

WIGWAM HILL & MENDON TOWN FOREST

This history is dedicated to the memory of Shirley Smith whose drive and commitment to the project has made the Town Forest, as it is today, possible.



Early Years-Mendon is Born

The town was incorporated in 1667 (2 dates are shown on the seal). In September 1662, after the deed was signed with the Native American chief, "Great John"* the pioneers entered this part of what is now southern Worcester County. An earlier, unofficial, settlement occurred here in the 1640s, by pioneers from Roxbury. In 1662, Squinshepauke Plantation was started at the Netmocke Settlement and Plantation or Netmocke Plantation as shown on the town's seal. It was incorporated as the town of Mendon in 1667. It was named after the town of Mendham, Suffolk, England and bore that name until changed, intentionally or accidentally, by the General Court at the time of the town's incorporation. The settlers were ambitious and set about clearing the roads that would mark settlement patterns throughout the town's history.

*Mendon still possesses this deed which is kept in a safe at the town hall.

The Mendon Town Forest Story



A Google earth satellite map of the Town Forest shows the bulk of the heavily forested area and adjacent properties. It is located off Millville Road in the south-western corner of Mendon near the Millville & Uxbridge town lines. A neighboring property and popular tourist attraction is Southwick's Zoo. The fire tower, indicated on the map, is the highest point on Wigwam Hill. The large rock, carved by J. F. Taft in 1876, is not far from the tower. Other sites could not be identified even during the winter months due to the heavy pine-covered foliage.

What's In A Name?

Wigwam Hill is highest point in the Town Forest. The name “Wigwam” for this hill, and the nearby brook, has caused some confusion as to its origins. According to the Annals of Mendon from 1659-1880 by Dr. John Metcalf, Caleb’s Hill was so called because Caleb the Indian, the last genuine Indian (a/k/a Native American) to whom the town paid bounties for killing wolves, had his *wigwam* there. One example, from Dr. Metcalf’s history mentions that in the year 1669 the town “ordered then that the assessment be made for 40s (schillings) to pay Caleb the Indian for killing the woulfe [sic] near the town.”

Some accounts claim he lived on Wigwam Hill and its being *referred* to as Caleb’s Hill, however Dr. Metcalf lists Wigwam and Caleb’s as being two different hills (see figure 1). In addition, according to Nason and Varney’s Massachusetts Gazetteer, 1890 pp. 455-456; Caleb’s Hill was also named Inman Hill. So this confirms Caleb’s wigwam was on Caleb’s Hill or what is known today as Inman Hill.

The origin of the name Wigwam Hill was, according to Milford Daily Journal, August 14, 1897 “This hill takes its name from being the last place a genuine Indian lived in a wigwam.”

The earliest inhabitants of what is now the Town Forest were the Native American Nipmucs. *Nipmuc* means "small pond place" or "people of the fresh waters". It is thought they used the hilltops to communicate with each other by smoke as they afforded unobstructed views for miles.





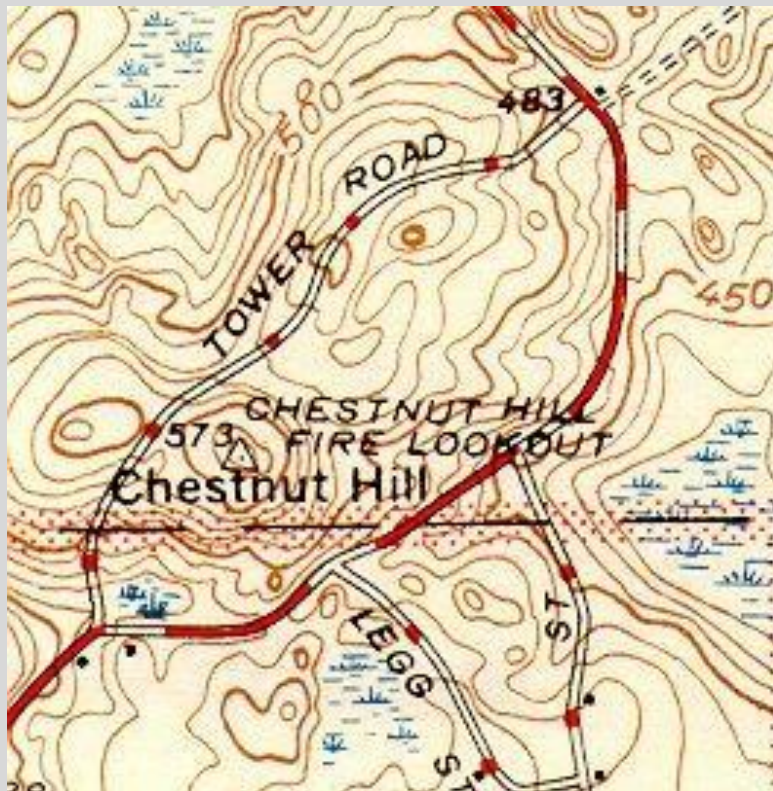
We do not know of the existence of a picture of the last wigwam on Wigwam Hill. This photo provided by Geocaching member Jim Mooney (Tribe Moon) shows one which would have been similar with its primitive, yet very picturesque construction.

Please be aware: The Town of Mendon and its representative, the Town Forest Committee, ask visitors to respect the natural beauty and history of the forest. Please leave any artifacts where they are found. They can provide a historical record of time which will be lost if they are removed. Please take items brought into the forest back out with you when you leave. We are proud of the Town Forest and hope you will treat it as if it belongs to you, because it does. Your tax dollars made this possible. Thank you and we hope you enjoy your visit and will return often.

“Woodland Thompson [was] the first [white] proprietor and settler on Wigwam Hill” (from New England Families Genealogical and Memorial- (the full title is in the footnotes at the end). He was born in Mendon in 1681 and probably lived on Wigwam Hill some time around the beginning of the 1700’s.

The land was taken as tax title property in 1934 for failure of the former owner, Charles L. Robinson of Providence, R. I. to pay the taxes due in the amount of \$63.29. The Town voted to convert the tax title property to a Town Forest under Mass. General Law, Chapters 132 & 143, Sections 35, in 1944. The total acreage acquired was approximately 120 acres +/- which includes the area known as Wigwam Hill.* Another 2.5 acres is located across Millville Road (on the east side of the street) recorded as lot 210.

*Wigwam Hill has also been called Chestnut Hill and is still so named on some maps.



USGS Topographic Quadrangle Map Blackstone, Mass. from the 1944 (left) and 1982.

The deed records of the town forest property & portions beginning with Nathaniel Taft.

Prior to his ownership it is difficult to determine parcels of land due to the methods used to record land boundaries during these early years (rocks, trees, fences and so on). So there is a gap in ownership listed on the chart from Woodland Thompson to Nathaniel Taft.

