1977 he and Virginia sold the old farm for development. The first Freedom Green developers bought the property south of Puddin Lane and Charter Oak Square was the first section to be built. However, the original plans called for units to be built where the huge tree stands near the corner of Puddin Lane and Mansfield City Road, but fortunately the builders were persuaded to change their plans and that beautiful tree survived.

Many thanks to Maggie Richards Ruotolo for the following pictures from her family's photograph album. They were probably taken about the time her parents bought the Eleazer Coburn House and farm in 1932.



The Eleazer Coburn House (built in 1803) in the spring of 1932. Note the early English Bank Barn directly behind the house. The barn on the left was built circa 1850 and still stands with some relatively recent additions.



Looking northeast from the vicinity of the cemetery on Mansfield City Road. Charter Oak Square is now in the immediate left foreground.



Looking east. Puddin Lane is just out of the picture on the left. Liberty Drive now runs from left to right where the two cows in the foreground are.



Looking east from behind Lebanon Square. Remnants of the stone wall are still there, but much of it has been destroyed and the area is now quite overgrown.