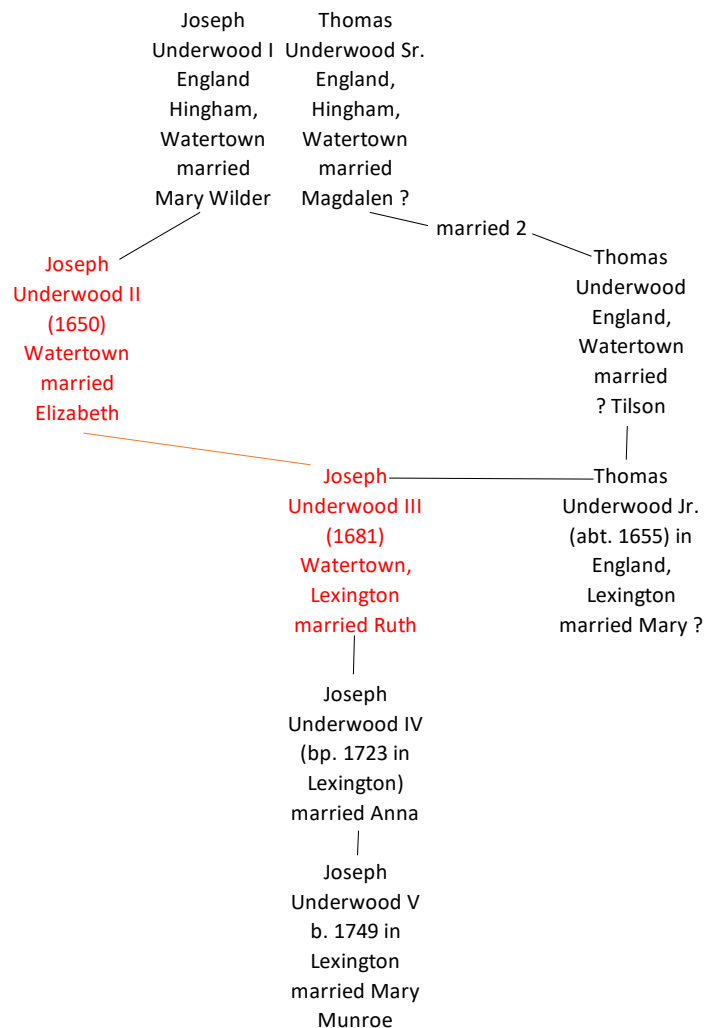


Joseph Underwood
A Brief Biography
By Bill Poole

There are two different ancestral lines that have been proposed for **Joseph Underwood**. The first descends from **Joseph Underwood I** who immigrated to Massachusetts in 1637 and settled first in Hingham and then in Watertown. He married **Mary Wilder**, and their son, **Joseph II**, was born in Watertown in 1650. Joseph II married **Elizabeth**, maiden name unknown, and their son **Joseph III** was born in Watertown on May 28, 1681. Joseph III married **Ruth**, maiden name unknown and moved to Lexington, MA where they had eight children all baptized in Lexington. One of their children was **Joseph IV**, baptized in Lexington on March 3, 1723, and married Anna Baker of Waltham. Their son **Joseph V**, whom we will call simply **Joseph**, born April 30, 1749, is the subject of this essay.¹

The alternate ancestral line, as proposed by Lucien Marcus Underwood in his *The Underwood Families of America*, descends from a **Thomas Underwood Sr.** who immigrated to Massachusetts about 1660. His son, **Thomas Jr.** remained in England, but following his father's death he also immigrated and came to Lexington where he and his wife, **Mary**, had a son, **Joseph**, who in the other line would be **Joseph III**.²

One other interesting, if complicating factor, is that Magdalen the wife of Joseph I's brother **Thomas**, married secondly, **Thomas Underwood Sr.** However, there were no children with either marriage.³



Charles Hudson, in his *History of Lexington*, used the first ancestral line in an abbreviated form, but Lucien Marcus Underwood in his *The Underwood Families of America*, insists on line two. The Vital Records of Lexington make it clear that Joseph Underwood IV was baptized on March 23, 1723. The record does not mention his parents, but Hudson claimed that it was **Joseph III** formerly of Watertown and his wife Elizabeth.⁴

However, Lucien Marcus Underwood presented the following document in support of his assertion that Thomas Jr. and Mary were the parents of Joseph III, not Joseph II and Elizabeth of Watertown.

