

The Bernardston Road
In the Early 1900's
Frank H. Reed

Recently one of the present residents of the Bernardston Road knowing that I had been traveling over it since the early 1900's, asked me about the places and the people who lived there when I first remember and shortly thereafter. I therefore have set down some of my own recollections and also things that I have been told. Memory is a faulty thing and I do not vouch for the correctness of the following, but I think for the most part it is accurate.

In order to remember many of the places and characters you will need to have been a resident of this vicinity for forty years or more. The road at this time was a narrow dusty track, with a bicycle path running along the east side, and a wooden bridge over "Cherry Run" brook. In order to get into the spirit of the thing you should furnish your own horse and buggy or perhaps to make it more of a party we should charter "Lute" Nims big barge and a four horse team. We would probably have Frank Wilson or Geo. Matteson as driver. We might even have Jake Bechtold, Mr. Nims' livery stable foreman, but after having had the distinction of driving Pres. Theodore Roosevelt and part from Northfield to Greenfield railroad station with an open hack and four, it is doubtful if he would want to drive for mere sightseers. If we traveled up Federal Street, after passing Beacon, we would find the houses few and far between, with trolley track running in the middle of the street at times and at times on the west side. At the junction of Federal and Silver St., the track bore to the left down Silver Street but we have arrived at "Four Corners" and the Bernardston Road begins.

At this time Four Corners was frequently called "Long's Corners" or "Out at Jim Long's" because Jim Long and his sister Sabra lived in their old family homestead on the right, just back of the triangle about where the brick house of John E. Shay now stands. The Long house was a tavern back in the days when the only church in Greenfield was located at "the Corners". In those days religion was the chief occupation on Sundays and church started in the middle of the morning and continued until the middle of the afternoon. During the noontime intermission parishioners gathered at the tavern to gossip and eat their cold lunches and in the winter time to thaw out, perhaps with the aid of "Spiritual Comfort", for so history tells us the church was unheated, except perhaps by the remarks of the minister and the anticipation of hereafter.

The Long house was of the style where the main part was two ^{1/2} stories high, stories, oblong, with eaves to the road, door in the center and two small paned windows on either side. A one story ell ran back from the main part and this was connected to the large barn north of the house by a shed. Even when I first remember the buildings were in bad repair and the shed finally collapsed. In those days circuses coming to town usually showed on the Long Meadow, with tents set up where Dunnell and Rangle Roads are now. If I am not mistaken "Buffalo Bill" showed there about 1907 and I believe that the famous "Annie Oakley" was one of the attractions.

"Jim Long" was something of a character. In my time he was an old man, with what I imagined a face like a Kentucky Colonel, having both the pointed beard and florid complexion. He was a familiar sight riding around town in an ancient "phaeton", drawn by an equally ancient looking horse. He was well educated man, well versed in the early history and happenings of the town. I wish that I had been more attentive to some of his reminiscences. At one time he had taken an active part in social and civic affairs and for a number of years served on the School Committee and had the reputation of being a gifted speaker, which I can believe as in talking with him he had a voice of an orator and had a wonderful command of the English language. However, trouble of some sort, together with his own inclinations took him out of public life. Finally conditions made a change necessary and Jim and his sister left the old place and moved to the house just south of Stoneleigh--Prospect Hill, now occupied by Judge Fairbanks.

owned

fair banks

At that time I think the Long property was purchased by the late Wm. Barber who divided up some of the land into building lots and tried to start a development. In any event the rear of the house was torn down, the main part moved up the Bernardston Road, ended towards the street, remodeled and is now the two family house, part shingled and part clapboard that stands just south of the Brick School. The big barn was moved down what is now Wildwood Ave. and stood at the east end for a long time.

