

THE DEERING HOMESTEAD IN WATERBORO, MAINE. BY JANIE LORD, 1973

The Deering¹ Homestead, located appropriately on Deering's Ridge between Waterboro and Hollis, was once quite an extensive farm. With fields and buildings there is a total area of 250 acres.

The present buildings lie almost exactly three miles due east of Little Ossipee Lake, less than one-half mile west of the Waterboro-Hollis town line, and approximately four miles due north of the Waterboro-Lyman town line. The farm lies in the third district in the county of York.

Once the site of great activity, the farm now stands deserted like so many other lovely old farmhouses in Maine. The house, shed, stable, and barn, which all connect to form an "L", stand on one side of the road. The lawns are still well kept and green in season while the surrounding maples still serve as shade. One surviving oak still stands where once Sarah Deering and the wives after her hung their aprons to dry. Across the road stand an old carriage house and a joiner shop badly in need of repair.

As one gazes at this great set of buildings, one can almost see the farm in operation. The men tend the fields--plowing, sowing, and harvesting their crops. It might be haying season; or repairs being made or new tools starting to take form in the shops. The children, for they too have their own chores, care for the cows, oxen, horses, chickens, or whatever they may be. The women are in the house--cooking, sewing, cleaning, or preserving fruits and vegetables from their own gardens. There is always something to do regardless of what time of the year it is.

It was William Deering and his descendents who made the farm what it was. Today, however, the buildings are empty and silent. The days of the excitement and activity are gone. Perhaps never to return.

In 1768 there were no settlers in Waterboro, then known as Massabesic Plantation, until John Smith came. He was the first permanent settler. Later, in 1770, seven families joined them. William Deering, the first Deering to settle on the Ridge, was among them. With so much land available the first settlers had the option of taking possession of what they wanted.

William Deering was the grandson of Roger Deering who traveled from Kittery to Scarborough in 1716. Born December 25, 1748, he was the son of William and Mary Pine Deering. Pine Point in Scarborough was subsequently named for this Pine family. When his parents died William, the youngest child, was taken in by his grandfather, Charles Pine, a known Indian fighter.

At the age of twenty-two, William left Scarborough to start logging. He and two other young men with guns on shoulder, axes, and other necessary provisions to last several days headed westward. They crossed the Saco River at Union Falls and followed a trail heading toward Alfred. The first night was spent at what is now called Westcott, then the Mast Camp, a site for collecting masts for the King's ships.

That next morning they separated. William climbed to the top of Ossipee Hill (Mountain). As he looked toward the east, he spied a ridge on which there seemed to be a piece of cleared ground.

He spent another night in the forest. In the morning he went out to make his way to this ridge. When he arrived the cleared area apparently had been burned over by the Indians. Because the ground seemed to be fertile, and therefore, conducive to farming, William decided to build his new home there.

William built a temporary shelter to use for a few days. The next morning he climbed the tallest

appropriate spot on which to locate a more permanent shelter. He built a puncheon and bark camp in the lower part of the field just beyond the present house.

The puncheon and bark camp was constructed of spruce and chestnut trees. "They were cut in eight foot lengths and split in halves. These sections, called puncheons, were placed upright in the ground, two feet deep, and ribs were tree-nailed to the inside surface to keep them in place. Next a roof was constructed of light poles covered with squares of chestnut or birch bark. Thus, with a rough couch of boughs constructed at the back, a shelter was provided with one side open to a great fire for warmth in the cold weather, and to lesser blaze in the summer to keep away mosquitos and wild animals, was not too comfortable a home."²

William lived alone there for three years. In this period, most of his time was spent clearing an extensive part of the surrounding forest. On part of the clearing a log cabin was erected where the monument now stands.

With the help of his neighbors, the cabin was raised in no time. Hewn timbers were carefully laid. The corners were dovetailed and tree-nailed together. The outside spaces were chinked with moss and clay. The inside spaces were filled with triangular ribs wedged in tightly. A large chimney was erected, openings in the front were left for two windows and a door. The windows were covered with oiled paper. A heavy-framed plank door with a stout wooden latch was built so as to secure against roaming Indians who might pose a problem. There was a puncheon floor, and tree-nails driven into the walls served as hoods on which clothes were hung. Wood and pewter dishes were placed on rough shelves. Crude furniture was made from planks and saplings.

