

# Towpath Topics

Middlesex Canal Association P.O. Box 333 Billerica, MA 01821  
[www.middlesexcanal.org](http://www.middlesexcanal.org)

Volume 57 No. 2

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Please mark your calendars

## MCA Sponsored Events

### 2019 Schedule

**Winter Meeting**, 1:00pm, Sunday, February 10, 2019  
Bill Kuttner "Concrete in Boston: Revolution and Evolution"

**Spring Walk**, 1:30pm, Sunday, March 24, 2019  
Sandy Beach: Winchester to Medford

**Bicycle Tour South**, 10:44 am, Sunday, April 14, 2019

**Spring Meeting**, 1:00pm, Sunday, May 5, 2019  
Speaker TBA "Riverfest in June"  
Annual Meeting

**17th Bicycle Tour North**, 9:00am, Saturday, October 5, 2019

**Fall Walk**, 1:30pm, Sunday, October 20, 2019  
Billerica-Chelmsford

**Fall Meeting**, 1:00pm, Sunday, October 27, 2019  
Speaker TBA

**The Visitor/Center Museum is open Saturday and Sunday, noon – 4pm, except on holidays. The Board of Directors meets the 1st Wednesday of each month, 3:30-5:30pm, except July and August.**

**Visit [www.middlesexcanal.org](http://www.middlesexcanal.org) for up-to-date listings of MCA events and other events of interest to canallers!**

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### **Editors' Letter**

Dear Readers,

Another year, another *Towpath Topics*! While the weather, so far this winter, has been seasonable, when the next storm hits, and it will, let *Towpath Topics*, be a distraction from whatever is going on outside.

MCA business items come first in this issue, so starting out is President Breen's account of the new museum project, followed by a tribute to Dave Barber. Next, there is a report on the excellent fall meeting and a "Thank You" to Bill Gerber following his retirement from the MCA Board of Directors.

Business concluded, we can get to the "meat" of this issue, and a review of *The Limner's Daughter* by Nancy Lloyd. Alec Ingraham has submitted a well-researched article tracing, for one hundred years, a piece of Canal land to its donation to the MCA. Part #4 of Alan Seaburg's "*A Social History of the Middlesex Canal*" continues his biography section, from Aaron Dexter to Christopher Gore. All well-written and fascinating reading.

Lastly, please note the "Events" and place them in your calendar for the upcoming months. As always, comments, correction, and criticisms are welcome.

Sincerely,

Deb, Alec, and Robert

## **MCA Sponsored Events and Directions to Museum**

### **Events**

**Winter Meeting:** On Sunday, February 10, 2019, the Middlesex Canal Association will hold a Public Meeting at 1:00pm at the Middlesex Canal Museum and Visitors' Center, 71 Faulkner Street in North Billerica, MA. Bill Kuttner will speak on "Concrete in Boston: Revolution and Evolution" building on his talk in 2017, "History of Modern Surroundings," to make what would be a subject for specialists interesting for a general audience. Bill is President of the Board of Governors of the Shirley-Eustis House Association as well as a director of Boston's West End Museum. Bill will be traveling to the meeting on the train from Boston if you would like to have a conversation with a long-time Charlestown Alternate to the Middlesex Canal Commission, Proprietor of the Association, and leader of the canal bicycle tours.

**Spring Walk:** At 1:30pm on Sunday, March 24, 2019, the Middlesex Canal Association in conjunction with the Appalachian Mountain Club will sponsor a pleasant walk along the remnants of the Canal in the vicinity of Sandy Beach. Those wishing to participate in the walk are encouraged to meet in the Sandy Beach Parking Lot, 4 Mystic Parkway, Winchester, MA. Sandy Beach is a ten minutes' walk from the Wedgemere train station on the Lowell line. The turnaround of the walk is at the Sagamore John Memorial near the West Medford Train Station. More information is available on the web at [www.middlesexcanal.org](http://www.middlesexcanal.org).

**Bicycle Tour South:** On Sunday, April 14, 2019, the Middlesex Canal Association will sponsor a bicycle tour of the Middlesex Canal. Incorporated in 1793 with John Hancock as the first proprietor, the canal connected the Merrimack River at Lowell with the Charles River at Boston by a ditch 3 1/2' deep, 30' wide and 27 miles long. It was the greatest work of its kind in the United States until the Erie Canal. The canal operated for 50 years, then the one-horse power canal boat quickly lost to a new competitor, the 30-horsepower steam locomotive. The tour will start at the Lowell train station after the 10:44am, when the 10:00am train arrives from Boston. This year an early group will take the 8:00am train from North Station to allow more time in Lowell and breakfast at the Owl Diner, United States Historic Landmark, [www.owldiner.com](http://www.owldiner.com). Train fare is \$10.00. The tour visits Lowell canals, River Walk, Francis Gate, the canal plaque at Hadley Field, then south on the route of the canal. Riders will stop at the mini-mall, 95 Boston Road, Billerica, MA for lunch at 1:00pm followed by a quick visit to the canal visitor center/museum, 71 Faulkner Street, Billerica, MA., and then back to Boston. More information is

available on the Web at [www.middlesexcanal.org](http://www.middlesexcanal.org).

**Directions to Museum:** 71 Faulkner Street in North Billerica MA.

#### By Car

##### From Rte. 128/95

Take Route 3 toward Nashua, to Exit 28 “Treble Cove Road, North Billerica, Carlisle”. At the end of the ramp, turn left onto Treble Cove Road toward North Billerica. At about ¾ mile, bear left at the fork. After another ¼ mile, at the traffic light, cross straight over Route 3A (Boston Road). Go about ¼ mile to a 3-way fork; take the middle road (Talbot Avenue) which will put St. Andrew’s Church on your left. Go ¼ mile to a stop sign and bear right onto Old Elm Street. Go about ¼ mile to the bridge over the Concord River, where Old Elm Street becomes Faulkner Street; the Museum is on your left and you can park across the street on your right, just beyond bridge. Watch out crossing the street!

##### From I-495

Take Exit 37, North Billerica, then south roughly 2 plus miles to the stop sign at Mt. Pleasant Street, turn right, then bear right at the Y, go 700’ and turn left into the parking lot. The Museum is across the street (Faulkner Street).

#### By Train

The Lowell Commuter line runs between Lowell and Boston’s North Station. From the station side of the tracks at North Billerica, the Museum is a 3-minute walk down Station Street and Faulkner Street on the right side.

### **President’s Message, Jan 10, 2019**

by J. Breen

The application for a Massachusetts Cultural Council matching grant of \$200,000 requires detailed information about the new visitor center/project. The information below is from the application.

#### “Briefly Summarize the Project”

The project is primarily the adaptive reuse of an 150-year-old wool cloth storehouse as a visitor center/museum. It will be the center for the 27-mile canal, the Billerica Mills Historic District, Billerica’s Garden Suburb, the Yankee Doodle Bike Path, and the Billerica & Bedford RR. Secondly, the project is the development of the summit pond, river, and river bank for public recreation.

The storehouse is brick and wood on a granite foundation. A 7” thick x 18” high granite facing is in place of two exterior wythes on top of the foundation. The top of the facing is el. 115.6’ (NAVD 1988), and the 100-year FEMA flood is el. 113.9’. The granite facing has not moved after 150 years indicating the

granite foundation likely extends to and bears on the bedrock which formed the Billerica Falls.

The 40’ x 60’ walls are 18” and 20” thick, respectively. The Talbots, first owners of the woolen mill, arrived in Billerica in 1837, and when building the storehouse with the profits from wool during the Civil War - no competition from cotton -, they had the experience and money to build lastingly. Unfortunately, in recent decades the leaking roof has not been replaced. While granite and brick tolerate dampness, wood rots. The building needs to be gutted, leaving just granite and bricks. A demolition contractor quoted three weeks and \$70,000. As the cost of seeking permission from government regulators for work at 2 Old Elm is thousands of dollars, whether a simple gutting in three weeks or a visitor center in six months, the Association is committed to seeking permission one time for a complete visitor center. The cost of the environmental specialist and supporting civil engineer for permission from the Conservation Commission alone is already more than \$25,000.

The new visitor center will have roughly the same exhibit space as the present one. It will have a much larger archive in an attic loft, 14’ x 60’. The deck aside the entrance to the canal north to the Merrimack and overlooking the summit pond is expected to increase the number of visitors and renters.

Because of the MA Riverfront Protection Act administered by the Billerica Conservation Commission, several hundred feet of riverbank will be landscaped as mitigation for the changes at 2 Old Elm. The owner of the lot, known as 6 Old Elm St, south of the canal, in granting an easement for visitor center parking, will be making it possible for boaters and anglers to access the river.

