

SARAH LUTWYCKE AND THE MATTHEW THORNTON FAMILY

Many people have asked why Sarah Lutwyche is buried with the Thornton family. Let's start with Sarah's family. Sarah was born in Salem, Massachusetts, the daughter of Deacon James Lindall and Mary Hutchinson Lindall on June 1, 1712. Deacon James was an original proprietor of Weare and Lyndeborough, but owned land in Merrimack. Sarah married Lawrence Lutwyche of Boston, who died in 1741, leaving his estate in equal parts to Sarah and their son, Edward Goldstone Lutwyche. Lawrence was the son of Thomas, who came from Wales to the new colony with his brother, Edward. Edward Goldstone Lutwyche was born in 1737 in Boston four years before his father's death. He and his mother, Sarah, moved from Boston to Merrimack in April 1760, to land left to her by her father, when she exchanged for land belonging to James Cummings. Edward then bought more farmland and built a three-story home near the Merrimack River, where he also had a store and toll house for the ferry to Litchfield. He continued to expand his holdings purchasing other nearby farms.

Next comes the story of the ferry. People crossed the river in various vessels until 1729 when Christopher Temple became the ferryman. This ferry was north of the later site and was critical for the settlers on both sides of the river, since at that time, the first Meetinghouse was on the eastern shore. When the two colonies separated, Temple neglected to reapply for a ferry charter from the new government, but continued to run or rent the ferry. A second ferry was run by Capt. James Cummings further south, with others renting or maintaining it over the years. Lutwyche bought other farms expanding his ownership and influence, and by 1763 was a selectman of both towns. After much conflict, Lutwyche used his influence in Portsmouth with Governors Benning and John Wentworth to secure a charter forbidding anyone else running a ferry within two miles and granting him land in Acworth and Enfield. As the river changed its course in the 1830's, the house and ferry were no longer as close to the river. When the railroad came in the 1840's, the house was demolished to install the tracks. The site of the house is now a stop on the scavenger hunt celebrating Merrimack's 275th anniversary.

Sarah and her son lived on this land for 14 years until the conflicts of the revolution began. Edward was a colonel in the Provincial militia, leading the 5th Regiment, succeeding Col. Zaccheus Lovewell. He remained in allegiance to the King, declining to sign the oath of allegiance, created by the Committee on Safety. He was ordered to take his regiment in defense on April 18, 1775, but decided to make other plans. At that time, he sold part of his property to his mother to obtain funds for his safety. On the night after the conflict at Lexington and Concord, he left during the night going to Boston. He left his mother, Sarah, behind when he left. When Boston was evacuated by the British in 1776, he accompanied the army to Halifax, Nova Scotia, probably to England and later to New York where, in 1777, he married Jane Rapalie, with whom he had a daughter Catherine.

So, what happened to Sarah at this time? She was widowed with no support, but continued to run the ferry until such time as the Committee on Safety headed by Jonathan Blanchard came with a warrant confiscating her son's property. She requested the state to retain ownership but was denied. Later this was granted, and it is said that she requested the town to be allowed to stay in one of the out-buildings, but I can find no documentation of this. In the meanwhile, much of the land was mortgaged to William Spooner and then sold to Matthew Thornton, when he moved to Merrimack from Londonderry after the war. He moved into the home, becoming a farmer and ferryman. Groups in Merrimack and Litchfield both opposed his ownership of the ferry, but their request was not granted. Thornton's wife, Hannah

Jack died in 1786. Their sons and daughters also moved to Merrimack. Matthew built a tavern on the main road as a wedding gift to his son James, and when James died, son Matthew Jr. took over that property. It remains today as the Common Man Restaurant. When Sarah died, in 1778, she was buried amidst the Thornton family in the graveyard nearby. Her gravestone matches the design of Hannah Jack's, although smaller, but her grave is in the midst of the family, leaving us to believe that the Thornton family took care of her during the rest of her lifetime.

The Merrimack Historical Society is open to the public on Tuesdays from noon to 8 PM and by appointment at the one room schoolhouse at 520 Boston Post Rd. in South Merrimack.. It is hoped that we will begin regularly programming in the near future. For more information or to become a member, contact John Lastowka at 603-759-9174 , John.lastowka@outlook.com or Anita Creager at 603-424-5084 , anitacreager58@comcast.net.