Town Forest

From	To	Date	Book/Page	Notes
Nathaniel Taft	Thompson Taft	11/09/1825	000257/337	Nathaniel Taft, father of Thompson Taft left him 1/9th of the property
Nathaniel Taft	Heirs: Taft siblings & others	11/09/1825		The remaining property was divided amongst this group.
The Heirs	Thompson Taft	c.12/08/1827		The remaining portion of the property was purchased by Thompson from the other heirs.
Thompson Taft, Jr.	Austin Wood	07/13/1868	000775/094	Mortgage deed—Thompson Taft, Sr. died in 1862 and Thompson, Jr. became the property owner.
Austin Wood	Noah Willard	04/10/1891	001347/473	Mortgage deed
Noah Willard	Elizabeth S. Robinson	02/08/1892	001370/437	Mortgage deed
Thompson Taft, Jr.	Elizabeth S. Robinson	04/13/1892	001378/091	Foreclosure—This was shortly before his death in 1896.
Elizabeth S. Robinson	William O. Burdon	03/05/1900	001641/359	
William O. Burdon	James Ellis	03/05/1900	001641/360	Lease

William O. Burdon	Jennie J, Ellis Nellie M. Ellis	03/05/1900	001641/361	Deed
Jennie J, Ellis Nellie M. Ellis	Charles H. Robinson	03/05/1900	001641/363	Mortgage deed
Jennie J, Ellis Nellie M. Ellis	Lillian T. Ellis Mary Frances Ellis	12/25/1900	001675/021	One undivided half-interest
John E. Sullivan Jennie J. (Ellis) Sullivan Nellie M. Ellis Thomas J. Middleton Lillian T. (Ellis) Middleton Herbert A. Gillman Mary Frances (Ellis) Gillman	Charles H. Robinson	03/04/1906	001849/211	
Charles H. Robinson	Charles L. Robinson	01/09/1909	001896/254	
Charles L. Robinson	County of Worcester	08/09/1932	002570/386	Relocation of Millville Road; Plan Book 72 Page 5
Charles L. Robinson	Town of Mendon	08/13/1934	002617/258	Taken for non-payment of taxes.

The history of the early years of what is now the Mendon Town Forest is taken from an article by Albert E. Jones, “Wigwam Hill” from The...Transcript, 1904 or 1905.

“The fast disappearing ‘virgin people of the soil’ may have looked with meditative eye from the hill on a goodly sweep of the heritage that would forever pass from the keeping of a people whose memory the name by which the hill is known helps to perpetuate. Looking westward from the hill no church spire, then could be seen. Years were to pass before down in the valley, upon the banks of the never failing stream, the first tall chimney marking the coming of the first of many ‘captains of industry’ to follow denoting the beginning of an industry in the (Blackstone) valley that was to make for the development of communities and for the happiness and prosperity of their people ‘scores of neat farm houses dotting the country (side). Looking to the north and north-east the spires and chimneys of distant towns and villages can be seen. The view from the north and north-east is certainly as grand as it is to the westward.

After the Industrial Revolution became established in the valley, the villages of Whitinsville, North Uxbridge, Uxbridge Center, the Woolen Mills, the long line of the Uxbridge Hills and the 3 rivers that wind through those towns could be viewed to the west from the top of Wigwam Hill. A score of neat farm houses which dotted the countryside and the blue peaks of Wachusett and Monadnock mountains could also be seen in the distance. For a long time the hill was popular as a picnic ground. Sunday school parties and other parties frequently visiting it and remaining the whole day.

Today (1904/05) very few people go here but, time was when the place was frequently visited and it is well worth a visit from anyone who enjoys looking at long stretches of landscape, immensity of blue sky, and a horizon far removed. Lovers of glorious perspectives beautiful to look upon often times go considerable distances to enjoy vistas, yet how many of them have taken the time to visit the locality which the words at the head of this paper (Wigwam Hill), long ago uttered by eloquent lips were often spoken.”

The author makes a point about Wigwam Hill (the future town forest) became nearly unknown to locals around the turn of the 20th century and this lasted, with a few exceptions, up until recently when it was improved and is becoming known to the public.



Figure 1: The area around Wigwam Hill from an 1831 map of Mendon includes the road over the hill built over 100 years earlier.

Tower Road is Built and Nearly a Century Later a New Road Replacing it is Accepted by the Town.

“In 1726 a 3-rod way (1 rod= 5 ½ yards or 16 ½ feet or 3 rods = 49 ½ feet) was laid out from the Arnold Taft place over Wigwam Hill ... to John Darling’s at Millville (the 2 red “x’s” indicate the beginning and ending of the old road). Also on the map is Caleb’s Hill, mentioned earlier, (at the top center). The home of Thompson Taft also appears on Wigwam Hill along what is now Tower Road. Below the line which bisects the map is what was known as the South Parish section of Mendon and is now the town of Millville.

Albert E. Jones continues; “On May 28, 1870 the Town voted to accept a road (Millville Road) laid out on Wigwam Hill northerly from the house of Nathaniel Taft and running easterly to intersect with the road from Mendon to Millville (then part of the town of Blackstone) and to discontinue that part of the road over Wigwam Hill (now called Tower Road) lying northerly of the point of beginning of the above new road” Also shown on the map are a shingle and saw mill across Millville Rd. owned by Arnold Taft located in what is now in Woods Estates. A road which ran south split off at the beginning of and paralleled the new road and which gave access to the mills and points in Blackstone no longer exists. The “Dam Swamp” refers to the swampy area where the mills were located and a dam was constructed to supply water power to run the machinery (see figure 2).

Millville Road exists to this day and several years ago the town voted to accept Tower Road once again. The section located in Mendon is, however, unimproved and not recommended for vehicle access (photos below).



The photo at right shows trail damage, which has to be repaired, caused by those vehicles which can navigate the road.