The Opportunity: “Describe the challenge or opportunity that led to the development of the project.”

The owner of the dilapidated storehouse at 2 Old Elm offered to gift the building to the Association. The Association as stated in its Articles of Organization has a purpose of acquiring property along the route of the canal for public recreation and education. The 1/10 acre of 2 Old Elm is the most important site along the 27-mile canal, the site of the ceremonial groundbreaking in 1794.

The owner in 2009 granted an easement to the Commonwealth’s Middlesex Canal Commission for a park on a large part of the owner’s property, including the lot across the 30’-wide canal from 2 Old Elm St. A Commission plan for the lot as part of a \$3 million park in the easement has 64 parking spaces. The lot, commonly known as 6 Old Elm St, has ample space today and in the future for parking on the same side of the street as the visitor center.

Two Old Elm St. is at the center of significant remnants of the historical

canal. On the north is the Billerica Falls Dam, built in granite two centuries ago with the profits from hauling cotton to the mills in Lowell, Nashua, and farther up the water highway between Boston Harbor and Concord, NH. The Port of Boston in 1835 received 90,109 bales of cotton. On the east is the summit pond formed by the dam to supply Concord River water to fill the canal and power its twenty locks. On the west, across Elm St, is the only remnant of the twenty locks. On the south is the canal and the mooring rings for the floating towpath across the summit pond.

Henry Thoreau here in 1839 left the Concord River. In *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers*, he described the Middlesex Canal, its then present and future, as he traveled on the canal to the Merrimack. He wrote, “in the lapse of ages, Nature will recover and indemnify herself, and gradually plant fit shrubs and flowers along its borders.” Here on the west bank of the summit pond begins two miles of canal which can be walked north to Chelmsford. During the advertised, public walks on the Thoreau Towpath, the guide will halt the crowd to read aloud Thoreau’s prediction of the canal’s future after a lapse of nearly two centuries.

As a free-standing building at a busy river bridge, the Visitor Center will attract more attention and be more memorable than as a tenant in a mill complex with twenty tenants. The Association with its own building may modify it as it sees fit and will not be subject to future large rent increases.

Tourists: “Describe the tourism impact of your organization. Tourism is defined as a person traveling 50 miles or more one way to a destination or who stays overnight.”

A review of the first 100 addresses in the visitor log has among those, in sequence, tourists from British Columbia, Canada; North Stonington, CT; Ledyard, CT; Upland, CA; Portland, OR; Palomar Mountain, CA; Venice, FL; Lewis, NY; Plainville, CT; Bristol, RI; Anchorage, AK; Tucson, AZ; indicating 13 % of visitors who signed the log were tourists. Notable is the lack of a tourist from England as canals are popular there with a consequent interest in America’s greatest canal before the Erie located near the tourist destination of Boston. File uploaded, “Visitor Log of Tourist Addresses”, in folder miscellaneous.

The English engineer, William Weston, who was a consultant in 1794 to the American, Loammi Baldwin, who was the builder of the canal, has some fame in England. In 2017, Pamela Gardner wrote from England to share information on Weston. Gardner is the author of *Billingsley, Brampton and Beyond: In Search of the Weston Connection*.

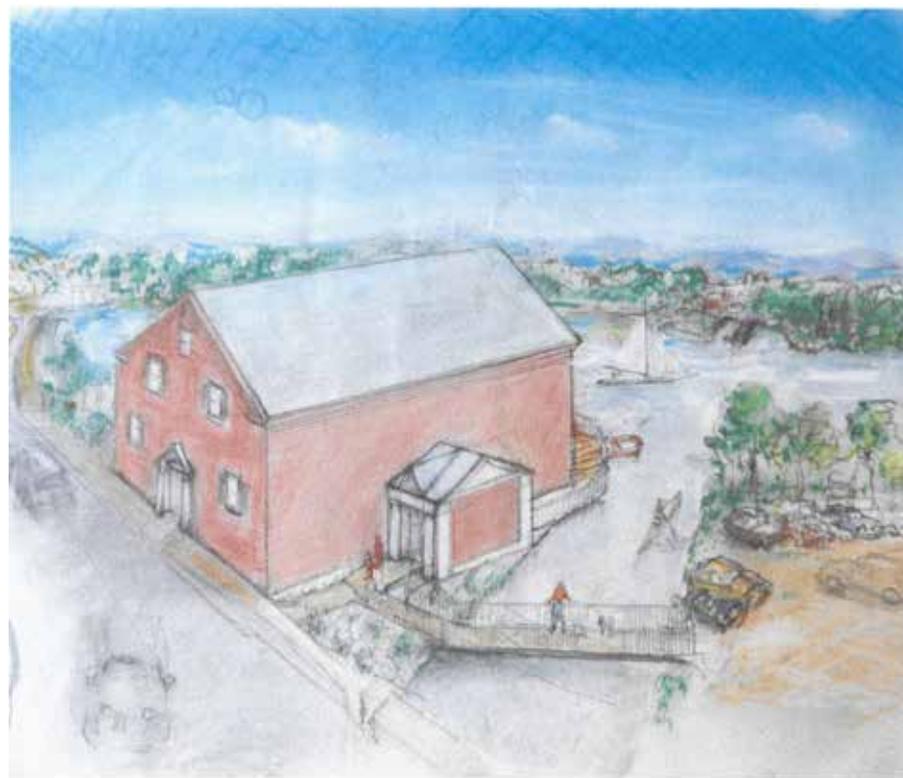
Tourists from overseas are mostly English, one time French.

Canal societies from other States have joined with the Association in scheduling a weekend of tours and talks on the Middlesex and Lowell canals.

The information above is supported by documents uploaded to a 10-GB internet folder provided by the Cultural Council, a significant improvement when submitting architectural drawings. Also, multiple paper copies are no longer required.

#### Note

In 1977, the legislature established the Middlesex Canal Commission. In 1981, it established the Blackstone River and Canal Commission. Today the Mass Department of Conservation and Recreation Central Regional Office is in the Blackstone Heritage Corridor Visitor Center which opened in 2018. The future Middlesex Canal Park at the summit pond might lead to a DCR office for the Middlesex Canal Commission as described in the following Worcester Telegram article from 2018: <http://tinyurl.com/yctf5na3>



**Two Old Elm St, Billerica 01862 - Tom Dahill 2018.**

**Middlesex Canal Association**  
**Fall Meeting, October 28, 2018**  
by Deb Fox

President J. Breen opened the meeting with a short update on the progress of the new museum. He then introduced the day's speaker, Frank Barrett, Jr., general and preservation architect.

The topic of Mr. Barrett's lecture was "Linking Watersheds: Visions of Canal Building across New Hampshire and Vermont 1792-1845." After an overview of the information he would cover in his lecture, he began. Clear, concise, interesting, and worthy of an award-winning college professor, Mr. Barrett's lecture was one of the best ever given at the Middlesex Canal Museum. Mr. Barrett left no rock unturned as he described routes, dates, maps, people, mileage, falls, and finally the future of canals in New England due to the enormous success of the Erie Canal route to the western United States and the emergence of New York City as the most important port in the country.

The 15 people who heard the lecture had a fascinating learning experience as evidenced by the discussion questions. Those members unable to attend missed a great opportunity for learning!

Those who stayed had the added pleasure of experiencing ham biscuits, apple cider, veggie skewers, and the usual coffee and tea. Just another reason not to miss the Winter Meeting on Sunday, February 10, 2019.



**A Tribute to Dave Barber**

by Bill Gerber, with substantial input from  
Linda Barth, Roger Hagopian and Bob Sears

David G. Barber, age 74, passed away on Saturday, December 15, 2018 at the Beaumont Care Facility in Westborough, MA. He was born in Worcester, MA in September, 1944, the son of George and Joan Barber. He is survived by his wife, Audrey, siblings Susan Herr and Paul Barber, and other relatives.



Dave graduated from Lehigh University with a degree in mechanical engineering. He served his country in the Navy Seabees, with a tour in Vietnam from November 1968 to September 1969, receiving an honorable discharge in 1978. He and Audrey (Schweinsberg) married in April 1973, and enjoyed 45 wonderful years together.

David had a fulfilling career as a project engineer and manager, working for companies in Pennsylvania, Vermont and Massachusetts. While employed

in Pennsylvania, he walked every inch of the 108-mile-long Delaware and Hudson Canal, then wrote the definitive guide book for it. Before and after retirement, he indulged his deep love for the outdoors by frequent hikes on the Appalachian Trail. He spent many hours as a rail trail volunteer with the Blackstone River Valley National Historic Park. He leaves behind a long trail of footprints from his multiple projects, such as building a canal boat, clearing pathways and erecting information stations.

