

CORPORAL EBENEZER PARKER

Ebenezer Parker was born in Lexington on August 13th 1750, the eldest son of Thomas Parker and his wife, Jane (Parrot) of Chelmsford. The couple had five children, only two of whom survived childhood, Ebenezer and his sister, Mary. Thomas died at 62, but Jane lived to the ripe old age of 85. More on Thomas later.

Ebenezer married Dorcas Monroe and at the time of the battle they had one child, Abijah. But Dorcas, on April 19th was very pregnant with their second, a son named Quincy who was born only nine days after the battle. One wonders about her feelings when her young husband of 25 set off for the green that morning. Abijah was to die that summer at the age 2; Quincy had thirteen children and lived until 1828.

And she had reason to worry. Once the firing started, instead of leaving the field with his comrades, he tried to persuade his uncle Jonas Parker from fulfilling his vow that he would never flee from the regulars. Failing to do so, much to his distress, and surrounded by redcoats, he left the field. Later in the day, with the rest of the company, he joined the march towards Concord and, presumably, participated in “Parker’s Revenge”

Corporal Parker, who lived near his cousin Captain John —perhaps in his father’s house— in the area that is now corner of Spring Street and Concord Avenue, went on to serve from May 6th to May 10th in Cambridge, with 25 other Lexingtonians – he is listed as “Sergeant” in the records. He was among the 61 members of the Lexington Militia who served June 17th and 18th, not at Bunker Hill, (much to their distress, they were assigned to guard the neck at Charlestown) and once more under Captain John Bridge in Roxbury from March 4th to March 8th 1776. At that point his life took a dramatic turn in the form of a major move west, to Princeton Massachusetts. Of the twelve veterans still alive in 1835 when the men who fell on the green were re-interred at the monument on the common, only Parker and Solomon Brown were absent. Brown, it seems was burdened by the “infirmities of old age,” and Parker simply lived too far away to make the ceremonies.

His father, Thomas, was the quartermaster of Captain Parker’s company. Unfortunately, he had a bad case of something the day of the battle – he was a Selectman at the time and maybe he was nervous about being reelected or something. Anyway, he was confined to his bed. Now the family story has it that two grenadiers who were ransacking houses on their way back from Concord – how and why they were wandering so far off the line of march when everyone else was running pell mell to the safety of Earl Percy’s guns I can’t imagine, but this is the family story, not mine. Anyway, they got across Route 2 and demanded of Thomas’ wife that she show them through the rooms. In the meantime, Thomas’ daughter had supplied her ill father with some stout cord. When the two Regulars burst into his room, sick as he was, he overpowered them, bound them with the cord and delivered them to the colonial authorities. I’d have hated to have met him when he was well, if he pulled that off when he was sick!

At any rate, Thomas was aggressive and energetic. In 1893, Theodore Parker writes: “By his characteristic foresight he dealt successfully in real estate and accumulated a respectable property. He sold his land in Lexington to his cousins there, also bought timber land in Shrewsbury, and new land in Hubbardston, formerly owned by his brother Amos.” In 1777, he purchased a tract of 400 acres in Princeton, Mass. For 1330 pounds – I have a Photostat of the deed, witnessed by his oldest son, Ebenezer, dated April 9th 1777.

So this branch of the Parker family left Lexington for Princeton, where Thomas built a solid homestead. He took along with them 32 year old Lucy, oldest child of the deceased Jonas Parker. Lucy was born deaf, and consequently was dumb. She lived with the family, first Thomas and then Ebenezer, until she died at 62. In 1993, a couple came up to me after the reenactment and asked if I were Ebenezer Parker. On learning that he was indeed my character, they told me that they lived in his home, built by his father, in Princeton and invited me to come to visit them.

On that memorable occasion, and thanks to their research in the records in Princeton, I learned about the rest of the Parker's life, saw some of his possessions including a sketch which made him look really stuffy I thought – maybe whoever it was who gave me his character to portray was thinking of the older Parker, not the 25-year old in the battle!

At any rate, the Parkers of Princeton – especially Ebenezer – were very substantial people indeed. Thomas built a beautiful twin chimney, central entrance homestead with an ell, approached by a circular drive and fine trees on a lovely site. He continued to add land to his holdings, established a tavern which he ran, and then turned over to Ebenezer. He died in 1799, leaving his son extremely well established. Four years earlier he had formally transferred his estate to Ebenezer; “I, Thomas Parker of Princeton....Gentleman, for and in consideration of the love and affection which...

Ebenezer and Dorcas had five more children, born in Princeton. When she died in 1798, he married one Mrs. Mary Binney Rice and they had one who went on to become a prominent Boston lawyer. When he married Mrs. Rice, his household increased by two since she had a son and a daughter. Mary died in 1716, predeceasing her husband by 23 years.

He was a selectman for nearly twenty years (good grief!), an assessor for at least twenty years, a deacon of the church (known from then on as Deacon Parker), a State Representative for three terms. He sold off pieces of his land to his cousins and to Lexingtonians who moved to Princeton; he gave part of his land for a schoolhouse and a burying ground, gave each of his children a farm. Sometime fairly shortly after he settled in Princeton with his father, he joined nine other men of the town in an outspoken statement declaring that the “commonwealth of Massachusetts is and of right ought to be a free, sovereign, and independent state,” swearing loyalty to it and telling the King of England just where he could go.

Deacon Ebenezer Parker died October 19th 1839, within ten months of his 90th birthday.

Dan H. Fenn Jr., Lexington Minute Men

Sources: Princeton town records, Hudson's History, Family history.