It was to this cabin that William Deering brought his bride, Sarah Rumery of Biddeford, on horseback. They were married on April 3, 1773 by the Reverend Peletiah Tingley, the town's first minister. He had met her on one of his trips to Biddeford to get supplies. Stopping at the Rumery

house on one of these trips for dinner, Mrs. Rumery and her daughter inquired about his progress up at Massabesic Plantation. On a walk after dinner, it is said that Sarah remarked to William that the presence of a helpmate might prove to make life more cheerful.

Since the log cabin required little housework, Sarah was able to help William with his work. The trees that had been felled earlier were now dry enough to be burned. The ashes provided nutrients which aided in the growth of his crops, mainly corn and rye.

During the Revolution William and Sarah lived quietly on the Ridge. Together they worked clearing more land, growing more grain and vegetables, and increasing their head of cattle.

In 1783 the first Deering house was built where the present road now runs through. William and Sarah had four children and had become prosperous and ambitious enough to build a larger and better home. Carefully choosing a site, taking in to consideration the exposure, view, water supply, William looked for a good location for the barns, while Sarah was interested in having her kitchen facing south toward the lowlands.

After deciding on the lot, they drew their blueprint on the ground--the number of rooms, their sizes, and their location. There was a kitchen, a back room, a forerom, bedrooms, dresser room, cellar-way, stairway, scullery, entry-way, and clothes press. The unfinished second floor would be where the loom would be set up. Beans, dried apples, and various other items would be stored there, also.

"The frame house was what Riddon called 'the third generation of New England dwellings.' The wide, low-posted farmhouse that succeeded the log cabin must have been the invention of those who settled the eastern colonies. There were no models like them in England and none in the colonies south. They were nearly forty feet square on the foundation, the posts were not more than eight feet in height, and the gables were very high. Framed of enormous timbers and braced with white oak, no tempest known in New England was

ever powerful enough to blow them down, although they were usually defiantly situated upon a hill. But, they would sometimes creak and groan under the force of a high wind like a ship at sea.”³

Neighbors and their sons came to help in the “raising” of the house. With them they brought their tools--podaugers, crosscut saws, framing-chieles, scratch-awls, and snap-lines.

After the exterior had been erected, the next few months were spent finishing off the interior. Some of the rooms were paneled in pumpkin pine; all the rooms had wainscoating and mantles. Doors were the Christian cross or six-paneled style. Rooms were lit up by small windows.

In the middle of the house a great chimney with fireplaces in at least three rooms was built. The kitchen chimney was most important since there was usually a deep brick-oven in which to bake beans, brown-bread, and Indian pudding every Saturday. A huge crane swung from the jamb on one side of the fireplace. This crane contained hooks and chain links on which the various kettles were hung. The kitchen hearth was an enormous slab of granite. Above it two or three poles were suspended with straps. Pumpkins, gourds, bell-peppers, dried apples, and traces of corn were stored on one end, on the other long skeins of yarn were hung to dry after being dyed.

In the dresser-room, off the kitchen, dishes and cooking utensils were kept. Resting on bare shelves, pails, piggins, noggins, and keelers were stored on the lowest shelf. Runlets, trenchers, and the pudding sticks were kept in the middle. Finally came the nested trays and the precious best china and a few pieces of silver.

In 1784 the population of the town was 118. In 1785 proprietors surveyed these lands, owned by the heirs of the Phillips family who had acquired the lands from the Indian Chief, Hombriant, otherwise known as John Ragamath. The proprietors divided the lands parcels into one hundred acres each.

William Deering purchased a deed from Josiah Waters, for whom Waterboro was named. In

1789 he purchased one hundred acres and later continued to purchase more land.

William and Sarah were married for fifty-six years. He died December 13, 1829. However, he left behind four sons, and three daughters.

Jonathan, the eldest son, was born March 24, 1776. When he married his father gave him a farm across the road and helped him build a two-story house. Blind in his old age, Jonathan died February 7, 1860.