Across the road from the Long's stood the Farr house, looking much the same in those days as it did last year when it was moved to its new location on Harrison Ave. ^{where the Royal Cleaners building was} to make way for the new Royal Cleaners building. Next came Harrison Ave. with a Mr. Maynard living in the house now occupied by Mrs. Henry Allen. This had a barn attached to it which has long since disappeared. I think the only house on Harrison Ave. was occupied by a Mr. Todd who ran a small green house in the rear and delivered plants and flowers around town with a horse and express wagon. Next to the Maynard place was the old school house which was abandoned when the present school was erected. It was a low one story white building, probably having two rooms and had a stump in the yard which had a hole bored down from the top and banded with iron, so that a pole could be set in it for a flag staff. Later the building was sold by the town and moved down Harrison Ave. where it was raised up, a story built underneath and so became a two story house, where it still stands. Next came the "Lute Pickett Place", with white house and brown barn. ^{some buildings} The buildings set some distance in from the road and were reached by a long drive that ^{is} about the present entrance of Ferrante Ave. The property was later purchased by Guy Ferrante, the house moved half way around to face the Ave. and the barns demolished. Lute Pickett had charge of keeping Bernardston Road "Open" in the winter. This was long before "Snow fencing" was ever thought of and after a light snow and heavy wind the road from Picketts to the Purrington Place would drift badly or as it was commonly called "Fill in". I have driven across the flat by Cherry Run Brook many times when the road would be so badly drifted that you actually could not see where it went. As Mr. Pickett's equipment for clearing the road in those days consisted of one or two horses hitched to a bob sled, to which had been attached to each runner, an iron plow, such as was used for turning sod, it is no reflection to him that the road was not always passable. After a "Big Blow" he added "Shovelers" to his equipment but sometimes even the man powers could not get the worst drifts open for several days. "Lute Pickett" was a genial man, well liked, who in his later years had the misfortune to lose an arm in an accident.

Next came the Pierce place, later owned by the Claude Fredricks and looking much the same. ^{There, and later in life, was struck by a car and killed. This house was just then demolished.} Mr. Pierce ran a Market Garden.

When I first remember, the present "Four Corners" school was only one story high. As the section grew more class rooms were needed and about 1908 the roof was raised and the second story added. Back of the school was a cart rd. running in where Wildwood Ave. now goes, and under a big Maple that is still there stood a miniature log cabin, complete with chimney and fireplace. This originally was carried on a float in one of the old Coaching Parades, representing an early settlers home and in some way a fire was kept burning inside ^{and for} as the team passed down the street smoke curled out of the chimney. After the parade was over the cabin was set off back of the school, perhaps for the youngsters to play in and remained there for a number of years.

From the Pierce Place there were no houses until the present Fairhurst house, then known as the "Leith place." The house looked much as it does now but there was a large stock barn in the rear which has long since disappeared. This house was later occupied by James Long, and he once told me that during the Revolutionary War the owner was plowing that part of the farm lying on the ledge ridge south of Stoneleigh School House. As he traveled behind his plow he could feel a tremor and on putting his ear to the ledge he could hear a rumble. He surmised that a battle was going on and knowing that troops had been assembled to the west, brought out his team, secured his musket, some provisions, saddled a horse and set out. He eventually arrived at Beanington but not in time for the battle. It is a good story but being before "my time" I cannot vouch for it.

Next north was the Asa Sprague place, now the Stoneleigh School farm house. The house looks much the same but south and west of it was a red horse barn ending towards the Rd. that ran back and joined a long unpainted hay and stock barn, at the right angles ~~and~~ in the angle was the barnyard, so located that stock from either barn could be turned into it. Asa Sprague was a tall heavy built man, who was clean shaven in warm weather and wore a full beard in the winter. He was a lover of horses and would usually have two or three colts either turned out in the barnyard or pastured near the buildings. After he sold the property to the school he moved to Northfield Farms where he lived until a few years ago, ~~when I understand he moved New York State. He was the last of the old-time men.~~ ^{AND DIED ABOUT A YEAR 8}