For almost two decades, Dave was President of the American Canal Society (ACS). He also ran the organization's web site; and, as noted in the most recent issue of *American Canals*, the organization's newsletter, Dave completed the addition of all 44 years of newsletter issues to the website, thereby creating an exceedingly useful historical resource, and managed to bring the website itself up to date. In addition, Dave was a frequent contributor to that newsletter, usually of well-researched articles. He stepped down as President at the ACS annual meeting in April of this year, passing the office to Mike Riley, another long-term member.

During the 1990s, Dave was very active with the Board of Directors (BoD) of the Middlesex Canal Association (MCA). While so engaged, he did the OCR transcription, error correction and editing of Lewis M. Lawrence's manuscript "*The Middlesex Canal*", which the MCA subsequently published (and still has available for sale). This, too, was a very worthwhile addition to our broader knowledge of the canal's history. Thereafter, Dave was often the featured speaker at one or another of MCA's thrice-annual public meetings.

Several years ago, I had the good fortune to accompany Dave and Audrey, and two others, for a two-week canal boat excursion of English canals, from Worcester to Wolverhampton and return. It was a most enjoyable trip with skilled, knowledgeable and most congenial companions. I'd not done anything like that since 1984 and so this was a good refresher for what life had been on and near those early canals.

Over the years, Dave and Audrey also accompanied me on a number of canoe and canoe-camping trips. Several were along on my 'canoe tours of discovery' of the Canals of the Merrimack River. At one time or another, Dave joined me in checking out all of the river canals. Also, by canoe, he and I checked out a possible docking area that once served the Head Brick Company, just upstream of Hooksett Falls Canal.

Dave and Audrey also joined me for a number of Labor Day trips to the Appalachian Mountain Club's Beal Island (in the Sasanoa River about 5 miles east of Bath, Maine). On those trips, to share the work load, I usually assigned specific meals to participating couples or small groups. Dave and Audrey had backpacked the Appalachian Trail and so I knew that they knew how to pre-

serve food. With this in mind, I always assigned the last morning's breakfast to them. (No one ever went home with an uneasy tummy!)

BoD member Roger Hagopian noted, [in the years after Dave resigned from the MCA Board] "I'd see him annually at the Big E model railroad show. Years before I joined MCA, in 1989, I met Dave at a canal walk and shortly after that, he invited me to his home to see his slide show of the Blackstone Canal; and he gave me his own documents and charts on the route and landmarks of the Erie Canal which I have used several times since in my travels and short hikes across NY state. My prayers to Audrey."

Dave was a good friend and a tireless worker. He will be missed by all who knew him and, very likely, by many who never did.

**A Middlesex Canal Legacy**  
**With Vignettes of the Lives of Those Who Contributed**  
by Alec Ingraham

Prior to the unfortunate death of Rev. Alan Seaburg, I began researching the life of Theophilus Manning, hoping to submit a brief biography of him for inclusion in the glossary of Alan's e-book, *A Social History of the Middlesex Canal*. My research took me well beyond Theophilus's involvement with the so called "incredible ditch". Although I am certain Theophilus has no idea that portions of the canal that he purchased from the Proprietors of the Middlesex Canal in 1852 would be preserved for posterity, fortunately, they have been. Recounted here are brief biographies of the people that form the links in the chain that led to the preservation of two sections of the Middlesex Canal near the Patten Homestead (308 Salem Road) in East Billerica.

Theophilus Manning was born on June 28, 1777, the son William Manning and Susan Heywood of Woburn, MA. His childhood was spent in North Billerica at the Manning Manse, the family homestead, that had been built by his great-great grandfather Samuel Manning in 1696. His father, was a farmer, tavern keeper, citizen soldier and self-educated author. William was born in 1747 and would serve as a sergeant when he answered the call with other Minutemen from Billerica on April 19, 1775. He was later appointed to the rank of second lieutenant in the Massachusetts Militia but when called he hired someone to replace him and he saw no further action. William did operate a saltpeter shop to aid in the supply of gunpowder for the war effort. Prior to his death in 1814, he is probably best known, however, for writing *The Key of Liberty* a treatise based on the conflict between two broad classes the Few and the Many.

When Theophilus was but 16 years of age construction of the Middlesex Canal had just begun. It was an ambitious project the route of which passed a mile or so from the Manse. Digging began in North Billerica at the Concord

River Mill Pond and slowly pushed toward the Merrimack River in Middlesex Village. Theophilus' brothers William, Jr. and possibly Jephthah contracted with the Proprietors of the Canal to dig the first section of the canal in Chelmsford. Much of the digging was done by local landowners who resided near the proposed route of the canal. Many took time out from their agrarian tasks and contracted to excavate a section of the waterway. Unfortunately, some of these individuals would underestimate the cost of the labor involved and lose money. This was not the case with William, he secured a tidy profit. In conjunction with the contract Theophilus drove a team of horses.

The section of the Canal extending from its high point at the Concord River in North Billerica to the Merrimack River above the Pawtucket Falls was finished in 1797. Digging on the Charlestown side of the river traversed a greater distance and took much longer, but the Canal's charter required that it be completed by 1803. William and his brother, in 1793, undoubtedly gained experience while working for the meadow owners in Sudbury. In an attempt to increase the river's flow and alleviate the flooding which occurred upstream, they cleared ledge from the bed of the Concord River at the Fordway (near Fordway Bridge, Pollard Street) in North Billerica.

On September 10, 1800, Theophilus took charge of a company of laborers, working directly for the Proprietors on a monthly basis. His crew did whatever it was directed to do: digging, building up the banks and tightening, with gravel, the timber crib dam which the Canal Company had recently completed in 1798. The dam spanned the Concord River and was an integral part of the project. Its presence created a mill pond, the waters of which were used to fill the 27-mile canal. No water could be wasted and dam maintenance was a priority. In the Summer of 1806, Theophilus traded in his shovel and piloted a canal boat before leaving the employ of the Proprietors. His meticulously maintained account books which he kept during his employ are housed in the Theophilus Manning, Middlesex Canal Accounts and Payrolls Collection at the Baker Library at Harvard College.

In 1805, Theophilus purchased a 70-acre farm in Harvard for \$1,400 and would live in that town for a dozen years. On March 29, 1807, he would marry Hannah Patten of Billerica. She was born March 3, 1782, the daughter of Asa Patten and Hannah Baldwin. By 1817 he would return to Billerica where a year later he would purchase the Sabbath Day House on Andover Road adjacent to the Congregational Church. The house had been built in 1765 by families, mostly from East Billerica, to provide a refuge between church services on Sunday. It is not clear if he ever occupied the house but there is evidence to suggest that Rufus Porter, the itinerant painter and his family rented the abode from Theophilus for at least part of their time in Billerica. It might explain the

presence of the Porter murals that grace the walls of the Patten Homestead. In 1848, after the Porter's vacated the home, his daughter, Sarah Heywood Manning, and her husband Ambrose French Page would come into possession of the house. Sarah was born in Harvard on February 6, 1809 and Ambrose was the son of Ebenezer Page. He was born in Salem, New Hampshire on September 16, 1807 and later moved to East Billerica. The couple were married in Billerica on January 26, 1843.

At the time of his death Asa owned the Patten family Homestead and a vast acreage. His farm extended to the Shawsheen River and adjoined Wilmington and Tewksbury. Asa and his wife, Hannah Baldwin, had two daughters and no sons. By virtue of his marriage to Hannah, Theophilus purchased the homestead after Asa's Death on October 23, 1817. He would live there in East Billerica for the remainder of his life. The house is believed to have been built by one of Thomas Patten's sons circa 1700, but there is evidence that a part of the structure was built much earlier.

The route of the Middlesex Canal passed a few hundred yards to the rear of the Patten Homestead separating it from the farm's vast acreage beyond, which included a saw mill on Content Brook. The Patten, later Manning, Accommodation Bridge #37 would span the canal providing convenient access to this land. In 1825, Theophilus sold the saw mill which would eventually provide water power for the Patten Furniture Works. His first wife Hannah would pass away on October 10, 1813. On September 28, 1817 he would marry her sister Polly who was born on February 8, 1784. Hannah Baldwin Patten, Asa's wife, predeceased both of her daughters dying in 1784.