Deed from Thomas Underwood and Mary, his wife.

To all people to whom these presents shall come: Know ye that I Thomas Underwood of Lexington in ye County of Middlesex in His Majesties province of the Massachusetts Bay in New England husbandman For and in consideration of love good will and affection w'h I do beare to my dutyfull son Joseph Underwood of the same town and county husbandman Have given granted and do by these presents freely clearly and absolutely give grant and convey and confirm unto him the said Joseph Underwood his heirs executors and assigns all and singular my land lying and being in Lexington above said containing by Estimation forty acres be it more or less being upland and medow bounded easterly on Dunback medow, westerly on Hunting swamp northerly by the lands of Joshua Warren and Benjamin Smith, and southerly of the lands of George Adams and John Adams. To have & to hold all the said lands with all the Housing Fences Timber Trees Wood and Underwood water and water courses, with all privileges and appurtenances to the same belonging or in any wise appertaining to him the sd Joseph Underwood his heires and assigns forever and that by the power and virtue of these presents the sd Joseph Underwood may forever hereafter have hold, use, occupy, possess & enjoy the same and every part and parcel thereof peaceably and quietly without the lawful lett suit deny all disturbances and contradiction of me ye said Thomas Underwood or any other person or persons by from or under me or my procurement. In witness whereof I the sd Thomas Underwood with Mary my now married wife have hereunto put our hands and seals this tenth day of March Anno Domini Seventeen hundred and Seventeen Eighteen in the fourth year of his Majesties reign.

his
Thomas X Underwood
mark
her
Mary X Underwood
mark

Syned Sealed and Delivered in
presence of us
her
Mary X Smith
mark
John Mason.⁵

A small remnant of Dunback Meadow still remains off Bacon Street north of the Beaver Brook in Lexington, but it was much more extensive in the 18th century.

It appears that this is fairly conclusive proof of the parentage of Joseph III who Hudson states was in Lexington as early as 1719 when "he was chosen to subordinate town office." In 1723, he "owned the covenant" meaning he pledged to voluntarily adhere to the basic moral and spiritual tenants of the Lexington church which was requisite for membership.⁶ His name appeared on the first extant tax bill in 1729 at 1 pound 4 shillings 0 pence⁷ In the 1745 assessment of real and personal property his valuation was 14 shillings 11 pence. Of the 371 taxpayers that year, there were 98 whose wealth was greater and 273 less, so he ranked somewhere in the second quartile in wealth⁸

The 1743 valuation of South Lexington lists Joseph III as owning 6 cows, 2 horses, no sheep or oxen and just 1 swine. His real estate was valued at 18 pounds, no shillings and his personal estate at 13 pounds and 8 pence.⁹ Charles Hudson observed that he paid taxes in Lexington through 1745 and was then classed as a non-resident by 1748/49, meaning that he had left town sometime before the latter entry.⁸ I did not find this in the records, but certainly it was true that he was classified as a nonresident by 1752 when his name appeared as such.¹⁰

Thereafter, Joseph III disappears from the records and his wife, Ruth is recorded as having died in Lincoln, MA as a widow on June 23, 1775.¹¹

Joseph III and Ruth had eight children all born in Lexington: 1. **Joseph IV father of Joseph Underwood the subject of this essay**, baptized March 3, 1723; 2. **Joshua**, baptized June 6, 1725; 3. **Elijah**, baptized May 5, 1728; 4. **Peter**, baptized May 25, 1729; 5. **Ruth**, baptized April 4, 1731; 6. **Israel**, baptized June 23, 1734; 7. **Moses**, baptized August 17, 1735; and 8. **Susanna**, baptized September 2, 1739.¹²

