

The John Sawin Jr. House, One Chestnut Street Weston, Massachusetts

by Pamela Fox and Brian Donahue

Introduction

Since 1980, Brian Donahue, Associate Professor of American Environmental Studies at Brandeis University, has been using deed research to map areas of Concord, Lincoln, and Weston to show changes in land ownership from the original land grants to the present day. In 2007 he turned his attention to the area from Highland Forest to the Case Estates, including Chestnut Street. By mapping all parcels within a large area, Brian can see how Weston farmers used land over time and can sometimes avoid the confusion caused by vague and incomplete early property descriptions.

In doing this research, Brian discovered that Francis Marshall, in her history “The Abel Allen House, Number One Chestnut Street” dated April 10, 1977, was incorrect in tracing the ownership of that house back to Abel Allen. Marshall writes that One Chestnut Street was one of the original farms laid out in the “Farms or Farmlands” of Watertown in 1642, when a total of 92 farms were allotted. That is true; however, Miles Ives, grandfather of Abel Allen, received Lot 68 and the property at One Chestnut Street was the adjacent Lot 69. That house was built, not by Abel Allen, but by John Sawin Jr.

The authors do not take lightly the idea of renaming this important house, which traditionally holds the title of “oldest house in Weston.” This report does not question the traditional date of c. 1696 or c. 1698 and in fact provides evidence that John Sawin Jr. was living in Weston at that time.

The Sawin Farm 69 did later come into the possession of the Allen family, in 1731, when Ebenezer Allen (Abel Allen’s half-brother) bought it from the daughters of Thomas Sawin (see #9 below). From Ebenezer, it went to his son John Allen (#10, c. 1736), to Josiah Smith (#11, 1744) and finally to Thomas Rand (#12, 1749).

On page 7 of her report, Marshall acknowledges a problem with her research:

Sometime after 1738 Thomas Rand. . . became the owner of the Abel Allen House. There are neither deeds nor a will to show a transfer of ownership to Rand of either of the Allen farms then owned by Col. Elisha Jones.

The reason there are no records is that Marshall was incorrect in thinking that this was how One Chestnut Street came to be owned by Thomas Rand. On page 9 of her report, Marshall refers in passing to the correct deeds (the transactions in #12 below) but mistakenly thought that their

recorded date, 1774, was the actual transaction date, 1749. The date of recording is generally different from the date of sale; and in the early years, deeds were sometimes recorded decades after the actual sale.

Beginning on page 9 of her report, Marshall discusses the history of Thomas Rand, “an outstanding patriot [who] served his town and country in many capacities.” The authors have not examined Marshall’s research on Thomas Rand or the subsequent history of the house as described on page 9 to 14 of her report, but have no reason to question this part of her research.

Marshall’s analysis of the structure of the house and architectural changes over time, based on the work of Philip Baker in 1961, also has not been analyzed for this report. The conclusion that the original house was built around 1696 cannot be confirmed but does not conflict with the Donahue/Fox chain of title below. The lean-to mentioned by Marshall on page 1 could have been added by John Allen when he took over the farm, perhaps on the occasion of his marriage in 1736. The major changes, said to date around 1760, would have been made by Thomas Rand, a housewright who could have done the work himself.

The authors would recommend that the house, because of its venerable age, historical significance, and many structural changes, would benefit from dendrochronological analysis. This would help to date the various parts of the house by examining the patterns of tree rings in the wood itself.

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Chain of Title

Note: While the Sawin Farm 69 was originally 73 acres, the number of acres and exact boundaries of the farm changed over time. In each transaction in this chain of title, we have focused on the part of the farm where the house is located

1) 1642. George Munning was granted Farm 69 (73 acres) in “The Farms.” “The Farms” or “Farm Lands” was the term used for the part of Watertown that is now Weston.

Ref: [WaBOP 13, 28, May 1642; Bond 1027-28]

Note 1: Munning also had a “homestall” in Watertown (“the “small lots,” Bond 1011) as well as other properties.

Note 2: His name is sometimes spelled “Munnings.”

Note 3: In the 1642 division of The Farms, Miles Ives was granted the adjacent Farm 68. In her report of 1977, Frances Marshall mistakenly traced the One Chestnut Street property back to Farm 68. (See introduction above)

2) 1652. George Munning and his wife Elizabeth sold to “John Shearman of Watertown” several parcels in Watertown including “also a dividend of great lots and farm land.”

Ref: [MLR 1:32. April 20, 1652]

Note 1: This sale included the 73-acre Farm 69 [WaBOP 28]

3) 1653. John Sherman and his wife Martha sold all of the above land back to George Munning, who deeded it to John Sawin Sr and Jr. “. . .in the behalf and for the use of John Sawin of Watertown . . . Senior and grandchild of the said George Munnings, as also for valuable consideration had & received of Jno. Sawin of Watertown . . . Senior & son-in-law to George Munnings . . . confirm unto John Sawin Senior & John Sawin Junior . . . ”

Ref: [MLR 2:357, April 4, 1653]

Note 1: This sale included the 73-acre Farm 69.

