

Introduction

This little book on the history of Easton grew out of a collection of pamphlets produced for the Recreation Commission's Labor Day Field Day three years ago. The Historical Society in an effort to promote neighborhood awareness decided to hand out flyers on Easton's ten neighborhoods. The number ten was arrived at somewhat arbitrarily, but these neighborhoods roughly parallel the school districts established in the 1850's. Whether the pamphlets promoted neighborhood awareness or not, they were popular enough to cause the Easton Historical Commission to suggest to the Historical Society that they be expanded as part of the town's tercentennial celebration of the first European settlement.

I readily accepted the challenge of turning one to two page pamphlets into four page chapters due to an expected year's layoff. A basic stipulation was that the book would be based solely on written material in the Historical Society's archives and on volumes one and two of the *History of Easton*. Over the course of the next eighteen months reality set in. First, the expected layoff did not occur, and second, as individual chapters were completed, they were passed around for comment which invariably led to the statement "You ought to talk to so and so." Thus, the chapters began to grow into something other than what was originally intended.

The book you have in front of you is not a definitive history of Easton. It is an idiosyncratic collection of essays based on my own personal interests with no attempt to be all inclusive. My interests can be summed up in a few sentences. First, the most important insight in this collection is the recognition of the major role our streams and brooks played in the development of the town. Chaffin in his magnificent *History of Easton* was so consumed by saving everything from our town's past that he never told why things happened; my small volume suggests that much of what happened in Easton can be explained by the people's interaction with the environment.

Second, being an ordinary man who came to live on a farm in Easton at age twelve, I seem to have an affinity for remembering ordinary men, farms, and everyday life. I am fascinated by the similarities and differences of life then and now and have included as much of this material as possible.

Third, while not in sympathy with the current vogue for political correctness, I do believe that women and minorities have played a much larger role in Easton's life than is generally recognized. Thus, while dependent on sources that downplayed these groups, I have tried to dust off a few stories to remind people that more than white Anglo-Saxon Protestant males lived in Easton. More research needs to be done!

Fourth, I have tried to preserve whatever ghost stories I have come across as they represent the last faint trickle of the rich folktale tradition of early New England. I do not necessarily subscribe to the "Bridgewater Triangle" theory of contemporary parapsychologists, but after the "big cat" scare, rampaging wild pigs, and reports of a bird large enough to carry off dogs (if only Yorkshire Terriers) one never knows!

Finally, I have probably fallen into the fallacy of nostalgic boosterism. While I have mentioned thieves, anti-Catholic sentiments, teenaged rowdies, bums, and the Ku Klux Klan, my feeling is that at any point in the story Easton was somewhat worse than the picture I paint. It is dangerous for biographers to fall in love with their subject, and I suppose that goes for historians as well. Chaffin too, seems to have been touched by this affliction. While noting that many of Easton's gravestone inscriptions could be called "monumental falsehoods," he did his best to promote his adopted home.

With all that said, why should anyone bother to write another history of Easton especially one that is not an all-inclusive creation of some committee of experts? Quite simply, I worked for twenty years in a nearby town that forgot the accomplishments of ordinary people in building a living community. With that forgetting came a decline in community institutions and a feeling that the town was only a place to hang your hat not live a life. I wrote this collection in hopes that young people and newcomers reading it would feel more connected to their neighborhoods and to their town. Walking through my own neighborhood after completing its chapter gave me a new appreciation of what had gone on there and what my own small part was in it. If just a few more people take a walk, talk to their neighbors and appreciate that they are the stewards of centuries-old traditions, then perhaps this book has served a purpose.

Bibliographic Essay and Acknowledgments

Too many people have written about Easton, and they have all done a better job than I could ever hope to! At least that is the feeling one gets in the presence of the many people who have taken the history of Easton for their text.

While some historical articles by D. C. Lillie appeared in the original Easton Bulletin around and after the mid-Nineteenth Century, the first historian still widely available to the general public is William Chaffin and his *History of Easton* published in 1886. The work is both indispensable and seemingly inexhaustible. Chaffin became the minister of the Unitarian Church in 1868 and continued in that position until 1914. Based on extensive research in town, county and state records, Chaffin also drew on a series of aged informants around the town. It is considered to be one of the finest Massachusetts local histories to be published in the Nineteenth Century. Today, thanks to the Historical Society and the Police Association, it is still in print at a low price. Even a casual reader of Chaffin and this present book will note my dependence on the master for much of my text. Quotations in my text not attributed to a specific author are almost invariably from Chaffin. What I hope I have achieved are the recovery of some interesting stories from some of his more obscure chapters and a rearrangement of his information to show patterns of neighborhood development.