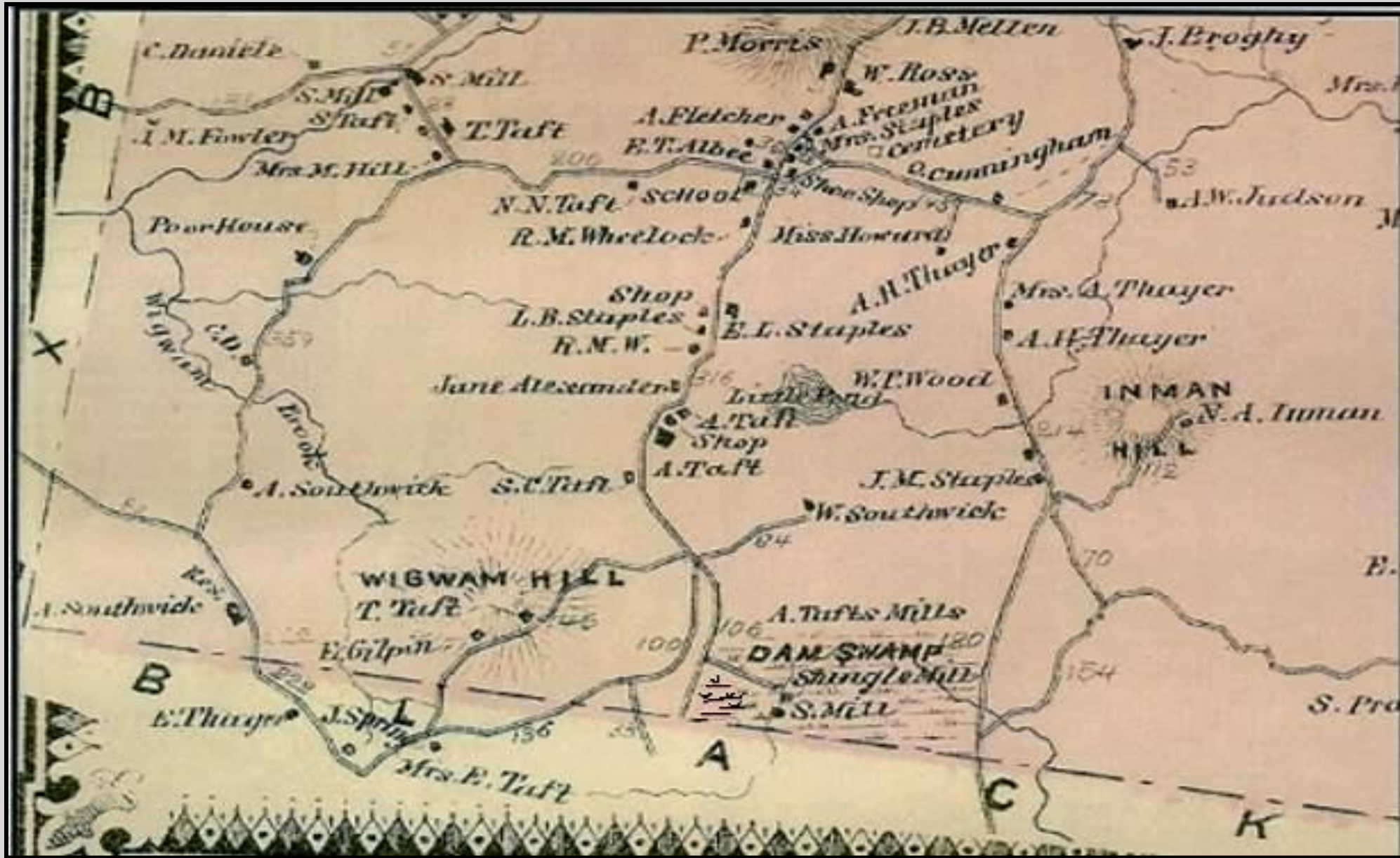
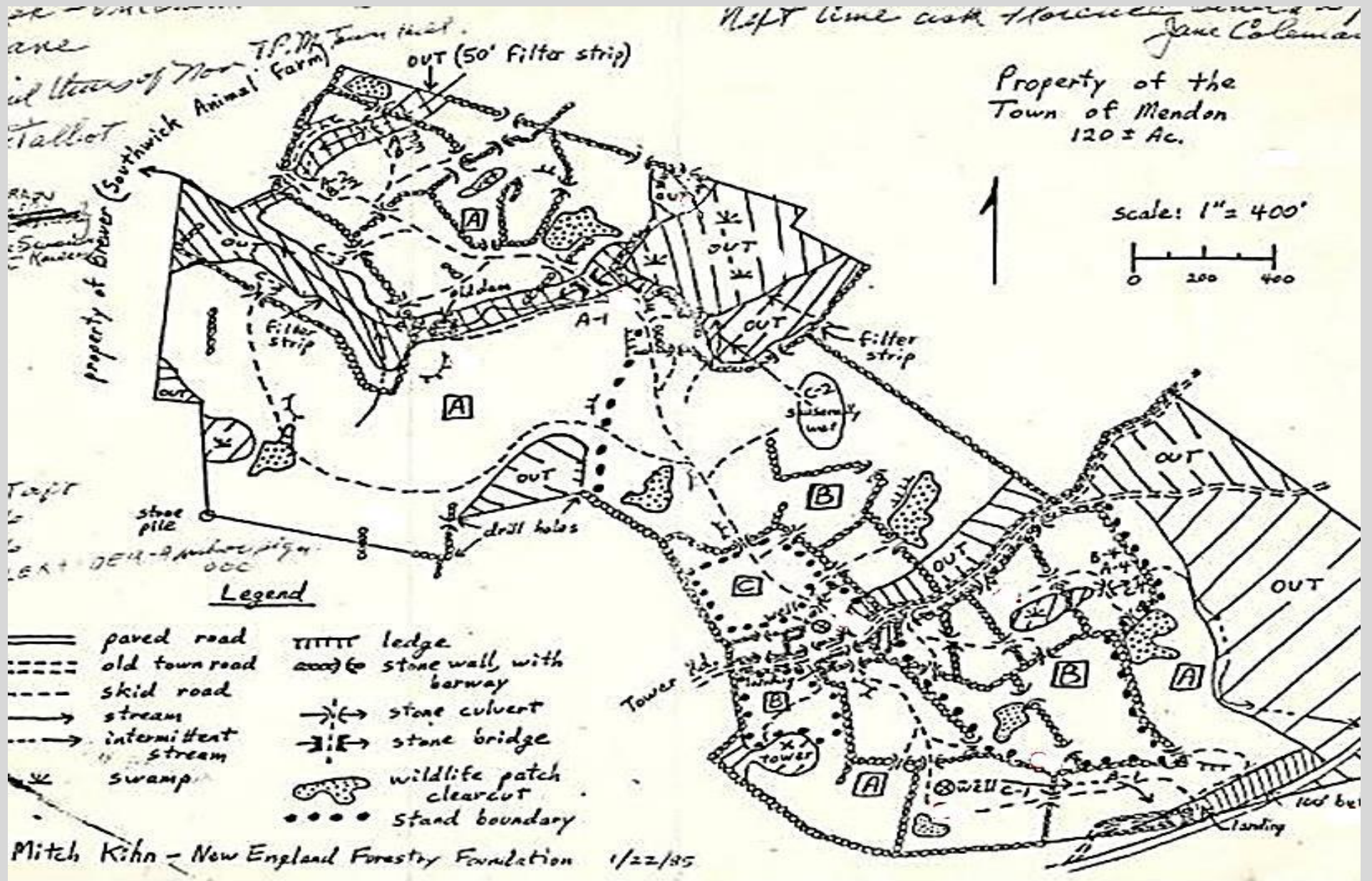


Figure 2: The map shows Wigwam Hill and the surrounding area in 1870. Thomson Taft's home is not far from the top of Wigwam Hill.