Note 2: John Sawin Sr. (~1620 to Sept. 2, 1690) came to Watertown from England in the mid-17th century. He married Abigail Munning (1626 – Feb. 16, 1690), daughter of Geo. Munning.

Note 3: Their son John was born before 1653. The property described in the 1653 deed appears to be Munning’s gift to his grandson, with the young boy’s father as joint owner. Sawin also contributed “valuable consideration” toward the purchase

Note 4: John Sawin Jr. married Judith Peirce in December 1666. She died June 10, 1723.

4) 1690. Death of John Sawin Sr. The two-page inventory is the only record in his Probate file. He is described as being “of Watertown.”

Ref: John Sawin, Probate record 19929 of 1690. [link below]

Note 1: The property on the 1690 inventory is listed below. The list does not include the 73-acre Farm 69, indicating that JS Sr’s interest in that farm had been transferred earlier to his son’s sole ownership.

An homestalle of 6 acres and hallfe [Would have been in Watertown proper]
3 acres of upland & an acre and hallfe of meddow
 Beaverbrook
2 acres and hallfe of meddow
 lu of township: [Watertown did a division called "land in lieu of township"
 after a group of people protested at not being included in a round of
 "township" grants]
5 acres and hallfe of upland
 Dividend:
15 acres of upland
31 acres and hallfe: a farm lott (See note 2 below)

Note 2. The 31 ½ acres was adjacent to the so-called “Cowpen” Farm in Weston and was bounded on the west by the Sudbury – now Wayland—town line. The reason for mentioning it here is that the Sawin Genealogy (p. 5 – 6) claims JS Sr. and JS Jr. were living on this property. The inventory above does not list any buildings on the property, nor are they mentioned in a later deed. JS Sr. seems certainly to have lived at his homestall in Watertown and JS Jr. could have been living on Farm 69.

5) **1694. John Sawin Jr. was living in Weston.** There are three pieces of evidence for John Sawin Jr. living in what is now Weston: 1) Bond's *History of Watertown* says "He was of Wat. Farms in 1694." (p. 932) This is the only reference we have found that pinpoints a pre-1700 date; 2) his wife Judith died in Weston on June 10, 1723 (*Births, Deaths & Marriages* p. 14); and 3) the Weston "homestead" later inherited by his two nieces (see #8 below) is described as "formerly belonging to John Sawin late of sd Weston, Deceased."

6) **1697. John Sawin Jr. sold his part of the "Cowpen" Farm to John Livermore**, who had purchased most of the farm decades earlier.

Ref: [MLR 12:250]

Note 1: There is no mention of buildings in the deed, and this property didn't bound on any other Sawin land.

Note 2: The sale could have provided John Jr. with money to build or improve a house on Farm 69.

7) **1722/3. "John Sawin and Judith his wife" sold the Weston property to John's brother Thomas in January, 1722/3, five months before Judith's death.**

Ref: [MLR 22:175-76, January 22, 1722/3]

Note 1: There is no record of JS Jr and Judith having any children.

Note 2: Judith signed the deed by mark.

Note 3: Thomas may have allowed his brother and sister-in-law to remain in the house after the sale.

Note 4: John may have gone to live with Thomas in Natick after Judith's death.

8) **1727. Thomas Sawin died intestate. His two widowed daughters, Ruth Morse and Deborah Adams, each inherited half of the Weston property**, described as "A homestead lying. . . in Weston (formerly belonging to John Sawin late of sd Weston, Deceased) with the buildings thereon standing, & being with all the Land and Meadows thereto Adjoining containing by Estimation Sixty Acres. . ."

Ref: Thomas Sawin, Probate Record 19944 of 1727, p. 994 [link below]

Note 1: The daughters' portion included not only the 60-acre homestead but also 3/4ths part of a "dividend lot adjoining on Stonybrook in Weston" with 11 acres.

9) **1731. Ruth Morse and Deborah Adams sold to Ebenezer Allen** two parcels in Weston, 60 acres and 9 acres, "with all buildings and commodities whatsoever may be found on above described premises"

Ref: [MLR 70: 509, April 21, 1731]

Note 1: The property is described as bordered "west on Abel Allen, north on George Parkhurst, east on said Ebenezer Allen & town road, and south with said Ebenezer Allen and Benjamin Bullard and James Jones."

Note 2: The land adjoined the land of Abel Allen, who had inherited Farm 68 from his grandfather, Miles Ives. It also extended south of the future Chestnut Street.

10) c. 1736? Ebenezer Allen gave or sold the northern portion of Farm 69 to his son John Allen, maybe about 1736, when John was married

Ref: The Registry should be checked again for this deed, but if the land was a gift from father to son, there may not be a deed.