Theophilus was an honest, hardworking New England farmer. He was devoted to the welfare of his family. His father's writings may have influenced him. William espoused that a man's prime social duties included that he be kind in dealings with family members and that he insure that all boys and girls receive a basic education. His children faithfully attended the district school unless they were ill. Theophilus on several occasions, when the instructor was particularly effective, convinced the Town to extend the school's term. At that time the families in the vicinity of a district school were expected to support it. This often included providing the land as well as building and outfitting the schoolhouse. The District School in East Billerica was located on present-day Salem Road just east of the Andover Road intersection and only but a half mile from Theophilus' homestead. Undoubtedly, he monitored the educational activities at the school each term. Around 1850, the competition from the Boston and Lowell Railroad, which also passed through Theophilus' vast holding, forced the Canal into bankruptcy. In January of 1852, he would purchase from the Proprietors of the Middlesex Canal the section of the channel

that passed to the rear of his homestead from just west of present day Dignon Road all the way distant to the Shawsheen River. Theophilus would have six children, three daughters with his first wife and three sons with his second wife. He would pass away at the age of 90 years on June 30, 1868 and his wife Polly would die on August 8, 1871.

But As I Noted in the Introduction the Story Does not End Here.

Theophilus' second son from his marriage to Polly, William, who was born October 29, 1823 would eventually prevail over the others heirs and take charge of the Patten Homestead after Theophilus's death. William grew up on his father's farm in East Billerica and for many years would deliver produce from Theophilus' farm to market in Lowell. He and his brother continued to operate the farm in Billerica before hiring a farm in Chelmsford which was in closer proximity to the Lowell market. After that he would reside in Chelmsford, his homestead, known as the "The Manning Place" which was situated in the vicinity of preset-day Riverneck Road and Manning Road off Carlisle Street near the Route #495 overpass. He, however, continued to maintain the home in East Billerica as summer residence. In 1870 his mother, step-sister and younger brother resided there.

When he was a school boy he and his older brother would pop corn and make molasses corn cakes for their own consumption. Occasionally, they would sell a small quantity of their confection in Lowell. At first William's plan to plant popcorn and enter the manufacture of corn cakes was mocked by local farmers. He would eventually prevail and convince them to grow popcorn which would assure him a steady supply. He began business at his home in Chelmsford preparing the ingredients by hand. After a short duration he successfully patented machines that would speed the process of making the corn cakes. Within a year's time he would outgrow his home-based facility, and would purchase a one-acre lot in Lowell at the corner of Broadway and School Street. In 1868, he moved the business to this location. So successful was his venture that he soon was importing his popcorn from farms all over the country and he registered sales of his corn cakes from coast to coast. He was truly a pioneer in the extensive and popular popcorn trade. In 1870, a ¼ page advertisement in the Sampson & Davenport edition of the Lowell City Directory reads:

*Manning's Pop-Corn Cakes  
Manufactured by  
William Manning  
228-230 Broadway cor. School Street  
Lowell, Mass.*

In 1875 he would add Cocoanut Corn Cakes to his product line; in the 1900 R. L. Polk edition of the Lowell City Directory, William is listed as a popcorn

dealer at 606-614 Broadway; and in the 1906 directory simply at 614 Broadway. In the February 5, 1950 issue of the Lowell Sun Charles G. Sampas writes on page #26:

*William Manning manufactured corn cakes at the corner of Broadway and School Street, using one hogshead of molasses per day during the manufacturing season. He employed 13 men. He started the business in 1868 and was widely known throughout Middlesex County.*

On April 16, 1846, William would marry Mary Ann Baldwin who was born on December 4, 1826. She was the daughter of Joel Baldwin and Mary Fry who at the time were living in East Billerica. The couple would have one child Charlotte Ann Manning who was born in Chelmsford on February 19, 1847. By 1870, William was one of Chelmsford's wealthiest citizens. In 1910, Billerica valuation records indicate that William continued his ownership of the Patten Homestead which comprised 138 acres of land including the abandoned section of the Middlesex Canal which his father had purchased in 1852. He, as well, held a large portfolio of properties in Lowell. In 1901 famed landscape architect, Warren Manning, would establish the Manning Family Association (now Manning Association) to manage the care of the Manning Manse, William's father's boyhood home. Despite his advanced age William played an active role in the organization and would serve a number of terms as president. He enjoyed good health until he broke his hip about a month and half before his death. William's wife passed away on June 18, 1905 and he would follow on January 16, 1913. Their daughter Charlotte Ann would marry Erastus A. Bartlett of Chelmsford on October 9, 1874 (some records place the date as 1872). Erastus was a long-time superintendent of William's Chelmsford farm, where he boarded for nearly six decades.

Erastus was born in Lowell around July of 1842 at the Merrimack Corporation but lived in Chelmsford his entire life. He was the son of Nathaniel Bartlett and Mary Churchill Bartlett and he grew up in the Middlesex Village neighborhood of Chelmsford. On August 9, 1862, he enlisted in Union Army, Company A of the Massachusetts 33rd Infantry. His obituary notes that he served at Gettysburg with The Army of the Potomac and later he would move south joining the fighting at Chattanooga and eventually fought with General Sherman on his March to the Sea. Erastus held the rank of Private during his length of service and was at least once wounded before being mustered out on May 16, 1865. In 1904 he received a pension in recognition of his service in the Civil War and he would remain active in the local GAR Chapter for the remainder of his life.

Although his primary occupation was assisting William with the supervision of his Chelmsford farm and in the manufacture of the corn cakes, he

and Charlotte Ann also invested in real estate in the Lowell area. In 1919, the couple owned so many properties in Lowell that they were included on a published list of that city's highest tax payers. After William died, Erastus and Charlotte Ann inherited the Patten Homestead and William's extensive holding in East Billerica. On February 16, 1914 they would sell the house and much of the East Billerica acreage to Mary A. Hopkinson, the wife of Isaac Hopkinson. Erastus, however, held back a small 20-foot strip of land which contained the remains of the west abutment and part of the central pier of the Shawsheen River Aqueduct which formerly carried the waters of the Middlesex Canal above the stream. Charlotte Ann would pass away on October 24, 1919 and Erastus on February 23, 1923. The 20-foot strip of land with structures thereon was bequeathed to the Billerica Historical Society and was recorded on November 27, 1925. The gift was reportedly in the name of his former employer William Manning. The couple had no children.

### The Story Continues.

Isaac Hopkinson was born in Willington, Durhamshire a coal mining community in England on May 18, 1863. He was the son of Henry and Sarah Hopkinson. He arrived in New York on November 15, 1880 and would marry Mary Ann Graham of Billerica in Malden on September 13, 1884. Mary Ann was born in Billerica the daughter of John and Mary Hannah Graham on September 3, 1865. The couple first appear in Billerica about 1895 and Isaac would become a naturalized citizen in Lowell on March 21, 1899. A farmer by trade he was also active in Town politics serving as a special police officer, a driver and as a member of the water board. He also ran unsuccessfully for the Board of Selectmen. He caucused with the Republican Party and was a member of the Thomas Talbot Masonic Lodge prior to his death on October 14, 1937. He and his wife had four children, two boys and two girls.

On October 30, 1942 Isaac's widow divided her holding in East Billerica among three of her children. The Homestead with the acreage extending east beyond the Boston and Lowell Railroad tracks was deeded to her daughter Doris who was born in Billerica on June 4, 1904. The year before Doris had married Frank Dignon of Billerica. At the time Doris was a bookkeeper for the Boston Insurance Company. On June 29, 1947, Mary would die after a long illness. On November 27, 1899, Francis "Frank" Dignon was born in Charlestown, MA the son of John W. and Mary Haley Dignon. The couple would move to Billerica purchasing a house and barn on a one-acre lot on Andover Road in Billerica. It was here that Frank and his two brothers and a sister were raised. Frank would graduate from the Howe School with the class of 1919 and would serve in the Student Army Training Corps during World War I. In 1918 he was employed as an inspector at the U. S. Cartridge Company in South



Lowell. He, however, was a carpenter by trade working in that capacity for many years at the Boston Navy yard before retiring in 1966.