On the lower right is a landing with a trail which can be followed to the site of the saw mill. This may have provided access to the outside world for their finished products and supplies to and from the saw mill. --To access the map of the Town Forest today go to: <http://mendonma.gov/town-forest-map> then link to Trail Map-Town Forest. This survey map is kept here for historical purposes.

Note: Some of the historic structures are thought to be located with what evidence we have at hand. We know from historic records they did exist. The words “likely”, “probably”, “appears” and so on are used to describe where we think the evidence indicates its location and can be regarded as such until, and if, new evidence turns up. We encourage you to contact us with information, images, or corrections related to this history.

The Observatory, Dance Hall and Grist Mill

“Thompson Taft, who represented the 4th generation of Taft’s who owned Wigwam Hill built his home, which was made of brick; along Tower Road in 1831 (the home’s foundation still exists). He recognized the great view of the valley an observation tower could provide. He decided, in 1849, to build one on the summit of that hill.”

“The Observatory (sometimes called the Monument) was 55 ft. high, 12 feet square at the top, and 24 square at the base.” Caleb S. Taft, a blacksmith from Blackstone (now Millville) testified; “The framing of the building was done by Thompson and Austin Taft. The 4 tall uprights, 2 of chestnut and 2 of white pine, were brought from Burrillville & Smithfield, R.I. The iron to brace it against the wind was Lowmore Iron, the best in the world, and was forged in my smithy by my father Caleb Taft. Thirty-eight men by the name of Taft assisted in raising the structure. The admission price to the observatory was 10 cents.

An elderly gentleman (not identified) who was born and lived near the hill his entire life said to Albert Jones; ‘Why, sir, from the top of the observatory...one could easily discern, with the aid of a good glass, on a day when the atmosphere was very clear, the masts of the shipping in Boston harbor.’

In 1850 Mr. Taft made an annex to it 40 feet long and 22 feet wide which was used as a dance hall, at the dedication of which a large company of ladies and gentlemen were present. Among the ladies were 3 of the most beautiful in the country who afterward became wives of men who were financially, socially and politically prominent. There was feasting and dancing and Prof. Absalom Daniels, famous in his day as a dancing teacher and master of ceremonies, presided on the occasion where he entertained the company in dancing a hornpipe in a most lively and energetic style.”

The area around Wigwam Hill became a place of social and recreational gatherings as well as local industry.



A boy sits among the stones of what we think was the dance hall in a photo from the 1960's.



A portion of the foundation of the former dance hall and later grist mill as it appears today (2016). From the comparison of this photo with the one on the previous page, it appears much of the granite slabs have gone missing over the years.



The remains of what appears to have been a mill stone and an illustration of horsepower being used to grind grain.

There is what appears to be part of a mill stone across Tower Road from the fire tower and near the beginning of the path which leads to the old saw mill and dam site. There is also a well for supplying water which is no longer active. This is probably the site of the dance hall and grist mill which replaced it and the large foundation on this spot seems to prove it. More investigation needs to be done as this location is not at the summit of Wigwam Hill, but across Tower Rd. from it. The observatory was said to be on the summit of the hill and the dance hall (and later grist mill) was an annex. Webster's Dictionary defines an annex as a building that is attached to *or near* a larger building and usually used as part of it. The observatory was within walking distance of the dance hall. Either this was a poor choice of words by the author or the tower may have been located closer to the dance hall. We have no positive evidence, but we think the observatory was located as shown on the map below in the text (figure 3).

From the Milford Daily Journal, August 14, 1897; in 1855 “a grist mill run by horsepower was added. These buildings stood for some years until the dance hall was taken down and made into a mill. Soon after the timbers of the observatory were found to be coming unsound, it was taken down rather than repaired.”

The spot upon which the fire tower now stands is the highest point on the hill at 573 feet above sea level, so the observation tower and other buildings probably stood *near* the present tower. According to maps of the area from 1831 and 1870 the summit of Wigwam Hill was indicated as being further north of the fire tower and behind the site of the Thompson Taft house.



One of the metal bars which we think supported the observation tower. It is located on what once was considered the summit of Wigwam Hill (see the approximate location below and the map from 1870, figure 2) which clearly shows Thompson Taft's house on the slope of the hill on the western side of Tower Road. The current fire tower is on the opposite side of the road.