North of the Sprague place ~~that~~ ^{there} was a lane, bounded on at least one side by an old Virginia Rail fence, running from the road into a pasture that included the ridge where the Peterson residence now stands. Probably 40 years ago two of our well known citizens decided that it would be profitable to start a piggery there. They secured the town garbage contract and a considerable number of pigs. The proprietors did not plan to appear in the picture at all except to derive the profits but ~~but~~ were to be silent partners." The winds drifted down from the north and if the pigs did not actually drift with it the indications of the environment did. The partners may have planned to be silent but the residents of Silver Street and the upper section of town did not. It reached the point where neither man could appear on the street without meeting some irate resident. Finally the pigs and probably the profits disappeared and the section again started to grow.

At ~~about~~ the point where the lane left the road was a place where one could produce a most beautiful echo. Many times when I was small my father would stop the horse there and either whistle or let me call and the sound would come echoing back as clearly as though someone was answering back. This, too, has disappeared, as has so many of the old land marks, probably due to so much building.

On the east side of the road, just south of the present drive going into the ice plant, was the Maynard Farm, where stands the house occupied by Richard Smith. His house was originally the ell of the Maynard house and behind it stood what was probably the largest barn on the Road. The main part of the house was similar in style to the Long house, only I think there was a rather good "Fan" window over the door. However, unlike the Long House, the main part of the Maynard house got into disrepair first and was not livable for a good many years. I remember seeing a two horse wagon backing up to what originally was a parlor window and stove wood being thrown in for winter storage. Eventually, both the main part of the house and the barns ~~were~~ torn down and the ell remodeled into the house as we see it today.

North, and up the hill from the Maynard's was the "Sawtelle" place. The house standing about where George Davis's house stands now. The house was a very plain structure and if it had ever been painted, it showed not signs of it in my time. Beside the back door grew one of the most beautiful lilac bushes I ever remember seeing and nearby was a covered well with wooden box, buckets and crank. North of the house and weatherbeaten barn stood and for years back of this stood an abandoned "Tin Peddler's" cart. I remember hearing that in his younger days Mr. Sawtelle had run the cart, but in my time he was "Retired". For a long time I wondered why anyone would build such a plain looking house and eventually I learned that what we saw driving by was really the back of the house and the ~~original~~ front of the house, which must have been rather pretty, faced on the old road, sometimes known as "the old stage road running north to Bernardston". ^{can} Ran east of the house and along the ridge. I have been told that this road came from "Four Corners" as at present, and I have also been told that it branched to the east near the brick school and ran east of the ridge north of the school, on reaching the Fairhurst Place it bore to the west and ran between the two rows of maple trees of the "Stoneleigh" farm house and then made almost a left "S" and swung east across the present road, passed in front of the Maynard house and up the grade to the ridge, ran east of the old Sawtelle house, the present Andrews house, and all the others on the east side of the present road and eventually it joined the present road about where Joseph W. Ballard Jr. now lives. A few years ago and probably still, the outline of the old road could easily be traced and in part was marked the remains of stone walls.

That story
 From the Sawtelle Place there were no other buildings until the old house north of Edw. Shay residence. This originally was also a "Sawtelle Place" both at one time belonging to brothers and all the land west of the road from Stoneleigh School to the Purrington Farm belonged to the Sawtelle's. In my time this place was owned by John Kiley. He raised the most beautiful strawberries I have ever seen. I think they sold two baskets for a quarter. Mr. Kiley was a tall thickset man with a long gray "walrus" mustache. If I recall correctly he was a night engineer at some plant down town although he owned a horse he would walk back and forth night and morning, ~~in~~ ⁱⁿ cold weather wearing a long ulster that nearly toughed the ground. He was a very silent man and when father would stop and give him a ride, he would never volunteer any remarks unless spoken to. Mrs. Kiley was a cheerful little woman and I think would have been a cheerful conversationalist only she had an impediment in her speech that made talking difficult. Perhaps that is why Mr. Kiley had so little to say. Myron Farr eventually bought the property, moved the old barn across the road and remodeled it for stock and hay. After Mr. Farr's death (if I recall correctly he was killed by a horse) it was used by the late Dr. Pfersick as an animal hospital. *And now by the Malcolm D. Davenport*
early in morning