The Lincoln branch of the Underwood family started with several of the children of Joseph II and Ruth. Peter died in Lincoln on December 6, 1806; Moses died there on March 15 1806; Susanna died in Lincoln on February 23, 1762; Israel lived in Lincoln and three of his children were born there before the family moved to Hubbardston, MA; Ruth married Jonathan Gage in Lincoln on November 29, 1752, and their mother Ruth as stated earlier, died in Lincoln on June 25, 1775.¹³

Joseph Underwood IV was the father of **Joseph Underwood** the subject of this essay. He married Anna Baker of Waltham, born in Charlestown, MA on August 3, 1727, daughter of John and Elizabeth Baker.¹⁴ They had two children born in Lexington: 1. **Samuel**, born November 21, 1747 and 2. **Joseph, the subject of this essay**, born April 30, 1749. Anna died May 30, 1740, and Joseph IV then married on January 4, 1750 in Lexington, **Eunice Smith**, born June 4, 1730, daughter of Daniel and Mary Burr ridge Smith. They had five children: 1. **Eunice**, born December 10, 1751; 2. **Nathan**, born August 3, 1753; 3. **Bettee**, born August 15, 1755; 4. **Anna**, born May 22, 1757; and **Sarah**, born April 30, 1749.¹⁵

Joseph IV died on April 25, 1760. His estate underwent probate on August 17, 1761. After the widow's third was allocated to Eunice, the administrators distributed sums owed to 27 individuals including his eldest son, Joseph, and also, interestingly, to Joseph's aunts and uncles in varying amounts.¹⁶

Joseph 97 pounds seven shillings and 2 pence
Uncle Israel Underwood, 18 pounds, 11 shillings, 10 pence, 1 farthing
Uncle Peter Underwood, 12 pounds, 2 shillings 4 pence
Uncle Joshua Underwood, 7 pounds, 7 shillings, 10 pence, 1 farthing
Uncle Elijah Underwood, 4 pounds, 3 shillings, 1 pence, 3 farthings
Uncle Moses Underwood, 0 pounds, 8 shillings, 0 pence, 2 farthings
Aunt Ruth Underwood Gage 0 pounds, 4 shillings, 0 pence, 1 farthing

Samuel was not mentioned, nor were the children from Joseph IV's marriage with Eunice. As minors, Samuel and Joseph were required to have guardians, and on October 5, 1765 they chose Jonathan Smith, gentleman of Lexington for theirs. In 1771, the five children of the marriage of Joseph IV and Eunice chose their step brother Joseph as their guardian.¹⁷

When Eunice died on June 18, 1805, Joseph initiated a suit to recover the widows' dower given to her in the division of Joseph IV's estate. Because Joseph IV had died intestate and insolvent, the debts had exceeded the two-thirds value of the estate left after Eunice's one-third dower was subtracted. Creditors were paid 12 shillings and 9 3/4 pence to the pound leaving an indebtedness of 7 shillings 2 1/4 pence.

Joseph was made administrator of his step-mother's estate and on December 26, 1806 he began pursuit of the recovery. On August 28, 1807, his request was assented to, and the value of the dower was set at \$1125.60. Joseph was awarded costs of \$75.57 leaving the amount to be distributed as \$1049.43 being considered the equivalent of 318 pounds 16 shillings and 6 pence in old money. Again, Joseph and his aunts and uncles were among the 27 individuals awarded commensurate sums.¹⁸

Joseph \$538.71

Uncle Israel Underwood, \$108.30

Uncle Peter Underwood, \$70.71

Uncle Joshua Underwood, \$43.12

Uncle Elijah Underwood, \$24.50

Uncle Moses Underwood, \$2.35

Aunt Ruth Underwood Gage \$1.17

Joseph Underwood, the subject of this essay.