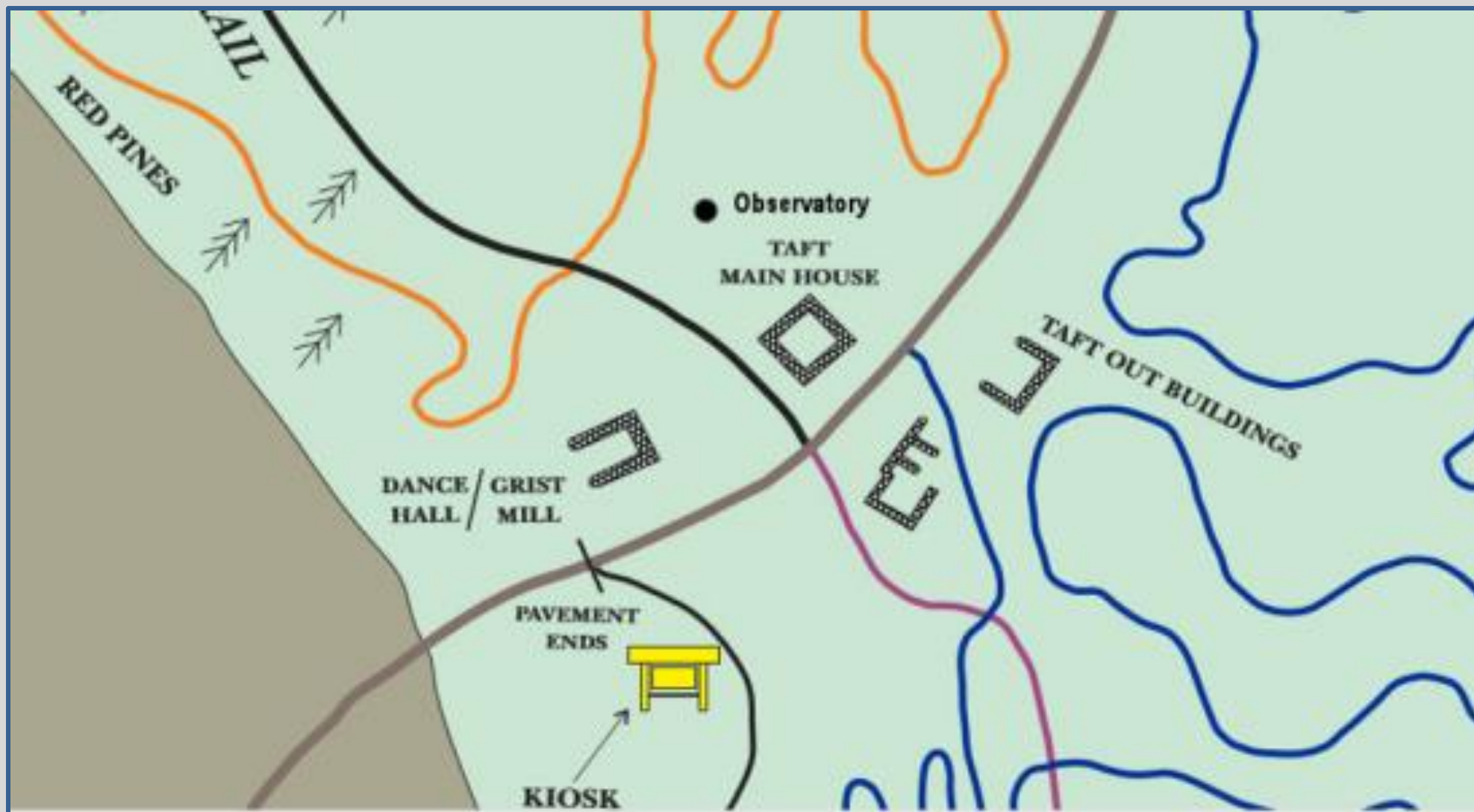
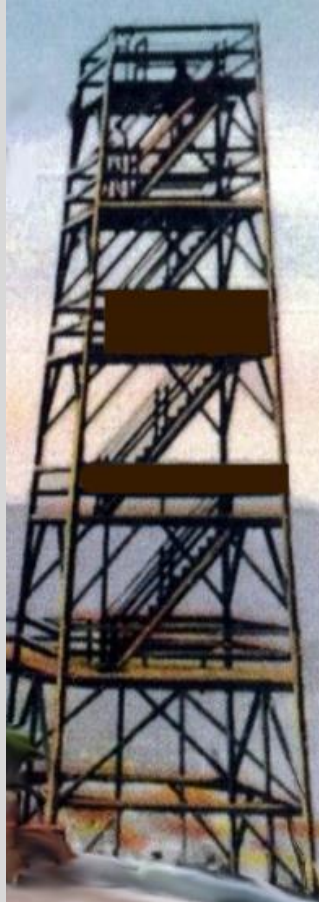


Figure 3: The observatory is indicated as being at the top of what was once considered the summit of Wigwam Hill. We are, however, uncertain at this time if this was the exact location



It is not known exactly how the observation tower looked. We can get an idea from ones built along scenic roadways and vistas which once dotted the landscape along places like the White Mountains of N.H. or the Mohawk Trail in western Massachusetts. A few still remain to this day. To many they were known as “Jacob’s Ladders” and provided wonderful views, including being able overlook several states. This image, taken and enlarged from a picture post card from the early 1900’s, is likely how the observation tower (observatory) would have appeared.

For a long time the hill was popular as a picnic ground and site of Sunday school and other parties who frequently visited it and remained for the whole day. The scouts also used the area for their activities.

“Wigwam and Miscoe Hill (the highest in Mendon which is located in the northern corner of Mendon) were also occupied as stations for observation in the Trigonometrical Survey of the State made for the construction of a topographical map by Simeon Borden Esq.” According to the [Annals of Mendon from 1659-1880](#) by Dr. John Metcalf.

Mendon Acquires the Town Forest

The following is taken from the Town Forest Reports dated January 1, 1945 and January 23, 1989.

“The land was taken as tax title property in 1934 by deed Book 2617 Page 258 for failure of the former owner, Charles L. Robinson of Providence, R. I. to pay the taxes due in the amount of \$63.29. The Town voted to convert the tax title property to a Town Forest under Mass. General Law, Chapter 143, Section 35, in 1944. The total acreage acquired was approximately 120 acres +/- which includes the area known as Wigwam Hill. Another 2.5 acres was located across Millville Road (on the east side of the street, known as lot 210).

There were 1900 red pine and 900 white pine seedlings set out at the Town Forest and planted by volunteers. Many of the trees planted were lumbered in 1987 and, more recently, about 2007.

The well on the property was cleaned out, which made drinking water available. This well was located along Tower Road not far from the fire tower and near where the mill stone was found. The well is no longer sanitary for drinking or washing (there are other wells found to date). The lack of available water forbids open camp and cooking fires which could easily get out of hand.

“The many stone walls indicate the property was farmed in the past probably as pasture for sheep and/or cattle. It does not appear to have been cultivated.”

An earlier Town Forest Committee worked on plans to further the usefulness of the Forest in 1945 and it was hoped that groups from Town would avail themselves of this site. Unfortunately, in most cases these plans or those proposed below in 1989, which were similar, were not carried out.

Fire Tower

“Frank M. Aldrich, Fire Warden of Mendon, received word in August of 1915 that the State was to begin, at once, the erection of a fire tower on Wigwam Hill in Mendon. The tower would be similar to the one on Fay Mountain in Westboro. The tower was 50 feet high and was opened for the first time in May 1916 when a watchman was installed. It served the State and protected the area for 38 years in what was to become the Town Forest in 1944.” Milford Daily Journal, August 20, 1915 and May13, 1916.

“In 1954 a new 70 foot high fire tower was built. The new tower rose 20 feet above the old one which stood nearby and was later torn down. A public dedication of the newly completed fire tower was held on August 20, 1954 at 10:30 am. In charge of the formal dedication was Howard Hurlihy, the State District Fire Warden.” Milford Daily News, August 20, 1954.



New Fire Tower (left) and the old Fire Tower on Wigwam Hill being razed--1954

Doug Taylor Photo

The current and former fire towers in 1954 (above). The old tower is in the process of being taken down.

Other Town Forest Points of Interest

Anchor Rock (a/k/a) Taft Rock



The large rock with carvings on it made by J. F. Taft. The carvings made into the rock are indicated by “photo #'s” and are shown in detail below. For the photos the carvings were outlined in chalk. Otherwise they are difficult to read.

Jerome F. (Fergus) Taft was born in Blackstone (now Millville) near Wigwam Hill on April 1, 1849. His home was across from Tower Road. His parents were Arnold A. and Eunice (Perkins) Taft. His occupation was listed as a farmer and boot shop worker.

On November 8, 1895, at the age of 46 he married Lillian F. Sargent (age 22). After their marriage they moved to Uxbridge and had 2 daughters; Eunice Lillian Taft born in 1897 (later Robinson) and Florence Gladys Taft (later Patt) born in 1902.