The next place north was owned by D. L. Fay. In the late 90's Mr. Fay went out to his barn to feed his stock, and climbed up into the haymow carrying his oil lantern. In some way the lantern fell over the hay and ignited the barn. Mr. Fay barely escaped death. Mr. Fay later purchased the barn that stood on the old Prospect Hill school on Prospect Ave, back of the Armory and moved it to its present location where it now stands on Warren Purrington's land. *and all his stock perished.*

North of the Fays ^{near} ~~in~~ what is now Clarence Strecker's front yard was a cellar hole on which once stood the house which was the birthplace of the late Dr. H. G. Stetson. From here to the top of the hill including the Jacob Luipold resident and running west was the section known as "Pine Hill", so called because this tract was covered with one of the last stands of "First Growth" pines. The timber was cut off by the late George Shearer but when I first remember the land, ~~it~~ was dotted with huge stumps, which gave a good idea of the size of the old giants that grew there. *Here of the entrance to Westwood Drive was a favorite camping ground for the old time Quakers.*

The Field House at the top of the hill looked much the same forty years ago. Directly across from this stood a small building which was used as a tombstone shop and although abandoned had a few samples of early craftsmanship leaned against it.

Just over the brow of the hill was the "Widow Bullards", now owned by Mrs. Edward Billings. I think Mrs. Bullard was widowed in early life but apparently was a good business woman and managed her farm successfully. As I recall her she was tall and rather angular, with snow white hair and always dressed in black. Her customary means of conveyance was the back seat of a "Democrat" wagon ^{drawn by a moderate ass.} and she usually carried a large black umbrella to keep off the sun or rain depending on the weather.

The farm where the ~~Martin~~ ^{Martin} Coombs live was owned by Mark Bullard, Mrs. Coombs' father. Mr. Bullard was a civil war veteran, very erect with a well kept white beard. In later years I ~~believe~~ ^{thought} that he walked with a staff or long start cane and to my youthful likes looked like a patriarch out of the Bible. When I first recall Mr. Bullard, he had a small brown horse that had the habit of lying down in the sharves if hitched to a post. I can see Mr. Bullard now driving down Main Street, pull up in front of Payne's Harness shop, where Hollister's Jewelry store is now, unhitch the horse from the "side bar" carriage, tie ~~the horse to the~~ ^{the horse to the} post and back the wagon around to the curb. I think Mr. Bullard must have been a patient man not to swapped the horses. In these days of meters, requiring two spaces would have been an expensive habit.

About opposite the Badertscher driveway was the remains of a foundation which had been the sight of a distillery and just south of Lovers Lane formerly stood a blacksmith shop.

The little house opposite the end of Lovers Land had several owners. The first I remember being a Mr. Savage. Mr. Savage does not stand out in my memory but he had a very pretty dapple gray horse ~~that~~ ^{that} I wanted my father to buy, ~~but~~ ^{but} father would not and since I have no further use for a horse it is probably just as well.

Above the "Savage" place was the "Fairman's". Mr. Fairman was a wirey little old man. He also had a beard or perhaps I should say a "Chin whisker". It was one of the active kind, not one of the practical variety like Mr. Bullard's that took the place of his necktie. Mr. Fairman's protruded from his chin, and when he talked, which he did with great enthusiasm, it traveled rapidly up and down and one felt that if you stood too close you would get the "brush-off". Whiskers and all, I liked Mr. Fairman and spent many good hours riding with him to and from some of our pastures when he was looking after stock.

Mrs.