We can dispense with the numbering system and use the simple name **Joseph Underwood**, by which he was then known. Joseph, born on April 30, 1749, was just shy of his 26th birthday when, on the evening of April 18, 1775 he joined with some forty of the Lexington Militia gathered near Buckman's Tavern to discuss what should be done in response to the passage through town of a number of British officers, an unusual occurrence at such a late hour. Years later, on March 7, 1825 when he was nearly 76, he swore a deposition recounting his experiences of that evening and of the following day, April 9, 1775.¹⁹

I, Joseph Underwood of Lexington, in the seventy-sixth year of my age, on oath do testify, that on the evening of the 18th of April, 1775, in consequence of a report, that some British officers had passed through town toward Concord, about forty of the militia company assembled, early in the evening, at Buckman's tavern, near the meeting-house, for the purpose of consulting what measures should be adopted. It was concluded to send persons toward Concord to watch the motions of the British officers; and others towards Boston, to ascertain if there were any movements of the British troops. A guard was stationed at the house of the Rev. Mr. Clark, for the purpose of protecting Hancock and Adams, who were then residing at Mr. Clark's. The first certain information we had of the approach of the British troops, was given by Thaddeus Bowman, between four and five o'clock on the morning of the 19th, when Capt. Parker's company were summoned by the beat of the drum, and the line formed. When the regulars had arrived within about one hundred rods of our line, they charged their pieces, and then moved toward us at a quick step. Some of our men, on seeing them, proposed to quit the field, but Capt. Parker gave orders for every man to stand his ground, and said he would order the first man shot, that offered to leave his post. I stood very near Capt. Parker, when the regulars came up, and am confident that he did not order his men to disperse, till the British troops had fired upon us the second time.

Joseph Underwood.

Middlesex, ss. 7 March, 1825. - - Then personally appeared the said Joseph Underwood, and made oath to the within statement, by him subscribed, before me.

Amos Muzzy, Justice of the Peace.

Joseph was a husband and father to two young children, yet felt his place was with his relatives, neighbors and friends defending their town from any potential British depredation. He also marched with his fellow townsmen to support the Colonial forces surrounding Boston.

The following is taken from *Massachusetts Soldiers and Sailors of the American Revolution*.

UNDERWOOD, Joseph, Lexington. Private, in a detachment from Lexington Militia co. commanded by Capt. John Parker; service 5 days; detachment reported on command at Cambridge from May 6 to May 10, 1775 by order of committee of Safety; *also*, pay roll of a detachment from Lexington militia co. commanded by Capt. John Parker; service 2 days; detachment reported on command at Cambridge from June 17 to June 18, 1775, by order of Committee of Safety.²⁰

The tour in June was during the Battle of Bunker Hill, in which the Men of Lexington did not take part.

Joseph married on March 21, 1771, **Mary Munroe**, daughter of Marrett and Deliverance Parker Munroe.²¹ The home of Marrett and Deliverance was located on the south side of Lexington Common and their son Nathan was among the militia gathered there. They could have viewed the battle, but the danger of doing so is attested to by the bullet hole that can still be seen in the home today.

Joseph and Mary had at least nine children all born in Lexington: 1. **Joseph Jr.**, baptized July 5, 1772; 2. **Mary**, baptized February 27, 1774; 3. **Anna**, baptized April 7, 1776; 4. **Polly**, baptized December 7, 1777 5. **John**, baptized March 26, 1780; 6. **Nathan**, baptized April 14, 1782; 7. **Anna**, baptized July 25, 1784; 7. **Betsey**, baptized September 30, 1787; and 8. **Dorcas**, baptized August 25, 1790. The records show that a child of Joseph died November 9, 1776 and another on August 30, 1778. These were most likely Joseph and Mary's as well.²²

Mary Munroe Underwood died on July 10, 1802, and Joseph then married at Waltham on November 28, 1804, Mrs. Mary Hammond and they had no children. Joseph served on a committee of six that submitted a report on the Lexington schools before the town meeting on May, 1821.²³

Joseph died on February 27, 1829 and Mary Hammond Underwood is probably the person listed as "Mrs., about 80 y., Feb. 1829."²⁴ Joseph wrote his will on March 15, 1825 and it was probated on April 14, 1829.²⁵ It was customary to give a portion of the homestead dwelling house to the youngest son, since he would not have had the time to accumulate wealth as had his elder brothers. This is reflected in the portion of the will quoted below.