William, Jr. was born January 2, 1778. When he married Eunice Haper of Limerick, land at the northern end of the Ridge was given to him by his father. William, Jr. and Eunice, in turn, had six sons. William, Jr. died April 5, 1832. His six industrious sons hauled ship timber to Kennebunk and wood to Portland and Saco. When gold was discovered in California in 1849, these sons constructed the frame of a brig on the Ridge and hauled it down river on the ice to Saco. They appropriately named it the “Six Brothers.” Being of four or five hundred tons burden, the vessel was loaded with lumber and sent down around Cape Horn to San Francisco. The ship was a long time in reaching San Francisco. By the time “Six Brothers” arrived, the lumber market had broken and the venture proved unsuccessful. The ship was sold after one or two more unsatisfactory voyages and later wrecked.

William’s next three children were girls--Mary, born May 3, 1782, died three years later; Sarah was born January 16, 1784 and died in 1855; and Margery, born in October 1784, died in 1868 at the age of 84.

Nathaniel, born July 1, 1791, married and settled nearby. He eventually moved to Saco, however, and died in 1865.

Isaac, the youngest child, was born in 1793. He remained at home with his parents until he married rather late in life (age 32), Clorissa Harper of Limerick.

William and Sarah’s frame house burned and in 1812 the present one was started by William and his two younger sons, Nathaniel and Isaac. The house was not finished until a number of years

later.

The foundations of granite slate were hauled in by six oxen. On these foundations were erected a story and one-half house and a barn which is presently a ten horse stable. Brick arches in the cellar of the house serve as the foundation for a huge center chimney. Seven fireplaces throughout the house connect onto this center chimney. The kitchen cellar also has a fireplace.

When Isaac married he chose to stay on the homestead, and inherited it when his father passed away. He and his wife spent their lives there, and brought up their two children there.

Isaac Newton, born in 1831, married Elmira Guptill of Limerick in May, 1856.

Isaac Newton also had a sister, Abigail Hamilton Deering.

Besides carrying on the farm operations, Isaac built a joiner shop located beside the red building and the carriage house. In this shop he started a barrel shuck business and hauled these hoops to Portland with a pair of oxen. Carriages were kept underneath this building. In later years the shop was used mainly for carpentry.

Cousins of the family started a lumber company, and located a saw mill in East Waterboro near Bartlett Pond.

When Maine and Massachusetts separated in 1820, state law required that geography and English grammar be taught as well as reading, writing, and arithmetic. This now required new teachers, among the first of whom was Isaac Deering.

Isaac Deering was the first teacher in School No. 8. Known today as simply the Little Red Schoolhouse, it is located just down the road from the farm at the edge of a vast rectangular field. Bushes have grown around it, hiding it from view; the building is slowly falling down due to the neglect.

Isaac was also very active in politics. He was in the State House of Representatives from 1839 to 1842. He was elected to the State Senate and served in 1844 and 1845. He was appointed Justice of the Peace. The house was often the site of marriage ceremonies of many a happy couple.

Before Isaac died in 1871, he deeded the property over to his son, Isaac Newton.

Isaac N. and his wife, mentioned earlier, also spent their lives on the homestead. Their seven children were brought up on the farm.

Howard Sumner, their first son, was born on August 6, 1857. He attended Dartmouth and Eidelberg Universities. He became a prominent doctor in Boston. He married Cora Chadbourne of Waterboro.

Estella and Sara Louella, twins, were born January 15, 1859. Estella never married and taught school. Louella married Edward F. Burnham. They had three children.

Abram Lincoln was born March 11, 1861. He married Mary Nowell, a teacher from Providence, Rhode Island.

Arthur Newton, born August 7, 1862, married Sarah Libby and had four children.

Lillian Abigail, born April 2, 1865, taught school in Hudson, New Hampshire.

The youngest child, Marcia, was born June 3, 1867. She married Dr. Henry Smith and had one son.

During Isaac Newton's time four or five pair of oxen and over one hundred head of cattle were kept on the farm. One hundred acres of hay were harvested.

Isaac N. raised the roof of the house and rebuilt it into a two and one-half story structure, making the total number of rooms sixteen. He also built the present barns, one which has since fallen down, and two other shops across the road.

The huge barn attached to the stable stored corn silage on its top floor. This silo, the first of its type in the area, showed the progressiveness of the Deering clan. The animals, excluding the horses, were housed in this barn. To the left back of the house was also built a haybarn used exclusively for the storage of hay.