Chaffin worked to the standards of a modern historian making it easy to trace his research and examine his sources, but like all historians he had personal and cultural biases which limited his work. For instance, his book generally answers the questions who, what, where and when, but not why things happened. Chaffin also did not share the modern genealogy buff's belief that a great grandfather who was a horse thief was an interesting thing to brag about. Thus, he suppressed any ancestral deeds that might reflect poorly on people living in his time. While perhaps justified in the case of criminal activities, this reticence sorely distorted the history of the Revolutionary War in Easton by downplaying the role of Tories.

Also, probably in the interest of saving space, Chaffin only detailed industrial development in Easton while rarely discussing commercial establishments. Aside from occasional disapproving glances inside taverns, Chaffin also neglects recreation entirely. He was not particularly clear on political history especially in the years preceding the Civil War, and finally, like most of his contemporaries, he focused too much attention on men. With all that said, there would be no history of Easton and probably no Easton Historical Society without the astonishingly detailed work of William Chaffin.

In writing this book, I rediscovered the work of a younger contemporary of Chaffin, Heman Howard (1865-1940). Howard published an outstanding genealogy of the Howard

Family which contained a large amount of historical material on Easton. He also produced several scrapbooks of information. One of these in the possession of the Historical Society details old homes with Howard associations. Since Howards lived all over Easton, the scrapbook proved invaluable for many neighborhoods in my book. Based on Chaffin's study, Howard used his own research and family traditions to expand our knowledge of town history. Howard's research and working experience at J. O. Dean Company provided most of my information on our oldest business. Howard's writing was the finest and most extensive of any local historian in the period from Chaffin to the present generation of active researchers.

Heman Howard's brother George also wrote an interesting pamphlet on the family homestead in the Howard Neighborhood which I have quoted extensively. Heman's grandsons Robert and John and great grandson "Skip" Howard continue the family's interest in history today.

For the Hayward family two authors stand out. The first was George Washington Hayward whose address for the family reunion of 1878 is an important source. Edward B. Hayward, another younger contemporary of Chaffin, also wrote a manuscript which is well researched and indispensable for any student of this family's neighborhood.

In the Twentieth Century many of Easton's finest historians wrote little. One of these was Walter Hatch of Washington Street who searched out and explored old sites, and willingly shared his information with younger researchers. Gus Winroth, a popular antiques dealer from Stoughton who retired to Easton, also had many stories about the town. The greatest of these essentially oral historians was Clifford "Kippy" Grant. Kippy was an avid trapper and woodsman who clearly saw the connection between land use and history. His explorations, especially in the western part of town, rediscovered much that would have been lost. An expert researcher at the Registry of Deeds and a superb amateur paleontologist, Kippy understood the full sweep of Easton's history. It is tragic that he did not write his version of the history of our town.

Enis Almquist has been a major oral source of information on Swedish immigrants and North Easton in general. Using her knowledge of Swedish she has made sources available that otherwise would have been neglected. A former member of the Historical Commission, she has done much to promote and preserve the Swedish heritage of Easton.

Willis Buck, like his contemporaries, has published little, but like Kippy Grant he has always been a major source of information for anyone willing to listen. Mr. Buck also was one of the founding members of the first Easton Historical Society. His taped remembrances and contributions to the Historical Society newsletters were important sources for me as was an article by his sister Anna Buck.

Two undated typescripts, probably from the time of the first Easton Historical Society, by Neubert Morse and Rebecca Flandreau provided additional information on industry in general and Furnace Village in particular.

That first Historical Society in turn seems to have stimulated what have come to be called "The Green Flyer Articles." *The Green Flyer* was a local paper of the 1950's and early 1960's which published a long series of historical articles focusing on old buildings. These long neglected articles by such fine writers as John Kent and Ruth Mackenzie Smith have been an important source for me.

Two contemporaries have been invaluable sources of inspiration and information in all my historical work. The first is Duncan Oliver. As the original newsletter editor for the re-established Easton Historical Society, Duncan gathered much of the best material used in this book. He also stimulated others, including myself, to write for the newsletter

and those efforts have been used as well. Duncan is the leading expert on Furnace Village and Bay Road history and has done much to get the stories of Kippy Grant into print. His research on such diverse topics as Abraham Lincoln and Cape Cod houses is illuminating and original. His encouragement of all my historical projects has been greatly appreciated, and his efforts to read and re-read drafts of this paper were far above the call of duty.

The second contemporary who has devoted many hours to this project is Hazel Varella. After Chaffin, Hazel is the most important figure in Easton's historical tradition. Her efforts to re-establish the Historical Society and make local history a part of the school curriculum were vital in laying the foundation for the current boom of historical interest. Her long service on the Historical Commission has both promoted historical awareness and preserved many landmark buildings. An outstanding educator, Hazel is also a superb historical researcher. Working with her on this project has made it very clear to me that her knowledge of Easton's history is unsurpassed. Aside from making cogent suggestions for further research or providing the answer to particularly difficult historical mysteries, Hazel has struggled mightily to bring my unorthodox punctuation and capitalization under control. Any errors that remain are monuments to the vastness of the problem and my ability to revise faster than she can reread!