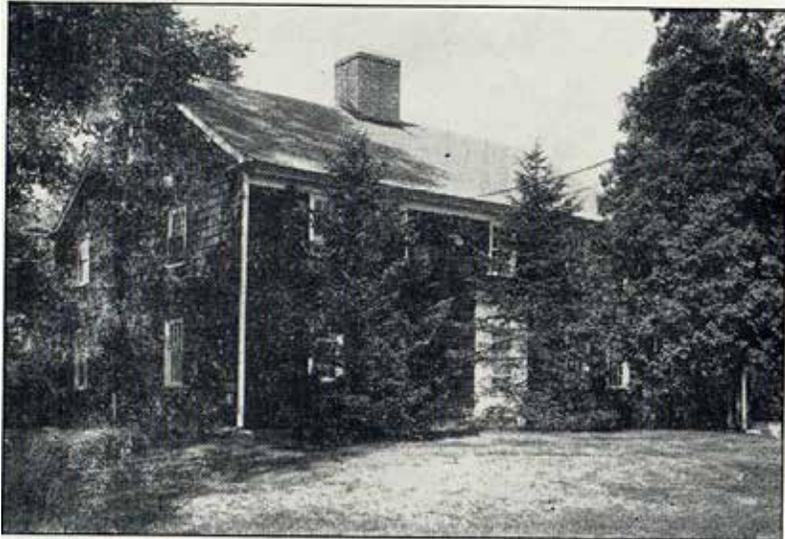
Frank served on the Town's Cemetery Commission from 1958 until 1988 and as a Town Meeting Member from 1957 until 1974. At the time of his death he held memberships with the Billerica Veterans of Foreign Wars: Estes Post and the Billerica America Legion. He was an honorary life member of the Billerica Knight's of Columbus: Father Wren Council #3963 and was an honorary member of the Middlesex Canal Association. He and Doris would reside in the Patten Homestead until her death on August 14, 1949. Frank passed away on January 29, 1988 and the homestead was soon sold to Elizabeth Cleary.

In 1965, Frank sold a large portion of the land which extended northward from the long unused canal to the railroad tracks to a local developer. He did, however, retain the rights to the abandoned canal bed which was contained in an approximate 1500-foot strip of land varying in width from 50 to 70 feet. This land he freely conveyed to the Middlesex Canal Association on June 29, 1981. The parcel is a portion of the land originally obtained by the Theophilus Manning from the Proprietors of the Middlesex Canal. His gift is clearly marked on the plan for the subdivision, Glen Arden Estates, in East Billerica.

The corridor extends from just west of Dignon Road to George Brown Street. At the time of his death Frank had sold off much of the vast acreage which had formerly accompanied the homestead, leaving only an acre and one quarter for his own use.

We owe a debt of gratitude to these families and to Theophilus Manning for preserving the legacy of the Middlesex Canal and for greatly assisting the Middlesex Canal Association and the Billerica Historical Society in achieving their preservation goals.

The End!!!



**Patten Homestead 1949 Courtesy Billerica Historical Society**

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### **No man can tether time or tide**

by Betty M Bigwood  
(Robert Burns -1759-96)

Director Bill Gerber stepped down from the BOD of the MCA in the Fall of 2018. Bill has been a very active member of our group for 30 plus years serving as President of the MCA, Editor of Towpath Topics, VP of the American Canal Society and a continual source for all things needing definition and explanation. Bill always keeps us honest as we sometimes attribute too many “firsts” to the MC.

Bill strongly supports the Appalachian Mountain Club and is active in cross country and down hill skiing, canoeing, Middlesex Canal walks and arranging group explorations requiring detailed planning.

Bill’s primary contribution has been his research especially into the New Hampshire Canal as a northern extension of the Middlesex Canal (well documented in past editions in TT) with Charles Mower, what canal boats carried and lodging/stations along the way. He is a meticulous gatherer of facts.

The first meeting of the Building Committee for 2 Old Elm was held in May of 2016. When Bill didn’t arrive, we asked the Chelmsford police to do a “wellness check” at his house and we learned that an ambulance had taken him to the hospital. He had had a serious sepsis following a tooth extraction and was placed in intensive care. It took a few months for him to recover. Such events are sobering. Bill has a large extended family in Pennsylvania and has applied to a long- term care facility for admission. Even more important is he has started to “clean out his collections of paper” - something we all need to do. He continues to docent on weekends and recently updated the “Director’s List” a valuable, ever changing, useful page of information.

Bill is a “the cup is half full” optimistic kind of guy. But he has two very strong negative feelings. The first is that he absolutely despises neckties – ties of every sort – he has tried a few alternatives such as snap on to no avail. He will go to great length to avoid this adornment. Not all Directors feel this way: Tom Raphael perfected the Windsor knot and proudly used it. Neil Devins collects “Designer” ties. But Bill is adamant!

The second is his feeling that Chelmsford’s “Middlesex Village” is not

given its proper emphasis/due as being the northern terminus of the Middlesex Canal. Chelmsford was a large area that is now subdivided into several towns today (such as Westford, Tyngsboro). Lowell was incorporated in 1826 – years after the Middlesex Canal was completed. And, more importantly the area of the Middlesex Village was not annexed to Lowell until 1876 – 15 years after the canal company was legally dissolved.

To quote Bill “ I’ve seen signs that the annexation of the M’sex Village may not have met with universal approval. A Village resident’s collection of glass ‘whimseys’ from the Hunnewell & Gore glass factory, sought by both Lowell and Corning glass was given to the Chelmsford Historical Society. It’s a small but very interesting collection – similarly, the Middlesex Canal Toll House was given to Chelmsford. So the bottom line, for me, is that the Middlesex Canal, or any part of it, never, ever, went to Lowell: not even once in its entire legally constituted life.”

So if you take away anything from reading this article please remember to say that the Middlesex Canal extended from Chelmsford’s Middlesex Village to Charlestown. It will please Bill.



**Lt. Col. William E. Gerber (Bill)**

**A good read**  
MCA Directors

After Nolan Jones' passing his wife, Joan, moved back to New Hampshire. Joan attended several MCA Lectures with her Sister, Nancy. President J told her about "*The Limner's Daughter*" by Mary Stetson Clarke, loaned her a copy and asked for a book review. When Joan became ill (9/18-/32--8/22/18) she asked Nancy to carry out her commitment. Nancy carried out her request below, dutifully returned the book and passed on a beautiful obituary.

**Book Review by Nancy Lloyd** (relative of Nolan Jones)

THE LIMNER'S DAUGHTER by Mary Stetson Clarke

Published in 1967, the author, a well know writer of historical fiction, draws an accurate picture of life along the Middlesex Canal at the turn of the 19th century. In fact, those readers who love the Canal can easily imagine working one of the boats or harvesting the Baldwin apples and packing them for the Boston trade. What is also fascinating are the bitter feelings still extant in 1805 between Patriot and "Tory" families dating from Revolutionary days. They were true enemies! Woburn and Canal country were lively places full of living history.

The story goes as follows. At 16, Amity Lyte, living in poverty with her father, Darius and brother, Tim, in New York City receives a letter from Aunt Keziah. Events happening at the end of the Revolutionary War some 30 years previous, made her father leave Woburn and a successful career as a portrait painter (limner). He has never spoken of these events to his children. Life in New York was not easy and after the death of his wife, he sank into a depression and could not work. To Amity, the letter was a life saver and she persuaded her father to return to Aunt Keziah's home.

Written for a young audience, the story continues with adventures on the trip north. The packet boat capsizes but the family is pulled ashore by strong passengers including Sam Baldwin who makes his first appearance here. Once in Boston a promised job for Darius Lyte falls through and Amity must again find work, this time as a flax spinner, to make enough money to pay for the Canal boat to take them to Woburn.

Once on the Canal and then at her Aunt's home which Amity turns into an inn for Canal passengers, the family's life takes an upturn. Friendship is resumed with the Baldwin family, the old slanders against Darius, made by Benjamin Rumford, are proved untrue and life becomes pleasant. In spite of social differences, Amity marries Sam Baldwin, joining him on another adventure as they begin a journey to Europe where he will study civil engineering!

The charm of this book is in the accurate details of how life was lived in the

New England of 1805. The descriptions of the packet boat sailing up Long Island sound, the delicious clam chowder served by the old couple who housed the passengers while waiting for the coach to Boston, the hard work of spinning flax which Amity had to learn and then the lovely description of floating up the Canal in spring time. Various characters appear at just the right time to describe how the Canal was made, what flowers and trees flourished beside it, and why there is a night muskrat hunter. This is a delightful read. It makes you want to live in "olden days" and take a stroll along the busy Canal.



**Part #4 in the series *A Social History of the Middlesex Canal***  
an e-book by Rev. Alan Seaburg.

**AARON DEXTER**

Aaron Dexter (1750-1829) was the second president of the Middlesex Canal Company, serving in that position from 1809 to 1828, a member of its Board of Directors from 1795 until 1829, and an owner of 6 shares of its stock.

Dexter was born on November 11, 1750 at Malden, Massachusetts; his parents were Rebecca (Peabody) and Richard Dexter, a wealthy farmer. Anxious to have one of their sons get a college education they selected Aaron to receive this educational benefit. But it took time for them to be able to afford his tuition. As a result, when he graduated from Harvard College with his A. B. in 1776, he was 26 years old, many years older than the other graduates of that period.