"I give and bequeath to my youngest son Nathan in case he be living the improvement during his natural life and in case also he shall return home the following described Real Estate and at his decease to his heirs of legal representatives the improvement only and not to be sold nor transferred and until he shall or may return home. I otherwise order the same Real Estate to be equally improved by my two sons Joseph and John after my decease their paying to my said son Nathan in case of his return the sum of forty dollars annually and in case he should be found not to return to improve it then the said Joseph & John to have the refusal to improvement by paying the same rent to him or his heirs and the same real estate is described as follows (viz) A piece of land of about nine acres more or less, the old orchard so called bounded Southeasterly on a turnpike road, Easterly & Southerly on land of Nath^{el} Cutler, Easterly on a town road about 25 rods thence Northerly of about thirty rods on land I have deeded to my son John, thence Easterly till it comes to a corner. Thence Northerly fifteen rods on said John Underwood, thence Southerly as the wall stands to said turnpike road — also a part of my dwelling house (viz) the East front room and chamber over the same & the cellar under the same with the privilege to the well and chamber cellar — also one third of my Barn and this I consider to be his full part or share out of my Estate. What I have given to him my wish is if he don't return to go to Joseph.

Joseph and Mary are buried in Lexington's old Burying Ground.



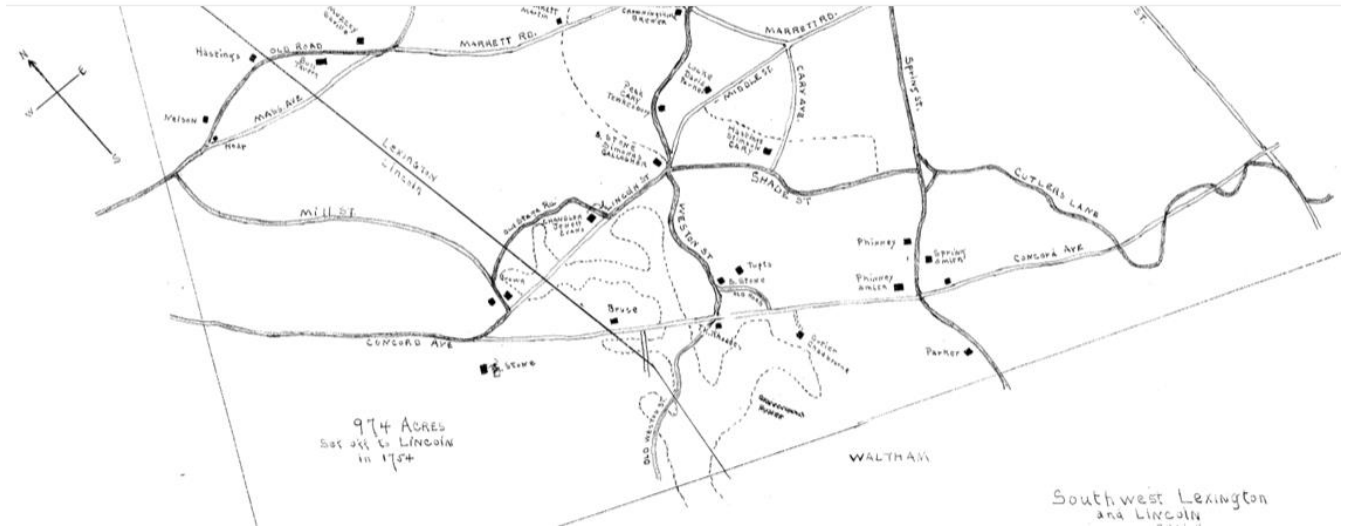
ERECTED
In memory of
MR.
JOSEPH UNDERWOOD
who died
Feb. 27, 1829;
Æt. 82.