By 1925 Jerome Taft is listed as living in Providence. He passed away on February 12, 1928 in Cranston, R. I. and was buried in the Chestnut Hill Cemetery in Millville.

An interesting achievement during his lifetime was a patent (# 682,293 dated Sept. 10, 1901) for a non-refillable bottle which he shared with Edward J. Prest. Both were living in Uxbridge at the time.



Photo #1 (above): One of the 3 individual carvings. The date, April 28th, 1876 was nearly 2 months before the Battle of Little Big Horn (June 25th, 1876), better known as Custer's Last Stand. Ulysses S. Grant was President of 37 states. Our nation's 100th birthday was on July 4th of that year and the defeat suffered at the battle was an embarrassment being so close to the nation's Centennial celebrations.



Photo #2 (above): A 2nd carving nearby with the date “1876”. The two “3 rings” symbols and “F.L.T.” carved inside the rings in photo #1 on J. F. Taft’s Rock represents the Independent Order of Odd Fellows - also known as “The Three Link Fraternity” which stands for Friendship, Love and Truth. J. F. Taft was likely to have been a member of this organization. “G. B.” is an unknown. Anchors are a symbol of hope or eternal life and are often on sailors’ graves. Anchors are also a Masonic symbol for well-grounded hope, therefore they are often found on Masons’ graves.



A. I. ALEXANDER written around the anchor ring.

Photo by Marc DeWitt

Photo #3 (above): The 3rd carving is the largest and most impressive image. It is a large anchor with the name “A. I. ALEXANDER” on its ring. The meaning of the anchor and name are unknown to us. There were, however, residents of the town by the name of Alexander at the time.

Some have claimed there are more carvings on the rock, but they are difficult and even nearly impossible to read. Time and weather (and possibly vehicular traffic) are causing the carvings to gradually disappear and increasingly difficult to see. Hopefully a way will be found to preserve them for future generations. If anyone reading this knows the meaning of the symbols carved onto the rock, please contact us.

The Saw Mill and Dam Site



The granite walls which were the foundation of the saw mill stand along the stream which flows through it.

At the Taft saw mill water wheel was located close to the falls with an axle attached to the granite foundation walls. The dam could be closed to back up the water and build pressure, or opened to provide the power to run the machinery for sawing the wood.



A view of the foundation from the waterfalls.

The stream passes under a stone bridge and the fire road on its way to the mill site. In just a few short years from 2011 plant growth and the weather have slightly altered this relatively clear view of the foundation.



The foundation looking towards and to the right of the dam & waterfall.



In this photo there is a triangular cut in the stone wall of the saw mill which may have held the axle to the water wheel.

The Stone Bridge beneath the “Taft Trail”



The bridge with its opening on the south side towards the mill site.

The water from a stream connecting to Wigwam Brook was dammed creating a pond from which water could be harnessed to run the saw mill. A stone bridge was built enabling the logging road (the “Taft Trail”), which led to Tower Road, to cross the stream. The trail provided access to the saw mill where cut wood was brought and the finished product taken away by horse-drawn wagons down the trail to Tower Road and out to market.



The bridge with its opening on the north side towards the swampy area which had been the pond. The old birch, which once had a tag indicating the site, is not easily recognized today.



What is today a swamp created from the brook which flows by the saw mill to Wigwam Brook.



The Beaver dam located where the brook leaves the swamp. A beaver baffler is being planned for 2017 to allow the beavers to remain while preventing flooding.

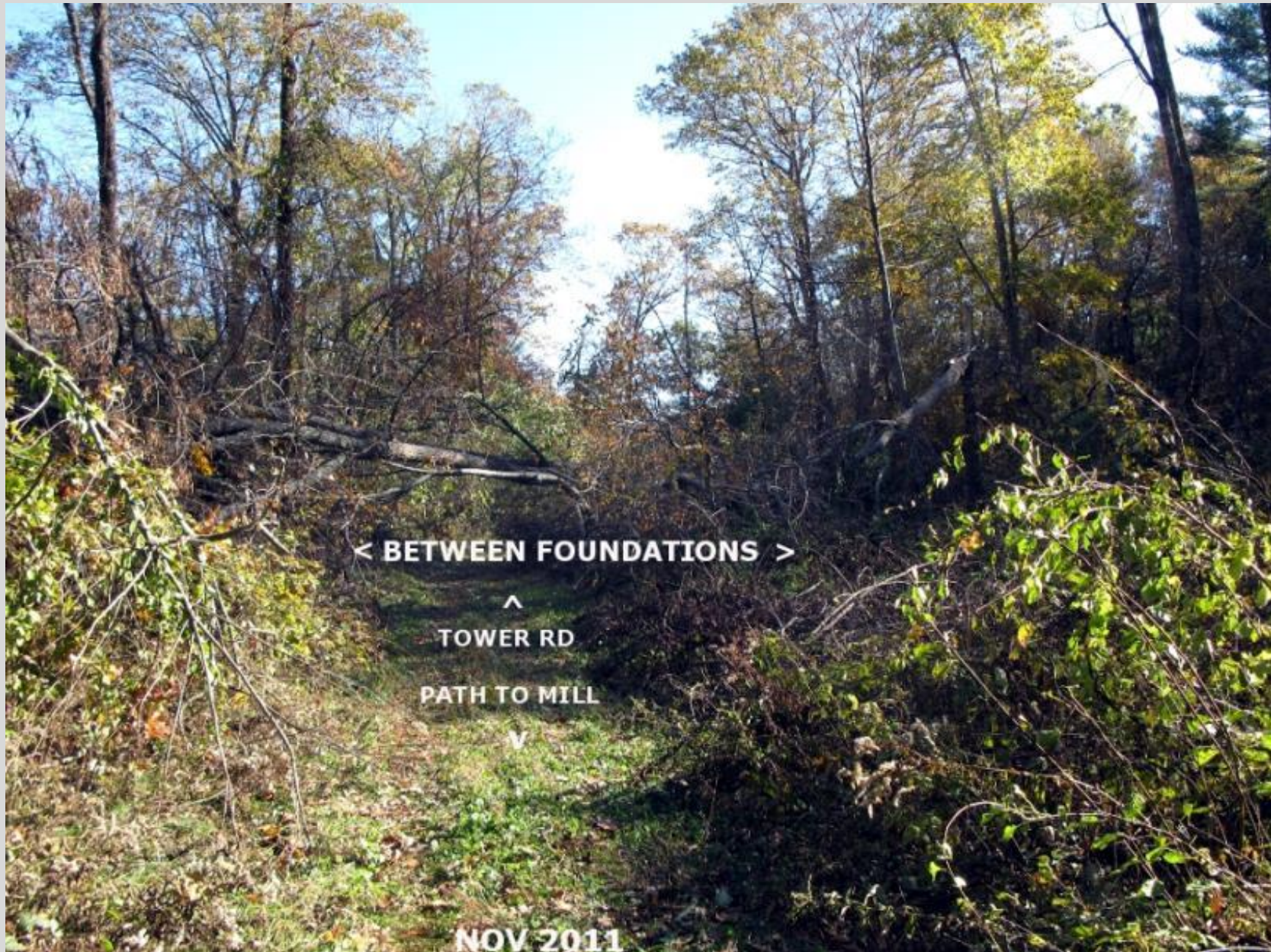
Foundations of Other Buildings

People lived along Tower Road in those days before electricity and central heating. They must have endured cold winters and dark nights. The danger from wild animals must have been extreme. A trip to the outhouse at night must have been a chilling experience.



