



Early Settlers of Sawyers Mills

Excerpt from the “Early Families of Boylston, Massachusetts”

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During the 1600 and 1700’s the area where Boylston now stands was an uninhabited wilderness. In 1643 the Sachem, Nashawhonan, later known as Sholan, of the Nashaway or Weshacum Indians was known to have banded with his tribe near the Nashua River and Waushakum Lake, so it is apparent that prior to the colonization by the British some of the indigenous peoples of the Wampanoag Confederacy, a coalition of Algonquian Native American tribes were residing in the area.¹ When the British colonists began moving into these lands, it was Massasoit Sachem of this Wampanoag Confederacy who formed an alliance with the colonists to protect his people against their rivaling Narragansett Tribe, so the colonists of the area lived in peace and harmony with the native people for several years.²

The first non-native child born in the local area of Lancaster was Thomas Sawyer Jr. who was born 2 July 1649 the son of Thomas Sawyer and Mary Prescott.^{3,4} It was he, who is considered to be Boylston’s first landowner. His father, Thomas Sawyer Sr., was one of the original settlers of Lancaster, Massachusetts. The Sawyers were skilled with their hands with building dwellings, water wheels and sawmills across the New England landscape, evidencing their handiwork. Today’s Sawyer descendants of Bolton, Berlin, Sterling, and Boylston stem from the line of Thomas Sawyer Sr..⁵

Unfortunately, after the death of Massasoit Sachem, his grandson, Metacomet (called Philip), did not wish to continue to honor the treaty his grandfather had made with the Government of Massachusetts Bay because he felt they had usurped the rights of their people for less than their value.⁶ Disruption began to evolve and the King Philip Indian War followed. Thomas Sawyer’s garrison protected most of his family from massacre except his son, Ephraim, who lost his life during these times.⁷ Finally, peace reappeared for about 25 years and not much is known of the 25 years that followed.

It was in 1705 that Thomas Sawyer Jr. acquired the land in the territory that would later become Boylston. On 26 October 1708 there was a raid on the British Colonies, where it is known that Thomas Sawyer Jr. of Lancaster, his son Elias, and John Bigelow of Marlborough were

“...taken and carried captive to Canada by the Indians, and for their ransom built a saw-mill (said to be the first saw-mill built in Canada), and then were detained for a time to learn the Canadians how to run their saw-mill.”⁸

So, although Thomas Jr. was the first landowner, it was Thomas Sawyer Jr.’s son, Joseph, who is credited to have built the family dwelling, barn, cornmill and sawmill near the Nashua River in the area that was later called “Sawyers Mills.” It is not known exactly when the construction of these buildings took place, but there was no mention of a sawmill or other buildings in the 1721 property transfer, however the transfer in 1728 mentions the Sawmill, so it was most probably built between 1721-1728 that the first mill was built in the area known as “Sawyers Mills, Boylston, Massachusetts.” Joseph, a blacksmith, had actually acquired several parcels of land between 1721 and 1750; the land of his father and the land on the 11 May 1721 deed transfer from his father-in-law, John Beaman Sr. which contained a one-half portion of the original George Tahanto land; a deed of Sarah Taylor to Joseph Sawyer on 23 September 1723; a deed of Elizabeth Howe and others of Marlborough and Shrewsbury transferring 25 ½ acres on the Nashua River on 22 December 1729 as well as several others.^{9,10}

¹ Boylston Historical Series, Bruce D, Filgate, 2012

² Wikipedia.org, search Massasoit and Wampanoag, May 2012

³ Birth Records, Lancaster, Worcester County, Massachusetts, 1649, digital image, ancestry.com

⁴ Sawyers in America, or A History of the immigrant Sawyers by Amory Carter, Worcester 1883

⁵ Sawyers in America, or A History of the immigrant Sawyers by Amory Carter, Worcester 1883

⁶ Great Native American Chiefs, Metacomet aka King Philip, University of Michigan Library Exhibits online

⁷ Boylston Historical Series, Bruce D. Filgate, 2012

⁸ Sawyers in America, or A History of the immigrant Sawyers by Amory Carter, Worcester 1883

⁹ Deeds, Sawyer Family, Boylston Historical Society and Museum, Archive Collection

¹⁰ Boylston Historical Series, Bruce D. Filgate, 2012

In 1757 Aaron Sawyer Sr. built a home not far from the original site of his grandfather, Joseph Sawyer’s home. When Aaron Sr. died, his real estate included about 500 acres of land, a dwelling house and barns, an oil mill for the manufacture of neatsfoot oil, a saw and grist mill, and other out-buildings.³ Aaron had married Abigail Moor, the daughter of Oliver Moor and Abigail Houghton, on 5 April 1754 at Lancaster, Worcester County, Massachusetts.¹¹ Aaron and Abigail went on to have seven children: Aaron, born 24 August 1756; Oliver, born 2 February 1759; Parma, born 16 September 1761; Abigail, born 2 July 1764; Dolly, born 12 November 1767; Submit, born 5 August 1770; and Silence, born 23 December 1774.¹²



Stone from Aaron Sawyer’s House at Sawyers Mills
Presented to the Sawyer Memorial Library
By Mrs. Thomas Todd, Great Granddaughter of Aaron Sawyer
Photograph by Erica Hout

Aaron Sawyer Jr., the eldest son, had succeeded his father at Sawyer’s mills. He was a Revolutionary War soldier from Lancaster. He served as Town Clerk, Selectman, Assessor and was a Land Surveyor.

