

9-21-17

William A. Sterling

RE: Sterling buildings in history--Starlin in Haverhill, MA. pages

William Starlin came to Rowley Village in Massachusetts to help build boats, houses and mills. He had been a shipwright and prior to that probably grew up a miller's son in East Anglia (possibly Colby) and would have built his own house on this property. It was most likely a mere log cabin, as was the practice of early settlers at the time to get shelter as quickly as possible. Others who had the means to do so built "garrison houses" for better protection against raids by Native Americans.



Ferry on the Merrimack River

Earliest records indicate that William Starlin had been living on 80 acres of land that he owned on the south bank of the Merrimack River (in Rowley Village, AKA Bradford, MA) that he deeded to John Remington in 1662 when he was about 25 years old. He sold this property, where five of his children were born, to Stephen Kent in 1669 (he was about 32).

In that same year, he acquired an existing house, barn and orchard near Kent and Remington. He moved the family across the river to the north bank of the Merrimack River near the mouth of The Little River at what is now Washington Square in Haverhill. It was the site of a ferry landing that continued to operate into the 20th Century.



The Town of Haverhill conveyed 12 acres to Starlin in 1683 where he built a central entrance colonial house which remained on that spot until it was razed in 1847 to make way for a new Town Hall. For years while Starlin retained ownership, it operated as an Inn, later called the Masons Arms Inn. He sold it in 1697. In 1789, George Washington stayed there while touring the northern states.

It was not until 1684 that William got his chance to build his own mill. He was about 47. The Town offered to trade his house (probably the one near Kent and Remington) for 10 acres of land on the Little



Central entrance colonial by Albert Mack Sterling

River if he also promised to build a corn mill there for the use of the Town citizens. The Town then offered the Starlin house for a parsonage as enticement for their visiting pastor to move to town permanently.



William made good on his promise to build a corn mill and between 1684 and 1697 he built a house, mill dam and pond and a mill building on the 10 acre lot. His sons William and Richard, John, Nathaniel and Daniel probably all helped build the dam, pond and complex of buildings. The mill probably would have been a one story structure with a garret above for the unground

A Mill on the little River

corn, probably constructed all of wood except for a stone wall to support the water wheel and stone foundations at the water level. The use of the dam and mill pond suggests it was an overshot water wheel with the water dropping over the top blades to drive the shaft. Inside there would be wooden gear with wooden spokes to change the direction of the drive shaft that drove a granite mill stone that lay horizontally as it rotated against another granite stone, both of which had been chiseled with grooves to catch the corn that was dropped from a chute above the wheel. It took many hours to re-chisel the grooves on the stones each week.

The mill became known as Duston's Mill five months after the famous Indian massacre in Haverhill on March 15 in 1697. Hannah Duston survived being captured and escaped back down the Merrimack River from Lake Winnepesaukee. Their house had been burned and completely destroyed during the raid. She and her husband acquired the Starlin house and mill complex and moved into it in August of 1697. The Starlin family moved to Lyme, CT.