Across the road beside the joiner shop a carriage house and the red building were constructed. The red building, filled with corn, had to be packed down by a horse. This corn was important feed for the milk cows. On the second floor of this building dry lumber was stored.

The carriage house, besides housing the surrey, carry-all, or buggy, also had a slaughter house with a windlass with hooks and ropes to hang up beef, hogs, and veal. There was a large boiler to hold water. The middle floor was used to flail out the bean harvest. The partly open second floor was used mainly for the storage of beehives, paint equipment, etc. The basement opened in the rear with a big double door. Inside was a complete blacksmith shop. There was a forge for coal and a bellows for heating the iron work. Also handy were an anvil and a vice to hold heavy work was bolted to a plank bench. The grindstone, was used to sharpen hand scythes, axes, and later, cutter blades for the mowing machines.

Isaac Newton served in the 61st Legislature in 1882. He was appointed high sheriff of York County, and also served as collector for a number of years. In the Town Report of 1881 it is written that he was paid \$5.68 for collecting taxes.

A business Block in Saco Was also owned Isaac N., Ezekial, and Joseph Deering.

The Deering women were known for their thriftiness and industriousness. They braided straw; spun, wove, and dyed cloth for bedding and clothing; and made soap and maple sugar. Fruits and vegetables were preserved and stored in the cellar. They were interested in education and religion. Many of the Deering women, as mentioned earlier, taught school.

The men were good cattlemen as well as lumbermen. They were politically-minded, hard working, and venturesome.

The Deering's were known for their hospitality. During Isaac Newton's time the table was usually set for from fifteen to twenty people and always loaded with food. They welcomed everyone into their home, and never accepted money for their generosity. It was never known how many could be expected at mealtime or how many beds would be occupied.

"Life on Deering's Ridge was complete-- everyone busy, happy, and interested."⁴

The golden age of the Ridge was reached between 1880 and 1900.

When Isaac Newton died on November 26, 1895 in Saco, the farm was taken over by his son, A. Lincoln Deering.

He kept the one hundred head of cattle and the eight to ten oxen. He also bought a few mules and work horses to help with the daily tasks. The crops were still planted and harvested and the fields still hayed as they had been two generations before him. Seven or eight men were hired to help with the work. Wages consisted of \$1.00 a day plus board.

Bees were kept on the farm. Potatoes were grown in among the orchard trees in back of the big barn. At various times blackberries and plums were also raised. A. Lincoln is said to have had one of the first peach orchards in the area. Their apples were pressed to produce cider. Many times A. Lincoln's sons loaded a wagon with these goods and sold them in markets in Biddeford or Portland.

The milk was sold to H. P. Hood. A. Lincoln had his own cooling system for the milk and a cream separator. Butter was churned on the farm and sold in Biddeford stores.

The Deerings were also known for their breed of horses. They were tough little strains, nicely bred, and partly Morgan. It is said that they were offered large sums for these horses.

A spring was opened up and a large spring house and windmill were built down in back of the carriage house. Water was pumped up to the house and the barn.

A. Lincoln became an ice merchant. He first started his operation on Bartlett Pond. He made quite a considerable amount of money, for the times, in this business. He then branched out to the Kennebec River and located his operation in Richmond. A crew of one hundred men was hired. Large ice houses rested upon the river's banks.

Strips of ice were marked out and then scored crosswise. Fifty foot lengths were cut off. These were moved through open water toward a conveyor where men with a spade-ended crowbar split off each block. These blocks were carried up to a chute leading to the ice house where they were

stored in sawdust.

The harvested ice was loaded in spring or early summer. Six and seven masted schooners were chartered to carry the ice to various ports. Usually it was shipped to cities along the eastern coast. There was one exception, however, the last shipment was taken to South America.

Deering's business was so prosperous that a main office was established in Boston. The invention of the artificial ice machine did away with the profits of this business. The demand for harvested ice slackened and eventually the business was done away completely.

During the period as a successful ice merchant, extensive farming took place back at the farm. With the profits from the ice A. Lincoln purchased farm machinery which lessened the labor. Thus, more acreage could be planted in the spring season with a better yeild per acre. He is said to have had the first modern machinery for miles around.