Ken Jackson followed Duncan Oliver and myself as editor of the newsletter and added much that was of use in this book. His efforts to record stories by people who grew up in Easton, particularly North Easton, around the turn of the century are especially important and should be continued for people of subsequent generations. Ken is also the leading expert on Easton's Nineteenth and early Twentieth Century doctors and a gifted tour leader who has probably "turned on" more people to Easton's heritage than any other.

Many names of people who contributed to this book are mentioned in the text, but I would like to give special thanks to the following people. As curators of the Easton Historical Society Dorothy and Paul Berry have provided me with documents and suggestions that were vital to this work. Paul's interest in photography has created one of the finest local history photo archives in the area. Paul and Dot selected the photographs that appear in each chapter. Dot Berry's own recollections were invaluable in the chapter on Unionville.

Janet Andrus, Jean Shearing, and the amazing Esther Anderson form a remarkable team at the Town Clerk's office. These intrepid ladies helped solve the most arcane genealogical puzzles in this book.

Rose Buck of Center Stage produced a series of audiotape interviews that are very important sources of oral history. Walter Swanson provided information on Indians and assistance at the Town Offices. Ed White wrote a fine piece on Simpson Springs which was important in the South Easton chapter. Leon Lombardi provided information on his own family and the Rankin family which enriched the agricultural history in this book. Bob Vogel, the leading expert on the Pool family of instrument makers, was always willing to discuss areas of mutual interest.

At Stonehill Professor Chet Raymo generously gave time to explore the geological history of Easton and Louise Kenneally gave assistance in searching the Ames Papers. Her husband Professor James Kenneally was the source of most of my information on Anna C. and Blanche Ames and their efforts towards securing the vote for women.

Frank Mennino, an outstanding researcher, suggested significant changes in the chapters on Furnace Village and Poquanticut and completely revised my views on

Clement Briggs. John Kent and Charles Willis answered many questions. Elmer Harlow helped extensively with questions regarding Easton Furnace and cemeteries. Mr. Harlow and his fellow Cemetery Commission members are preserving an irreplaceable part of Easton's heritage. Herrick and Virginia Hollis read and suggested changes in the Hayward-Pool chapter. Helen Kyse, a fine genealogist, uncovered much lost material about the Manley family including pages of Chaffin's notes for his unfinished *Genealogical History of Easton*. Edgar Craig, Jr. helped with the Poquanticut chapter. Agnes Wiedemann was an important source on Swedish immigrants and North Easton. David Varella provided information on the Portuguese in Easton and many other subjects as well. Bob Babineau, Wayne Southworth, Anthony Gomes, Carl Johnson and William Holland helped with a great deal of information on several neighborhoods.

A word of thanks should also be given to two former teachers at Oliver Ames High School, Willis K. Smith and Robert "Buddy" Wooster, for inspiration and basic skills. Professor Jane Herrick of Bridgewater State College instilled in me a sense of the historical craft along with a number of horror stories about historians who researched forever and never published. Special thanks should also go to Olivia Luke and Mae and Al Brooks for their encouragement of a young person new to the Easton Historical Society in the 1970's.

Karl West and William Milhomme of Foxborough and George Yell of Norton have added their expertise to this project.

The Easton Police deserve special thanks for not arresting me during my repeated slow drive-bys of innumerable houses and dawn patrols of various cemeteries.

Many others have made suggestions or offered information; thank you very much for your assistance!

Every effort has been made to prevent errors in this text, but certainly some must have crept in. Errors of omission are inevitable in a book with a very precise focus. Many suggestions have been made to include this or that person or event, and some have been added if they provided flavor to the story of a neighborhood. Others such as doctors, police and firefighters did not fit neatly into neighborhoods and were neglected here. The same apology can be made for events that affected all parts of town in the same way such as the Civil War or World War II. The historical record of Easton is so rich that many books can be written about it. Perhaps the most important of these unwritten books would focus on Easton in the Depression and World War II, an era in danger of being lost from historical memory.

Errors of interpretation serve to stimulate more research and the pleasure of historical discussion. Discovering those rare points where Chaffin had taken a wrong turn due to insufficient information and excessive speculation was a real pleasure. My interpretation of the place of our small textile mills in the larger Industrial Revolution in America is also speculative and open to the challenge of further research.

Errors of fact are the most inexcusable and should be eliminated as quickly as possible.

Thankfully, this book exists in another form than the one before you. A computer disk, unlike the printed page, can always be made fresh with each new bit of information. I would like to challenge you, the reader, to add your views, ideas, facts, and stories to that computer disk, and a future second edition of this work.