This is one of the best preserved of the foundations (Thompson Taft house built in 1831). Others are located on the latest Town Forest map which you can connect to: <http://mendonma.gov/town-forest-map>.





Taft Trail (Path to the Mill) between the Thompson Taft home foundation and the Dance Hall/Grist Mill. Note the damage from a storm which hit the area. Clean-up was done by the Boy Scouts and other volunteers. It is still difficult to access the area pictured on the right, but plans are to clear the area.



Storm damage on the Taft Trail looking west in the direction of the saw mill site.

The Out-buildings for the Thompson Taft Property

Located here is the foundation of the barns and other out buildings. There were several sheds which may have included the crib /swine house and wood house. There were 3 barns on the property (2 large and one small). According to town tax records during the 1850's Thompson Taft owned 2 oxen, 5 cows, 1 horse and a pig. These numbers changed over time. There was also a carriage house where the horse & carriage were kept, but it *may* have been located nearer to the home which is across Tower Road (West Side) from these outbuildings.



The area of the several foundations of the Thompson Taft (Sr. & Jr.) property which are located across Tower Road from the home and other out buildings nearby. A visit to this site features some interesting remains not shown in this photo.

Split Rock

Just off the Taft Trail is a large abandoned rock cut by man. We can only speculate why it was not finished. Perhaps it was deemed too large to successfully split and move.

The method used to split this large granite boulder seems to differ from the method used to split granite at the quarry site and other locations in the area and can best be described as follows:



Above are two views of the large split rock. The first photo gives an indication of its size, while the second photo includes the trail and marker leading to the rock (in the background).

How it was split

This is an early version of the plug & feather method. The method was an improvement over the blasting method as it often times produced pieces of stone with a flat face suitable for building. Unlike later versions, the early plug & feather method used a maximum of 3 holes. A person drilled one, two or three round holes per boulder as he saw fit. These were generally small holes about one inch diameter and from two to four inches deep. Two half-round shims were placed in each hole and a metal wedge was placed between them. The shims were used to keep the wedge from hitting the bottom of the hole. When a wedge hits the bottom of a hole it often flies out of the hole and becomes a very dangerous flying projectile. Once each hole was filled the shims and wedges, a person with a small hammer, about three pounds in weight, hit each wedge until he heard a cracking sound. At that point he let the boulder finish splitting apart on its own.

Big Wall Mystery

From Shirley Smith, Bill Dakai and the Town Forest Committee Aug. 9, 2013

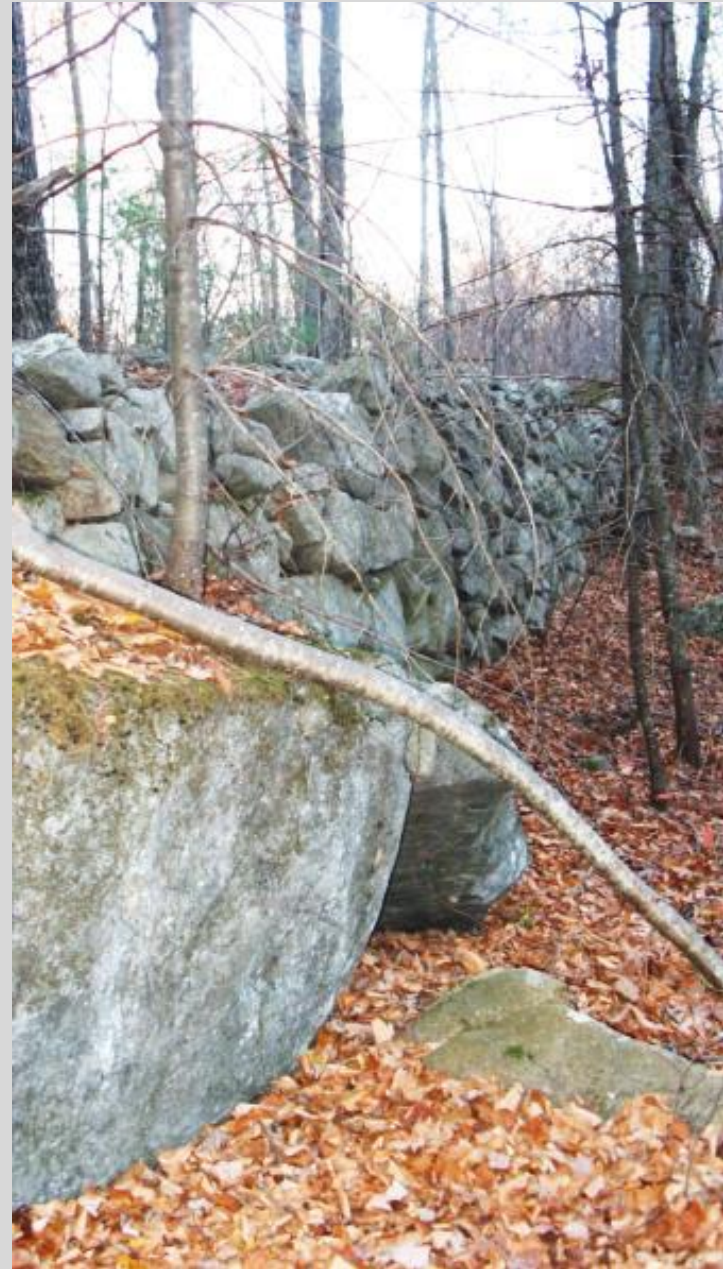
On the southerly side of the Town Forest, not far from the lookout tower, there is a mysterious 10 ft. high stone wall that appears to be part of a foundation for an abandoned road. A segment of this road stretches 8 to 10 ft. wide across the top of the wall. There was a road abandoned by 1870, but it is on the northerly side of the forest, some distance away (the 1870 map figure 2 shows the old road). It would have taken a lot of human effort, without the help of machines and power equipment, to construct such a wall.