This machinery consisted of a hay tedder, two hay forks, and a hay press with a shaft and a horse pressed the hay together by going around in a circle. The corn harvester bundled the corn, tied it up, and dropped it behind. The bundles were thrown onto a jigger and hauled up to the barn where someone was hired to cut them up. A carry-all took the cut corn up into the silo. A potato planter and a potato digger that sifted out the dirt was also put into use. A sulky plow, a manure spreader, cultivator, and a barrel-type sprayer for spraying the orchards, potatoes, and corn were also in operation.

Over the shed yellow corn was placed on racks to dry. The corn served as food for the chickens, horses, and hogs. Bins in this part of the shed were filled with oats. Because of its scarcity, wheat was raised and stored here during World War I.

Since no one in the area shoed oxen, an ox shoeing compartment was put into use in the blacksmith shop. A windlass with foot wide heavy leather belts suspended on chains hung from the heavy beams. After this was fastened under the

ox's belly, he was then lifted up and shoed. Because the Deering shop was the only one available for miles, area farmers came to have their oxen shoed in this fashion.

During this period the homestead came to be known as "Royal Oak Farm." These oaks on the farm were cut off for ship timber at the time of World War I.

Abram Lincoln and Mary Deering had two sons, Noel Webster and Roger Lincoln. Both were born in the house on the Ridge, Roger Lincoln being the last Deering born there.

Mary taught at the schoolhouse, mentioned earlier, the last three years it was open. She was paid \$8.00 on a weekly basis and taught approximately fifteen students. Many of the Deering children, from the first day the schoolhouse doors opened until the last day that they closed, received some education there.

The operation of the farm continued until about 1930. A. Lincoln and his sons plus the hired help kept it running. Work persisted from sunup until past sundown. The boys had chores to tend to every morning beforeboarding the train at Westcott Station in East Waterboro for Portland where they attended Deering High School. When they returned there were always jobs waiting to be done.

The farm started to decline when A. Lincoln fell ill and died four years later. The oldest son, Noel, was away at college and later attended law school. Roger, still in high school and on his way to becoming a successful artist, and his mother tried as best they could to keep the farm running. The odds were against them and money was needed, so the stock was sold.

Roger Deering and his mother moved into Portland while Noel Deering went on to Massachusetts to become an attorney.

For a number of years they returned during the summer months and remained residents of the town until around 1940.

Since that time many of the fields have once again become wooded. Various surrounding farmers, including my father, have made use of the

fields to save them from growing in. The hay barn and red building are gone. The house windows and doors are boarded up to discourage prowlers and parts of the stable and barn are beyond repair.

The Deerings were examples of the true breed of self-sufficient pioneers. Through "good old Yankee ingenuity" and hard work they transformed the dense forest into the beautiful stand buildings seen at its peak in the late 1800's. Of course, hardships were frequent and the labor of each day sometimes lasted long into the night. However, they took it all in stride and still found time to enjoy life.

Today many of the Deerings have passed away while others have moved away--gone elsewhere to seek their fame and fortune. Many of the buildings still stand--the two and one-half story house, the original barn (now a stable), the magnificent barn, and the dilapidated carriage house and joiner shop across the road--but need to be restored. The other buildings have either fallen down or are obscured by trees and bushes.

What is there now is all that remains of days gone by. One can only hope that these are saved before they too are overcome by the weathering of time.

FOOTNOTES

¹Although the spelling "Deering" was used in various sources, I could not determine, through my research, when or why the spelling was changed. Perhaps at one time it became expedient to alter the spelling to "Deering." Therefore, throughout this paper "Deering" will be used for the sake of continuity and for the lack of confusion.

²Pioneer Days on Deering's Ridge, Kelley, Mary Carpenter, 1933, pg. 5.

³Ibid, pgs. 8-9.

⁴Ibid, pg. 14.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Kelley, Mary Carpenter, "Pioneer Days on Deering's Ridge", 1933. This article was also published in the Portland Sunday Telegram And Sunday Press, Portland, Maine, March 26, 1933.

Knights, Ernest G., Waterboro, York County, 1768-1955.