Sacred
to the memory of
MRS MARY UNDERWOOD
Consort of
Mr. Joseph Underwood
who died
July 10th 1802,
Æt. 52
Also Polly, & Anna
daughters of Joseph
& Mary Underwood²⁶

Where was Joseph Underwood's home located?

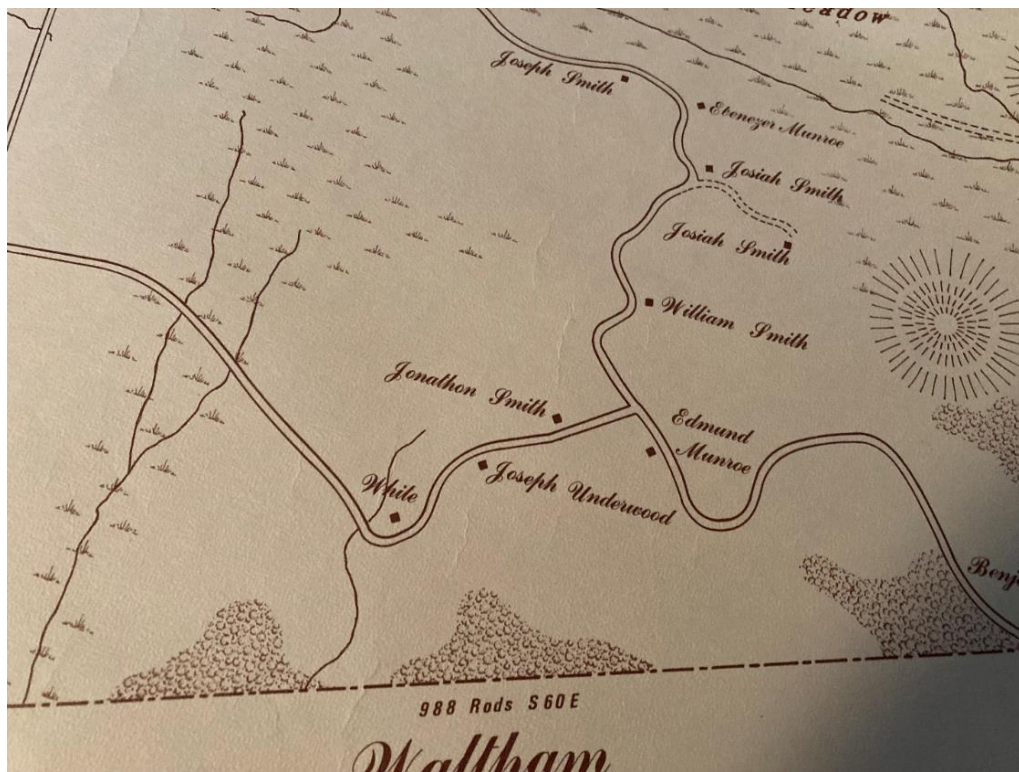
There are clues as to the location of Joseph's home in the property descriptions in the gift of land from Thomas to Joseph III and in Joseph's bequeath to his son, Nathan. The gift from Thomas mentions Dunback Meadow and the name, Benjamin Smith. Dunback Meadow appears on historic maps, and as stated earlier, a small remnant of the meadow still remains off Bacon Street north of the Beaver Brook in Lexington. It was significantly more extensive in the 18th century. Members of the Smith family resided along a much more twisting and meandering Waltham Street that ran through Dunback Meadow.

In the bequest to Nathan, the property description mentions the land of Nathaniel Cutler. The "754 map of Southwest Lexington and east Lincoln" shows a Cutler's Lane running from the junction of Shade and Spring Streets, bisecting Concord Avenue and continuing past Waltham Street. Today there is a Cutler's Farm Road off Hudson Road and Spring Street.