It is speculated the wall was created to hold back water from the lower ground which tended to flood.





This and the photo on the previous page show parts of the wall and trail allowing visitors to experience the size and tremendous amount of work involved to create it before the availability of heavy machinery.



Above is the top of and side view of the “Mystery Wall” which is wide enough for a vehicle to traverse.

Wells Located in the Forest.



Several wells are located in the Town Forest. Above is a picture of one of them. Their use was to supply water to the home, farm, dance hall, grist mill and possibly recreation sites in later years. There are 5 found to date and the largest are covered by metal grates for safety (below).



Granite Quarry



The large amount of cut granite (above) is ample evidence of granite quarrying in what was to be the Town Forest. An actual pit quarry exists near the southwestern boundary and there are also the unmistakable signs that the glacial erratics were used as a source of granite.

The early settlers needed granite for foundations, stone walls, cellars, wells, fireplaces, dams to harness water power for grist and saw mills, and for grinding wheels. The owners of Wigwam Hill were the Taft family who migrated from Braintree around 1800. At the time Quincy was a part of Braintree, and Quincy Granite was the best known granite

throughout the country. King's Chapel in Boston was built from Quincy Granite in 1750. In 1825, the Bunker Hill Monument was also built from Quincy Granite. It is likely that the Taft's brought with them knowledge of granite quarrying. Another source of information could have been Milford, but Milford quarries opened in the mid 1800's and Town Forest quarrying seems to predate that. The Town Forest granite is said to be part of the Milford granite vein.

The granite blocks in the Town Forest show the characteristic marks of the feather and wedging method of cutting the granite used between 1823 to the present time. Holes were cut several inches apart and 4 to 5 inches deep using a metal hand drill or hammer and chisel. Two feathers, pieces of curved metal, were inserted into each hole and a metal or wooden wedge was inserted between them. Each wedge was hammered a few times before moving on to another wedge. This applied even force and the rock eventually split under the pressure of the wedges. If the granite did not break into the desired shape it was discarded. This would account for the pieces left lying around the site.

The Brick Kiln-Not Located Inside the Town Forest

Since the publication of this history of Wigwam Hill and the Town Forest and after reviewing the original tax records for the property, it was found that no mention of a brick kiln was referenced on the owner's (Thompson Taft) property. Brick Kilns were owned by Arnold Taft and his brother Stephen who were brick makers. The Archeological Survey completed in 2015 did not find any evidence of a kiln being in the Town Forest.

The Brick Kiln, shown on the 1831 town map below, must have been outside the Town Forest boundaries and been owned and operated by Arnold & Stephen Taft. Remains of a brick kiln exist across from the Arnold Taft home across Millville Road.



Some of what has been done in the Town Forest:

Photos of some of the park creations done by volunteers including the Boy Scouts, Mountain Bikers, and Members of the Town Forest Committee, including Stewards of the Town Forest, and by hired contractors and artists are included below.



Town Forest Committee member and trail steward, Ryan Oliva, installs one of 2 signs alerting drivers of the entrance to the main parking lot just ahead along Millville Road.



The wonderfully painted entrance stone to the Town Forest designed and created by local artist Abby Barnett.



Trail Steward Ryan Oliva and Land Steward Bill Dakai next to the sign they created and erected behind the parking lot entrance to the Town Forest.



The kiosk at the parking lot off Millville Road. (There are 3 others located on Tower Road, and at the Zoo and Asylum Street entrances.)

This is the main entrance to the forest, but the other 3 entrances have equal access to the trails and historic sites. Shirley's Trail leads visitors to the many trails and historic sites inside the Town Forest.



Some of the vehicles belonging to visitors parked at the main entrance off Millville Road. It is encouraging to see so many taking advantage of this wonderful recreational forest park. Organizations such as the New England Mountain Biker's Assoc., Geocachers, as well as hikers, horse riders have taken advantage of the many trails. Snowshoeing and Cross-Country Skiing are also enjoyed in the winter months.



Shirley's Trail offers a scenic and pleasant welcome to the forest and is an example of trails throughout the forest.



Hikers in the Town Forest stand on the 60 foot boardwalk on Shirley's Trail built over rock filled terrain making it easier for hikers, bikers and others to navigate the trail. This and the boardwalk near the Asylum Street entrance were well built by volunteer labor.



The boardwalk near Asylum Street at middle left in the photo.



One of several signs posted at the entrances to the town forest.

The 4 kiosks in the town forest are each unique and superbly hand built by Boy Scout volunteers. Three are shown below while the Millville Road parking lot kiosk can be on page 49.



The Asylum Street Kiosk



The kiosk located at the zoo parking lot entrance to the town forest just before the signs were added.



The kiosk just off Tower Road on the roadway to the fire tower.



Wherever you are in the Town Forest a trailblazer or other sign marker will help you find your way.

The latest map of the Town Forest can be viewed at: <http://mendonma.gov/town-forest-map>.

We wish to thank the volunteers and others who helped make this possible:

Members of the Blackstone Valley NEMBA (a chapter of the New England Mountain Bike Association) Dave Cournoyer, Justin Hollander, Derek Markle, Team BUMS and the Dakai Family.

Boy Scouts of America: Colin Burgess, Patrick Kennedy, Joshua Luttrell and Brian St. John, their leaders and others from Boy Scout Troops 1 & 44.

The Town of Mendon and committees whose members are too numerous to name, including the Board of Selectmen, Police Department, Town Administrator, Administrative Assistant, Town Accountant and Treasurer, the Land Use Committee, Parks Department, the Conservation Commission, and the Town Forest Committee.

The Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation Trails Program for providing the funds to make this town forest accessible to the public.

Footnotes:

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Mendon, Town of property tax records for various years during the 19th century.

Milford Daily Journal, August 14, 1897, August 20, 1915 and May 13, 1916.

Milford Daily News, August 20, 1954.

Nason and Varney’s Massachusetts Gazetteer, 1890

New England Families, Genealogical and Memorial: A Record of the Achievements of Her People in the Making of Commonwealths and the Founding of a Nation, Volume 2--pp. 692 & 838, edited by William Richard Cutter. Lewis Historical Publishing Company, 1913 - New England.

Odd Fellows Symbol and information taken from Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

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“Town Forest Committee Report”, January 1, 1945**

The...Transcript, 1904 or 1905 “Wigwam Hill” by Albert E. Jones.

Worcester Society of Antiquities, Proceedings of the, Vol. 5-1883

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P. O. Box 760, Chepachet, R.I. 02814.-January 23, 1989.**

Photos courtesy of Bill Dakai, Doug Taylor, Mark DeWitt, Jim Mooney, Paul Doucette and Google Earth.

Compiled and written by Town Forest Committee member & treasurer, Paul A. Doucette.



Stones placed by visitors to help mark the trails.