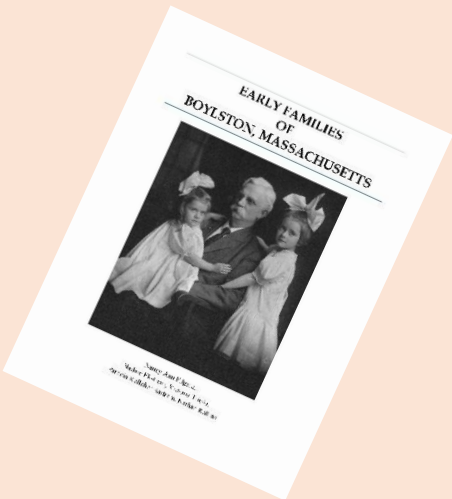
“At the time of Lieutenant Aaron Sawyer's death on 30 April 1817, the property at Sawyer’s mills consisted of a sawmill, a grist mill, a clothier’s mill, and a fulling mill for the manufacture of homespun cloth, an oil mill, a blacksmith shop, a country store, the dwelling house and farm, and farm buildings. It is estimated that the store served the residents of Boylston as early as 1787.

After the death of Lieutenant Aaron Sawyer, several members of his family managed the property. In 1822, the mills were sold, and James Lees and William Lees, of West Boylston, operated them until about 1830. Sawyers Mills remained the center of industrial activity. “¹³

This collection of historical narratives [found in the Early Families of Boylston publication] primarily concentrates on the descendants of the second son of Aaron Sawyer Sr., Oliver Sawyer Sr. Oliver was born 2 February 1759 at Lancaster.¹⁴ In 1780, Oliver Sawyer Sr., his brother, Lt. Aaron Sawyer Jr. and others, some of whom resided within the limits of Lancaster, Massachusetts, petitioned the town of Lancaster that they may be set off from that town and annexed to Shrewsbury. The area petitioned was known as Shrewsbury North Precinct. The request was granted on 23 June 1780 and confirmed by the General Court of Massachusetts. Shrewsbury North Precinct was incorporated in March 1786 to be the Town of Boylston and Aaron Sawyer Jr. became its first Town Clerk.

Oliver Sawyer Sr. and Martha “Patty” Hinds, the daughter of Benjamin Hinds and Elizabeth Temple, filed marriage intentions on 23 February 1785 at Shrewsbury, Worcester County, Massachusetts.¹⁵ Oliver and Patty resided in Boylston, Worcester County, Massachusetts where they raised three children: Patty, born 18 April 1786; Oliver Jr., born 15 June 1788; and Abigail, born 5 December 1791. ¹⁶ Patty would marry Joshua Kendall on 25 May 1807 at Boylston. Oliver would marry Harriet Bush on 18 September 1816. And Abigail would marry Pitt Moore on 20 September 1815.¹⁷ It would be the grandson of Patty, Oliver Sawyer Kendall Jr., who would accumulate the photographs of this family into an album and donate this piece of history to the Sawyer Memorial Library so the history of Boylston’s people will remain in perpetuity.¹⁸

To view the photographs and other artifacts of this family, watch for the upcoming “Sawyer’s Mills Exhibit” at the Boylston Historical Museum to be released this spring. For further information on the lives of the Sawyer family see the Early Families of Boylston publication available in the Fuller Research Library, 9 Central Street, Boylston.



¹¹ Marriage Records, Lancaster, Worcester County, Massachusetts, 1754, digital image, ancestry.com
¹² Birth Records, Lancaster, Worcester County, Massachusetts. 1756, 1759, 1761, 1764, 1767, 1770, 1774, digital images, ancestry.com
¹³ Sawyers Mills Village, The Early Years, Inga Milbauer, 2021
¹⁴ Birth Records, Lancaster, Worcester County, Massachusetts, 1759, digital image, ancestry.com
¹⁵ Marriage Records, Shrewsbury, Worcester County, Massachusetts, 1785, digital image, ancestry.com
¹⁶ Birth Records, Boylston, Worcester County, Massachusetts, 1786, 1788, 1791
¹⁷ Marriage Records, Boylston, Worcester County, Massachusetts, 1807, 1815, 1816
¹⁸ Minutes of Trustees of the Sawyer Memorial Library
Editor Nancy O’Loughlin Filgate, Director, Boylston Historical Society & Museum, Inc., 9 Central Street, Boylston, Massachusetts
Photograph of Sawyers Mills, View from the west End of Bridge, Looking North, Digital Commonwealth Collection, 1896