

SANDI SERKESS SIDE WALKS THE FAMILY HEARD ROUND THE WORLD: THE DRAPERS OF WEST ROXBURY

This can be confusing, and the only way I could understand the material I was researching was to draw a graph. That may help you, as well.

In about 1650 James Draper built and operated Draper Tavern. He was married to Miriam. It was the last tavern in West Roxbury before crossing the Charles River, located almost where Centre Street meets Washington Street, and was a popular inn. This house was destroyed by fire in 1870. When James died, he left the land and the farm, about 100 acres, to his son, Jonathon, who was the father of Moses Draper. Moses Draper later married Mary Aldis Allen. James and Miriam Draper are buried in the Old Westerly Burial Ground and their head stone is dated 1691.

Mary Draper was born in Dedham in 1713 and was the daughter of Nathan and Mary Chickering Aldis. She lived until 1810. She was married for three years to Abel Allen (1739-1742) and was widowed only for one year when she then married Moses Draper (who died in 1775) and moved into the tavern. They had ten children who were baptized in the First Church of Dedham.

An article in a newspaper of which I have a copy, written by "EMFeeney" states, "On April 19, 1775, Mary Draper was busy with the usual chores a large farm and several children entailed. Suddenly the bells of the First Church in Dedham pealed the alarm. The British had killed innocent men in Lexington and were on their way to Concord to seize stores of ammunition and capture Hancock and Adams. Quickly the Minutemen responded, including Mary's three sons—Moses, Jonathan, and Nathaniel." Her husband had died the previous January.

Just think. I can imagine myself with her that day. Can't you?

Although she was in her sixties at the time, with the help of her daughter Kate she set up a makeshift table, baked bread and brewed coffee to serve the soldiers passing by, melted pewter for bullets after the Battle of Bunker Hill in which her sons fought, and tore up her own clothes and blankets for bandages for those brave soldiers of the Continental Army. If the soldiers had torn garments, she would try to mend them. If their shoes needed new soles, she would try to find the leather. This selflessness went on for many years and is well documented.

A story is told in the book, Women of the Revolution, by Elizabeth F. Ellet, that one day after the Battle of Lexington 100 soldiers passed by her house, weary and hungry. She was totally unprepared for them, but did her best, and with their cheerful help was able to feed all 100 within the space of an industrious hour or two!!

Her daughter Mary's husband, John Mayo, was killed by a British cannon ball while marching to Dorchester on March 16, 1776.

Mary Draper was named the first Daughter of the American Revolution for her bravery. On Friday, October 27, 1905, a plaque was dedicated to Mary Draper on a memorial fountain built in front of the West Roxbury Library.

At the other end of Centre Street, Captain William Draper lived in a house at 1721 Centre Street. The house was built in 1678 and survived until 1930. He was the son of Nathaniel Draper, II, and Mehitabel Weld, who is the grandson of the original James Draper of Draper's Tavern, making William his great-grandson. William, Sr. commanded a company of minutemen at Lexington and he lost his life in the battle of Fort Ticonderoga. His house was later occupied by his granddaughter, Miss Betsy Draper, who owned and operated a general store where the police station is now. She inadvertently started the first lending library there due to her love of reading and lived to be a ripe 91. At one time she had been engaged to a Nathaniel Fisher, but later broke it off. Her father was William's son, William II. A great deal of this information was furnished by Mrs. Emma Draper Tate, a

member of this famous family, in a paper she wrote dated 1904. Interestingly, Nathaniel Fisher bought Mary Draper's farm in the early 1800's!

On April 19, 1775, Captain William Draper (1721 Centre Street) and his son William, about age 16, were plowing the fields when they, too, received the news of the Battle of Lexington. They left the horses as they were and walked to Roxbury Neck where the troops were being gathered. William Jr., however, was not allowed to fight as he was too young, but did become the Drum Boy for the company, William, Sr. related a story that became a family legend. He is so starved for food that he foraged in a field for potatoes. He is successful, but later realized he had left his bag behind. He is horrified, as this could cause his capture. He returns and finds the bag, but the fright stays with him!

Where the post office stands today was Richards' Tavern. (Hannah Richards was Betsy Draper's best friend). George Washington stopped there while traveling to Cambridge. He was the Commander-in-Chief and was on his way to take command. Centre Street then was called "Post Road".

There was land which Captain Draper owned in West Roxbury and sold to Miss Nancy Corey. In 1773 a church was built there, on the corner of South and Centre Streets. This became the Second Church of Roxbury and was the First Unitarian Church. Mr. Draper played the fiddle there and sang in the choir. In the 1800's Betsy Draper had her pew there, as did many African Americans in the 1700's. African Americans were baptized and married in that church, even though, as slaves, they paid no taxes. After the Declaration of Independence was signed, declaring all men free and equal, the people of our grand state believed that the credo should be applied to all her residents, and so declared slavery illegal in 1780.

Go Massachusetts!!!

Paul Draper was the grandson of Captain William Draper, the brother of Betsy Draper, and was the first postmaster of West Roxbury. He had been a businessman in Brookfield, MA, but returned to West Roxbury when Betsy said that she could no longer take care of their aging parents alone. Their parents were William Draper (the sixteen year old not allowed into battle) and Rebecca Richards. Paul was one of the founders of the Orthodox Church which stood on the corners of Centre and Mount Vernon Streets. Paul's son, William Willard Draper, lived in the home at 1721 Centre. It was bequeathed to him in Betsy's hand written will, two copies of which are in the archives today! Along with those are two copies of Paul's handwritten will!

William Willard worshipped in the Orthodox Church, but was unhappy. He and his wife took off for California, hoping to find gold, but were disappointed. They returned to West Roxbury and died in 1898 and 1901, respectively. Their son, William Jr., died in 1901 as well, leaving only Emma Draper who married Mr. Tate and their daughter, Mrs. Dorothy Draper Oleson, with her family to live there. Emma boarded cats in the summer in the back!! She was trampled to death by a team of horses stampeding down South Street in 1921.

I am on my way to the Westerly Burial Ground, but can't go until I, once again, thank Bob Murphy and all the keepers of the West Roxbury Archives. Hope to see you there sometime...

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