The house now occupied by Myron Stimson was the "Hillman Place". The elder Mr. Hillman ran a shop just north of the house where he made "log pipes". Before the days of metal pipe these were used to convey water in many parts of the town. Not too many years ago some were dug up on Main St. near Dr. Freeman's office when street excavations were being made. As I recall they were made from pine logs about six feet long. The maker started boring with a long auger, to which extensions could be added. A good eye and a steady hand were required to make a pipe, for the maker must not only bore in the center of one end but bore six feet and come out the center of the other. After the hole was completed one end was sharpened like a pencil and the other recessed in a cone shape, so that when the pipes were layed the point of one fitted into the recess of the next. When the line was completed and the water run thru the points swelled enough to make a tight joint.

Beyond this shop was the home of William Chambers who was supposed to be the originator of "Golden Bantam" sweet corn and next was the old "Carbee" place, which once was a tavern. The original house burned in the late 80's or 90's and the present two story yellow residence was built by Mr. Fred Lamb who carried on a grain business in Turners Falls and later occupied for many years by Dwight Carpenter. Mr. Carpenter, like Mr. Bullard, was a veteran and also wore a beard but unlike Mr. Bullard he was short and thickset. He used to drive a thickset black horse to and from the street hitched to a low hung pheaton and when in a hurry to reach home would drive the old horse at a gallup, which I think both horse and man enjoyed more than Mrs. Foster, who kept house for him. Many a time he would make the turn into the yard with two wheels of the pheaton in the air or at least so it seemed. Mrs. Foster, who I think was either his sister or sister-in-law, was one of the kindest women I ever knew. I first remember her, when as a small boy another youngster and I were camping at the farm. I don't suppose we were outstanding cooks and as I recall our meals had something of a "canned" sameness. At anyrate Mrs. Foster called over and said she wanted to see us a minute at noon. When we went over she had a platter of the best tasting sweet corn that I ever had and it started a friendship that lasted as long as she lived.

Across from the Carpenter's was our farm house which was built before the Revolutionary war.

The little house just beyond the Carpenter's was not standing when I first remember but was built by a family by the name of Nicklaw about 1915. They were hard working people who were very devoted to their children. One night Mr. and Mrs. Nicklaw were driving either to or from Bernardston with a horse and sleigh, during a snow storm, when they were struck by a train at the Bernardston R.R. crossing and killed.

At the foot of the hill was the "Meeks Place" so called, now occupied by Dr. and Mrs. D. P. Taggart and the former home of the Rythers, who were the parents of Mrs. Barnard Newell who lived in the Channing Bete residence. Mr. Meeks, a New York lawyer, purchased the property in the 80's and converted it into a summer dwelling. The stable at the west of the pond was once a mill and stood just below the present dam. The late Jeremiah Keefe once told me that he considered it the oldest building now standing in Greenfield and a deed of 1820 intimates that it had been used for the manufacture of "Sharp Edge Tools" for many years before that time. An old friend related that Mrs. Newell was glad to sell the place to Mr. Meeks for \$600.00 as she was "sick of stuffing her old petticoats into the dam to try and stop leaks and her two sisters who also shared in the property were not interested enough to do that." Perhaps Mrs. Meeks was not as well supplied with petticoats, for Mr. Meeks replaced the old wooden dam with the present one of stone. After spending about 20 summers there, Mr. Meeks became involved personally and the place was closed for many years and acquired the reputation

of being a "haunted house". I cannot vouch for the accuracy of this, for in the nearly forty years we have owned the place I have never been able to locate a ghost.

Across the road where the Crowell's now live, was the home of Dea. John King. Perhaps the Dea. was ahead of his time, for he had many ideas that were considered queer. One of which was to hang a lantern on the end of the pole of his mowing machine and cut his grass after dark and late into the night and sleep late into the next day. Although tractors now have headlights as part of their standard equipment, horses drawn mowing machines did not, and Mr. King's methods did not gain him the reputation of being a progressive farmer.