Interested in medicine, he began its study with Dr. Samuel Danforth, who was a practicing chemist, Boston physician, and a Tory. During the American Revolution Dexter who sided with those in rebellion, served as a ship's surgeon on several sea voyages to Europe, until one of the ships he was on was captured by the British and brought into the port of Halifax. There its crew was imprisoned and suffered greatly until later exchanged. Aaron returned home to Boston, set up as a physician and apothecary, and was soon quite successful.

During these formative years he kept in close touch with the friends he had made while at Harvard. They met regularly at John Trumbull's rooms as sort of a club where they talked over the latest developments in literature and politics. Many of these friends were to play significant leadership roles in the new republic, and included William Eustis, who was to become a Massachusetts Governor, the playwright and Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Vermont Royall Tyler, and Rufus King, a future Minister to England and United States Senator from New York.

When just 33, Harvard appointed him on May 22, 1783 to be Professor of Chemistry and Materia Medica, which position in 1791 was endowed by his friend British Major William Irving (Harvard, 1703) as the Irving Professorship. He held this post until his retirement in 1816. Dexter was not one of the college's great lecturers, and his students found in addition his presentations poorly prepared. But through trips to France he had become aware of the important reforms in the field of chemistry that the French had embraced, and so was among the earliest proponents of their pioneering views in America.

Besides teaching chemistry, he taught as his title indicated medicine. Harvard founded its Medical School in 1832 calling it at first "The Medical Institution of Harvard University." Classes were held at Holden Chapel during these years. The first medical faculty included beside Dexter just two other professors, John Warren and Benjamin Waterhouse. Dexter did not begin to actually teach until 1785. The next year Harvard awarded him an honorary M. D. and in 1805 Dartmouth also gave him that degree.

In 1787 he was married to Rebecca Amory and their marriage produced three children. In addition to their Boston residence on Milk Street, Dexter eventually purchased a large farm in Chelsea, which he later sold to the Federal Government, which built there a Marine Hospital.

As a leading figure in the cultural and social life of his community, Aaron Dexter was actively engaged in the work and programs of many public organizations. He served on the Boston School Committee from 1781 through 1813, and when he retired the town voted him their thanks for his 32 years of "able, impartial & faithful" service. During this period, he also was one of the incorporators of the Massachusetts Medical Society, and was their librarian from 1789 through 1792. In connection with his medical practice he was after the founding of the Massachusetts General Hospital one of its visiting physicians.

In May 1792 he became a member of the newly formed Massachusetts Historical Society, and that same year when the Massachusetts Society for Promoting Agriculture was founded he became its first treasurer, then in 1800 its second-vice president, and finally in 1812 its president. He was also along with James Sullivan involved with the Boston Aqueduct Corporation, where he was

both one of its Directors and Presidents.

On the social level he and his family were members of King's Chapel, and he also served on their Vestry Committee (1789-1826). In addition he was a member of the Anthology Club and of the small informal social gathering, the Wednesday Club (1778-1820), which met monthly during the year, except in the summer, at the homes of its members for friendship and conversation. And remembering his early and many voyages at sea, he supported the mission of The Humane Society of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. Founded in Boston in 1786 it was concerned with the needless deaths connected with shipwrecks and drowning that regularly occurred on the shoreline of the state. To assist those who made it to land the society had constructed by 1796, 18 huts filled with provisions and firewood that survivors would need until help arrived. He served the society as its fifth president.

After a long and useful life Aaron Dexter died in Cambridge on February 28, 1829. He was first buried in the rather plain Central Burying Ground in Boston, and then re-interred in 1872 in Cambridge's more attractive Mount Auburn Cemetery.

### **Aaron Dexter and the Middlesex Canal**

With the deaths of Loammi Baldwin on October 20, 1807 and Governor James Sullivan on December 10, 1808 the two most significant figures of the first generation in the Canal's story were gone, and needed to be replaced by the Board of Directors. In doing so, they turned in their selection of the new president, not as might have been expected to either a successful Boston merchant or an up-and-coming engineer, but to a professor of Chemistry and Medicine – Aaron Dexter.

While he lacked either of those qualities, as a Canal Director since 1795 he did know its background struggles and the hopes for it that had been expressed in the lives of Baldwin and Sullivan. In addition, he was a close friend to many of Boston's wealthy merchants and power brokers. Appointed in 1809 he was to serve as president for the next twenty years, during the era of two of the Canal's most effective Superintendents, John Langdon Sullivan and James F. Baldwin.

An example of the kind of help Dexter gave the Canal concerned "trass" – "a light-colored variety of volcanic ash resembling pozzolana, used in making water-resistant cement." Early on during the Canal's construction Baldwin had problems finding the right material to bond boulders and stones under water. European canal builders used pozzolana ash from Italy, which was, however, expensive and time consuming to secure. So, the Directors looked for a substitute, which turned out to be "trass," that was easily available from the island

of St. Eustatius in the Dutch West Indies. Dexter who had by chance heard of a Boston vessel loaded with lumber that was about to depart for the island passed on the information to the Directors. They immediately hired the ship to bring back “a cargo of Dutch Terra” as cheaply as possible. This proved to be just what was needed and so work could continue with confidence on the building of the Canal’s locks.

Another example was his service in 1795 on the committee charged with making a contract with men for the laying of stones in connection of building those various locks. The contract that the committee worked out came to establish the future way this task was handled by the organization. He was also an active participant in engineering discussions with William Weston, and through 1805 chair of the Canal’s committee of operations. And so the professor proved to have been a good choice to be the Canal’s second president.

While the company’s president, one of his decisions was to send a petition to the General Court of Massachusetts, signed by all the Directors, regarding lottery relief due the company through an act passed in 1814 by New Hampshire that permitted its Union Canal to sell lottery tickets to raise money, and which a year later Massachusetts supported by allowing such tickets to be sold in its state to benefit the Middlesex. The petition begged a six-year extension of this relief, which had expired. Such aid was needed their petition stated, because the company by “opening the very important inland water communication from Boston about *one hundred miles* into the interior of New Hampshire, they have expended a sum which, together with its accumulating interest from the year 1794 to the present time, amounts to *one million eight hundred and ninety seven thousand eight hundred and fifteen Dollars*, after deducting the sum of *forty four thousand Dollars*, which has been divided among the Proprietors in the last four years, and which is all that has ever been received by them, being less than *sixty cents* per annum for *one hundred Dollars* on what it now actually stands the Proprietors in. When the well-known utility of the undertaking, the unremitted perseverance with which it was pursued, under all the discouragements and heavy expenses they incurred for twenty-eight years, together with the acknowledged great benefit to the country in general and to the Navy of the United States in particular, though to the great loss of the Proprietors, are duly considered, they are encouraged to hope that a favorable answer will be given the petition, and that the right to dispose of the tickets, in this State, of said Lottery will be continued for a further time, which right the act of 1818, regulating Lotteries, preventing them from enjoying, according to the original grant.” Unfortunately for the company, the General Court was not impressed and the petition failed.

Dexter was during his presidency of the Middlesex Canal also one of the

Proprietors of New Hampshire’s Amoskeag Canal whose stock, some 500 shares, he held. He also served as its president too. The history of these two canals were especially closely associated.

### **FRANCIS “FRANK” DIGNON**

Francis “Frank” Thomas Dignon (1899-1988) was an Honorary Member of the Middlesex Canal Association, and the donor to the Association in 1981 of “a portion of the canal route from Brown Street to slightly beyond Dignon Road in Billerica.”

Francis “Frank” Dignon was born November 27, 1899 in Charlestown, MA, the son John W. and Mary Haley Dignon. Soon after his birth his parents purchased a house and barn on an acre of land on Andover Road in Billerica. It was here that Frank and his two brothers and a sister were raised.

During the first World War he served in the Student Army Training Corps and was also employed during 1918 as an inspector at the United States Cartridge Company in South Lowell. In 1919 he graduated from Billerica’s Howe High School and became a carpenter by trade, working for many years in that capacity at the Boston Navy Yard. In 1941, he married Doris E. Hopkinson, who in 1942 inherited at her father’s death the “Patten Homestead” on Salem Road in East Billerica. There she and Frank lived until her death in 1981.

For many years Frank was actively engaged in the life of the community, as a Town Meeting Member from 1957 until 1974, and on the Cemetery Commission from 1958 until 1988. He was also a member of several local organizations, including the Billerica Veterans of Foreign Wars: Estes Post, the Billerica American Legion, and the Billerica Knights of Columbus: Father Wrenn Council #3963.