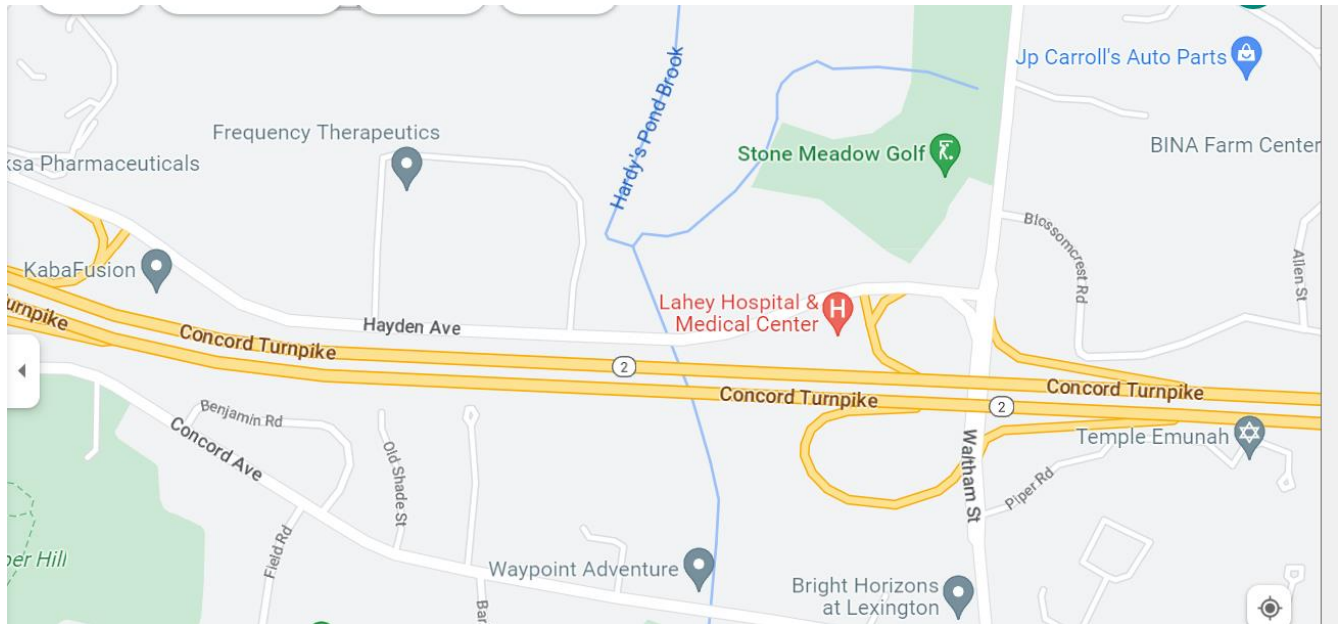
1754 Map of Southwest Lexington and Lincoln

The map prepared for the bicentennial celebration of the Battle of Lexington located Joseph's home on a winding road that might have been meant to represent Cutler's Lane. It is clearly situated east of what is Hardy's Pond Brook and west of Waltham Street.



Portion of Bicentennial Map of Lexington

The Bicentennial Map shows the homes of many members of the Smith family and is supportive of the location of the Underwood homestead, because the connections of the Underwood and Smith Families were many. A very important factor in finding a mate in the 18th century was proximity. Neighbors married neighbors. Joseph's father, Joseph IV, had taken as his second wife, Eunice Smith, and three of Joseph's children married members of the Smith family. Polly married Joseph Smith, John married Mary Smith and Anna married Ebenezer Smith.



The construction of Route 2 and modern Hayden Avenue have dramatically altered the landscape of this portion of Lexington, but perhaps Hayden Avenue would be the approximate site of Joseph Underwood's home.