Note 1: John Allen, b. Sept 1713, was the son of Ebenezer and Sarah Ives Allen (BD&M, 393)

Note 2: John Allen married Sarah Shepherd in 1736 (BD&M, 39)

11) 1744. John Allen, husbandman, sold to Josiah Smith, weaver, 58 acres, including “messuage with buildings,” bounded west on Abel Allen, south with town way, east and southeast with another town way, north on line 30 rods south of squadron line, running parallel to squadron line.

Ref: [MLR 46:1, 1744]

Note 1: This deed includes the part of the Sawin farm where the buildings were located and excludes the north 30 rods, which was meadow. It includes additional land to the east, between the Sawin farm and Wellesley St. It stops at Chestnut Street to the south.

Note 2: Josiah Smith was 22 at the time. He built the tavern in the Town Center in 1757.

Note 3: John Allen moved to Lancaster for a few years after selling his homestead to Josiah Smith, then returned in 1746 to a second farm bought from his father Ebenezer, possibly on the south side of Chestnut Street [MLR70:514]. Ebenezer and his youngest son, Ebenezer, moved to the Lancaster farm.

12) 1749. Josiah Smith, yeoman, sold to Thomas Rand, housewright, 38 acres w/ buildings bounded north on line 30 rods south of squadron line, east on old division line between Sawin and Bigelow, southeast on town way and south on another town way, west on Abel Allen

Ref: [MLR 76:305, Feb. 28, 1749]

Note 1: This deed is for the southwest part of the Sawin Farm, which includes the buildings

Note 2: Three weeks earlier, on February 8, Thomas Rand also bought an adjoining piece of land, this time from John Allen, encompassing the north and east part of the Sawin farm, which Allen had retained when he sold part of the farm to Josiah Smith in 1744.

This parcel is described as 40 acres of upland and swamp beginning on town way near Josiah Smith’s barn, run north on a ditchbank in division line between the farms formerly Sawin and Bigelow to within 30 rods of squadron line, run west to Abel Allen’s meadow, run north to squadron line, run east by squadron line to town way, south by town way to beginning. [MLR 76:304, Feb. 8, 1749]

Note 3: Thomas Rand (1727 – 1805) was 22 years old when he bought these two parts of the Sawin Farm #69

Extensive information about Thomas Rand can be found in Frances V. Marshall’s 1977 report.

Abbreviations:

MLR: Middlesex Land Registry (Middlesex County Registry of Deeds, So. District, Cambridge, MA)

WaBOP: Watertown records

BD&M: *Births, Deaths, and Marriages*, see below

Printed Sources:

Bond, Henry, M.D., *Genealogies of the Families and Descendants of the Early Settlers of Watertown, Massachusetts including Waltham and Weston*, Vol I. Genealogies and Vol. II, Additions, Corrections, and Early History (Boston 1855)

Town of Weston, Births, Deaths and Marriages 1707 – 1850; Gravestones 1703 – 1900, Church Records 1709 – 1825. (Boston 1901)

Unpublished Sources:

Marshall, Frances V., “The Abel Allen House, Number One Chestnut Street, Weston, Mass., April 10, 1977. See pages 1 – 2 for structural analysis, 9 - 15 for information on Thomas Rand and later owners, and page 17 for a bibliography.

Anderson, Robert, research notes on Farm 68, Farm 69, and the Cowpen Farm, no date.

Internet Links:

Sawin Genealogy:

<https://books.google.com/books?id=KrdXAAAACAAJ&pg=PA5&lpg=PA5&dq=john+sawin+weston+sudbury&source=bl&ots=KRP7b4wQYC&sig=ACfU3U3thHMPV4Ji4BcpPrPtrUcBqw2PpQ&hl=en&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwiIioz6wcHhAhXjUt8KHcm9DXwQ6AEwAHoECAUQAQ#v=onepage&q=john%20sawin%20weston%20sudbury&f=false>

Probate, John Sawin (1690)

<https://www.americanancestors.org/databases/middlesex-county-ma-probate-file-papers-1648-1871/image?volumeId=14466&pageName=19929:1&rId=38386524>

Probate Thomas Sawin (1727)

<https://www.americanancestors.org/databases/middlesex-county-ma-probate-file-papers-1648-1871/RecordDisplay?volumeId=14466&pageName=19944:1&rId=263994880>

Allen Genealogy

<https://books.google.com/books?id=ONyBYniOswxC&pg=PA396&lpg=PA396&dq=lewis+allen+watertown+bent&source=bl&ots=AQxlmJiAUu&sig=ACfU3U01W6LcSevwzz9fKUEwwxc9TwoC6g&hl=en&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwi3q83tkfHjAhVIT98KHS6EDxE4ChDoATAEegQIBBAB#v=onepage&q=lewis%20allen%20watertown%20bent&f=false>

Ancestry.com and americanancestors.org