Dignon retired in 1966, and died after a long illness on January 29, 1988. Among the legacies he, and his wife, left to future generations was an extant but nearly forgotten piece of Middlesex Canal history in an area where nearly all traces of the canal have disappeared.

When Frank’s wife Doris received title to the “Patten Homestead” it included a sizeable tract of land, which extended far to the east beyond the Boston and Lowell Railroad right-of-way. This acreage was the remains of the abandoned Middlesex Canal, and was adjacent to, and visible from, their backyard. The Patten Homestead (still extant) is among the older homes in Billerica, having been built at least as early as 1725, perhaps even prior to 1680.

In 1965 Frank sold the portion of his holdings that extended from the remains of the canal east to the railroad to a local developer. When building houses there he named one of the new roads Dignon. He did, however, retain his rights to the abandoned canal bed, which was contained in an approximate 1500-foot

strip of land varying in width from 50 to 70 feet. Their action is clearly substantiated in the subdivision plan for Glen Arden Estates (MNRD Plan 102; Pages 66-67). This corridor extended from Dignon Road on the north, south to George Brown Street. On June 29, 1981, after Doris's death, Frank freely convey this parcel to the Middlesex Canal Association in his wife's memory. The idea of doing so was facilitated by his friend and lawyer, Arthur L. Eno Jr. who was one of the founders of the Middlesex Canal Association and its first President (1962-72).



It is interesting that this very same parcel represents a portion of the canal bed that was originally purchased from the Proprietors of the Middlesex Canal on January 6, 1852 by Theophilus Manning, who at the time was in possession of the Patten Homestead via his marriage to Hannah Patten. In the October 1981 issue of *Towpath Topics* H. Lawrence Henchey, Jr., the President of the Association wrote, "I am pleased to announce that the Board of Directors has completed the transfer of title to the Association of our first actual section of the Middlesex Canal. With deepest appreciation, we acknowledge this generous gift from Mr. Frank Dignon of Billerica of the portion of the canal route from Brown Street to slightly beyond Dignon Road in Billerica. This is the first clearly visible section of the canal ditch north of the Shawsheen Aqueduct. We'll be having a clean-up day in November (see separate article and

map) to get the land in shape for a spring dedication. Again, our sincere thanks to Mr. Dignon for his kind gift." In appreciation of his gift, Frank Dignon was made an Honorary Member of the Association.

Alec Ingraham  
Billerica Town Historian

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## GEORGE BARRELL EMERSON

George Barrell Emerson (1797-1881) was one of the Harvard College lads who were members of probably the best-known and beloved Canal excursions to Horn Pond, that of July 1817, which Eliza Susan Quincy, Fanny Searle, and Samuel J. May described so very delightfully.

Emerson was born in Wells, Maine, then a part of Massachusetts, on September 12, 1797. His father, a Harvard trained physician with a large practice, was also a good Latin scholar, well read in history and old English poetry. As a result George found it an excellent household to grow up in. He went to school during the winter and worked on his parent's farm during the summer. That latter experience developed early on his knowledge of trees, plants and shrubs, which was further increased when his father made him memorize the Linnaean taxonomic system.



When he was older he was sent for a short period to Dummer Academy (now The Governor's Academy) in Byfield, Massachusetts where his studies included Greek and Latin. Then in 1813 he was admitted to Harvard College where "he was studious to a fault." His major interests were mathematics and Greek. When he could, he taught school at various communities not far from the college. As "first" scholar at his class's Junior Exhibition he delivered the Greek oration. In attendance was his cousin Ralph Waldo Emerson, who after the presentation commented to Edward Everett Hale, "I did not know I had so fine a young cousin."

Emerson graduated from Harvard in June 1817 when he was 16, and for the next two years taught in a private school at Lancaster, Massachusetts after which he was hired by Harvard College to teach math and natural philosophy. He next served briefly as the first principal of the English Classical School for boys in Boston, today the English High School.

Then in 1823 he opened his own school for the education of girls, where his

first wife was his assistant until her untimely death in 1832. He was married again two years later to Mary Rotch Fleming. The school was limited to 32 students for he thought that was the proper class size for successful teaching.

He wrote in his autobiography that its “object” was “to give my pupils the best education possible, to teach them what it was most important for every one to know, and to form right habits of thought, and give such instruction as would lead to the formation of the highest character.” The subjects he taught them included the English language, Latin, French, arithmetic, history, natural philosophy, and science.

Among the young ladies who attended his school were Susan Hale, the daughter of his friend Edward Everett Hale, who went on to become a writer and artist, Hale’s sister Lucretia, and many from Boston’s “better” families. He conducted it until 1855 when he gave its care over to his nephew, although he did some work from time to time as a tutor. He also continued to give educational lectures on such subjects as the education of women, health, sanitation and home economics. And for many years he was an able member of the Massachusetts State Board of Education where he was a strong supporter of Horace Mann’s ideas concerning new methods to improve the way public schools functioned.

In addition to his work as an important educator, he also had a deep interest in Botany, and in 1827 was elected a Fellow of the American Academy of Arts & Sciences. Over the next decades he helped to establish several major natural history organizations, including in 1827 the Boston Mechanics Institute for instruction in sciences related to industry, in 1830 the Boston Society of Natural History (now the Museum of Science) whose president he was from 1837-43, and in March 1872 the Arnold Arboretum. Earlier, in 1837, Governor Edward Everett had appointed him chair of the commissioners for the zoological and botanical survey of Massachusetts for which he wrote in 1846 its *Report on the Trees and Shrubs Growing Naturally in the Forests of Massachusetts*, which still remains for scholars a “valuable” study. His many scientific friends included Asa Gray, Louis Agassiz, and Frederick Law Olmsted, all of whose work he firmly supported.

George Emerson was a religious man and a devoted member of King’s Chapel, serving as one its wardens for many years. In 1858 in recognition of his many services to education and natural science Harvard awarded him an honorary Doctor of Laws degree. In 1878 he published a short rather charming autobiography entitled *Reminiscences of an Old Teacher*. Emerson died after a long useful life at his daughter Lucy’s home in Brookline in 1881.

As far as can be determined George Emerson’s only link with the Middlesex Canal was the July day in 1817, just after he had graduated from Harvard, when

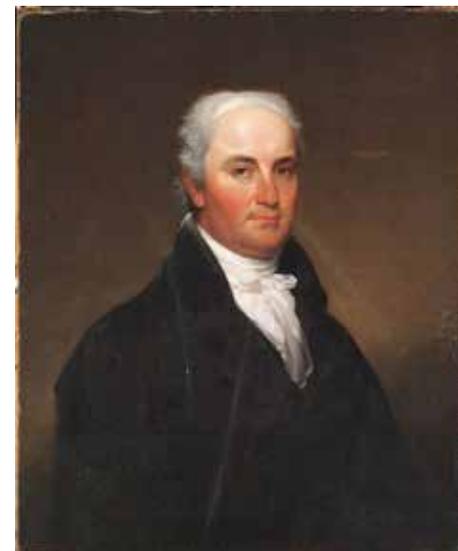
he took one of the loveliest voyages that we know about on the old Canal. It was a most joyous day’s outing to Horn Pond with such notables as Daniel Webster, Josiah and Eliza Quincy, Fanny Searle, John Sullivan, and probably of more interest to young Emerson some of his Harvard College friends plus a bevy of attractive young ladies. It became even more of a delightful day when on their way back to Boston they stopped for a bit at Mystic Lake when the young women spotted in the pond a group of colorful water lilies. Unfortunately, they were growing too far off shore for the ladies to pick them. So, they clamored for their escorts to get some for them. Now who could refuse such a request? Not these Harvard men! So, all the young gentlemen, except Emerson and his friend Samuel May, went searching for a boat to row out to the desired blooms. But those two rascals, after the others were out of sight, simply jumped into the pond and waded up to their chests to their goal. When there they loaded their arms with the lilies and returned to present them to the ladies, and for their gallant action they will be remembered by future generations who are fortunate enough to read the account of this charming Middlesex Canal jaunt.

G

### CHRISTOPHER GORE

Christopher Gore (1758-1827) was a Director of the Middlesex Canal Company from 1805 through 1814, and an owner as of 1805 of 35 shares of its stock.

Gore was born into a family of Boston artisans on September 21, 1758. His father John Gore who owned his own shop “The Painters’ Arms,” was a painter and color merchant. His basic business was painting coaches and designing “coats of arms” for aristocrats in Boston, New York, and even a few in Philadelphia. His mother was Frances (Pinkney), the daughter of a Boston shopkeeper. They were the parents of 13 offspring. So fortunately, while not an extremely wealthy family, they were still clearly well off.