Footnotes

- ¹Bond, Henry, M.D., *Genealogies of the Families and Descendants of the Early Settlers of Watertown, Massachusetts including Waltham and Weston in Which is Appended the Early History of the Town With Illustrations and Maps*, Second Edition, Published by the New England Historical Society, Boston, 1860, p. 610; *History of the Town of Hingham, Massachusetts in Three Volumes*, Volume 1 Part 1 Historical, Published by the Town, University Press, John Wilson and Son, Cambridge, 1893, p. 202; *Vital Records of Watertown, MA to the End of the Year 1849* at <https://ma-vitalrecords.org/MA/Middlesex/Watertown/>; *Vital Records of Lexington, MA to the End of the Year 1897* at <https://ma-vitalrecords.org/MA/Middlesex/Lexington/>
- ²Underwood, Lucien Marcus, *The Underwood Families of America*, in two volumes, Volume 1, Lancaster, PA, Press of the New Era Printing Company, pp. 217-222.
- ³*Ibid.*, p. 37.
- ⁴Hudson, Charles, *Bi-centenary Edition History of the Town of Lexington Massachusetts in Two Volumes*, Volume II, *Genealogies*, Lexington Historical Society, Boston and New York, Houghton Mifflin Company, The Riverside Press, 1913, p. 714.
- ⁵Underwood, *op. cit.* pp. 320-21.
- ⁶Hudson, *op. cit.*, p. 714.
- ⁷<http://records.lexingtonma.gov/weblink/0/doc/328652/Page1.aspx>
- ⁸<http://records.lexingtonma.gov/weblink/0/doc/328705/Page1.aspx>
- ⁹1743 South Valuation <http://records.lexingtonma.gov/weblink/0/doc/328699/Page1.aspx>
- ¹⁰<http://records.lexingtonma.gov/WebLink/0/doc/328724/Page1.aspx>Hudson, *op. cit.* p. 714; Hudson, *op. cit.*, p. 714.
- ¹¹Vital Records of Lincoln, MA to the End of the Year 1850 at <https://ma-vitalrecords.org/MA/Middlesex/Lincoln/>
- ¹²Vital Records of Lexington, MA, *op. cit.*
- ¹³Vital Records of Lincoln, MA, *op. cit.*
- ¹⁴Vital Records of Waltham, MA to the End of the Year 1850 at <https://ma-vitalrecords.org/MA/Middlesex/Waltham/>; Vital Records of Charlestown, Massachusetts to the Year 1850, p. 294 at <https://digital-americanancestors-org.nehgs.idm.oclc.org/digital/collection/p15869coll33/id/5555>

¹⁵Hudson, *op. cit.*, p. 714; Vital Records of Lexington, *op. cit.*

¹⁶Middlesex County Probate: File Papers 1648-1871, volumes Middlesex County Cases 22000-23999, pages 23165:1-15

¹⁷*Ibid.*, pages 23170:1-4; 23166:1-3; 23167:1-3; 23168:1-3; 23169:1-3

¹⁸*Ibid.*, pages 23165:16-35

¹⁹Kehoe, Vincent J.R., "We Were There April 19, 1775 The American Rebels," Self-Published, January 1, 1975, "Deposition of Ebenezer Munroe," p. 249.

²⁰*Massachusetts Soldiers and Sailors of the Revolutionary War, A compilation from the Archives Prepared and Published by the Secretary of the Commonwealth in Accordance with Chapter 100, Resolves of 1891*, Boston, Wright & Potter, 1896-1908, Volume 16, p. 255.

²¹Vital Records of Lexington, MA, *op. cit.*

²²*Ibid.*

²³*Ibid.*; Hudson, *op. cit.*, p. 715

²⁴Vital Records of Lexington, *op. cit.*

²⁵Middlesex County Probate: File Papers 1648-1871, volumes Middlesex County Cases 22000-23999, pages 23173:1-8

²⁶Brown, Francis H., M.D., *A Copy of Epitaphs in the Old Burying Ground of Lexington, Massachusetts*, The Lexington Historical Society, 1905, p. 161.