Interviews with the following:

Roger L. Deering
Kennebunkport, Maine

Clinton and Dorothy Wakefield
East Waterboro, Maine

RAFFLE WINNERS

Edith Heck, Blue Seal Feeds, 15.00 Gift Certificate. Joseph Montario, Milk Room, 2 large Pizzas. Lorraine Woodward, David Seafood, \$10.00 Gift Certificate. Frances Winslow, Waterboro Superette, \$15.00 Gift Certificate. Bill Pierce, Brunettes Rest., \$10.00 Gift Certificate. Nancy Spence, Lee's Dairy Curl, Mouse Door Stop. Leonard Walliston, Lee's Dairy Curl, Free Clam Dinner. Bill Pierce, Ossipee Florist, Silk Flower Arrang. Leonard Walliston, Moody's Corner Store, 2 large Cheese Pizzas. Lorraine Woodward, Peppercorn Rest., \$10.00 Gift Certificate.

QUILT INFORMATION

Mrs. Edith Rowe Ryder of North Weymouth, Mass. donated an autographed quilt made by the Ladies Aide of Blaisdell Baptist Church in 1936 and won by her mother, Mrs. Robert (Edith) Bluntner at a penny sale in 1937. Mrs. Bluntner now is 81 yrs. old and has Alzheimer's and she cannot recall the quilt so her daughter gave it to the Historical Society.

ITEMS OF INTEREST

The first town meeting held in Waterboro was at the dwelling house of Capt. John Smith, innholder, April 5, 1787, and chose William Bean Moderator. Town officers elected were Benjamin Warren, Clerk; James Carlisle, Andrew Burley and William Bean, Selectmen and Assessors; Nathaniel Maines, Treasurer; James Hamilton, Capt. John Smith, Nicholas Carpenter, Clement Moody, Joseph Sanborn, Thomas Gubtail, Lieut. Simeon Tibbetts and John Bridges, Surveyors or Highways.

At a meeting held Sept. 19, 1791, it was voted "that it was expedient to build a court-house at the 'crotch', near Phineas Colcord's, by subscription." Soon after the court-house was built on the spot where the transformer station now stands. The courts were removed to Alfred in 1895 and the buildings sold in 1806.

In 1780, Samuel Dan, of Durham, N. H., settled a mile south of Old Corner and opened the first public house for the accomodation of lumbermen and teamsters on their way to and from the coast.

Town elections were held alternately at Capt. Smith's inn and at Jeremiah Brown's near the county road, from 1787 to 1793, when they were changed to the "Upper Court House", at the Old Corner. In 1794 they were held at the Baptist meeting house, in the south part of the town, near the court house, and at Mr Brown's; in 1801 at the inn of Samuel Dam; and after 1807 at Rev. Henry Hobbs meeting house; on Ossipee Hill, until it became dilapidated in 1852, when they alternated with "the Scratch Bridge", on (Little Ossipee.) They were transferred to the present polling place in 1857, Sept. 14.

Taken from Twice Told Tales, by Ernest G. Knights, 1955.

MEMORIAL CHAIRS

In order to furnish the upstairs meeting room the society is selling chairs. These chairs will remain in the building and will have a brass plate affixed denoting that the chair was bought in memory of John Doe. If anyone is interested in purchasing a chair the cost is \$30. This may be remitted to:

Edith Pierce
Box 46
North Waterboro ME 04061

Remember to include how you wish to have the brass plate inscribed.

Examples: In Memory of John Doe Given by
John Doe 1850-1900 John Doe

MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

If you are interested in joining the Waterborough Historical Society, please clip and nail the following:

WATERBOROUGH HISTORICAL SOCIETY MEMBERSHIP FORM

NAME: _____

ADDRESS: _____

PHONE: _____

Membership: \$5.00 per year,
Life Membership \$25.00

Mail to:
Edith Pierce
Box 46
North Waterboro ME 04061

HELP WANTED

If the newsletter is to continue for many more publications new material is needed. If you have a short or long article you think would be of interest to the readership please send it to James Carll, Box 326, North Waterboro, ME 04061. Such things as newly found cemeteries, old ledger items, short genealogies, genealogical inquiries, histories of buildings, areas of town, businesses, ect, would be appreciated.