The present "Bete" residence was built by Barnard Newell who supposedly made a fortune operating stage coach lines and lost it when R. R. replaced them. When I first remember, Mrs. Horace Parmenter lived there and had since shortly after the Civil war, coming to work for the Newell's ~~home~~ when she was a young girl. When I knew her she was very lame and it was difficult for her to get around too much but she had sharp eyes and keen ears and many friends and as long as she lived there was little that went on in the neighborhood nor had during her life time, and she was both an interesting conversationalist and an unending source of information. I regret that I did not make a note of the stories and incidents that she related.

The Present "Salt Box", the home of Barnard Newell's parents, according to report once stood on the site of the Bete house and was moved across the road when that was built. It formally stood nearer the road but was moved when remodeled into the tea room.

The "Fargo" house north of the cemetery looked much the same 40 years ago as at present, as does the Turner home, which at that time was owned by a family named Pomeroy. The present Lindell farm was owned and operated for many years by the Eben Taylors and I have been told that at one time it was the site of a Tannery. In the bend of the road where the Yetter's gardens are was the "Osgood" place. After Mr. Osgood's death it changed hands, shortly after ~~burned~~.

The last place before reaching the Bernardston line was "Elmhaust" This was the home of Barnabas Snow, who was killed in an accident about the turn of the century, when his horse became frightened by one of the "new trolleys" on Federal Street and ran, throwing him from his carriage. One of my early recollections was the disastrous fire there, when the barns and livestock burned. The late Isaac Snow, a son of the former owner remodeled it and used it for a summer home. He was a tall distinguished looking gentleman something of the "Old School" type and in my young eyes typified the "Country Squire". It was rather picturesque to see Mr. and Mrs. Snow riding to town with their driver and the "station" wagon drawn by a pair of sleek Bays or in later years to see Mr. Snow jogging back and forth in his "Stanhope" and handsome mare. I think Mr. Snow used a driving horse the longest of anyone in the section and it brought back good memories after everyone else had motorized.

About 1915 the closing scene of bygone drama was depicted on the Bernardston Road. If I recall correctly, it was a daughter of the famous Mark Hanna, and her husband, residing in Lenox, decided to revive one of the pleasures of the past, and with make a trip with "coach and four" as many had done before. Gone was the huge stage barn of Asher Spencer back of our present Town Hall, gone was the barn at the "halfway house" now the Eck Inn in Bernardston and gone were the dirt roads and comfortable footing for the horses. The machine age had come and even in this revival it must play its part. The Party planned to cover 30 miles a day and to do this, 12 coach horses were required, so that a fresh team could be put on every ten miles. Two trucks were used to transport four horses each while four drew the coach, and the trucks would go ahead to where a change was to be made at noon or mid afternoon. Unload their fresh "four in hand" and pick up the tired ones. About noon on a pleasant summer day the coach rolled up Clay Hill and the coachman wheeled a half circle up to the Mansion House door, while the footman blew the call on his horn that was supposed to bring the landlord to his door, as many footmen had done in days gone by.

The passengers alighted in their gay and colorful costumes and went in for lunch, the coach again wheeled and went across the street to Roger Rourke's stable, which stood in the rear of the present Garden Theatre to "Bait" the horses and pick up the fresh team. When the nooning was over and the grooms went to the harness, they found that modern roads had taken their toll and one of the leaders had gone lame. So they hitched a "Spike" team, two wheel horses and one leader and the party rolled on up the Bernardston Road, not quite so gaily, perhaps not quite so swiftly, but still picturesquely depicting for the last time, that which in former days had been a common sight on the "The Old Stage Road" running North from Greenfield to Bernardston.

2. Tavern.

Blacksmith Shop.

Distillery

Wagon Shop.

Blacksmith Shop.

Wagon Shop.

Wagon Shop.

Wagon Shop.