Gore’s early education was at the South and North Grammar Schools, then at the Boston Latin School, and upon graduation when he was 14 at Harvard College. As a student he was serious and well behaved. Due to the British

siege of Boston in 1775, and the legislature meeting in the College buildings in Cambridge, the College relocated to Concord just before his senior year. The turbulence of the struggle for independence made difficult the usual life experienced by students. Nevertheless Gore received a good classical grounding as well as knowledge of former political ideals, which was to serve him well later in life.

Harvard was to hold a special place in his life, and as an adult he was to be one of its Overseers, a Fellow of the Corporation, and awarded an honorary LLD. At his death he left it \$100,000, the largest gift it had then received, which was used in 1838 to build Gore Hall, a Gothic structure made with Quincy granite, that became the new home for the College's rapidly growing library.

When Gore graduated in 1776, he joined the Continental Army and served as a clerk in an artillery regiment. During this period he decided to be a lawyer and spent the next several years apprenticed to the well-known Boston lawyer, John Lowell<sup>1</sup>. Passing the bar exam in 1778 he opened an office in Boston. In 1785 he married Rebecca Payne. The Paynes were a prominent Boston family, and his marriage into it proved helpful to his growing legal firm, which soon came to represent influential clients not only in the Boston area but also throughout the new country as well as in the former "mother" country.

The young lawyer now turned his attention to politics where he became known for his vigorous support of the ideas that came to be called Federalism. In 1788 and 1789 he was elected to the Massachusetts House of Representatives, and in the latter year President George Washington appointed him to be the first United States District Attorney for Massachusetts, a position he held for seven years. He became also at this period a Director of the Boston branch of the Bank of the United States, a supporter of the economic ideas of Alexander Hamilton, and with others helped to form the Federalist Party, the new nation's first political party which was influential until about 1821.

President Washington in 1796 asked Gore to serve the country in London as a Commissioner of the joint Anglo- American Claims Commission under Article 5 of the Treaty of Amity, Commerce, and Navigation with Great Britain, informally called Jay's Treaty after Secretary of State John Jay, who supported by Hamilton and Washington, had negotiated it with the British. Through arbitration it cleared up several important issues that existed between the two countries, which resulted in ten years of peaceful trade between them.

In 1804 when the job of the Commission was completed, Gore and his wife returned to Boston where he resumed his legal practice, purchased a town

<sup>1</sup> Any one interested in John Lowell should read *The Lowells of Massachusetts* by Nina Sankovitch. Published 2017

house in Boston, and constructed in nearby Waltham a mansion house on their extensive land holdings there, some of which they had bought from Aaron Dexter, a fellow Director of the Middlesex Canal. The new house replaced the original structure, which had been destroyed by fire in 1799. That house still exists today as "Gore Place" and is admired as a fine example of a Federal Period historic mansion.

Through the contacts he made while in public service and his competency as a shrewd lawyer, his practice steadily increased. His wealth did too, for he was a careful and wise investor, chiefly in various transportation and mercantile opportunities, such as textile mills, bridges, and canals. At his death his estate inventory listed \$61,000 as invested in canals, locks, and bridges.

Besides his business activities he took a leading role in the cultural and religious life of the town, serving as president for twenty-two years of the Massachusetts Historical Society (1806-18), and for twenty years as a vestryman at King's Chapel where his college friend James Freeman was the minister. In addition, he was elected in 1802 to membership in the American Academy of Arts and Sciences; at his death he bequeathed it \$1,000.

Once more he turned his focus to politics and was elected in 1806 to the Massachusetts Senate and in 1808 to Massachusetts House of Representatives. That same year he ran for the governorship too, but was defeated as he had been when he had run the previous year. However, the following year he was elected to that one-year term, but then defeated again for the position the next two years. In the spring of 1813 Federalist Governor Caleb Strong appointed him to be a Senator in Washington; it was his last public office, and of short duration, for poor health forced him to retire in 1816.

He and Rebecca, they had no children, lived in retirement at first year round in Gore Place, but in 1822 Gore found it too "isolated" from society so they purchased for winter use a townhouse on Cambridge Street in Boston. It was there that he passed away at age 69 on March 1, 1827. His body was buried in the Granary Burying Ground.

### **Christopher Gore and the Middlesex Canal**

It is an interesting fact that in the first decades of the story of the Middlesex Canal two Massachusetts governors were an important part of its construction and development as a working business venture – James Sullivan governor in 1807 and 1808, and Christopher Gore governor in 1809. If their political philosophies were diametrically opposite – Sullivan was a Democratic-Republican and Gore a Federalist – they nevertheless both understood that the growing transportation needs of the area required financial support from the business community in order to be realized. They also saw that those who

provided such funding might make a tidy sum from investing therein, and so they worked jointly to establish the Middlesex Canal Company.

Gore played an active role in its planning and preparations. Once the charter was secured the first business meeting was held, and he along with James Winthrop and James Sullivan were made the committee to plan the agenda for that meeting. They recommended “that the business of the corporations be transacted by a committee annually elected consisting of thirteen directors, who shall choose their President and Vice-President out of their own number.” That was voted, and while Gore was not made a Director at this time Sullivan did become one, and until his death, its first President.

At the venture’s start he owned 70 shares, but by 1805 he had only 35, perhaps because the Company had yet to pay a dividend. Indeed, that did not happen until 1819, and that dividend did not amount to very much. But there had been “assessments,” some 21 by 1796. As a result, some of the original stockholders either sold their shares or reduced their holdings. In Gore’s case he halved his and by 1805 held only 35 shares.

He remained engaged with Canal activities until his appointment to the Anglo-American claims commission in 1796, which took him away from Boston for eight years. One of his last tasks for the Corporation was to serve with Aaron Dexter in arranging a contract with the men who were to be involved with the laying of stones for the Canal’s locks.

While he was in England, he was inactive on Canal matters except on one occasion. That was in 1798, when he and William Vaughan discussed construction problems, particularly relating to canal banks collapsing and masonry, other than those set with trass, that proved defective, with the British engineer John Rennie and sent his “sound” suggestion back to Boston.

When Gore returned to United States, he was made in 1805 one the Canal’s Directors, a position he held until 1814. By then he was a United States Senator and so often in Washington which as it probably did the year he was Governor left him little opportunity to be involved with Canal matters at any depth. In addition his health was starting to fail which forced him into early retirement. Nevertheless, unlike some of the other early investors, Andrew Craigie was one, he never abandoned the project by selling off his stock.

## MISCELLANY

**Back Issues** - More than 50 years of back issues of Towpath Topics, together with an index to the content of all issues, are also available from our website <http://middlesexcanal.org/towpath>. These are an excellent resource for anyone who wishes to learn more about the canal and should be particularly useful for historic researchers.

**Back Page** - Excerpt from an August, 1818, drawing (artist unknown) of the Steam Towboat *Merrimack* crossing the original (pre-1829) Medford Aqueduct, probably on its way to service on the Merrimack River.

**Estate Planning** - To those of you who are making your final arrangements, please remember the Middlesex Canal Association. Your help is vital to our future. Thank you for considering us.

**Museum & Reardon Room Rental** - The facility is available at very reasonable rates for private affairs, and for non-profit organizations to hold meetings. The conference room holds up to 60 people and includes access to a kitchen and restrooms. For details and additional information please contact the museum at 978-670-2740.

**Museum Shop** - Looking for that perfect gift for a Middlesex Canal aficionado? Don’t forget to check out the inventory of canal related books, maps, and other items of general interest available at the museum shop. The store is open weekends from noon to 4:00pm except during holidays.

**Nameplate** - Excerpt from an acrylic reproduction of a watercolor painted by Jabez Ward Barton, ca. 1825, entitled “View from William Rogers House”. Shown, looking west, may be the packet boat *George Washington* being towed across the Concord River from the Floating Towpath at North Billerica.

**Web Site** – The URL for the Middlesex Canal Association’s web site is [www.middlesexcanal.org](http://www.middlesexcanal.org). Our webmaster, Robert Winters, keeps the site up to date. Events, articles and other information will sometimes appear there before it can get to you through Towpath Topics. Please check the site from time to time for new entries.

The **first issue** of the Middlesex Canal Association newsletter was published in October, 1963. Originally named “Canal News”, the first issue featured a contest to name the newsletter. A year later, the newsletter was renamed “Towpath Topics.”

**Towpath Topics** is edited and published by **Debra Fox, Alec Ingraham,** and **Robert Winters**. Corrections, contributions and ideas for future issues are always welcome.





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